

A future without Aid is possible and favourable

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From September 2 to 4, a High Level Meeting on Aid Effectiveness took place in Accra, Ghana. The issue of the quality and volume of Aid has become very important since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.



At the Millennium Summit in 2000, UN global leaders, heads of state and governments surveyed the state of the peoples of the world and reviewed the achievements, challenges and opportunities that faced us at the dawn of a new millennium. Their collective judgement was not flattering. While there has been undeniable progress in science and technology, they were ashamed that the benefits of this progress have not been evenly shared by the peoples of the world. There was a huge disparity between the richer countries of the world (mostly in the northern hemisphere) and the poorer countries (predominantly in the southern hemisphere and especially in Africa and South Asia).

The disparity exists even within the same countries and regions. The stark reality was that the world's poor and powerless, who constitute the vast majority of the world's population, were living in poverty and billions were suffering from extreme hunger. Yet the world could not have been richer. More than fifty years ago, Mahatma Gandhi declared that 'there is enough in the world to satisfy our need but there is not enough to satisfy our greed'. It was true then and even truer now. Surely the world could do more and much better to satisfy the needs of all peoples of the world. It was both a collective sense of shame and a shared hope that inspired the 189 leaders gathered at the General Assembly to make the Millennium Declaration.

The Millennium Declaration was subsequently translated into the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Declaration was a statement of intent, while the Goals provide compass to the realisation of the good intentions. The UN is a museum for many good intentions, declarations and grand plans that are never implemented before being superseded by yet another set of plans. So why should the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs be different?

There are important distinguishing features that promise to differentiate the MDGs from previous plans. One, it is not just a set of declarations but it has been reduced to concrete, achievable goals. Two, the goals have clear indices of progress. Three, they have time lines and a target date by which they have to be achieved.

The other distinction has to do with accountability. While it is true that they do not have the force of law, they have the political commitment of the most powerful political leaders representing all peoples of the world -- rich and poor. Unlike in the past when development pledges have usually been declarations of the richer countries to help the poorer ones, the MDGs commit both the rich and the poor. But it is not just a commitment of the governments. It has also sought the partnership of all peoples of the world: citizens, corporations, clergy and all stake holders.

Fundamentally, the MDGs are a social contract at two levels. The first is between the political leaders of the world and the peoples of the world -- especially the poor, the sick, children, women and the marginalised. The second is a pledge between governments of the South and those of the North. The former pledges to do right by its peoples by eliminating poverty and hunger, educating the children, empowering its women, and looking after its sick in a pro-poor development that does not destroy the environment and is sustainable. These are goals no. 1-7. In return, the latter, richer countries commit themselves to the eighth Goal which stands on a tripod stool of increasing Aid both in quality and quantity, writing off the debt of poor countries, and reforming the rules of international trade that are rigged against the poorer countries.

The Accra Aid Effectiveness meeting (2-5 September) was meant to review the progress that has been made in meeting the commitment to improve on the quality and quantity of Aid in the past 7 years. It is a follow up on similar reviews that took place in Paris in 2005. Out of that grew the PARIS DECLARATION. The basic tenets of the declaration include Local Ownership, National Alignment, and Harmonization of policies/ coordinated efforts that ensured Managing for Results in a new partnership that guarantees mutual accountability.

In spite of the declaration and attempts at adhering to them, as we begin the second half of the 2015 target date for achieving the MDGs, progress on Aid effectiveness has been at best mixed. The three-decades-old promise of richer countries committing 0.7% of their GNI to international development has only been achieved by a few countries. The biggest economies including Germany, Japan, the USA and even Britain, which is

so enthusiastic about MDG advocacy internationally, are yet to meet the target.

In recent years the volume of Aid has actually dropped while the quality issues continue to be undermined by the old habits of tying Aid to national interests, including commercial considerations and geo-strategic interests of the donor countries. The UN secretary-general has identified an annual funding for development gap of over \$60 million.

Accra provided an opportunity to see the much-neglected principle of mutual accountability in action. All countries signed up to the MDGs; therefore it is not just about poor countries accounting to the richer countries. It is about everyone being accountable to the peoples of the world to whom these commitments were made.

However, the wider question is that no matter how effective Aid is on its own, it cannot lead to sustainable development without universal debt relief but, more importantly, a reform of the unfair trade rules which continue to trap the poorer countries, penalizing the poor and impoverishing their communities. Whatever progress has been made so far on Aid and debt relief to a few of the countries is being compromised by the lack of progress and recent collapse in the Doha round of the WTO talks. Accra without Doha can only be conducive for Aid pushers and their Aid-addicted patients and other vultures of the development industry. **Maybe the real meeting Africans and other poor countries need to have is about a future without Aid. This would be not only desirable, but necessary.**