

**A Review of the Role of Leadership
in the
Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals**

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1 Preamble

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) came into effect to both introduce social values to capitalism and fight poverty (World Vision International, 2011). In the background, the economies of the West were booming fueled by the rising value of the dot.com companies and a new era of growth brought about by technical innovation. The state of affairs for the less developed countries was worsening with runaway poverty. The developed nations, as a consequence, were attempting to deal with issues of poverty through its debt-relief plan for the low-income countries. The adoption of the MDGs by the United Nations Assembly in September 2000 was, thus, a welcome and laudable initiative by the international community to fight poverty, accelerate human development, and facilitate the gradual, but more effective integration of the developing world, especially Africa, into the global economy (Ministry of Planning and National Development, Kenya, 2005). The eight MDGs, the eighteen targets (Bourguignon, et al., 2009) and sixty indicators have been in place for nearly a decade. The issues that the MDGs intended to address are still evident in the developing world with the achievement of subsets or the entire set MDGs largely a mirage. The majority of the countries will fall in between, meeting some goals but not others (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007). Several factors may have contributed to the slow or ineffective achievement of the MDGs. It is both necessary and essential to have a critical review of the role of political governance in the achievement of the MDGs and beyond the MDGs era.

2 Governance Perspectives

It has been demonstrated that bad governance impacts negatively on the poor, aspects of good governance including democratization and anti-corruption affect economic growth, institutions of governance matter for poverty reduction (Earle & Scott, 2010). It is thus important to understand governance in the context of poverty reduction, human development and economic development as espoused in the pursuit of the MDGs. In this vein four governance attributes namely efficient, effective and accountable administration; control of corruption; scrutiny of public sector management by an empowered civil society and decentralization (Witoelar, 2005) are considered key ingredients for the achievement of the MDGs.

The use of the terms leadership and political governance may be prone to ambiguities depending on the schools of thought and practice. It is, in some schools of thought, viewed as the close and multi-faceted connections between politics, administration and society as are necessary to facilitate the efficient and legitimate provision of public goods (Blatter, 2007). It is this view of governance that informs the description of the Afghanistan governance as a politically driven hybrid order made up of shifting links among many difference formal, informal and illicit actors, networks, and institutions (Lamb & Shawn, 2012). Governance has also been seen as the process, institutions and customs through which the function of governing is carried out (Public Sector and Governance Team, 2013).

Blatter (2007) summarizes political governance as shown below.

Table 1 Ideal-typical forms of political governing (Blatter, 2007)

<i>Instrumental forms of governing</i>		
	Segmentary differentiation	Functional differentiation
Holistic	Centralised Government Aggregating Votes and Hierarchical Directions	Concerted Governments Assigning Competences and Compulsory Bargaining
Elementaristic	Competing Governments Allowing Mobility and Mutual Adjustment	Contracting Governments Aligning Supply to Demand for Collective Goods
<i>Constitutive forms of governing</i>		
Holistic	Communitarian Governance Representing Commonalities through Cultural Symbols and Rituals	Civic Governance Reaching Consensus/Acceptance through Justification and Principled Argumentation
Elementaristic	Creative Governance Stimulating Innovation through Attractive Images and Emotional Events	Cogent Governance Shaping Agendas and Attitudes through Priming and Framing

This approach brings out political governance as the institutionalized forms of political steering and integration that is capable of deriving the public good. The MDGs in essence demonstrate a global effort to achieve the public good for the common good of all with the emancipation from poverty and economic development for the less developed.

Whereas the form of political governance by Blatter (2007) views political governance as institutionalized forms of political steering and integration represents a concise summary of political governance we utilize the form which views governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s social and economic resources for development and, consequently, the way those with power use that power advanced by the Asian Development Bank.

3 Millennium Development Goals

3.1 The Goals and Values

The MDG dream was crystallized into a set of eight goals namely to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (Ministry of Planning and National Development, Kenya, 2005) (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007). These goals were underpinned by a commitment to certain fundamental values essential to the conduct of international relations in the twenty-first

century including freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, and respect for nature and shared responsibility (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007). The achievement of each of the MDGs was not exclusive of the others but each would be complementary to the others hence in need of a holistic approach and synergistic relationship in pursuit (Witoelar, 2005).

The MDGs and the underlying values signified the collective commitment of the international community to create a better tomorrow for billions of people, prioritizing efforts to reduce poverty and hunger; empower women; increase access to essential services like education, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation; and forge strong global partnerships for development (UNDP, 2010).

3.2 The Achievements

The World Summit, 2005, affirmed the centrality of the MDGs to the international development agenda with all nations, both developing and donor alike, making a strong and unambiguous commitment to achieve the Goals by 2015 (UNDP, 2010).

According to the global MDG Report 2009, significant advances had been made in the period from 1990 to 2005 on a number of indicators. Extreme poverty (measured as the number of people living on less than a \$1.25 a day) decreased from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion people globally. In the developing world as a whole, enrolment in primary education reached 88 percent in 2007, up from 83 percent in 2000. Most of the progress was in regions lagging the furthest behind: in Sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, enrolment increased by 15 percent and 11 percent respectively, from 2000 to 2007. Deaths of children under five declined steadily worldwide, from 12.6 million in 1990 to 9 million in 2007, despite population growth.

Kenya has recorded significant progress on the MDGs in general. On the path to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger the proportion of people living below the poverty reduced from 52% in 2000 to 46% in 2006 with a target of 26%. Universal Primary Education has been on course with the launch of FPE (Free Primary Education) in 2003 raising gross enrolments ratios rose from 88 % in 2002 to 115% in 2011, primary to secondary school transition rate improved from 67% in 2009 to 73% in 2011 while net enrolment rates rose from 92.9% in 2009 to 95.7% in 2011. In the promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women the proportion of female MPs at 9.9% in 2011 up from 4.1% in 1998 while the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was at 29.8% in 2011. In reducing child mortality both Infant mortality and under-five mortality rates remained at 52 deaths per 1,000 live births and 74 deaths per 1,000 live births respectively as was the case in 2009 and the proportion of one year olds who are fully immunized was 80% in 2011 against 90 % 2015 target up from 78 % in 2009. Maternal mortality has lagged with 43.8% of births in Kenya being attended to by trained health personnel against a 2015 target of 90 % and maternal mortality rates being 488 per 100,000 live births in 2011 against a 147 target by 2015. The overall HIV prevalence rate among adults 15-49 years was estimated to be 6.3% in 2011 down from 7.4% in 2007 and 6.7% in 2003 while the proportion of Kenyan households owning at least one Insecticide Treated Net rose from 6% in 2003 to 48% in 2007 and 56% in 2008/09. On

environmental sustainability the proportion of households with access to improved sanitation was at 22.6% in 2008/09 having increased from 19.4% in 2003. Mobile telephone subscribers increased from 19,364,559 in 2009 to 26,980,771 in 2011 while mobile network coverage increased from 49.7% in 2009 to 68.4% in 2011 (Mailu, 2012).

Whereas their improvement on the global arena there exist vast differences across and within regions and countries on the progress on the attainment of the MDGs with much of the progress toward poverty reduction being driven by advances in China and India (Kiringai & Levin, 2008) (UNDP, 2010). Some of the reasons for these performance gaps can be found in lack of economic growth, income inequality, political mismanagement and inefficient policy making (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007) all which are linked to inadequacies in leadership and political governance.

4 The Role of Leadership and Political Governance in the Achievement of MDGs

4.1 Adoption of the MDGs

Strong leadership and political will was at the very centre of the push towards the crystallization of a set of goals to address the huge disparities between the huge economic boom of the West in the 1990s and the developing world crippled by slow growth and development. It required both astute leadership and political putsch to get the world to accept the agenda and coalesce around a set of goals, targets and indicators, offer to mobilize resources for the fund the resources and to push towards the realization of the MDGs.

The MDGs were a result of the political will at the international level for an over-arching set of goals to serve as a rallying call to the global community with Bill Clinton and Tony Blair – then the US President and UK Prime Minister respectively– pursuing the “Third Way” to blend social values into capitalism and investing massive political capital on the global stage to fight poverty and prioritize development (World Vision International, 2011).

It is noteworthy that world leaders resolved to "spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development" (UNDP, 2011). There was clear and explicit recognition, at the highest political level, that poverty in the poorest countries could be reduced if well-designed and well-implemented plans were put in place by developing countries and if rich countries simultaneously match their efforts with substantial increases in support (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007).

The eventual buy-in of the MDGs by the global community was an intricate affair that required astute leadership and political settlement in the national and international realms. It is instructive that the process required forging consensus over a long period of time in 1990s (World Vision International, 2011). The achievement of a consensus and the will to set

aside resources for the achievement of the MDGs required a political settlement (John & Putzel, 2009) to bargain outcomes acceptable by the contending global powers and movements in the interest of the eradication of poverty and economic development.

4.2 Realization of the MDGs

The role of strong leadership and political governance is an essential ingredient to the timely achievement of the MDGs as well as the transition into the post-MDG era beyond 2015. In recognition of this fact several reports, researchers and intellectual locally and globally attest to the fact the level of achievement of the MDGs has risen or fallen on the political leaders. Democratic governance is central to the achievement of the MDGs, as it provides the 'enabling environment' for the realization of the MDGs (UNDP, 2011).

Underscoring the role of political governance in the achievement of the MDGs, Kenya identified three pillars for the long-term development framework, the Kenya Vision 2030. Of the three pillars, there was the political pillar which was intended to address the 8th MDG - the Millennium Declaration that Developing countries would spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, respect internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including right to development (Mailu, 2012).

The critical role played by leadership and political governance is evident in most progress reports on the MDGs. In its midpoint review the UNDP report (UNDP, 2010) indicated that the evidence is clear that without effective and accountable institutions, systems, processes and political will, economic gains are not automatically translated into development outcomes or registered as MDG achievements.

Achievement of the MDGs requires a conducive policy framework, sufficient resources and institutional capacity. All these are critical economic and political governance issues, and hence the achievement of the MDGs is crucially linked to good governance (Ghaus-Pasha, 2007).

Three key factors have been isolated as posing a challenge on the realization of the MDGs by UNDP. These are policy choices and coherence that govern how a country participates in the global economy, and whether domestic policies contribute to broad-based, inclusive growth both at the macroeconomic and sector level; governance and multiple capacity deficits that undermine the creation of an enabling environment needed for securing MDG progress; and fiscal constraints which including both domestic and ODA and development assistance practices that limit the capacity to scale up public investments needed to ensure MDG outcomes (UNDP, 2010).

4.3 Post-MDGs into the Future

4.3.1 Supporting MDGs

The UNDP midpoint review (UNDP, 2010) noted MDG achievements would only be meaningful if they would be sustained in the world beyond 2015 and if the human development objectives that they embodied would be realized in those countries and for those people for whom the Millennium Declaration was intended. Moving into the future the following will need to be enhanced:

- i.) Support of national processes and ownership of the MDG agenda. MDG achievements will require working with politicians, civil society partners, civil servants, other UN agencies and development partners, among others.
- ii.) Supporting and strengthening democratic governance practices and building accountable and responsive institutions will be key to sustain MDG achievements.
- iii.) Pro-active role in the global policy arena to champion for policy coherence, and especially in those areas critical for shaping MDG outcomes in food security, global trade agreements and the global financial architecture.
- iv.) Greater reliance on domestic resources to finance development over the longer term.

4.3.2 Additional Goals

A school of thought has emerged that considers transparency as a key goal to pursue post 2015. In this case four transparency indicators have been proposed including the Statistical Capacity Indicator, produced by the World Bank; the Open Budget Index, produced by the International Budget Partnership; the Open Government Score, produced by the World Justice Project; and the Government Accountability Index, produced by Global Integrity (Public Sector and Governance Team, 2013).

The World Vision has made the most far reaching recommendations for the post-2015 MDG era as shown below.

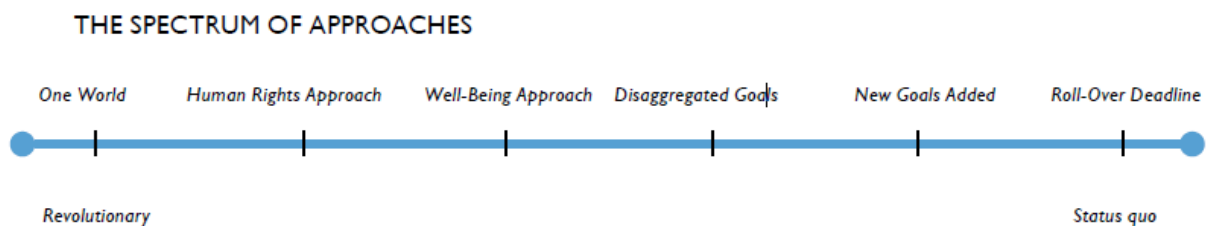


Figure 1: Post-2015 MDG Era Approaches (World Vision International, 2011)

The roll-over option is a most conservative approach just sustaining the MDGs as is for another period of time with the one-world option being a without-the-box-option that envisages a focus on a goal such as climate change which when addressed would deal with a host of other issues.

4.3.3 Sustainable Development Goals

A radical without-the-box-option has emerged from another front and gained root in the last few years. This is a movement whose focus is on improving the MDGs and transforming them into the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This approach is a results from the fact that the international development debate has been dominated by two trends that seem at first to be heading in a similar direction (Loewe, 2012). These are on the one hand the agenda of reducing poverty in developing countries in its various dimensions (lack of income, education, water and political participation among others) that found their expression in the MDGs. On the other hand, there is the idea of sustainability that became popular at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and that at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 generated a parallel concept to the MDGs: the so called SDGs. This emerging scenario has led to two independent UN working groups being created: one to discuss whether there should be a new global development agenda after the term of the MDGs ends in 2015, and what such an agenda should entail; the other is to compile a list of possible SDGs. This raises the question what happens if these separate processes actually result in two differing sets of goals, and if it might still be possible to merge the poverty and sustainability agendas.

Three important principles are expected to underpin the SDGs (Barry, 2014):

- i.) True sustainability must be the goal: With the world economy projected to triple or quadruple in the next half century, it's not enough to make the economy more efficient or "greener." Half-steps will not achieve sustainability. We must balance human needs with natural resources
- ii.) Sustainability must be measured: No one would think of driving a car or flying a plane without a fuel gauge. By the same token, we cannot plan for our future without knowing whether we have enough biophysical capacity to meet our projected needs. Resource evaluation is crucial.
- iii.) Sustainability can only be achieved by reducing aggregate resource demands: We are already exceeding bio-physical limits. Unless the emerging and developed economies curtail greenhouse gas emissions and slow their consumption of scarce resources, there will be little hope for the developing world. The SDGs must be global in scope.

The fact the both the MDGs and SDGs emerge from UN and quasi-UN bodies that bring together top-tier social, economic and political leaders across the globe stresses the centrality of national and international leadership in forging common paths to address development agenda.

4.3.4 Re-Invigorating the Political Putsch and Governance

It is noteworthy that the MDGs as exist were a result of deft push by key world leaders of the time lead by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. A number of factors have coalesced to nurture a weak leadership and political governance clout on the world stage in the last decade – hence

undermining the political steering and integration that was well evident in the birth of the MDGs. The factors can be summarized as (World Vision International, 2011):

- i.) Western economies are running record deficits with the EU facing crisis as the deteriorating financial situation of euro zone members puts pressure on the banking system and demands further government bail-outs, US running huge debts and low public support for official development assistance (ODA).
- ii.) Global financial crisis has badly affected developing countries and their ability to make progress on the MDGs – with drastic reduction on social spending on education, health and other key sectors of the economy.
- iii.) Reduced ability to make global agreements is crumbling as countries bicker about different approaches to global economic strategies in the post-Washington Consensus era with the progress from G7 to G8 and now G20 with G20 yet to assert itself as a prime platform for the resolution of major global issues.
- iv.) Major shift in the global power balance over the past ten years giving to some hitherto unexpected nations to dictate agenda at the global stage as rapidly witnessed with the emergence of the BRICS.

Getting the way forward would require a concerted effort to bring together the governments, academia and think-tanks, private sector, international financing bodies, trade unions, environmental groups and the civil society with a right timing, right processes and right approaches (World Vision International, 2011). The stage then seems set to test leadership and political governance at the post-MDG era and beyond the governance requirements for MDG achievement.

5 Conclusions

Whereas achievements have been made on the MDGs, it is very clear that positive and sustainable change is poor and conflict-affected societies comes about in significant part through the action of institutions of governance, security, justice and other public goods (Lamb & Shawn, 2012) and the general state of governance. For instance, the post-election debacle in the 2007 general elections had a huge negative impact on Kenya's economy and the MDGs in general (Kiringai & Levin, 2008).

Although authoritative references have shown that the political, institutional and social determine economic growth and MDGs in essence, the governance-matters approach to development is not without problems. Cross-national studies showing that good governance is a key determinant of economic performance can be challenged on the grounds of causality problems, measurement errors, missing-variable considerations and conceptual vagueness (Avellaneda, 2006). There is a general sense that while it seems obvious that better and stronger governance systems at the country level are needed to hold the state to account and in turn to support growth and eradicate poverty, it is hard to build an irrefutable case (Public Sector and Governance Team, 2013).

It is noteworthy that the pre-MDG era took exceptional leadership and political governance to give birth to the MDGs. The MDG era has also placed an exceptional burden on good leadership and political governance to achieve the MDGs. The stage is set to test the leadership finesse and political acumen at the global stage to steer the world into the post-2015 MDG era.

It seems quite probable that some of the beneficiaries of the MDG push will have to pay back and lead the stage for the posterity of the MDGs. In this the BRICS come in mind. Or perhaps the tried and tested powers will briskly come back, awaken the sleeping giants, and offer the much needed leadership and political governance towards the MDGs 2:0.

Whether the post 2015 will have reloaded MDGs or a fresh start encapsulated in the SDGs, leadership will continue to play a critical role towards forging a common post 2015 framework, sustaining the global development agenda and paving way for even better ways to a better posterity.

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