

# MDGs

## Promises and actions - It is almost half-time

*Those whom you push down will chain you down  
Those whom you leave behind will pull you behind  
The more you envelope them under darkness of ignorance  
The more distant will your own welfare be*

“Disgraced”, Rabindranath Tagore

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Being a staff member of CIVICUS, and part of the Global Team behind the Global Call for Action against Poverty (GCAP)<sup>i</sup>, I am inclined to limit my contribution to the role and responsibilities of civil society organizations on the MDG agenda. Indeed, CIVICUS is a convenor within civil society and defend and promote civic existence, civic engagement and civic expression<sup>ii</sup>. CIVICUS also has a track record of constructive engagement with the multilateral institutions<sup>iii</sup>. Therefore, CIVICUS utilizes the MDG's as a recognized framework for advancing a more progressive advocacy agenda for social, economic and political justice.

This text presents the engagement of the world of CSOs in the MDG agenda (section 1 and 3). It attempts to take stock of the MDG progress so far (section 2); it discusses some of the key policy questions on financing for development and highlights key policy changes which would enable the attainment of the MDGs (section 4). It then concludes with some directions and tools for the future engagement of CSOs (section 5).

### 1. MDG and CSOs

Early, CIVICUS adopted the MDGs agenda, convened CSOs dialogue on it and developed related tools, as an MDG campaigning toolkit<sup>iv</sup>. But, can we say in 2007 that the MDGs are now part of the CSOs' development agenda? Many of us still consider them as “Minimalist Development Goals” or “Most Distracting Gimmick”<sup>v</sup>.

CSOs globally did not see the MDGs as their agenda for obvious reasons:

1. The commitments made at the Millennium Summit betray previous commitments made at international Summits<sup>vi</sup>, such as Copenhagen<sup>vii</sup> and Beijing<sup>viii</sup>
2. There was not a single consultation with the CSOs for the elaboration of this development agenda<sup>ix</sup>
3. It took two years to elaborate the targets and indicators and those appear unacceptable for most of the CSOs

4. The UN builds around the MDG agenda a multi-stakeholder approach which is for many of us a way to engage the privatisation of public services or to throw the responsibility of public service delivery at CSOs
5. And for most of us, the MDGs maintain a systematic silence on the learning and experiences of policy reforms and institutional changes. As Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir writes: *Evidences suggest that the gap between the rich and the poor, between and within the nations have widened in an unprecedented scale. The blanket privatization, deregulation, liberalization, and competition do not automatically yield prosperity and wellbeing for the nations. The institutions, structure and process that create and sustain poverty are ignored too. They have maintained heightened silence about unequal market power, consolidation of corporate power, restricted migration and access to rich economies, and local political realities (elite capture, under-regulated monopolies, rising global and local inequalities). Hence, to link the MDGs with a particular set of policy prescriptions as has been done in the developing world including Bangladesh is a wrong approach, no matter which policies are prescribed, precisely because there is no single "correct" policy for all societies and circumstances<sup>x</sup>.*

Still, at the time of the War against Terror, one can say that the MDGs are a "revolutionary" agenda. An agenda which can to be taken seriously and that can offer a window of opportunity for CSOs engaged with governments and international organisations.

## **2. Are the MDGs a Priority? Are we on track?**

A recent publication from the United Nations states: "At the midway point between their adoption in 2000 and the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of the Goals. Although there have been major gains in several areas and the Goals remain achievable in most African nations, even the best governed countries on the continent have not been able to make sufficient progress in reducing extreme poverty in its many forms"<sup>xi</sup>.

The World Bank 2007 Global Monitoring Report on the Millennium Development Goals, published last April 13, focuses on gender equality and the lack of opportunities for women as well as the vulnerability of fragile states. Main findings include that an estimated 135 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty between 1999 and 2004, due largely to strong growth in developing regions. The share of people living on less than US\$1 a day in Sub Saharan Africa dropped by nearly 5 percentage points to 41 percent over the same period, although the absolute number of poor remained near 300 million due mainly to high population growth. The report also states that progress in gender equality and women's empowerment has been uneven<sup>xii</sup>.

On the same issue, we could go much further. Brian Tomlinson writes: "Women as development actors are particularly absent from the MDGs. Progress on gender equality and women's empowerment revolves around Goal 3 and its basic education target and indicators, but are also embedded in other social development Goals. For the most part the MDGs characterize women as vulnerable victims, instrumentally important for achieving certain goals, rather than as agents of development, acting to claim their rights".<sup>xiii</sup>

And our sources confirm and amplify the situation. Social Watch asks "When will dignity for all be achieved? What is the bare minimum for a decent life for all? The world leaders who signed the Declaration did not define it clearly but its principles are embedded in the commitment to achieve certain targets by 2015. When we will achieve the basic standards of material dignity for all the world's people? Not in a hundred years unless we

substantially accelerate the current trends of progress in social areas"! For Sub-Saharan Africa:

- In food security (under 5 children malnutrition and undernourishment): 50% of the region register no progress and at the current pace, the goal would be reached by 2282
- In women reproductive health (births attended by skilled personnel): 32% of the region register no progress and at the current pace, the goal would be reached by 2130
- In basic education (adult literacy and primary and secondary school enrolment ratio): 21% of the region register no progress and at the current pace, the goal would be reached by 2079
- In child mortality: 41% of the region register no progress and at the current pace, the goal would be reached by 2155
- In water and sanitation: 28% of the region register no progress and at the current pace, the goal would be reached by 2159<sup>xiv</sup>

Are MDGs simply unrealistic for many countries, asked Brian Tomlinson<sup>xv</sup>? Quoting a detailed study by Michael Clemens, Charles Kenny and Todd Moss, the costing approach to MDGs, as part of northern campaigns to make the Goals "realistic", creates a false sense of their achievability<sup>xvi</sup>. They point to numerous sectoral studies that demonstrate that financial resources are sometimes not even the most important constraint. Of the 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 42 are considered off-track for half of the targets and 12 countries for all of the targets. These researchers conclude that "many of the MDGs are simply unrealistic for many countries" where the world community is "asking [them] to perform at the top end of the world's historical experience of the best performers of the last 50 years. The rate of growth expected of Sub-Saharan Africa, after a decade of very marginal growth, has in fact only been accomplished by 5 developing countries in the world in the past 15 years. In primary education, for example, the expectation is progress at a rate over 11 years that took rich countries close to a century<sup>xvii</sup>.

### **3. So what's in it for us?**

What is the role of CSOs in the MDG agenda? Are we factio participating, and how do we want to participate? Are we helping to *localise* the MDGs and in some cases to *deliver* the services needed? Are we here to play the role of a watchdog and to *monitor* the fulfilment by Governments of their promises and the implementation of the internationally agreed goals? Are we *campaigning*, as invited by the UN Millennium Campaign, or are we *responding* to the MDGs by lobbying and presenting alternative policies and practices?

We are everywhere in the world, and notably in the SADC countries, doing all of this. The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) was launched at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005 as a civil society response to the MDGs. But the movement started before with consultations being held in the SADC countries (in Maputo, in December 2003, and in Johannesburg, in September 2004). As a loose alliance of civil society formations, GCAP has gained energy across the world in 2005 and 2006. The national campaigns that make up GCAP have mobilised citizens and conducted lobbying work on GCAP's four policy demands, 1) trade justice, 2) debt cancellation, 3) a major increase in the quantity and quality of aid and, 4) national efforts to eliminate poverty and achieve the Millennium goals that are sustainable and developed and implemented in a way that is democratic, transparent and accountable to citizens. The Global Call to Action against Poverty is far more than an MDG campaign, as it responds to the MDG agenda by offering a wider platform for policy analysis, lobbying activities and on the ground mobilisation.

#### **3.1 Monitoring progress and holding governments accountable**

At the occasion of the Millennium Summit + 5, in September 2005, several civil society coalitions produced MDG shadow reports alongside those of National Governments which were prepared for the Summit. The civil society reports which were produced in an exemplary consultative manner, have observed amongst others things that many National MDG Reports had failed to consult with civil society organisations which deal directly with communities. Most of them overstated their achievements with regards to MDG<sup>xviii</sup>.

Civil society groups involved in development and poverty alleviation agree on the necessity of facts and reliable statistics as a base for any advocacy campaign. But what is the ultimate goal of those exercises? As Roberto Bissio, Social Watch Director, says: the purpose of these initiatives "are not intended as pure research but are used to interpellate authorities and help shape better pro-poor and pro-women policies". Indeed monitoring help:

- To underpin policy asks and advocacy, and informs mobilization
- To make National Governments fully accountable and transparent in the use of public resources;
- To actively involve civil society, particularly poor and excluded groups, in the formulation of national development priorities, policies and plans;

And are we only monitoring the MDGs? Brian Pratt writes: "Commitment to the MDGs is no doubt worthy. However, we need to be wary of allowing them to be used as an excuse for avoiding difficult political issues, and ignoring the very real complexity of human development in its widest understanding. Development cannot, and should not, be reduced to simple physical and technical indicators and we should question the real motives of those organisations and donors who adopt such methods. (...). We need to ensure that we maintain a vision of social justice, gender equity, and human development that relates to more than just the MDGs."<sup>xix</sup> Action Aid International with its "As if people matters" global report in 2005 attempted to look further than just the MDGs, including in its analysis a Human Rights and Gender based approach.

Finally, how should we do it, avoiding reinventing the wheel? We can then use existing tools and networks, notably the ones established over 10 years of existence of the Social Watch network. Social Watch's reports<sup>xx</sup>, provides a very comprehensive account of the state of poverty and gender equality, globally and more specifically in 50 countries. This international network follows up the fulfillment of internationally agreed commitments on poverty eradication and gender equality. All previous international commitments are being screened and national groups report on the progress or regression towards these commitments and goals. In order to do so, Social Watch has developed over the years two powerful tools, which are the "Basic Capabilities Index" and the "Gender Equity Index".

Finally, one important regional monitoring initiative has been recently developed, that deserve our attention: the "African Monitor Initiative", led by the Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town, envisages the creation of an independent body, rooted in Africa's civil society, to monitor and promote effective implementation of development commitments to Africa<sup>xxi</sup>.

### **3.2 Debt, Trade and Aid**

The Global Call to Action against Poverty is based on existing networks, campaigns for economic and social justice. It wants to develop and disseminate further the existing policy changes and mobilisation tools by offering bridges between civil society organisations.

In terms of lobbying and presenting policy changes, some important work has been done on each of the Goals, and especially on Goal 8 (Partnership for Development). Authors as

Charles Abugre and Terry McKinley present rich analysis of the present economic trends and policies. They also propose viable alternatives.

Charles Abugre wrote on the resources for development, and the role of debt, trade aid<sup>xxii</sup>. According to the economist, the rationale behind the “more and better aid, debt cancellation and more just trade policies” is that these will create the conditions to ensure adequate resources to finance Africa’s development. He argues however that these demands will not provide the resources adequate for Africa’s development. These demands, though relevant, are slightly misplaced in their singular focus on sources of “inflows” to the total denial of the mechanisms of “outflows”.

On debt, Abugre believes that the issue is not so much what we demand but whom we address with what messages. The message of ending the debt burden has been directed largely at one direction – the creditors. The message itself has been one of appealing for understanding whether based on justice or empathy. By directing the energies at appealing to northern creditors suggests our lack of belief in the power of the debtor. However, Abugre states that the Nigerian debt relief effort and the Argentinean debt restructuring initiative suggest that debtors do have power and can force change. Some would say that Nigeria and Argentina could do what they did because they hold large debts - \$34bn and \$32bn respectively – and that they fit the classic case of “if you owe the banks \$50,000 you are in trouble but if you owe hem \$50bn the bank is in trouble”. If so, Africa’s debt overhang of over \$200bn provides the muscle for a successful collective African threat. The cancellation of \$200bn, poses no threat to the global financial system but can save millions of lives. Even a threat of a collective moratorium will send the message clear and loud, especially if this threat were accompanied by an enforceable commitment to transparency and ant-corruption and the channelling of the money so saved into revamping public services. Abugre proposes the following principles in relation to debt?

- Welcome the principle of debt stock cancellation but condemn the selectivity and divisive approach.
- Develop a strategy to pressurise the AU and its member states to adopt a debtor-led strategy
- Campaign for an International Law to regulate international debt.

The trade policy focus has been in 4 areas: defending domestic markets from further harmful liberalisation; defending producers – especially farmers – from demise resulting from “dumping” of subsidised imports; seeking market access without reciprocal market opening obligations and promoting regional integration. These demands are relevant and we should continue to maintain a focus on them. So what do we do in relation to trade and investment?

- Encourage national governments to be more proactive in protecting their markets especially in the area of consumer goods, agriculture and essential public services. They will not necessarily suffer punitive action. Even if they did, their economies may still come out better-off.
- Drum home to national governments that opening markets will not necessarily bring FDI and even if it did, FDI will not necessarily bring about develop. Encourage the AU to promote a critical debate on the role of FDI in Africa’s development.
- Continue the campaign for policy flexibility and end to coerced liberalisation. This is crucial for defending Africa’s producers.
- Scale down the export focus of agriculture (market access in the north) and emphasise its food security and rural development objectives.
- Support the Stop EPAs campaign

On aid, the key problems are its purpose, its governance and its impact on the psychology and accountability of our governments and elite. Abugre proposes the following:

- Support our northern partners' efforts to make their governments fulfil their part of the global compact but scale down its importance in Africa's plan of action;
- Support the establishment of a Peer Trust Fund to assist the AU to deal with the governance issue;
- Increase domestic CSO interests and involvement in budget processes so as to reduce the influence of donors on budget governance and steer budgets to deliver public services and fight corruption;
- Oppose donor-driven budget management arrangements that undermine parliamentary oversight and propose parliamentary oversight procedures that are transparent and inclusive of civil society.

### 3.3 Aid Effectiveness

The Reality of Aid network works since 1993 on the issue, and presents regularly complete analysis of the forms of Aid<sup>xxiii</sup>. The network is leading the current dialogue on Aid Effectiveness, which started with OECD some time ago, as CSOs were already present at the adoption of the Paris Declaration, in 2005<sup>xxiv</sup>. Since then, with the political support of the Canadian and the Norwegian governments, the OECD/ Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Working Party of the Aid effectiveness initiated a more formal consultation with civil society groups from the South and the North. This dialogue takes place in the context of the preparations for the High Level Ministerial Forum, convened by the OECD, to be held in September 2008 in Accra, Ghana.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness<sup>xxv</sup> adopted in March 2005 is the culmination of ten years of donor discussion on ways to improve aid effectiveness. Key foundations of the Paris Declaration are the notion of "partnership" which replaces the traditional donor/recipient relationship (donors and "aid partners" make a total of 56 "partnerships commitments across all five areas); and the "Programme-based approach", in which a number of donors pool development resources in support for a defined development programme. It then takes two main forms: the sector-wide programme (programme coordinated by a sector Ministry) and the budget support (support to the central budget of the government to implement its Poverty Reduction Strategy).

The Paris Declaration implies that its principles and objectives are applicable to all country-level development actors, including civil society organizations. Nevertheless, to date, the aid effectiveness agenda is largely focused, as seen in the targets of the Paris Declaration, on the need for institutional reforms by donors and developing country governments. While CSOs have welcomed many aspects of the Paris Declaration, they reiterated that the Declaration has very little to say on essential questions: aid effectiveness for what purpose, for whom and as measured by whom? How much aid actually reaches the poor and mobilizes them to address their own problems? CSOs also assert that the purpose of the aid should be the true measure of its effectiveness.

The Paris Declaration actually sets out an unfinished and narrow agenda for reform. It ignores the role of citizens and CSOs as development actors in their own right who have a long history in organizing economic, social and political initiatives with and on behalf of the poor. CSOs involved in the aid effectiveness debate propose change in four areas to achieve real impact on poverty with aid resources:

- Understanding the role of civil society as development actors related to efforts by poor and marginalized peoples to claim their rights
- Aligning donor approaches with a more complex understanding of aid modalities to support the poor
- Resolving the tension between local ownership and donor conditionalities
- Assuring independent assessments of progress for improved development results

On the principle of **local ownership**, CSOs advocate for a real country, or democratic, ownership which require participation from citizens over development policies. The Paris Declaration commits in several places partner countries to "encourage broad participation

of a range of national actors in setting development priorities". But we know that the public space for participation is never given and granted and requires strong political determination. We also note that macro-economics associated with Structural Adjustment Programs remain a strong consensus among donors, and have reemerged for debt cancellation, PRSPs, as well as in the coordinated donor programme-based approaches. The use of aid as a policy tool to impose economic policy and other conditions has no place in an aid paradigm rooted in a commitment to local ownership.

On the principles of **alignment and harmonization**, CSOs affirm that these reforms rest on the untenable assumption that a limited donor/recipient partnership made up of State officials can represent the consensus interests of major development actors in any society. We have now a static state-centred approach that ignores and devaluates the critical importance of communities of poor and marginalized people, and their role in organizing local knowledge, and articulating local demands to respond to unique local conditions. Civil society efforts complement, but also sometimes challenge the directions of state policy. If the Paris Declaration aid modalities undermine autonomous and responsive aid support to civil society development actors, the Declaration will reduce the chances of achieving the MDGs<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Finally on the principle of **mutual accountability**, CSOs call for a more comprehensive approach. Accountability is not just about technical and contractual relationships in aid spending, but also about addressing the political inequalities in donor/recipient relationships. Strengthening independent institutional monitoring of donors against clear and enforceable benchmarks for donor performance is essential.

All CSO involved in the Aid Effectiveness debate would agree that the principles and objectives of the Paris Declaration are to be applicable to all country-level development actors, if the Declaration acknowledges and includes clearly not only the role and responsibilities of all development actors but also aid as an important support to the development agenda. Let us seize now the opportunity and contribute to the aid effectiveness debate in 2007/2008, by pushing our development agenda. What can we do?

- In the SADC countries, we need to assess the multiple role in development of CSOs, and to liaise and consult with Northern CSOs present and work on joint policy positions;
- We can manage and contribute to wide national consultations on the aid effectiveness in order to prepare the regional workshops which will take place between August and October 2007<sup>xxvii</sup>;
- With the support of the analytical framework being prepared by the Reality of Aid network, we shall produce our own monitoring and evidence-based national reports on the effectiveness of aid;
- Since the "Paris Declaration" came after the "Rome Declaration", adopted in 2002, let us acknowledge that those texts are not cast on stone. Therefore, we shall lobby and seek support from local and national government officials and advocate for a new comprehensive Declaration, to be adopted in Accra;
- We also finally need to build bridges between two parallel processes on aid effectiveness; the OECD/DAC process and the Financing For Development (FFD) process, starting at the Spring meeting of ECOSOC in April 2007 and culminating with the Follow up conference on FFD, to be held in Doha, Qatar during the second half of 2008;

#### **4. Financing Development: Beyond aid debt relief and trade**

According to Abugre<sup>xxviii</sup>, the reality of Africa is that the resources that leak out far exceed those that flow in. This is why Africa is a net exporter of capital. Njukumana et al

estimate that between 1970 and 2000, whereas Africa received about \$100bn aid (including loans) it lost \$274bn in capital flight induced by debt, trade mis-invoicing and imputed interests. Add also losses that African countries have incurred simply by opening up their markets. Africa was made to reduce their rates of protection at a pace 3 times as fast the countries of the OECD. This has left the continent ridiculously open relative to its stage of development. Christian Aid recently calculated that over the past 2 decades, Africa lost in income terms the equivalent of over \$270bn from the negative growth effects alone of trade liberalization. This amount alone more than matches the accumulated value of grants, loans and net FDI channelled into the continent.

Add also, continues Abugre, losses due to tax competition, tax evasion and tax avoidance. Losses from tax competition have largely benefited multinational corporations whilst the tax burden has been transferred to wage earners and small businesses. Some analysts suggest that African oil producers command less than 20% of the profits. The rest are lost to complicated network of unfair trade practices. The transfer of revenues to tax heavens by these corporations and rich individuals further exacerbates the revenue loss. It is estimated that at least \$11.5 trillion is currently held in about 74 tax heavens – lost to tax authorities – by wealthy individuals. This does not include laundered profits of businesses which operate through tax havens to avoid tax nor does it include money illicitly transferred abroad through corruption, drugs and money laundering. These latter elements in any case comprise a much smaller share of resources losses than is generally believed.

As is obvious from above, Africa is not as poor or as helpless as is often presented. Instead, it is a continent that leaks heavily. The task is to plug these leaks. To do so, African civil society must turn attention to addressing:

- Support campaigns aimed at corporate transparency
- Campaign against tax concessions and for progressive tax policies
- Work with relevant networks to campaign for the end to banking secrecy and tax havens
- Follow-up on the recommendation of the Africa Commission report to pursue and return stolen wealth from Africa and to put in place measures to discourage illicit transfers abroad.

Reliance on domestic sources for financing development also provides a more conducive environment for promoting democratic accountability than the dependence on aid. We have an obligation to *plug the leaks*, concludes Abugre.

## **5. More ambitious economic policies needed**

We could the ask ourselves if the resolution adopted by the General Assembly-2005 World Summit Outcome, *“To adopt, by 2006, and implement comprehensive national development strategies to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals”* has been at all followed up.

In the paper *“MDG-Based PRSPs Need More Ambitious Economic Policies”*<sup>xxix</sup>, Terry McKinley advocates that if ‘Second-Generation’ Poverty Reduction Strategies are based on MDGs, they should have economic policies that are less fixated on macroeconomic stabilization and more geared to accelerating growth with equity and promoting long-term human development. To reach the MDGs, economic policies have to be bolder and more expansionary. Fiscal policies should be focused on substantially scaling up public investment, financial policies geared to channelling considerably more lending to productive private investment and monetary policies reshaped to target, not just inflation, but also real economic variables, such as increases in incomes and jobs and big reductions in poverty.

The call for substantially larger ODA contributions to many developing countries, especially in Africa necessarily involves making PRSP objectives much more ambitious. Such an injection of funds should rapidly scale up public investment in physical and social infrastructure. But a sizeable share should be targeted, upfront, to enlarging 'absorptive capacity'—i.e., each country's ability to effectively disburse these monies for development purposes (Nebie 2004). Otherwise, national ownership of poverty reduction strategies will be sacrificed in the process. Thus, central to this campaign is a major agenda of national capacity development.

One of the most common excuses that donors give for not substantially increasing their assistance is that countries lack the "absorptive capacity" to disburse such large new sums of money. In some cases, this is certainly not true: adequate capacities do exist. In many countries, donors contribute to the problem by over-burdening national capacities. Aid management systems are geared to donor requirements, not national priorities and are often run parallel to government structures. As a result, government capacities are weakened, not strengthened. In addition, donors often place multiple, diverse and uncoordinated demands on governments—even when they co-finance the same project. Governments often have difficulty in complying with complicated donor procedures, which, to make matters worse, frequently change, along with donor staff and policies (Nebie 2004). In those cases where national mechanisms are, in fact, lacking to disburse development funds, the priority for donors should be to rectify this condition, instead of lamely using such a problem as an excuse to hold back funding. Building up absorptive capacity involves increased expenditures, particularly during the early stages, on personnel and governance institutions and increased investments in a foundation of social and physical infrastructure.

The best use of ODA is to finance public investment, such in physical and social infrastructure or in the restructuring of institutions, such as the banking system, that can galvanize private investment. In economies with under-utilized capacities—a characteristic of most low-income countries—such investment is unlikely to cause more than a moderate increase in inflation. At the same time, a positive supply response is likely to be rapid (because new capacities do not have to be immediately created).

To avoid long-term aid dependence, governments also need to mobilize more domestic resources: boosting revenue or borrowing domestically, if necessary, for public investment<sup>xxx</sup>.

McKinley sparks, in order to advance 'national ownership' of the development agenda, a broader policy dialogue—based on creating wider policy choice—on the macroeconomic and adjustment policies that govern Poverty Reduction Strategies. The economic policies under-girding 'Second-Generation' PRSPs—namely, PRSPs firmly anchored in an MDG framework—should be less fixated on macroeconomic stabilization and more geared to stimulating rapid growth and long-term human development. Unless economic policies are revamped along these lines, and fully backed up with ample development resources, the prospects for reaching the MDGs will remain remote. And PRSPs will remain short-term, tactical instruments designed primarily to legitimize stabilization measures and set up social safety nets in order to mitigate the inevitable adverse consequences for poverty.

## **6. Ways forward**

As Brian Tomlinson puts it: "Being unrealistic about the MDGs in our public rhetoric and campaigns over the next decade "runs the risk of creating a climate of inaccurate pessimism about development and aid". Indeed, in the absence of radical reforms greater global equality on the part of developed countries, beyond delivering more aid, an exclusive emphasis on MDG targets potentially sets up poor people and poor countries to take the blame once again for "their failure" to achieve the unachievable. Yet again, it

will be said these countries failed to take the advice of the international community and squandered billions of dollars of aid and debt relief without reaching the Goals<sup>xxxix</sup>.

We then need to deconstruct the language used on and around the MDGs, question the governments' reports being issued and answer to the MDGs with our tools. As seen previously, several indexes have been established and provide excellent tools to respond to the MDG and development language. Some Northern NGOs are also attempting to capitalize on the efforts being made. The KICC "Monitoring project", launched recently by Oxfam NoVIB, attempts to build a community of organisations involved in monitoring governments and by large in participatory governance. The KICC project already had regional workshops in Bamako and Lusaka.

National initiatives as in South-Africa<sup>xxxii</sup>, Uganda<sup>xxxiii</sup>, Malawi<sup>xxxiv</sup> and many others show the interest and the will to challenge official data, to implement tools, and to interpellate decision makers at the national but also the local levels. Still, there is a need for a better national ownership and capacity. This applies for national economists and policy makers, but also to CSOs. What Reality of Aid is attempting to do, is to involve a large community of CSOs in the aid debate, at the international, regional and national level. Clearly, in some of the SADC countries, aid has such a political and economic importance that CSOs must engage in its overall management.

For us at CIVICUS, one of the opportunities the MDG's and the GCAP campaign offers civil society is the possibility for collective and collaborative action, notwithstanding the specific goals that different sectors support. Engaging around the MDG's can boost civil society's capacity to engage national governments and intergovernmental bodies, while increasing their collective experiential knowledge of the politics and operational dynamics of engagement with governing institutions. The civil society response to the MDGs needs to be diverse and united. Exemplarily in South-Africa, Naledi, which essentially underpins COSATU's work, offers to civil society organisations a simple and ready to use toolkit on fighting poverty<sup>xxxv</sup>. In Zambia, The GCAP campaign is united with Micah Challenge. This unity within civil society is an important strength in achieving our goal.

As the work of Amartya Sen demonstrates, people-centred development for poverty eradication is ultimately about recognizing the rights of the vulnerable transforming the power relations, as well as affecting the cultural and social interests that sustain inequality. The poor are not objects to be acted upon by development officials who "deliver" the MDGs. The impoverishment<sup>xxxvi</sup> of large numbers of people in the South has been the consequence of complex national and international economic, social and political processes. Consequently, the poor will be central actors in sometimes conflictual politics, with their aim to strengthen the hand of a political constituency supporting pro-poor development strategies. The challenge of combating poverty therefore is not so much "political will" of donor governments, as it is strengthening the means to address unequal power, capacity, and access to resources for those whose rights are systematically denied – the poor, impoverished women and children, and other marginalized peoples.

Progress in meeting the MDGs will also require a much more comprehensive set of policy changes by governments and other development actors, reflecting a holistic approach to poverty. Initiatives that promote democratic governance and citizens' rights, at all levels, without externally imposed conditions on directions for development strategies, are fundamental. They must be accompanied by international actions on the part of governments to radically reform current trade, investment and environmental agreements. And the impact of development policies must be measured against our human rights obligations, the Right to Development and the responsibility to give priority to ending global poverty.

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<sup>i</sup> More at <http://www.whiteband.org>

<sup>ii</sup> More at <http://www.civicus.org>

<sup>iii</sup> As the facilitating role of the World Bank-Civil Society Joint Facilitation Committee (JFC), CIVICUS drafted in March 2005 a Discussion Paper on World Bank-Civil Society Engagement: "A Call for Participatory Decision-Making". Kumi Naidoo, SG and CEO of CIVICUS was also part of the UN Expert Panel on the relationship between the UN and Civil Society organisations

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.millenniumcampaign.org/site/pp.asp?c=qrKVL2NLE&b=403123>

<sup>v</sup> MDGs – the Most Distracting Gimmick, Peggy Antrobus, in Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice, **Seeking Accountability on Women's Human Rights: Women Debate the Millennium Development Goals**, January 2004, accessible at [www.wicej.addr.com/mdg/toc.html](http://www.wicej.addr.com/mdg/toc.html) Page 15.

<sup>vi</sup> See the summary of this history in Mirjam van Reisen, "The Millennium Development Goals: A reality check on their past, present and future", European External Policy Advisors, for Social Watch, September 2004. Commentary on the pre-2000 history of the MDGs can be found in various editions of the Reality of Aid Reports for 1998, 1999 and 2000 and in Roberto Bissio, "Civil Society and the MDGs", UNDP *Development Policy Journal*, Volume 3, April 2003.

<sup>vii</sup> **Quality Benchmarks for the World Summit for Social Development  
A Summary of an NGO Statement, September 1994**

1. Ratification of the six core Human Rights Treaties and legal binding obligations of the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the development of an optional protocol for a complaints procedure;
2. Fundamental revision of structural adjustment policies that deepen social inequality and poverty, with greater accountability of the IFIs to the UN system (ECOSOC);
3. National and international programs for social development should be assessed explaining what steps are being taken to assist governments to comply with their obligations to economic, social and cultural rights;
4. Low income countries should receive compensation for losses as a result of the Uruguay Trade Round;
5. The new trade regime (WTO) should be subject to social audits as well as review by expert bodies on economic, social and cultural rights, including recognition of the right of Nations to establish food and agricultural policies to eradicate hunger and ensure food security;
6. Governments must take vigorous action to assure that market forces are not allowed to degrade the community and environment in which they operate, including international monitoring and a code of conduct for the operations of transnational corporations;
7. Promote the write-off of multilateral debt in Africa and all Low Income Countries;
8. Achieve the 0.7% UN target for aid and devote at least 50% to a broad range of fundamental human needs;
9. Establish effective measures to curb the arms race to minimize violent social disintegration;
10. Governments commit themselves to provide legal and regulatory frameworks for the contribution of different actors so as to involve local, regional and national civil society in social development, including measures to eradicate corrupt practices;
11. The gender specific aspects of each issue addressed by the Social Summit should be explicitly identified in the policy analysis and commitments taken by the Social Summit, recognizing the central role of women in social and economic development. The Social Summit should draw on the contributions and respect of the unique cultures of people and integrate sustainable indigenous and traditional practices which do not violate women's rights into social development; and
12. The Social Summit should vest principle responsibility for the monitoring of the commitments undertaken in the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Sixty NGOs and national platforms signed, "Quality Benchmarks for the Social Summit" (mimeo) some months before the Social Summit. The Statement sought commitments from governments in the outcomes of the Summit. EUROSTEOP News (Issue 19) published an assessment of the

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Summit against the Benchmarks. In the words of Oxfam at the time, "The final Declaration and Program of Action, although liberally sprinkled with references to the role of the market and the importance of safety nets, unequivocally state for the first time that macro-economic policy making cannot be divorced from social development and human rights." Patricia Feeney, Oxfam Policy Department, "The Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development", June 1995, mimeo, page 1.

<sup>viii</sup> A focus on MDGs as the framework for making progress on poverty may become a set-back for the global agenda for women's empowerment in the 1990s. Women's organizations have pointed to the exclusion from the MDGs of women's sexual and reproductive rights due to the forces of religious fundamentalism in global politics. While women's equality and empowerment will be central to the achievement of the MDGs, few of the targets and indicators are disaggregated by gender. Others have criticized the lack of critical perspective on the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on poor women, emphasizing the importance of legislation protecting the basic labour rights of low-income women.<sup>40</sup> Broad goals collapse gender concerns and depoliticize the uneven distribution of power and resources within households. Equality and non-discrimination, along with participation and empowerment, were key human rights principles guiding a comprehensive Platform for Action agreed at the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. These principles may now be marginalized in global initiatives for the achievement of the MDGs, in **The Politics of the Millennium Development Goals: Contributing to Strategies for Ending Poverty? Part One: The Politics of MDGs and Poverty Eradication**, Brian Tomlinson, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 2005-05-31 - <http://www.realityofaid.org/themeshow.php?id=14>

<sup>ix</sup> "The claim is made that the MDGs follow up on the conclusions reached in the cycle of summits organized in the 1990s. That's going a bit too far. The preparatory meetings to these summits had tried something new by organizing assemblies of so-called civil society representatives parallel to the official conferences where only state representatives were seated. Although things had been organized to reserve the best places for the charitable NGO's, which are beneficiaries of financial support from large foundations and states, and largely to exclude popular organizations fighting for social and democratic progress (authentic popular organizations are always poor by definition), the voices of the latter were sometimes heard. In the official conferences themselves, the points of view of the triad and of the South often diverged. It is often forgotten that the triad's proposals were rejected in Seattle not only in the streets, but also by states from the South. It is also important to remember that the reconstruction (or at least the first signs of reconstruction) of a group (if not a front) of the South took place at Doha. All of these divergences were smoothed away by the supposed synthesis of the MDGs. Instead of forming a genuine committee for the purpose of discussing the document, a draft was prepared in the backroom of some obscure agency. The only common denominator is limited to the expression of the pious hope of reducing poverty" in **The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South**, by Samir Amin

<sup>x</sup> **Bangladesh Public Policy Watch 2005, Millennium Development Goals, A Reality Check**, Unnayan Onneshan -The Innovators, <http://www.unnayan.org>

<sup>xi</sup> **Africa and the Millennium Development Goals 2007 update**, published by the UN Department of Public Information. DPI/2458 — June 2007

<sup>xii</sup> Concerted country efforts have helped raise girls' enrolments significantly in the past decade, reaching gender parity in primary school enrolments in most (83 of 106) developing countries. Yet, in the same period, the increase in women's participation in the economy and in political decision-making has been modest at best. The report finally recommends a stronger role for donors and IFIs in monitoring gender equality and in scaling-up women's access to opportunities, rights, and voice. Investing in gender equality is smart economics, the report stresses. **Millennium Development Goals: Confronting the Challenges of Gender Equality and Fragile State – Global Monitoring Report 2007**, World Bank - [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2007/Resources/3413191-1176390231604/i-xviii\\_GMRfm.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2007/Resources/3413191-1176390231604/i-xviii_GMRfm.pdf)

<sup>xiii</sup> Genevieve Renard Painter, *Gender, the Millennium Development Goals, and Human Rights in the context of the 2005 review processes*, Report for the Gender and

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Development Network (UK), October 2004, accessible at [http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg\\_women2004.pdf](http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg_women2004.pdf).

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrosesos/whatbeyond2015/index.htm>. See also the Tanzania Social Watch page: <http://www.humanrights.or.tz/sahringon>

<sup>xv</sup> Op. cit

<sup>xvi</sup> Michael Clemens, Charles Kenny, Todd Moss, "The Trouble with the MDGs: Confronting Expectations of Aid and Development Success", Centre for Global Development, Working Paper #40, May 2004, accessible at [http://www.cgdev.org/docs/cgd\\_wp040Rev2.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/docs/cgd_wp040Rev2.pdf).

<sup>xvii</sup> In Uganda for example, education financing to permit free enrolment did boost the rate of participation in primary school, but the fraction of grade three achieving a "satisfactory score" on an English oral test fell from 92% to 56%. Countries with a ratio of 80% girls to boys in school enrolment have taken 28 years to achieve a ratio of 90%, due to cultural and economic circumstances in the wider society. Most countries that have achieved the goal for child mortality have had per capita income above \$1600 and there is no recent precedent in poor countries. National income, ethnic divides, and the predominant religion have been the most significant determinants of slow progress on this goal. Changes in maternal mortality rates require a **quadrupling or more** of rates of change in most poor countries since 1990. These researchers are more optimistic about making significant progress in HIV/AIDS, malaria, sanitation and drinking water as they "are much more susceptible to change through investment, technological and medical advances", although accelerated urbanization has been crucial for large changes in sanitation and potable water goals.<sup>33</sup> Quoted by Brian Tomlinson, from: Michael Clemens, Charles Kenny, Todd Moss, op. cit

<sup>xviii</sup> For example the South-African MDG report failed to note for the MDG 3 and 4, which focus on empowering women and on education, the number of girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies, financial factors etc., focusing only on the increase in number of those who started school. The report also created an MDG 9! Other interesting national reports, among many others, include the Ugandan Report titled *A Long Way to Go – Civil Society Perspectives on the progress and challenges of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Uganda*

<sup>xix</sup> *Ontrac* - No. 30 May 2005 - The Newsletter of the International NGO Training and Research Centre

<sup>xx</sup> available online at <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/portada.htm>

<sup>xxi</sup> <http://www.africanmonitor.org/>

<sup>xxii</sup> Most of these notes are taken from **A leaking ship: The role of debt, aid and trade** Charles Abugre (2006-02-02): <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/31754>

<sup>xxiii</sup> Reality of Aid published in 2006 revealing facts on aid:

- In 2004, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, military spending globally exceeded US\$1 trillion. According to the 2005 Human Development Report, just the increase in military spending since 2000 would have been more than sufficient for all donors to reach the 0.7% target for aid spending.
- The World Bank estimates that between 1992 and 2002, "poor performing" countries, according to their definition, received 43% less aid than predicted by their poverty and population levels. These countries receive less aid despite the fact that 28% to 35% of the population is estimated to live on less than \$1 a day, one in three persons are malnourished and up to 50% of children die before their fifth birthday.
- Donor countries are not doing enough to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Currently, it is estimated that there is a financing gap of \$50 billion. If there is no change in funding, by 2015 this gap will be approximately \$75 billion.
- Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa, as a proportion of total world-wide ODA, increased from 25% in 2000 to 33% in 2004. However, reaching the 33% mark means that aid spending for Sub-

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Saharan Africa is back to where it was in 1990. Almost half of this increase is due to debt cancellation.

[http://www.realityofaid.org/downloads/roa\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://www.realityofaid.org/downloads/roa_facts_and_figures_final_eng.pdf)

<sup>xxiv</sup> It should also be noted that, while a number of CSOs, notably The Reality of Aid and CCIC, are listed in the Appendix of the Declaration as “participating CSOs”, they never endorsed the Declaration. CSOs present in Paris provided critical feed-back on several issues. Similarly developing country representatives present provided often critical commentaries. The Declaration itself was set out by the DAC as an expression of consensus at the meeting but was never brought to a vote or sign on process.

<sup>xxv</sup> The Paris Declaration is commonly described by donors as “an unprecedented global consensus” for reforming the delivery and management of aid to improve its effectiveness. These reforms are intended to “increase the impact of aid... in reducing poverty and inequality, increasing growth, building capacity and accelerating achievement of the MDGs”. Its origins lie in the declining aid levels and increasing disillusionment, among donors, with the impact of aid in the 1990s. It is an action oriented road-map for aid reform built on five main themes, with corresponding objectives:

1. **Ownership:** “Partners” (recipient) countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies and coordinate development action
2. **Alignment:** Donors base their overall support on partner countries’ national development strategies and procedures
3. **Harmonization:** Donors’ actions are more harmonized and transparent
4. **Managing for results:** Countries have transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks for national development strategies
5. **Mutual accountability:** Donors and partners countries are accountable for development results.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Today, many Southern CSOs are capable and have the independence to challenge their local and national governments for state programs that enable benefits for poor people. If much more needs to be done to improve knowledge, democratic organization, and respectful North/South partnerships in civil society, this will not happen if resource transfers for these organizations are locked into donor-approved development “blue-prints” designed and managed through government offices. If civil society organizations become only sub-contractors to their own governments to access donor resources, these organisations will not be able to hold the same governments accountable for results. The limitations of the new aid paradigm are evident in the recent analysis of the mainstreaming gender issues in development practices. All in principle recognize the centrality of gender equality to making progress on poverty reduction. Nevertheless, national development strategies rarely mainstream gender benchmarks and donor alignment with national strategies is already resulting in “gender policy evaporation”.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The DAC Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness has encouraged a series of national GO-CSO consultations and CSO seminars to be organized by individual AG members in countries where there is capacity and interest. The Advisory Group is also planning a series of regional CSO and multi-stakeholder consultations between September and November 2007. These consultations are being planned by Southern CSOs respectively, including the invitations to relevant CSOs in their region. The purpose of the Southern consultations will be two-fold – preparation of Southern CSOs on the implications of the Paris Declaration and CSO aid effectiveness issues and shaping Southern CSO positions on these issues. A third day will be multi-stakeholder with partner government representatives invited, along with interested donors, UNDP or northern CSOs. The organizing CSO for each Consultation has resources to invite a representative group of up to 30 CSOs in their region. The East and Southern Africa regional Consultation will be organized in Lusaka, Zambia, by AFRODAD early September. It will be followed by a North/South CSO Workshop, organized in Johannesburg, in November 15 – 16, 2007. The Canadian Council for International Cooperation CCIC will then convene a multi-stakeholder forum, in Ottawa, Canada, in February 4 – 6, 2008 (tentative).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Op. cit

<sup>xxix</sup> <http://www.undp.org/poverty/macro.htm>

<sup>xxx</sup> MDG-Net is currently having an e-discussion on the same theme : Securing fiscal space for the MDGs

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<sup>xxx</sup> Op. cit

<sup>xxxii</sup> See The People's Budget Campaign, comprising the SA Council of Churches, the SA NGO Coalition and the Congress of SA Trade Unions have pleasure in launching its People's Budget for 2008/9, at: <http://www.sangoco.org.za/site/>

<sup>xxxiii</sup> See the **Budget Tracking and Poverty Expenditure monitoring** tools at <http://www.udn.or.ug/>

<sup>xxxiv</sup> In its conclusion and recommendations, the Malawian civil society report on the MDGs progress, prepared for the UN Summit September 2005, states: "There still remains many challenges that the Government still needs to overcome in the delivery of services. For example allocations to some of the key MDG areas has been far below the international standards, such as in the area of education where 14% and 12% of the GDP were allocated instead of the international standard for achieving education for all of 26% of GDP. There have also been levies that were originally meant to finance PPEs whose destination has not been properly explained by Government.

Despite these challenges civil society is unanimous that Government has to put into place policies initiatives, strategies and programmes that address the MDGs.

While agreeing with Government recommendation of increased international assistance towards the financing of MDGs, civil society is of the view that Government should also consider the following: -

- Ensuring political stability in order to woo both foreign and local investors so that more jobs are created and unemployment reduced.
- Making MDGs a priority in its budget allocations
- Increasing resources allocation to MDG related expenditures from the national budget and ensure that such increased allocations are either in line with international commitments and recommendations, or at the minimum equal to the increase in the total national expenditure.
- Ensuring transparency and prudence in the utilization of resources earmarked for MDG specific expenditures.
- Continuing with stronger political will in the fight against corruption at all levels of the public service and the society at large.
- Joining hands with civil society organisations to popularize MDGs and create the country's own priority list of MDGs and a time frame for achieving them within the overall international MDGs framework".

In: Malawian civil society report on the MDGs progress, prepared By The Council for Non Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA), September 2005.

<sup>xxxv</sup> [http://www.naledi.org.za/fighting\\_poverty/book.htm](http://www.naledi.org.za/fighting_poverty/book.htm)

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Sanjay G. Reddy, Thomas W. Pogge, "How *Not* to Count the Poor", March 2003, accessed at <http://www.columbia.edu/~sr793/count.pdf>.