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Global Food Crisis and the Millennium Development Goals in Africa (Pp. 216-225)

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], were adopted by the United Nations member states in the year 2000 pledging to meet those goals by the year 2015. Looking at MDG one which conveys the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, it reveals that years of solemn pledges by global leaders has yielded no fruits yet. Instead of a decrease in world hunger/poverty, food security in the world has been deteriorating, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Amidst the slow pace of meeting the millennium goal of reducing poverty/hunger arises a serious challenging threat - the food crisis in the midst of the MDGs' efforts. It is on this premise that this paper examines the global food crisis and the achievement of Africa's millennium development goal one and makes recommendations.

Introduction

Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is the first goal of the millennium summit. World leaders promised to tackle these problems. However, given that some years have passed without any tangible development, achieving this goal in Africa appears bleak. The global food crisis arises, complicating these problems. This paper examines the global food crisis vis-à-vis the progress of Africa on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal one.

The paper is divided into 4 sections. Section 1 introduces the paper, section 2 discusses hunger/poverty, and the MDG-One, section 3 focuses on Africa's progress and the global food crisis and section 4 has the conclusion and recommendations.

Hunger / Poverty and the Mdg-One The Millennium Development Goal One

The United Nations millennium declaration was adopted at the millennium summit held 6th-8th of September, 2000 in New York. By the year 2015 [i.e. between 1990 and 2015], all 191 United Nations member states have pledged to meet these goals. The eight millennium goals, ranging from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education all by the target date of 2015 form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest [UN, 2004]. The framework of the MDGs is of eight {8} goals, eighteen {18} targets and forty eight {48} indicators to measure progress towards the millennium development goals.

The Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality,
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
7. Ensure environmental sustainability,
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

Each of these goals has targets and indicators which give rise to 18 targets and 48 indicators. Goal one for example: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger has two targets and five indicators.

Target one:

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the number of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Indicators:

1. proportion of population below one dollar{1993 PPP},

2. poverty gap ratio {incidence/depth of poverty},
3. Share of poorest quintile in national consumption.

Target 2:

Halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Indicators:

4. Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age,
5. Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption.

The goals, with their related time-bound targets and indicators are designed as an agenda for international community. The targets/indicators are for measuring the progress of the MDGs. Since poverty is multi-dimensional, a compact strategy is used to attack it. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger can not be achieved if questions of population and health care, women's rights, investment in education and health {including reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention } are not squarely addressed; global partnership, or global compact is required to end poverty/hunger. The attainment of all the other goals can drastically lead to the attainment of goal one. Let us therefore look at the state of poverty/hunger in the regions of the world and especially in Africa.

The State of Poverty and Hunger in the World

The advanced learner's dictionary defines *hunger* as "the state of not having enough food to eat especially when this causes illness or death". And starvation as "the state of suffering and death caused by no food to eat". Even if a person consumes enough calories, this does not guarantee adequate intake of essential micronutrients – vitamins, minerals, and trace elements. Micronutrients malnutrition is often called "hidden hunger" because it is not readily apparent from clinical signs of a wasted body; but it afflicts a far greater swath of humanity than insufficient calorie intake [Cohen et al., 2008]. The chart below shows the number of undernourished people in the world in millions between 2001 and 2003.

Figure 1 shows that undernourishment is a global problem; however, some regions experience it more than others. It shows that the industrialized and the transition countries' undernourished are have 9 million and 25 million

respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia including china and India are the worst hit with 206 and 524 million undernourished respectively.

Malnutrition takes a particularly severe toll among preschool children. One in three developing country preschoolers- 178 million children under the age of five-suffers stunting as a result of chronic under nutrition [Black et al., 2008]. Eighty-per cent of these children live in just 20 countries in Africa and Asia pacific region. As shown in the table 1

Stunting is associated with higher rates of illness and death, reduced cognitive ability and school performance in children and lower productivity and lifetime earnings for adults. Chronic malnutrition during the first two years of life usually results in irreversible harm. Children become stunted not only as a result of insufficient calorie intakes but also because of poor quality diets. Children who become stunted in the first two years of age and gain weight rapidly after that may be at high risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension [Cohen et al., 2008]. Hunger, starvation, or hidden hunger [malnutrition, or undernourishment], are deadly, have destroyed and are destroying if not more than the most sophisticated weapon of mass destruction.

Poverty

The poor are conceived as those individuals, or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services. Basic goods are nutrition, shelter/housing, water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skills/tools and political/civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions [Streeton/Burki, 1978]. From the above definition of poverty it is obvious that hunger and poverty are closely related. It is no wonder that the MDGs attack poverty and hunger from so many dimensions since poverty itself is multidimensional – MDGs Two to Eight are attacking poverty from different dimensions. Table 2 shows the number of people living on one dollar a day.

Table 2 indicates that in Sub- Saharan Africa, the number of people in extreme poverty was 164 million; it grew to 227 million in 1990 and further rose to 313 in 2001. The picture is not beautiful in the Latin America/Caribbean region too; it rose from 36 million in 1981 to 49 million in 1990 and to 50 million in 2001. The Middle East and North Africa noted a

slight improvement in 1990 when it decreased to 6 million from 9 million in 1981, in 2001 it slightly rose from 6 million to 7 million. Europe and Central Asia's extreme poor dropped from 3 million to 2 million and tremendously rose to 17 million in 2001.

In 1981, more than half of the people in extreme poverty lived in East Asia and over a quarter in South Asia. The number dropped from 796 million in 1981 to 472 million 1990 and further to 271 million in 2001, South Asia on the other hand, noted a reduction from 475 million in 1981 to 462 in 1990 and further to 431 in 2001. The above table shows that in Africa, Asia and Latin America/Caribbean, a good number of people who live on less than a dollar a day still exist.

The Global Food Crisis and Africa's Mdg-One Progress MDG-One, the Progress so Far

The previous section reveals clearly, that poverty and hunger are still serious problems in Africa. The numbers of the undernourished, stunted children and people living on less than one dollar a day are very high as shown by the previous chart and tables. All these are related to the targets/indicators of the MDG one. In Nigeria for example, in 1991, 1996 and 2003, the percentage of the undernourished population is 13.0, 9.0, and 9.0 respectively; the poverty gap ratio at \$1 a day is 29.3, 44.1 and 34.5 respectively; also the percentage of the poorest quintile's share in national income, or consumption is 4.0, 3.7 and 5.6 respectively. [UN, 2005] These millennium goal one indicators reveal that where progress has been made, it is very slow in fact there are cases of retrogression as the % of the poorest quintile's share in national income, or consumption shows.

The UN MDGs progress report in 2005 on goal one explains that Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest poverty rates in the world and millions more actually fell deeper into poverty. It explains that in the same region, the number of malnourished children has actually increased. This report identifies the following as reasons for this lack of progress:

- Declining agricultural productivity,
- Inability to meet the needs of the growing population,
- Conflicts and economic failures.

The above reasons are an increasing source of poverty and food crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2007 the UN states that “Sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of the MDGs” [UN, 2005 & 2007].

Global Food Crisis and Africa’s MDG-One Progress

As seen above, Sub-Saharan Africa is not making progress in achieving the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Yet, as though, to make this disappointing progress worst is the emergence of global food crisis which is a serious threat to Africa’s progress. The world food prices have been sharply increasing, except tackled, it will significantly increase hunger, malnutrition, starvation and of course poverty in Africa. Little wonder that the former Secretary General of the United Nations and the present Chairman of the Africa Progress Panel, Anan, in Africa Progress Panel [APP, 2008] points out that:

The cost of food will not be measured in the price of wheat and rice, But in the rising number of infant and child deaths across Africa. ... Many countries are already experiencing the reversal of decades of economic progress, and 100 million people are being pushed back into absolute poverty.

The current food crisis obviously challenges the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in the developing world especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. What then are the causes of the global food crisis? The Associated Press [2008] explains that this is the first global food crisis since World War II and that it is as a result of converging factors across the world:

- Drought in Australia has nearly wiped out that country’s rice production, which normally feeds 20 million people worldwide,
- Government policies and rising oil prices have led countries such as the US and Brazil to divert corn into the production of ethanol for fuel,
- Corn and grain production has fallen in South Eastern Europe because of droughts,
- Food prices on international markets have nearly become doubled in three years,
- Growing populations and changing diets in countries such as India and China have driven up demand for food,

- A new strain of fungus that attacks wheat is spreading from Africa to Iran and most of the world's wheat varieties are vulnerable.

From the above factors, it is obvious that climate change, soaring food prices and the growing use of food crops as a source of fuel [bioenergy] are the three major challenges that have risen to complicate efforts made to overcome food insecurity and malnutrition. Climate change affects all four dimensions of food security [food availability, accessibility, safe and healthy food utilization and stability of food supply]. Flood and drought for example reduce food availability. Rising petrol prices have made new biofuels such as ethanol and biodiesel an attractive alternative energy source, thus, reducing food availability/accessibility. The International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI] estimates that rising bioenergy demand accounted for 30% of the increase in weighted average grain prices between 2000 and 2007 [Cohen, 0p.cit]. Really, climate change, rising use of biofuel and its concomitant increase in food prices are the three major causes of the current global food crisis.

Obviously the impact of the food crisis is more on poor countries, where there are no safety nets. It has pushed most countries to adopt export bans on key commodities such as rice and wheat further pushing prices upward; it has also pushed the cost of food aid higher. Implying that import-dependent or highly food-insecure countries are the worst hit and also food aid which is a key safety net stagnates. For example, in 2002 – 2005, food aid accounted for about 9% of grain imports for the 70 low income countries. The highest share which is 17% was in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the share was 10% in lower income Asian countries, 6% in the CIS and 3% in the low-income Latin American countries. Some low-income countries like Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Niger [all in Africa] – are so poor that they were financially unable to import grain even under historically lower prices and relied heavily on food aid to augment their food supplies. But food aid quantities fall as prices rise, [ERS, 2008]. Obviously, the impact of this current global food crisis is more on the African countries where reductions in food aid to some of the countries are more of a problem than higher prices for food imports.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper reveals that food insecurity, hunger and poverty are serious problems in Africa, MDG one is a good strategy that can combat these problems if effectively implemented. However, Africa specifically, Sub-

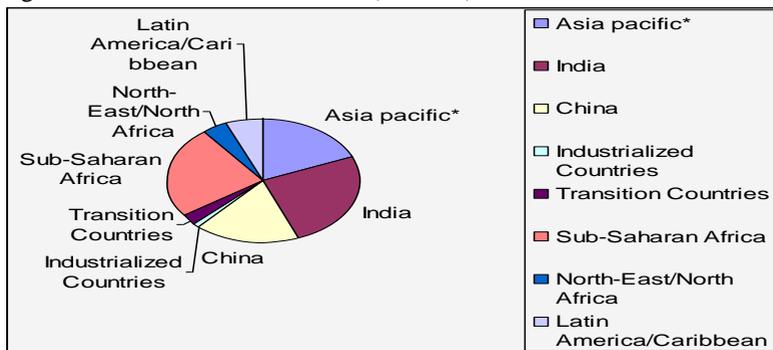
Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of those MDGs, implying that it is not making progress in eradicating extreme poverty/hunger. As though this disappointing report is not enough, the global food crisis puts up its ugly head compounding these problems. The food crisis is inimical to the combat of hunger/poverty which MDG one seeks to achieve. Since Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst hit by this scourge, the food crisis is a serious challenging threat to the attainment of the MDG one in this region and in African continent at large. Immediate steps therefore have to be taken to address this scourge :

- The agricultural sector needs to be given serious attention, so as to convert the food crisis into an avenue for wealth creation; the opportunities ought to be maximized. Agriculture is a powerful tool for reducing both hunger and poverty especially in the poor countries where agricultural sector is the highest employer of labor. Agriculture should therefore be made participatory and sustainable.
- More efforts should be made to reduce the emissions of the greenhouse gases [GHGs].
- Other sources of fuel apart from food crops should be identified, especially in the poor countries where resources are not enough for the production of food crops. This calls for more research in order to identify high oil yielding plants which cost less to produce.
- International trade should be made fair. Comprehensive rethinking of trade policy is needed to boost agricultural production around the world.
- Rich countries should fulfill their promises which they made at the millennium summit- to channel part of their resources into poor countries to combat their poverty. The Africa Progress Panel chaired by Kofi Anan explains that the promised aid is rather reducing. Nevertheless this aid must be without strings.

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Fig.1: Undernourished 2001-2003 (millions)



Source: FAO (2007)

Table 1: Twenty Countries are Homes to 80% of World' Stunted Preschoolers

Africa	Asia-pacific
Democratic republic of Congo	Afghanistan
Egypt	Bangladesh
Ethiopia	India
Kenya	Indonesia
Madagascar	Myanmar
Nigeria	Nepal
South Africa	Pakistan
Sudan	Philippines
Tanzania	Vietnam
Uganda	Yemen

Source: Bryce et al., {2008}

People Living on Less than \$1 a day (Million)

Year	Region					
Year	Sub-Sahara Africa	Latin-America & Caribbean	Middle East & North Africa	Europe & Central Asia	East Asia & Pacific	South Asia
1981	164	36	9	3	796	475
1990	227	49	6	2	472	462
2001	313	50	7	17	271	431

Source: World Development indicators (2005)(World Bank)