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Sustainable Development Goals in sync with Africa's priorities

Support for deal on climate change

Nelson Mandela Prize winners

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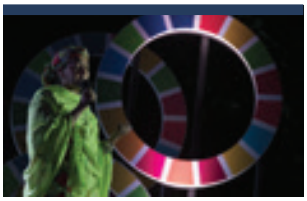

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A rally to promote the SDGs in Batare, Rwanda.
United Nations Development Programme

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In a historic event, more than 150 world leaders gathered at the UN in New York on 25 September to adopt a new and ambitious development blueprint known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This momentous agenda will serve as the launch pad for global action to promote shared prosperity and well-being for all over the next 15 years.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

World leaders listen to an address by Pope Francis on 25 September before adopting the SDGs at the United Nations headquarters, New York. UN/Cia Pak

Sustainable Development Goals are in sync with Africa's priorities

Newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals could transform the continent

BY **KINGSLEY IGHOBOR**

On 26 September, a day after world leaders adopted the new development agenda known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, prominent personalities in world politics, social activism, business and entertainment gathered in New York's Central Park for an annual event organized by the non-governmental organization, Global Citizens.

Among the distinguished personalities were US Vice President Joseph Biden, First Lady Michelle Obama and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Other guests included Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai, British billionaire businessman Richard Branson and Grammy-Award winning singer Beyoncé Knowles.

Over 60,000 people witnessed the event whose aim was to raise awareness on the issues of gender equality, the environment, poverty, peace and justice. Top leaders who could not make it to the event, including US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron, addressed the crowd via video links.

Given that the UN had just agreed on the SDGs' adoption, the festival became as much a victory lap as it was a rallying cry for individuals, organizations and countries to redouble their efforts to make the world a better place.

"Take your passion and compassion — and let's make the global goals a global reality," said Mr. Ban, in an impassioned

speech at the event. The head of the UN was referring to the 17 SDGs and 169 targets designed to guide the world's development agenda over the next 15 years. These goals, he said, are "a promise from your leaders. Hold them to it. Demand that they deliver."

Ms. Obama, Ms. Yousafzai and Amina Mohammed, former UN special adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, underscored the message of Mr. Ban, with the US first lady putting emphasis on the need for education for girls. True to form, Beyoncé spiced up the event, viewed on satellite television and the Internet by millions worldwide, with a performance that was both entertaining and instructive on the SDGs.

The pomp and the substance

Some 193 member states, most represented by their heads of state, ratified the SDGs on 25 September at the start of a three-day UN summit on sustainable development in New York. The 39-storey UN headquarters building was bathed in 17 different colours, each colour representing a goal, turning the iconic building into a dazzling spectacle.

Speaking at the summit, the world leaders pledged to work hard to achieve the goals and their targets. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany put it forcefully: "We want to change our world, and we can."

The address by Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church, to the UN General Assembly was particularly poignant. Speaking to heads of state and other dignitaries, he warned: "A selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and the disadvantaged."

But beyond the pomp lay the substance: that the SDGs aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, tackle climate change, and build resilient infrastructures — all to be achieved between now and 2030. In particular, efforts will be deployed to reduce maternal mortality to below 70 per 100,000 live births, end HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other tropical diseases; ensure quality education and gender equality; achieve universal access to safe drinking water and energy; address climate change; and achieve at least a 7% global economic growth, among other major goals.

MDGs' uneven benefits

Meeting the 169 targets would transform the world, some development experts say. It would lead to a world without wars, where everyone lives a good life, where people go to bed with stomachs filled with nutritious food, where the gulf between developed and developing countries is narrowed, where women and men get equal opportunities, where modern infrastructure is accessible to rural dwellers and where climate change no longer threatens human existence. A utopian dream?

Yet could this dream become reality? Why not, proponents of the SDGs respond. After all, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), regarded as largely successful, inspired less confidence in their ultimate achievement than the SDGs have received. Mr. Ban described the MDGs as the "most successful anti-poverty movement in history." And Ms. Mohammed, in an interview with *Africa Renewal,* defined the 17 goals as "a response to the crises we have in the world today" (see interview on pages 6-7).

The logic is if the MDGs were good for the world, the SDGs will be even better. For example, because of the MDGs, the number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty (less than $1.25 a day) fell from 47% in 1990 to 14% in 2015, while deaths of children worldwide fell to 6.6 million from 12.6 million during the same period, notes the World Bank.

But positive reviews of the MDGs may not reflect current socioeconomic situations for all developing countries, particularly in Africa. An MDGs assessment report on Africa released in September by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the African Union (AU) indicates mixed results. While there has been progress in areas such as women's political representation, maternal mortality, and secondary school enrolment, Africa could not meet all the targets, including that on poverty, blamed on poor implementation and a drip-feed of funds.

The reduction by more than half of the number of people living in extreme poverty, touted by MDGs proponents, was not universal, some critics say. Impressive economic growth in Brazil, China and

The iconic UN headquarters building bathed in SDGs colours. *UN Photo/Cia Pak*

Vietnam influenced that data. But the growth of these economies is currently slowing down, according to the International Monetary Fund, making it doubtful that their contribution to global poverty reduction in the next 15 years will be at the level witnessed in the past 15.

Dealing with realities

In addition, Africa's economy, which has been growing at approximately 5% over the last decade, will slow to around 4.2% in 2015, according to the World Bank. Even if growth ticks up to around 5%, and China's economy grows faster, between 6% and 7% of the global population will still be living in extreme poverty, says Jim Yong Kim, the president of the World Bank. Currently, of the over a billion people living in extreme poverty, 415 million are in Africa.

Worse, with falling oil and commodity prices, oil export countries such as Nigeria, Africa's biggest economy, and Angola, among others, will most certainly face new economic headwinds that could complicate the poverty fight, says Kaushik Basu, the World Bank's chief economist. This means that achieving the SDGs targets in Africa will require extraordinary efforts.

But statistics from Africa do not tell the whole story, counsels Carlos Lopes, the ECA's executive secretary, in an interview with *Africa Renewal*. "Sometimes comparisons are not appropriate, methodologically speaking. You can't compare a marathoner with a speed runner by saying that both have the same finish line," says Mr. Lopes. Countries with better socio-economic positions will achieve targets faster than the others, he says. The real success of the MDGs was that they "helped focus the efforts of [African] governments and development partners on pressing issues in human development," according to the assessment report issued by the AfDB, AU, ECA and UNDP.

The SDGs include a heavy dose of pro-poor, pro-women, pro-equality, pro-development targets, which will challenge Africa, where HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other tropical diseases have set back wealth accumulation and development. The Ebola epidemic, which hit Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone from early 2014, will cost those countries a total of $1.6 billion in economic growth, reckons the World Bank. UNDP added that the West African region as a whole may suffer Ebola-related losses of $3.6 billion per year between 2014 and 2017, due to a decrease in foreign direct investment, border closures and flight cancellations.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaks at the Global Citizen Festival in New York's Central Park, a day after the SDGs were adopted. *UN Photo/Mark Garten*

Since the beginning of 2015, there have been 214 million new malaria cases in Africa and 438,000 deaths. "Fifteen countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, accounted for 80% of malaria cases and 78% of deaths globally in 2015," says the World Health Organization (WHO). Eradicating malaria and other tropical diseases would be huge for Africa.

SDGs vs. Agenda 2063

Ending hunger and increasing investments in rural infrastructure are also priorities for Africa, as are economic growth, access to energy and water and investments in agriculture. In 2013 African leaders adopted their own Agenda 2063 — a set of seven 'aspirations' that resemble the SDGs. These aspirations are not a planning document, explains Mr. Lopes. Rather, they envision "the Africa you would like to have 100 years after the founding of the OAU [Organization of African Unity]," the continental body that morphed into the AU in 2002. Last March, African leaders approved the aspirations' first 10-year implementation plan.

The link between the SDGs and Agenda 2063 is clear from the first aspiration: "We want a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development," specifically an annual growth rate of at least 7% (the same as the SDG target), healthy and nourished citizens, and a three-fold increase in food and agriculture. Under aspiration 6, Africa hopes to achieve development, "relying particularly on the potential of women and youth."

The alignment between Agenda 2063 and the SDGs is clear, experts say. But could Agenda 2063 interfere with the SDGs' implementation? Not at all, says Mr. Lopes, who envisages a convergence of both agendas. "Africa will have their own agenda and then dialogue with the universal agenda," he says, adding that African countries creating development plans on the basis of Agenda 2063 may decide to infuse SDG-related activities in those plans.

Considering that many African countries will depend on donor funds to implement the SDGs, there may be little wiggle room regarding which resources are allocated to what sectors. Mr. Lopes hopes Africa will not rely too heavily on donor funds. "Countries must generate internal revenue. No countries have developed without internal revenue," he observes, with the caveat that donor money be used only to stimulate domestic resource mobilization.

Ms. Mohammed, the UN special adviser, hopes that the SDGs, just like the MDGs, will galvanize the continent into taking action to achieve set goals. Specific indicators for the SDGs will be released in March 2016, she says, which will help to measure the progress that each country makes to achieve set targets.

Given that most of the SDGs and their targets align with Africa's priorities, the continent may well be on the brink of a transformation.

INTERVIEW

'I foresee a world without poverty'

— Amina Mohammed

Amina Mohammed is the United Nations secretary-general's former special adviser on post-2015 development planning. She was heavily involved in planning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a new development agenda to be implemented over the next 15 years, and in getting UN member states, the private sector and civil society to agree on them. The SDGs were formally adopted by 193 countries on 25 September. In this exclusive interview with *Africa Renewal's* **Kingsley Ighobor**, Ms. Mohammed talks about the evolution of the process, the commitments made, the challenges ahead, and why the goals, if implemented, could transform the world.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Africa Renewal: What were the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and how did they shape the SDGs?

Amina Mohammed: With the MDGs, we only addressed the symptoms. We didn't really address the root causes of such development challenges as gender inequality, lack of access to clean water and the insufficiencies of health services. We've learned through this experience that having a set of goals directs people to discuss, create partnerships and find investments to execute plans. We've also learned to agree on the means of implementation. With the MDGs, we agreed to finance them after the goals were adopted, so we were always running after the money. This time, finance is part of the package.

Does this mean that money to implement the SDGs is ready?

It's not that money is ready; it's the framework for accessing that money that is ready. It is important not to conclude that there is a stash of money somewhere for the SDGs.

There are 17 goals and 169 targets, covering a wide range of sectors in development. Critics may say you are looking to turn the world into a paradise, which is hardly possible.

We have taken a reality check. We agree on the existing and emerging challenges — from migration to inequality, to conflict, to climate change. The 17 goals are a response to the crises we have in the world today. Now, if by trying to solve these crises we are seeking paradise, then yes, that is our goal. Ownership of this agenda is what we wanted. Conversation about the process is not just among countries alone, but among stakeholders in many of the crisis-stricken countries we see, with solutions coming from the very same people. It is a very heavy agenda. This is a much more complicated set of commitments. It is a universal agenda.

What about unforeseen circumstances such as wars that break out from time to time? How does the SDGs framework survive such challenges?

We have taken into consideration the experience from such unforeseen circumstances and considered what causes them. The goals seek to prevent conflicts by investing in people, infrastructure, in livelihoods and people's aspirations. What we have done as member states is to include the human rights agenda because the fabric of SDGs is human rights. We have acknowledged that context matters, therefore the humanitarian issues that we face are also embedded in this agreement. But we are also saying that human rights and peace pillars need to be recalibrated so we can close that conflict gap.

There are lots of development agendas in the world and critics say that there's much talking but little action. How do the new goals change this dynamic?

Those other agendas are the work of

experts writing prescriptions. Ours was a process that took not just countries on board, but key stakeholders including parliamentarians, business people and civil society. However, there are legitimate concerns among some people. There is a trust deficit between what governments say and what they can actually deliver. What the UN does is promote the belief that the gap between rhetoric and actual practice can be bridged.

> "The SDGs seek to prevent conflicts by investing in people, infrastructure, in livelihoods and people's aspirations.

Many of the biggest economies like China and Brazil are slowing, and yet you expect these to help achieve the "end to poverty" goal. How can this happen given the current situation?

China, in fact, helped achieve the MDGs target of a 50% reduction in poverty. China has also committed to integrating SDGs in its five-year development plans. And as chair of the G20, China will also promote the goals' implementation.

When are you releasing indicators to monitor progress in implementation?

The UN's department of economic and social affairs is responsible through an independent expert group to produce the indicators by March 2016.

Some people say you cannot measure countries on the basis of a set of indicators because countries have different socioeconomic conditions.

I don't think that's the point people are raising. What we have said is, you can have a global set of indicators that will give you some comparisons to show us how, as one world, we are moving towards a set of objectives. But many more indicators have to be developed at the country level to reflect those countries' priorities and contexts.

Do you think it's fair to use the same indicators to measure two countries with different economic conditions?

If you measure one country doing better than the other one, then one wants to know whether it's because of finance, capacity or governance. We have to look at those issues and find solutions.

In the course of putting the SDGs together, what were the behind-the-scenes challenges?

The first challenge was to make this a universal agenda. People feared it could become too ambitious, and leave the poor behind. The second challenge was bringing the poverty agenda and the environment agenda together. There were concerns that one might outshine the other, although they are two sides of the same coin. The third was how to find the means of implementation. The fourth was accountability.

How did you deal with these challenges?

Head-on. We talked it over with those who had these concerns. We had been talking for so long; North talking to South — usually Europe talking to Africa — and sometimes Southeast Asia. To bring Latin America, the Arab world and the small island states into this conversation was a different dynamic. You have to understand the ideology and concerns of all parties so that you find a common narrative on these issues. How will you convince somebody in the Arab world that the SDGs will work when you know that conflict is a present-day reality for them? But that didn't stop us from agreeing that even when there is conflict, there are children going to school and women giving birth. When it came to inequalities, Latin America was a new area for us. We struggled with it, but we learned to speak the language and understand their concerns.

Going forward, what can the UN do to ensure that countries live up to their commitments?

There are 193 nations that own this agenda. The expertise of UN agencies will have to become fit for purpose to facilitate the SDGs agenda in host countries. The stakeholders at the country level are more than they ever were. So the donors, the UN, World Bank — all these partners need to have some coherence around sustainable development. Also, we have a broader range of stakeholders, including businesses, parliaments and civil society, because we are not just carrying out the social agenda, but we are also handling the environmental agenda and climate change issues.

What do you expect from civil society?

Civil societies have contributed to this agenda and share the ambitions that we have. They should have a role in holding us to account. They can be helpful in ensuring that the data revolution is fulfilled. We need to invest not only in traditional data, but also in data for real-time feedback to help decision makers. In some cases, civil society will be partners in implementation.

How do you see the world in 2030?

I see a world where there is no poverty and there is equal opportunity; where our economies are inclusive; businesses change their business model and are no longer exploiting our resources and people. I see a world where young college graduates can find jobs, where there is less conflict, and where migration is planned and not forced.

Amina Mohammed, former Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning. *AR/Pavithra Rao*

WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states will be expected to use to frame their agendas and policies over the next 15 years. The 17 SDGs follow, and expand on, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focused only on developing countries.

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

INTERVIEW

Financing Africa's development agenda

— Carlos Lopes

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will build on the expiring Millennium Development Goals, which were launched in 2000 to end extreme poverty by 2015. What do the SDGs mean for African countries? **Carlos Lopes**, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), shared his thoughts with *Africa Renewal's* **Jocelyne Sambira** in Addis Ababa and **Kingsley Ighobor** in New York.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa.

UN/Eskinder Debebe

Africa Renewal: Africa reportedly made progress on a number of MDGs targets but fell short on others as compared with Latin America or Asia. What can Africans expect from the new goals?

Carlos Lopes: What is important is not to think that SDGs are only an African agenda. The SDGs are a global platform to which everyone must contribute. However, many regions, such as the European Union, are not going to wait for the SDGs to define their strategy for development. Nor should Africans wait for the SDGs to define their particular strategy — they have to have their own strategy, it's Agenda 2063: their aspirations and vision for the long-term. It has been under construction for the last three years. We now have a 10-year development plan within those "aspirations" to tackle all the various frameworks that Africans have adopted on infrastructure, agriculture, industrialization, health and education. The African goals don't contradict the SDGs. Our goals are specific and more focused on the transformative policies that can make a difference.

This means Africa's focus will be on Agenda 2063?

Africa has developed its own strategy and will provide input on the international agenda. What I hear from our leaders is basically that they're following Agenda 2063 and its 10-year plan, and they see a convergence with the SDGs. This is very important for African agencies because it will give much more credibility to whatever they are doing. There is a whole process of African countries submitting their national plans to the AU and NEPAD to make sure they conform to the aspirations of Agenda 2063. In that process it will be easy to infuse the SDGs.

You just launched a report — an assessment of the MDGs — indicating that poor implementation and reliance on aid undermined achievements.

On the MDGs, we advanced the expansion of secondary education. We did well in women's representation in the political system, but not in all the gender indicators. It is true that we ended up with a fragmented agenda that depended to some extent on where the donor money was going. We are now entering a different stage. We have taken stock and we shall move on. We are ready for the next stage.

During the Third Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015, the question of the price tag for implementing the SDGs was often raised.

You see, when we had the first Financing for Development Conference in 2002 in Monterrey, it was about how we fund the MDGs by increasing support toward some of our priorities — the eight big goals. I think it captured the imagination of people; they could relate to those goals. Now it's a bit more difficult because the SDGs are quite widespread; they encompass almost everything. Therefore it's going to be difficult to communicate to the majority this complexity unless we simplify the message, which I think is needed — it's a communications issue.

In the coming years Africa will most likely get $48 billion per annum in official development aid (ODA). Could that be one of the key financing sources?

I know Africa gets about $52 billion of ODA per year. According to the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], this figure is declining. Maybe we will end up with $48 billion in the next five or six years. The answer to Africa's financing is very clear: the efforts have to be internal. We cannot have a situation where our continent is exerting the least fiscal pressure to such an extent that when you take out a number of important contributions such as the extractive industry, people basically don't pay taxes. There are no countries that have developed without internal efforts. So aid is not really what we should focus on, although it is important to help maximize opportunities. If I have a choice, I will put all the aid money into catalysing our domestic resource mobilization. Then it will have a multiplier effect without diverting our attention from a single agenda.

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INTERVIEW

Agenda 2063 is in harmony with SDGs

— Maged Abdelaziz

Maged Abdelaziz, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa. AR/Paddy Ilos

At the annual Africa Week in October 2015 held at the United Nations headquarters, representatives of the African Union's development institutions held discussions with their UN counterparts on the AU's Agenda 2063 and the newly-adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Africa Renewal's **Franck Kuwonu** talked to the UN secretary-general's special adviser on Africa, **Maged Abdelaziz**, about UN-AU collaboration in implementing the two agendas.

Africa Renewal: To what extent do the SDGs relate to Africa's vision as spelt out in Agenda 2063?

Maged Abdelaziz: Based on our discussions with the African Group at the UN and the African Union, the two agendas are mutually supportive and coherent. There are some differences, but these do not in any way affect how the agendas are implemented by both organizations.

What are these differences?

Agenda 2063 is much more specific on the targets to be achieved. In education, for instance, the SDGs talk about achieving universal primary and secondary education, while Africa's Agenda 2063, in addition to targets on primary and secondary education, set a specific target of increase in tertiary education. Water security is another example. The SDGs call for a substantial increase, but Agenda 2063 calls for a specific increase. The same goes for other targets, including ICT.

This year's just-concluded Africa Week looked at creating synergies between both agendas. Are there areas of convergence that will require special focus from the UN?

The UN should give African regional economic communities [RECs] much more support than they are getting now. Agenda 2063 is structured around activities at the country level and the coordinating role will be done by the RECs. The Office of the Special Adviser on Africa has been very supportive of the RECs and we always make efforts to include them in our activities. During this year's Africa Week, for the first time, the activities of the RECs were part of the programme. They participated in the discussions of the interdepartmental task force on Africa, which comprises all UN departments working on African issues. The discussions centred on how the AU can work closely with the UN.

At the opening of the Africa Week, you said the UN was committed to supporting Africa in its efforts to achieve the goals set out in the first 10 years of Agenda 2063. What kind of support should Africa expect?

According to the mandate of my office, we are in charge of advocacy and outreach in mobilizing the support of the international community, including the UN, for the AU goals and in particular, its implementing agency, NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa's Development]. Agenda 2063's first 10-year plan includes eight projects that have been identified for implementation. We are working with NEPAD on advocating and mobilizing support for these projects.

There are some concerns that the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development might overshadow or distract attention from the AU's Agenda 2063. Is there any merit to these concerns?

I believe both agendas can be made to work together; so there is no reason to be alarmed. When the negotiations started on the post-2015 development agenda, Africa developed a common African position on the issue. This common position has largely been accommodated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development except for certain aspects, which the AU has now included in Agenda 2063.

In the past, adequate financing was one of the main constraints in achieving global development. With the global economy still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis, is it not asking too much from donors to finance both agendas?

For the AU, domestic resource mobilization will provide the core funding for African projects. And domestic resource mobilization is not only money contributed by African citizens; it also includes proceeds from reformed taxation systems. It also involves recovering money Africa loses through illicit financial flows, which amounts to about $50 billion every year. In terms of external support, Africa is looking for partnerships rather than handouts. African leaders are not waiting for outsiders to finance their projects; they are looking for people with whom they can form partnerships in developing and financing profitable projects.

Is the private sector interested in investing in African development infrastructure?

There is a lot of interest within the private sector to collaborate with the UN. The major impediment to private sector involvement in Africa, as I see it, is the issue of peace and security. Some private sector investors still have concerns about investing in countries that are rich in mineral resources, rich in human resources, have the right capabilities to undertake viable economic activities but suffer from internal conflicts. In our interaction with investors, we see a lot of attention and a lot of interest in Africa within the private sector.

Ibrahim Mayaki, NEPAD CEO. AR/Bo Li

INTERVIEW

NEPAD mobilizes funds for regional infrastructure

— Ibrahim Mayaki

Ibrahim Mayaki is the chief executive officer of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a developmental agency of the African Union. *Africa Renewal's* **Franck Kuwonu** caught up with him at the UN headquarters in New York, where he was attending high-level meetings, to talk about the state of the proposed regional infrastructural projects on the continent.

Africa Renewal: In 2014 NEPAD was looking for financing for 16 regional infrastructure projects in Africa. At that time you said these projects were ready to start. What is their status now?

Mr. Mayaki: We selected the 16 infrastructure projects through a very strict screening process. We worked with the private sector in Africa and representatives from the World Economic Forum and others. We now have bankable projects. The Algiers-Lagos Highway (about 4,500 km) is one of them. Currently, only 19 km are left for it to be completed by 2016. This is a big achievement for us.

Yet there have been reports of newly paved portions of the road often disappearing under drifts of sand that block the route for days on end. What is being done to address these problems?

I believe those problems have been solved for now.

Powering the continent was one of the three priority sectors highlighted in 2014. Two hydropower projects — Ruzizi III in East Africa and the Sambangalou Dam in West Africa — were also part of the 16 projects. Has the financing been settled and work started?

There is no financing for the Sambangalou Dam as yet, but we are currently working on a scheme that we hope will help us to raise the money by 2016. Financing was settled for Ruzizi; the dam is almost complete now.

The Abidjan-Lagos corridor in West Africa was another one of those bankable projects. Last September Côte d'Ivoire completed a small portion of it—just a 42 km stretch of the expected 1,022 km highway. Progress appears rather slow; what are the constraints the project faces?

It is true that progress is slow. We need to improve our capacity to manage cross-border projects. The experience of African countries is fundamentally about managing national projects, not cross-border ones. So we are on a learning curve. One experience that has proved to be quite useful is from the Algiers-Lagos Highway. We may face resistance and other difficulties, but strong political will from ECOWAS [the Economic Community of West African States] and President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire, who is championing that project, will make it succeed.

Since NEPAD is not directly involved in implementing projects, how do you get national governments to live up to their commitments and agreements to implement mega-projects?

On the Lagos-Abidjan road, for instance, we worked very closely with ECOWAS. We received funding from Germany for much of the consultancy work that has been done so far. We have close working relations with each of the governments that are involved in this highway. So we are doing our job.

What is positive is that the project was decided by ECOWAS. It is their decision, and they have to implement it and then issue a report. The other positive thing is that President Ouattara was tasked to lead the initiative and to report on progress. Also, we have NEPAD and ECOWAS working closely on the technical aspects of the project in order to move it forward.

Do donors channel funds through NEPAD to finance regional infrastructure projects?

No. Financing is not channelled through NEPAD. We are a facilitating entity and all we can do is help the countries mobilize resources.

We know that most national infrastructure projects are being funded by China. With China's economy slowing and commodity prices, including oil, declining, can we now expect a slump in infrastructure development in Africa, which has been one of the main drivers of economic growth?

Well, NEPAD is working on regional projects, so the impact for us is low because China is not involved in regional projects, but works with individual governments on national projects. Naturally, the slowing of the Chinese economy will affect countries that are exporting commodities to China or countries that depend on China for investments. Again, remember that many of the Chinese investments now are from Chinese private companies who are looking for returns. They will not change their behaviour because their economy is slowing down.

Nelson Mandela Prize winners feted

A former Portuguese president and a Namibian eye surgeon are recognized for outstanding public service

BY **BO LI**

The planting of a small food garden this summer just outside United Nations headquarters in New York was more than a decorative effort by a gardener with a green thumb. It was one of many "Time to Serve" activities in the worldwide 'Take Action, Inspire Change' campaign motivated by former South African President the late Nelson Mandela.

Inside the UN, Mandela's legacy was further recognized with the announcement of the first winners of the UN Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize, announced by the president of the UN General Assembly, Sam Kutesa. Speaking to an informal meeting of the 193-member body, Mr. Kutesa named Dr. Helena Ndume, an eye surgeon from Namibia, and Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as the inaugural laureates of the prize.

The award, said Mr. Kutesa, recognizes the outstanding achievements of two distinguished people who have dedicated their lives to the service of humanity, particularly in the promotion of reconciliation, social cohesion and community development.

Speaking to *Africa Renewal*, President Sampaio called the honour "a fantastic surprise." Dr. Ndume, similarly, said she couldn't believe her eyes when the news came by e-mail.

The two were selected from about 200 nominees by third-party organizations that believed their commitment to community health (Dr. Ndume) and social change (Mr. Sampaio) fulfilled Mr. Mandela's ideal of community service, to which the former South African president devoted most of his life.

Mr. Sampaio began his activism at law school. Elected head of the students' union of the Lisbon Law Faculty, he became a leader in the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Portugal. The government at that time was a dictatorship and the country had no press freedom or political parties. When the Carnation Revolution of 1974 deposed the dictatorship, Mr. Sampaio left his law practice, where he had been defending political prisoners, and entered politics. It marked the beginning of a journey that would take him to the presidency two decades later.

He left the presidency in 2006, having enabled the handover of Macau — Portugal's last remaining colony in Asia — to China and actively promoted East Timor's independence.

As the UN secretary-general's first special envoy to stop tuberculosis from 2006 to 2012, Mr. Sampaio helped bring international attention to the scale of the disease and its impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As the UN high representative for the alliance of civilizations from 2007 to 2013, he set up an important UN forum for dialogue and cooperation against hatred and violence, and promoted common action at local, national and regional levels to meet the challenges of cultural diversity across the globe.

Most recently, Mr. Sampaio has been involved in two main fields of action: as a member of the Global Commission on Drugs Policy, he has been advocating for major reforms of drug policy worldwide; he has also launched the Global Platform for Syrian Students, a multi-stakeholder initiative that provides emergency scholarships to Syrian students that allow them to resume their university studies.

Dr. Ndume, who describes herself as "just an ordinary eye surgeon," has helped over 30,000 Namibians receive at no cost eye surgery and intraocular lens implants, reversing blindness, cataracts and myopia. To her patients she is a "miracle doctor" for restoring their vision.

After fleeing apartheid Namibia, Dr. Ndume grew up in refugee camps in Zambia and Angola. She dreamed of a career in the fashion industry, only to realize, when she was about to make a career choice, that an independent Namibia would need more highly skilled people like engineers and doctors rather than fashion designers.

"The secretary of education of SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organization, Namibia's liberation movement] in

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The two laureates, Helena Ndume of Namibia and Jorge Fernando Branco Sampaio of Portugal.

UN/Rick Bajornas

A rally in Lagos, Nigeria to mark 500 days of the abduction of Chibok girls. AMO/Ademola Akinlabi

Women, peace & security

15 years of implementing UN Security Council resolution 1325 in Africa

BY **ZIPPORAH MUSAU**

As conflicts and crises in Africa took a more complex turn in recent years, there has been a devastating upsurge of violence against women and girls. The abduction of 200 Chibok girls from a school in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram militants in April 2014 remains a tragic case in point. So has the sexual violence being used as a weapon of war in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Sudan, among others.

Women and girls are singled out as targets by terrorist and extremist groups, who abduct them and use them as suicide bombers or sex slaves. Although women generally despise war, their bodies have become the new battlefields. Worse still, they are not consulted on issues of peace and nation-building, according to Zainab Hawa Bangura, the special representative of the UN secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict.

In Africa women play important roles as custodians of culture and nurturers of families, yet in times of conflict they are not represented at the peace negotiating table or in community reconstruction efforts. According to UN Women, a UN body that promotes women's empowerment and gender equality, women constitute fewer than 10% of peace negotiators globally and only 3% of signatories to peace agreements.

Many experts believe that leaving women out of peace and security processes hinders communities from finding long-lasting peace. In times of conflict, women's vulnerabilities and unique needs are often forgotten during negotiations, which in turn limits the effectiveness of both peace and security agreements, and humanitarian responses.

Fifteen years ago the international community recognized the importance of women's participation in creating the conditions for permanent peace. On 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which acknowledged the critical role women could play in preventing and resolving conflicts, negotiating peace, participating in peacekeeping and in humanitarian response and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Among other things, the resolution calls for women to participate fully in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. The resolution also requires the UN to solicit and take into account all viewpoints on gender issues in order to increase the role of women in all peace and security activities. It also requires all parties at war to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

Despite these requirements, UN Women says the percentage of women in peace talks has stagnated at single

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Early this year Masimba Tafirenyika travelled to Ethiopia to see how much has changed since the infamous famine of the mid-1980s. This is the second part of a series on a country in transition.

Ethiopia: fixing agriculture

A no-nonsense agency works to remove bottlenecks

BY **MASIMBA TAFIRENYIKA**

A charity song, "We Are the World," written by US award-winning singers Lionel Richie and the late Michael Jackson, raised more than $60 million in 1985 for victims of the worst famine to hit the Horn of Africa in a century. Today, 30 years later, Ethiopia is again faced with a crisis — a crop failure triggered by erratic rainfall. The drought could pose the same threat to the livelihoods of about eight million Ethiopians.

But conditions are now vastly different from the dark days of the 1980s: the government has transformed the economy into one of the fastest-growing in the world (9.9% in 2014) and made agriculture the centrepiece of an economic policy designed to ensure that the severity of future famines will not be measured by the number of people starving to death but by the seriousness of other less life-threatening factors like malnutrition.

Today the story of Ethiopia's agriculture—the nucleus of its fast-growing economy—paints a landscape hugely different from how it was barely a decade ago. The World Bank reckons that in 2014 the sector accounted for slightly less than half of Ethiopia's gross domestic product, 84% of exports and 80% of total employment. What has created the turn-around?

First, as part of a policy to turn millions of poor farmers into surplus producers for local and export markets, the government has been setting aside a sizable portion of its national budget — 17% in 2015 — to agriculture. This is more than the 10% that African governments committed to apportion to agriculture under the Maputo Declaration of 2003. Second, it created institutions and enacted policies to identify and fix the bottlenecks that have crippled agricultural production for decades. The result: crop yields have shot up, growth in agriculture has averaged 7% per year over the past decade and millions of farmers have been lifted out of poverty.

Cultivating effective institutions

Ethiopia's overhaul of its agriculture takes a leaf from the successful models applied by Asian nations like Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea. The models feature two key elements: first, a clear set of priorities to fix critical bottlenecks (skills, resources, funding and coordination) in specific areas of the sector; and second, a dedicated body to advise key players in agriculture on how to remove these bottlenecks. The government gave the troubleshooting job to the Agriculture Transformation Agency (ATA), a semi-autonomous, donor-sponsored state agency that punches above its weight.

"We are a problem-solving organization," said ATA's CEO, Khalid Bomba, a former employee of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and a one-time investment banker with J.P. Morgan & Co. "Our job is to identify bottlenecks in agriculture and remove them," he told *Africa Renewal* in an interview in his office in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Since its birth in 2011 as the secretariat to a board chaired by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and made up of heads of key agricultural institutions, the ATA has doggedly focused on accomplishing specific goals, or what it calls "deliverables." Its latest progress report lists 84 such deliverables. Among them is a nationwide digital soil mapping scheme that has transformed the use of fertilizer in Ethiopia, and a hotline that dispenses free advice to farmers.

The mapping scheme — known as the Ethiopian Soil Information System (EthioSIS) — is one of the ATA's most successful projects and the first of its kind in Africa. Its job is to collect and analyze the nutrient needs of specific soils found in Ethiopia. Launched in 2012, EthioSIS uses remote sensing satellite technology and soil sampling to produce digital soil maps for each region. As a result experts have generated a national soil fertility atlas, giving the agency the ability to recommend the specific type of fertilizer to be used in each region. A farmer simply has

to provide a sample of soil from his land and EthioSIS workers advise on the exact brand of fertilizer to use.

Before the system was developed, farmers had access to only two brands of fertilizer, regardless of the type of soil they were working with. EthioSIS workers have come up with 12 new types of fertilizers after analyses of assorted soil samples. They expect to complete the project and release local soil atlases for the whole country by June 2016. Thanks to the ATA, today millions of farmers have access to fertilizer matched to their specific soil. Such is the success of EthioSIS that it now serves as a model for other African countries, with Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania starting similar schemes.

Free agricultural hotline

The ATA has extended its innovation to take advantage of mobile phone technology. One initiative popular with farmers is a free automated agricultural hotline. Ethiopia boasts Africa's largest network of agricultural extension workers. But even this is not enough to get messages out to millions of farmers in a country of 94 million people, the second largest on the continent after Nigeria. Worse still, there is always the risk that the message from extension workers could be distorted, lost in translation or misinterpreted as it cascades down the chain. In February 2014, ATA teamed up with the agriculture ministry, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, and Ethiopian Telecom to pilot-test the country's first automated agricultural hotline.

Formally launched in July 2014, the system offers free, real-time agricultural advice to farmers on how to prepare land, plant crops and apply fertiliser; it operates in Ethiopia's three main languages — Amharic, Oromiffa and Tigrigna. The hotline also uses crop, geography and demographic data from registered farmers to "push" tailored information when, for example, there is a drought or an outbreak of pests or diseases. It boasts more than a million registered callers, the majority of whom are smallholder farmers, who have made 7.3 million phone calls a year since it launched.

While millions of farmers now have free access to critical information, access to the hotline is still limited because mobile phone penetration in Ethiopia is a measly 21%. "We accept a certain amount of failure from our partners," noted Mr. Bomba, "but the overall success of the project has been phenomenal given that it's been going on for only a year."

Buyers meet sellers

Many other innovative agricultural projects are being tried in Ethiopia outside the ATA. Thanks to the government's progressive policies, backed by huge investments, agricultural production has surged. Farmers now produce more crops, with surpluses sent to local and export markets. But for buyers and sellers to transact business, they need assurances of reasonable prices for their crops, reliable delivery and a trouble-free payment system. Enter the Ethiopia Commodity Exchange (ECX) — another first in Africa. The seven-year-old exchange, which is state-owned but privately run, provides a reliable interface whereby traders are offered guarantees of quality, delivery and payment.

Ethiopia Commodity Exchange building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *AR/Masimba Tafirenyika*

"It can't just be about producing more — sure, producing more is important but we've got to figure out how to distribute it," Eleni Gabre-Madhin, the founder and former CEO of ECX, told the UK-based daily *The Guardian*. "We've got to figure out how to make an efficient market work for everybody — for the farmers, for the buyers, because otherwise we're always going to be in this cycle" of surpluses in some parts of the country and deficits in others. The ECX founder has since moved on and is now helping other African countries to set up similar exchanges.

ECX guarantees next-day payment for crops. "We do not provide a full range covering all commodities," said Ermias Eshetu, the exchange's current CEO. "But for what we have on the table at the moment, we have been able to normalize and stabilize prices for the buyer and the seller. And I think that's key," he told *Africa Renewal* in an interview held in his modest office, which sits a few floors atop the exchange's trading floor.

Members of the exchange bring their commodities to ECX-run warehouses, where they are graded, certified, weighed and stored. "We've brought in a degree of security of supply because we also control the warehouses," said Mr. Eshetu.

Coffee is one of Ethiopia's major exports; it and sesame account for more than 90% of crops traded on the exchange. The ECX's central coffee laboratory was the first in Africa to be certified by the Specialty Coffee Association of America, a trade organization for the coffee industry. According to *Bloomberg Business*, a US magazine, ECX plans to expand the range of crops it trades and to introduce stocks and bonds under a five-year expansion plan.

Agriculture in Ethiopia has come a long way. If all goes as planned, the country will be food secure within the next 10 years. To achieve that, Ethiopia must cover more ground. But so far the scorecard is inspiring, officials are committed to seeing results and millions of smallholder farmers are seeing their lives improve. This year's looming drought is likely to test the systems created to make Ethiopia's agriculture resilient to erratic rainfalls. It is a test the country hardly wants to flunk; it certainly does not expect a replay of the 1985 charity song.

Towards a unified African market

Newly-signed tripartite free trade area to bring together EAC, COMESA & SADC blocs

BY **SARA CANALS**

For several years, experts from the three largest trading blocs in Africa — the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) — were locked in intense negotiations over a free trade agreement whose aim is to bring about a unified and liberalized single market. The talks finally bore fruit on 10 June 2015 when 26 African countries signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) agreement in Cairo, Egypt.

Under this agreement, all the 26 countries, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of about $1.3 trillion and a population of 565 million, will merge into a common market and eliminate tariff lines and trade barriers. The participating countries will benefit from liberalized intra-regional trade, which is expected to boost the flow of goods and services. When implemented, the free trade area will constitute about half of Africa's GDP, half of its population and will cover a combined landmass of 17 million square kilometres, about the size of Russia.

At the moment, however, only three of Africa's eight regional economic communities are participating in the TFTA. Non-participating economic blocs include the Arab Maghreb Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States. For now, these blocs are not participating in this new initiative for political and economic reasons. The Abuja Treaty of 1995 signed by 51 African countries mandates all regional economic communities to join the group by 2017 in anticipation of an African Economic Community by 2028.

"The conditions [to form the TFTA] have never been better," says Sindiso Ndema Ngwenya, the secretary-general of COMESA. "We have improved governance, and the very fact that we withstood the global financial crisis of 2008 attest to sound macroeconomic policies. This is what is giving us resilience," he told *Africa Renewal* in an interview.

The benefits of the free trade area are numerous. "It has the potential to increase economies of scale [which are the cost advantages that can be derived from size of a market and production] through integration, will increase demand for the region's goods and services and make the region more attractive to foreign investments," says Jason Kapkirwok, senior director of TradeMark East Africa, an African non-profit company that supports trade growth in East Africa. "This would in turn create more jobs and catalyze technology transfer."

Trade between African countries, as a share of the continent's total trade has hovered at 10-12% for decades, but some experts argue that the actual figure is much more than that because a big part of the continent's trade is conducted informally and at times across porous borders where it's not recorded. The proportion in Europe and Asia, by contrast, is close to 60%.

A factory in South Africa. *AMO/ Graeme Williams*

Leading the tripartite

South Africa and Egypt, two of Africa's biggest economies in terms of manufacturing and services, are the main forces driving the TFTA, followed by Kenya and Mauritius. Angola, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia could also play key roles in fostering the region's economy as they are expected to absorb a large share of the region's exports while supplying cheaper

inputs such as electricity, petroleum, gas and other raw materials.

Even as the bigger economies take advantage of the opportunity of an expanded and liberalized market, less advanced economies could also benefit from the TFTA. For example, countries in the EAC, such as Kenya and Uganda, have the most advanced customs union, which they will be expected to deploy to increase the pace and depth of integration.

However, experts caution against high expectations of the TFTA because of existing hurdles that may slow down its implementation. For instance, the current low level of intra-regional trade in Africa could impede attempts to boost trade volume within the single market. In addition, some countries have overlapping memberships in the regional economic blocs, leading to incoherent national trade policies. Also, there are varying levels of socioeconomic development across countries, particularly in industrial, infrastructure and energy sectors, making it difficult for some participating countries to implement the agreement as speedily as others.

Further, economies represented in this and other trade agreements are dominated by agricultural production; the UN Conference on Trade and Development notes that "the narrowness of African production and export structures and relative dependence on primary commodities are inhibiting factors to the boosting of intra-regional trade in Africa."

Open trade with a country with very different economic characteristics will yield predictable results — however, for African farmers, opening to trade with their similarly agricultural neighbours is a fraught prospect. When considering increased trade between two agriculturally dominant African countries, it is not immediately apparent which country will have the comparative advantage in its existing agricultural production — this uncertainty stunts regional economic integration.

Experts have argued that there is a lack of political will in some countries to implement the TFTA agreement. Already, not all participating countries have ratified the agreement, although they have until the end of the year to do so. Even South Africa, one of the most influential within the block, along with Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zambia, have yet to sign the TFTA, which must be ratified by two-thirds of the participating countries before it comes into force by the expected date — January 2016.

Even if two-thirds of the countries do not ratify the agreement, Mr. Ngwenya, the COMESA official, says the ball will keep rolling. "In the event that not all the 26 countries sign the tripartite, we shall use the principle of variable geometry in terms of implementation, because those that are ready must move on. If we allow one or two countries that are not ready to hold up the process, then we will never move." The principle of variable geometry means that members from an integration scheme will be flexible enough to adopt different speeds to make progress.

A major sticking point for many undecided countries is the TFTA's elimination of trade taxes, which serve as a major supplier of domestic revenue. The TFTA requires all countries to open up their markets to duty-free imports, which could spell some revenue loss. To this point, the TFTA includes phased reduction of tariffs, specifically the immediate liberalization of just 63% of tariff lines, to address such revenue losses.

Overall, there are many enticing elements in the TFTA. By harmonizing policies on trade, movement of business persons and industrial and infrastructure development, the agreement will expand the market for goods and services and subsequently promote greater intra-regional trade. Mr. Kapkirwok hopes that all forms of trade barriers such as import and export restrictions will eventually be eliminated.

Africa on international trade scale

While the TFTA may accomplish its goal of an expanded market for countries in the single trading bloc, Africa still needs to be more prominent in the international trade arena, says Mr. Kapkirwok. Africa should implement prudent macroeconomic policies and regulatory reforms, he says, and countries should embrace good governance and establish competent institutions.

Currently, massive infrastructure deficit impedes trade and development, according to Mr. Kapkirwok, and underscores the need for Africa to understand properly the international markets, and to build better trade facilitation and services programmes across all the regional economic communities.

Overall, the hope is that TFTA's success will strengthen one of Africa's ambitions — the establishment of a single market.

The shrinking Gilgel Abbay River, Amhara region, Ethiopia. *Panos/ Petterik Wiggers*

African leaders pledge to fight for a deal on climate change

An opportunity to emphasize the link between climate and development

BY **DAN SHEPARD** AND **KINGSLEY IGHOBOR**

As African leaders, climate change experts and scholars understand it, the climate change agreement currently being negotiated and expected to be adopted in Paris in December is an opportunity to emphasize the link between climate and development.

At the Sustainable Development Summit held at the United Nations in New York in September, various African leaders forcefully made the case for a strong climate change agreement in Paris. They said extreme weather variations on the continent had led to devastating human costs, affecting livelihoods. Taking action to address climate change is essential for promoting sustainable development, the leaders told the UN, as they joined in adopting a new global agenda — the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — to end poverty, promote prosperity and protect the environment.

The 196 countries that are parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are negotiating the details of an agreement that will put the world on a pathway to meeting the goal of limiting the rise in global temperature to less than 2 degrees Celsius (which is the point at which climate change's worst impacts can be prevented) and reduce greenhouse emissions blamed for causing extreme weather variations.

To ensure a unified approach during the negotiations, African experts from the government, the private sector, academia and the media met last March in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the auspices of

the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) at the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, jointly organized by the commission and the African Union. At the end of their deliberations, in addition to existing individual countries' efforts and resources from international partners, the experts requested additional resources to address Africa's climate change challenges, according to a report on the ECA meeting.

The African experts argued that Africa is contributing little to global warming, and that emissions coming from the activities of multinational companies should be blamed on the beneficiaries of such investments, not on the host countries.

Extreme weather variations

There are many ways climate change is taking a toll on African countries, African heads of state maintained at the UN in September. Nigeria's new president, Muhammad Buhari, said these include extreme weather variations, rising sea levels, encroaching desertification, excessive rainfall, floods and land degradation. "These developments have devastating human costs and are affecting food security, livelihoods and the very survival of our people," said President Buhari.

Unlike earlier climate talks that featured "top-down" targets, for the Paris agreement individual countries will come up with plans for carbon reduction. These national plans, designed to make countries accountable for their pledges, will in turn be included in the global goal. Experts do not anticipate the plans, which were submitted before the conference, to be sufficient, and the Paris agreement will need to outline how the world will move forward to strengthen the will needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Rising temperatures

African policy makers are aware of the consequences of inaction on climate change, which includes temperatures rising by more than 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a UN body that evaluates and reports on the state of climate change, the region is already facing faster acceleration of climate change than the rest of the world. "An increase of global temperatures of 2°C by 2050 is going to be catastrophic for Africa," warns the report at the meeting in Addis Ababa.

The IPCC says there is already increasing evidence of warming over land regions across Africa, which is precipitating patterns, water availability and food security. And African heads of state made it clear at the SDGs Summit in September that any agreement needed to be supported by a climate finance package that will allow their countries to develop low-carbon economies as well as adapt to the impacts of climate change.

For financing climate change adaptation and mitigation activities, Africa will rely heavily on the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which was created by parties to the UNFCCC to assist developing countries. But the snag is that rich countries are slow to fulfill their financial commitments. For example, Japan and the US have disbursed just $15 million of the $4.5 billion each country pledged to support Africa's efforts. "This is a drop in the ocean," states the report, adding that Africa may need between $20 billion and $30 billion per year for adaptation.

Some experts are sceptical about the availability of finance to implement any agreement to be reached in Paris. South Africa, which currently chairs the Group of 77 representing 134 developing countries in the negotiations, has advised that a viable finance package is essential for a deal. South African President Jacob Zuma warned that "a Paris package that is hollow and weak on finance would not be acceptable," urging developed countries to honour existing obligations.

While referring to climate change as the "greatest challenge confronting humankind," Djibouti President Ismaël Omar Guelleh added that Africa's request for assistance was legitimate and understandable, because the continent has more to lose than other regions.

Money matters aside, the African experts who met in Addis Ababa would like future discussions about climate change to involve more African experts. "African scientists and scholars are grossly underrepresented in the IPCC process," they said.

With the ECA recommendations as a guide, African negotiators will argue that any climate change agreement should also include a plan that addresses social issues such as poverty, health, education and gender. Adaptation programmes must be designed by a group that includes representatives from the private sector, civil society and academia.

In addition, African experts will call for more climate observation networks on the continent to assist in real-time monitoring and data collection. The ECA report indicates a need for "appropriate capacity building and technologies for climate-smart development."

President Zuma wants negotiators in Paris to close the existing ambition gap between now and 2020, including by ramping up action before the new agreement goes into effect to meet the goal of limiting the rise in global temperatures to less than 2 degrees Celsius. It is not yet clear if all the African leaders' and experts' recommendations are included in the final agreement.

Meanwhile, as Africa pushes its interests at the negotiations leading up to the Paris conference, the hope is that the current global enthusiasm for a climate change agreement will be matched by action during implementation.

MDGs: An assessment of Africa's progress

Was development goals' yardstick unfair to Africa?

BY **JASPREET KINDRA** AND **JULIET WASSWA-MUGAMBWA**

In just two decades, primary school enrolment in two of the world's poorest countries — Niger and Burkina Faso — increased from 20% to more than 60%. Despite this encouraging trend, both countries are rated as having failed to reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education by 2015.

Over the years, the lack of an appropriate yardstick to monitor progress in poor countries' development programmes has often been criticised by experts.

As the MDGs come to a close, some experts believe the global community needs to be aware that the assessment process was unjust to Africa and that progress made by countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger ought to be recognized.

"It took the United States over a century to make the transition from Burkina Faso's current enrolment rate to universal primary schooling," noted Michael Clemens and Todd Moss, senior research fellows at the Centre for Global Development, a US-based think tank, in their paper, *What's Wrong with the Millennium Development Goals?*

Long-time critics of the MDGs, Mr. Clemens and Mr. Moss asked: "Would it not energize the development community more to celebrate Burkina Faso's performance than to condemn it as disaster?"

A March 2015 paper by Laura Rodriguez Takeuchi, Emma Samman and Liesbet Steer of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a UK-based think tank, also faults the MDGs' evaluation system for failing to account for national realities.

Countries are classified as either "on track" or "off track" in a non-linear way with countries at various stages of development, notes the paper. The authors found that depending on the indicator, up to 46% of poor countries for which sufficient data were available "have registered better-than-expected progress on some MDG targets, even though they are not 'on track' to meet them."

"This country-level application (of global targets) has been problematic in some cases and promotes a misperception of real progress made," the authors asserted. "Applying the same targets to all countries suggests similar efforts will result in similar 'gains' across different countries. But our analysis – alongside that of others – shows progress is rarely linear: improvements in people's lives across different dimensions occur at varying rates across countries. For some MDG targets, progress has been faster for countries further from a target; for others it has been slower.

New York University professor and economist William Easterly has argued that making the first MDG about halving poverty by 2015, compared to its level in 1990, "biased the campaign against Africa in the sense that it was much more likely that Africa would 'fail' than other regions, for two reasons."

First, in his influential 2007 paper, *How the Millennium Development Goals Are Unfair to Africa*, Mr. Easterly is critical of the choice of 1990 as the baseline year (the MDGs campaign started in 2000) when economic growth in Africa was particularly poor. "This means that countries and regions are judged not only on their progress during the campaign, but also for progress made (or not made) before the campaign started," he said.

Second, Mr. Easterly argues, the decision to make reduction in poverty a goal places more weight on economic growth as a driver of poverty reduction (a trickle-down effect) than on efforts to improve the incomes of those already living below the poverty line. Mr. Easterly finds bias against Africa in setting the target for each of the MDGs, such as claiming Africa has failed to reduce maternal mortality by two-thirds, despite the lack of reliable data indicating this.

Many of these critiques are well-known and have been documented by various researchers over the years. The criticism has influenced the monitoring of the progress of the MDGs, leading observers away from simply noting that "Africa is off track" to a more nuanced approach, one that considers the level of progress of each country in its own specific context.

According to the MDG 2014 report, *Assessing Progress in Africa toward the MDGs*, African countries have made some progress towards achieving the MDGs despite difficult initial conditions. Thirty-four out of the 48 countries that are classified as least developed countries are in the Africa region.

"Producing country case studies to better understand both the level of progress achieved and the specific factors

AFRICA'S MDGs PERFORMAN

ON TRACK

MDG2

In 2012, over 68% of African countries had a net enrollment rate of at least 75% in primary education

MDG3

GPI in primary education increased from 0.83 to 0.92 in Sub-Saharan Africa; region leading on numbers of women in parliament

MDG6

Deaths related to and prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are down

NCE AT A GLANCE

OFF TRACK

MDG1

48.4% Poverty in Africa excluding North Africa declined from 56.5% in 1990 to 48.4% in 2010

MDG4

Under-five mortality rate fell by 55% between 1990 and 2012, while the infant mortality rate fell by 40%

MDG5

By 2013, Africa had 289 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to the world average of 210 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births

MDG7

Declining forest cover in 2012, only 64% of Africans excluding North Africa used an improved drinking water source

MDG8

Wide gap between trade and ODA commitments and delivery

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE SDGs

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND POLITICAL WILL

Huge payoffs on the goals, where there has been national ownership and political will to implement effective policies, strategies and programmes for MDG achievement.

INNOVATIVE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

E.g. South Africa and Rwanda's multiple social protection systems, Ghana's school feeding social insurance programmes, Ethiopia's rural development efforts and Malawi's fertilizer subsidy scheme.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND FINANCING

The Global Fund on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; the Global Environment Facility on the environment; the Millennium Challenge Account on economic growth and poverty reduction are some example.

SUSTAINED ADVOCACY AND MONITORING

Helped focus efforts. The UN Millennium Campaign, national and regional, global reporting of MDG achievements, kept the momentum on MDGs.

Sources: Economic Commission for Africa, African Union, African Development Bank, UNDP

that have driven it is crucial," notes Susan Nicolai, head of the Development Progress project at the Overseas Development Institute. The institute has produced 49 case studies exploring the progress different countries have made over the past two decades and what lessons can be drawn for the global community.

The way forward

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the end of the MDGs process in September, ODI's Ms. Takeuchi noted that the process of developing this new set of goals had "been much more inclusive, both in terms of bringing the voices of different countries to the table but also of different groups within countries." She cites as an example MyWorld2015, a global survey conducted by the UN to gather the views of over 7 million people "from around the globe on what they think would make their lives better in the next 15 years." The survey results were communicated to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) negotiators through civil society.

Discussions on setting indicators to measure progress on the 17 SDGs are still continuing, says Ms. Nicolai. The need to use country-specific indicators to show progress is feeding into the discussions. If a country establishes its own parameters of development, it will require strong incentives to push itself towards excellence.

Financing sustainable development

Ms. Takeuchi reckons that surveys such as MyWorld2015 can be powerful tools in ensuring national targets are in line with national priorities. "Data is another great incentive. We now have much more data to track progress than we did in 1990 (although my colleagues at ODI have shown that there are still huge gaps) and we can use it as an input to know what is realistic for a country to achieve."

Money to finance development is a major requirement as well. Aid played an important part in the MDGs' implementation. However, unlike the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal and is expected to receive global financial support for implementation as spelt out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which was adopted by world leaders at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Ethiopia in July 2015. The Action Agenda emphasises the need to mobilize domestic resources, and lays the foundation for implementing the SDGs. To broaden the revenue base to finance the SDGs, member states agreed to improve their tax collection systems and to combat tax evasion and illicit financial flows. They hope to encourage more private investment and aid for poor countries.

There is no doubt that the international community expects the SDGs to benefit from the invaluable lessons learned from implementing the MDGs.

MDG 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind

BY **FRANCK KUWONU**

A slum in Kibera, Kenya. Poverty remains a challenge in Africa. *AMO/Colin Walker*

Burkina Faso, a landlocked West African country south of the Sahara Desert, has been in the news since political unrest erupted there in 2014. Had peace prevailed, the country would have had a moment to savour the finding that they were among the few African countries that reduced poverty over the last 15 years.

The Gambia, a narrow strip of land tucked inside Senegal, topped the list of countries showing a single digit reduction. Overall, Gambia reported a 32% poverty reduction. Other countries faring relatively well were Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Swaziland and Uganda, according to the *Africa Millennium Development Gap Report 2015*.

Launched in late September in New York, the report assessed Africa's progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It highlighted good practices and policies to support the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the next 15 years.

For all this progress, however, sub-Saharan Africa fell far short of halving the proportion of people living in poverty and the proportion of those suffering from hunger — the two targets that would have indicated that extreme hunger and poverty were being eradicated.

In 1990 just over five out of every ten people (56.5%) in the continent were living in poverty. Twenty years later that proportion was estimated at about 48.4%. This translates to a 14% reduction, but to achieve the target the reduction should have been at least 28.3% — half the 1990 levels. Moreover, poverty levels increased in five of the 30 African countries assessed.

Growth not strong enough

Steady economic growth in the region and specific poverty reduction strategies are credited for most of the progress across the continent. Ethiopia appears to be a good example of when concerted and deliberate policies supported by economic growth can have an impact on poverty levels.

By 2011, poverty levels in Ethiopia had fallen from 44% to 30% in just over a decade, with the main driver of poverty reduction being sustained agricultural growth. Authorities created the Agriculture Transformation Agency and staffed it with highly trained people who act as problem solvers in transforming the agricultural sector, Haddis Taddesse, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's representative in Ethiopia, told *Africa Renewal*. The country "has consistently allocated 10-17 % of its budget to agriculture."

While sub-Saharan Africa's economic expansion has been remarkable over the last two decades and has contributed to alleviating poverty, growth levels were not enough to engineer structural economic transformation, as periodic assessment reports on MDGs progress have consistently pointed out. Although unemployment remained stable at around 7.5% in 2012, this number, according to the International Labour Organization, gave no indication of the great proportion of workers (77%) in vulnerable employment, or the large share of those involved in subsistence agriculture.

While progress was modest in a majority of countries, Kenya and Nigeria experienced a rise in poverty levels, as did the Central African Republic, Mauritania, and Zambia.

Having Nigeria and Kenya, with their overall relatively well-performing economies, at the bottom of the list for poverty reduction illustrates the challenges faced by many African countries. Population growth, unstable commodity prices, natural disasters, including droughts leading to failed crops and persistent conflicts causing massive displacement are some of the main causes of the underperformance in Africa, the report said.

MDG 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

More students in school but still not all

BY **FRANCK KUWONU**

One objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was to ensure that all children entered primary school at an appropriate age and completed the full educational cycle. That is how the goal of universal primary education would have been achieved.

Fifteen years later, sub-Saharan African countries are close to enrolling all school-age children, but they have not met the target. While the region has made progress in keeping a greater number of children in school, one out of three children is likely to drop out before completion. Ensuring equal education for boys and girls was also part of the goal. Yet 33 million children did not attend school in 2012, 56% of whom were girls. This includes 5.5 million in Nigeria and more than a million in Ethiopia.

First day at school at the JP Brand School in Utuseb, Namibia. *AMO/Graeme Williams*

While progress for the region as a whole remains just below target, performances differed from country to country. In 2012, 10 countries, including Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia, were able to get more than 90% of their school-age children into classrooms, the *2015 Africa MDG Report* said. The other countries were Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Congo and Mauritius.

Rwanda made remarkable progress. With 97%, the country had the highest primary school enrolment rates on the continent in 2012. Girls' enrolment (98%) exceeded boys' (95%), while the percentage of children completing their primary school cycle stood at 73% — "a dramatic increase from 53% in 2008," according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The completion rate for girls was 78% during the same period.

A combination of awareness campaigns and deliberate, targeted policies contributed to boosting enrolment numbers. Reducing or eliminating school fees in public institutions, making the school environment gender-sensitive (more accommodating to boys' and girls' specific needs) and providing food in impoverished areas also helped keep children at school. Yet progress is still slow in serving "hardest-to-reach" populations such as children with disabilities, children living in conflict-affected states, nomadic people and some ethnic minorities, said the MDG report.

More youth can read and write

Earlier this year UNESCO and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) called for strengthening and expanding education systems, including by specifically targeting those children who are the "hardest-to-reach." On the other hand, education specialists fear that the target of getting all children to school is getting in the way of providing quality education. There is more to education than just getting boys and girls into classrooms, they say.

Looking beyond 2015, "one fundamental step for the education community is to refocus their energy on girls' and boys' learning and to move beyond the goal of just getting students in school," says Rebecca Winthrop, the director of the Centre for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, a US think tank.

Nonetheless, getting a greater number of children in classrooms appears to have considerably improved literacy rates on the continent. While according to UNESCO, Africa remains the only continent where more than half of parents are not able to help their children with homework due to illiteracy, a growing proportion of people aged 15 to 24 are able to read and write, with the ability to understand a short simple statement on their everyday life, as literacy is defined.

Chad, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger were the only African countries in 2012 with youth literacy rates below 50%, while Algeria, Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, South Africa, Swaziland and Tunisia had 95% literacy rates, according to the MDGs report.

Overall, four in five young adults in 17 out of the 30 African countries for which data are available are now able to read and write.

MDG 3: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

Closing Africa's 'elusive' gender gap

BY **ZIPPORAH MUSAU**

Architects at the drawing board of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) identified gender equality and women's empowerment as key to achieving all the other goals. Six out of the eight MDGs mentioned women and girls as priority targets.

The third MDG was designed to promoting gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education; by increasing the number of seats held by women in national parliaments; and by raising the number of women in formal employment in non-agricultural sectors by 2015.

In fulfillment of this goal, Africa came close to attaining gender parity in primary level education, with the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school improving in many countries. A girl born in Africa today has a better chance of finishing primary school, going to university, getting a job or becoming a member of parliament than her grandmother had. Yet gender parity on the continent is still far from sight.

"Progress on gender equality has been unacceptably slow and uneven," Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of UN Women told *Africa Renewal* in an interview. "Widespread and persistent gender inequalities are holding back progress for all," she noted.

Countries have been making strenuous efforts to address these inequalities. By the end of 2015, UN Development Programme (UNDP) projects that 18 African countries will have achieved gender parity in primary level education. "Four countries — Guinea, Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Chad — made an astonishing improvement between 1990 and 2011 (70 to 86.9%)," says UNDP's MDG report. Countries that performed poorly were Malawi, Mauritania and Senegal.

Political participation

On women's political participation, even though Africa could boast of one country with the highest number of female members in parliament globally (Rwanda with 64%) in 2015, the continent also had the most countries with the least number of women in parliament. For example, women in Comoros, Congo, Egypt, Gambia and Nigeria still have national parliaments made up of less than 9% women, according to the report. In 1990, only 3% of parliamentary seats in sub-Saharan Africa were held by women and by August 2015 the numbers had increased to 23%.

Hope prevails though that Africa is making steadier progress than other regions in increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, but much still needs to be done to bridge the gender gap in secondary and tertiary levels of education. By 2013, only 12 African countries had achieved parity in secondary education enrollment.

In eight countries — Angola, Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Niger and Togo — the gender parity index, which is used to measure the ratio of girls to boys in school, is still lower than 0.7, meaning there are fewer than seven girls to every ten boys in secondary school.

Nine countries — Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles and South Africa — had surpassed the target parity level of 1.03, says the UNDP report.

On wage disparity, although the number of women in non-agricultural employment in Africa rose modestly from 35% to 39% between 1990 and 2011, women continue to earn much less than their male counterparts. Only in Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia do women earn 75% or more of men's wages for doing similar jobs. In Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania, women earn less than 60% of what men earn.

To achieve full gender parity in Africa, countries need to address structural barriers that discriminate against women and girls in accessing education, employment and finance, as well as restrictions on the right of women to use or own land. Early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence against women are some of the cultural impediments that hold back progress on the gender front in Africa today.

Ethiopian women in a skills training workshop.
UN/Eskinder Debebe

MDG 4: REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

A glass half-empty, yet half-full

BY **KINGSLEY IGHOBOR**

Maternity ward at the King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban, South Africa. *AMO/John Robinson*

Measured against the Millennium Development Goal for 2015 of a two-thirds reduction in child mortality, which is the probability of death between birth and fifth birthday, Africa managed a reduction of 55%. Some people view Africa's achievement as a glass half-full, others consider it a glass half-empty. In a sense, both views are correct.

Those who view the glass as half empty maintain that the continent did not meet the fourth MDG target, and that the number of child deaths was still unbearably high. With 81 deaths per 1,000 live births in Africa currently, an African child is seven times more likely to die before the age of five than a child in other regions of the world, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In Europe, by comparison, the figure is 11 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Of the seven countries worldwide with more than 100 deaths per 1,000, the majority are in Africa, including Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Central African Republic, according to the *MDG Report 2015: Lessons learned in implementing the MDGs*, co-authored by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, the African Development Bank, and UN Development Programme.

Globally, of the 6.6 million children under-5 who died in 2012, some 3.2 million were in Africa. Up to 16,000 children die every day in Africa, notes UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund.

Although Africa did not meet the MDG target for 2015, the continent made significant gains since 1990, experts say. In that year, Africa recorded 146 deaths per 1,000 live births. In fact, of the 99 countries out of 188 that "observed significant decreases in child mortality during the 2000–2013 period, 43 are in sub-Saharan Africa", notes the joint MDG report.

This time, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Liberia and Malawi met or surpassed the MDG target while Algeria, Eritrea, Libya, Morocco and Rwanda achieved reductions of 60% or more in child mortality. In Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, however, the rate of child deaths increased, largely due to HIV/AIDS.

Policies put in practice, such as affordable treatment, innovative ways of attending to the poor in rural areas, combined with political commitment, were effective in preventing child deaths. In Ethiopia, for example, 38,000 health workers were hired, trained and sent to isolated parts of the country to treat malaria, malnutrition and diarrhea, which are responsible for many child deaths. Malawi, another country that met the target, effectively linked poor mothers with maternal resources. The result was an increase in child survival rates in both countries.

A national policy of affordable and quality health services, public education on the need to seek early care, and rewards for healthy behaviour will make an immediate impact, according to WHO experts. The joint report recommends social protection in the form of health insurance for children in very poor households.

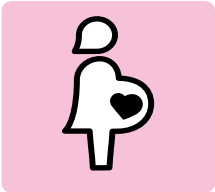
Neonatal mortality, which is the probability of a child's dying within the first month of birth, remains stubbornly high in Africa. The joint report states that many African countries made "slow progress or [had] stagnating neonatal rates," especially in rural areas where there are no health services."

WHO Assistant Director Flavia Bustreo says that newborn deaths can be prevented if there is "quality care around the time of childbirth, including simple affordable steps such as ensuring early skin-to-skin contact, the exclusive practice of breastfeeding and extra care for small and sick babies."

Overall, progress made so far should be continued or even accelerated, says Wu Hongbo, UN under-secretary-general for economic and social affairs. And if the world is to achieve the target for child mortality, he adds, efforts must intensify "in high-mortality countries of sub-Saharan Africa."

MDG 5: MIXED RESULTS IN MATERNAL HEALTH GOALS ACROSS AFRICA

Lack of resources affecting interventions



BY **ZIPPORAH MUSAU**

Despite some success by Africa in achieving much of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), improved maternal heath has proved the hardest to deliver.

The fifth development goal sought to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015. Despite modest improvements in some areas, Africa falls short of the set targets. The continent still has the highest number of maternal deaths in the world. In 2013, for example, of the total 289,000 maternal deaths reported worldwide, 62% of these occurred in Africa, according to the World Health Organisation. This is about 800 women dying each day due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth.

Maternal mortality in Africa is largely associated with three kinds of delays during the childbearing process – delay in seeking healthcare, delay in reaching caregivers, and delay in receiving care, according to the *MDG Report 2015: Lessons learned in implementing the MDGs*. The report, released in September 2015, was co-authored by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Union (AU), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Simple healthcare interventions such as antenatal care and having skilled care during and after childbirth could help prevent these deaths.

Although the use of contraception would reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions and maternal deaths, the irony of unmet needs for contraceptives for women aged 15-49 in Africa is disturbing. The ensuing acute shortage of contraception means that women who want to prevent or delay pregnancy are not able to. Adolescent childbirth has also been a cause for alarm, considering its harmful consequences on both the girls and the babies they bear.

In addition to these challenges, the absence of accurate and reliable maternal mortality data further complicated the successful implementation of this MDG, as it was difficult to know which interventions to prioritize or whether the interventions were working or not.

An expectant mother. *AMO/ Nikki Rixon*

The road to safe motherhood with access to sexual and reproductive healthcare in Africa has been long and bumpy, with missed targets and lack of follow-through on the promises made to fund the implementation of the agreed programmes. A year after the launch of the MDGs in 2000, African heads of state and governments signed the Abuja Declaration in Nigeria and pledged to allocate at least 15% of their annual budgets to the health sector.

An assessment of the progress after 10 years showed disappointing results, with WHO reporting that only three countries were on track in meeting the health MDGs, while 27 countries made insufficient progress or none whatsoever. Twenty-six countries had scaled up government spending on health but by 2010, only Tanzania had allocated the pledged amount — at least 15% of its budget to health. In fact, 11 countries cut government spending on health during that period and in another nine countries, progress had completely stalled.

In the midst of insufficient funding to implement health programmes overall, maternal health was the first casualty. Since 2001, several regional and national initiatives and campaigns have been initiated to specifically support Africa's efforts towards achieving the maternal health goal. These include the Maputo Plan of Action in 2006 by 48 African countries to ensure universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services on the continent. The African Union launched a major campaign to accelerate the reduction of maternal and child mortality, which has been enacted in 40 of the 53 AU member states. There are also other regional and national initiatives and campaigns on saving mothers in Africa.

These efforts seem to have borne some fruit. Africa reduced its maternal mortality ratio from 870 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 460 in 2013, a 47% reduction, although still short of the target.

Some steps forward

Between 1990 and 2013, four African countries – Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and Rwanda – reduced maternal mortality ratios by over 75%, according to the UN ECA report.

Countries like Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco and Mozambique also did well and reduced their ratios by 60%. Those with a slight improvement of less than 10% were Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Countries affected by conflict such as Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Somalia reported exceedingly high maternal mortality ratios.

Shockingly, Mauritius, which usually leads in economic indicators, actually increased its maternal mortality ratio by 4.3% (70% in 1990 to 73 % in 2013), according to the report.

MDG 6: COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA, TB AND OTHER DISEASES

New cases drop, but numbers still high

BY **PAVITHRA RAO**

Africa made good progress in meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 6, which called for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015, achieving universal access to treatment for the virus and stopping and reversing incidences of malaria and tuberculosis by 2015.

The 2015 *Africa Progress Report*, released by the Africa Progress Panel that advocates for the sustainable development of Africa, stated that by adopting the World Health Organization's recommended interventions such as the promotion of condom use and the widespread availability of antiretroviral medication for HIV/AIDS patients, African countries managed to contain the rate of transmission.

New HIV infections declined on the continent by 40%, from 1.8 million people to 1.1 million, between 2005 and 2013, according to the APR report. Rwanda, in particular, made impressive gains, with AIDS-related deaths declining by 76%, while Eritrea and Kenya followed closely at 67%. However, Angola and Uganda did not make as much progress as the other countries, according to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Progress was also seen in the drop in new HIV infections per year in the 15-49 years age bracket, which was reduced by more than half in Southern, West and Central Africa. In East Africa it was reduced by 46%, while the number remained unchanged at 0.1% in North Africa.

In spite of such progress, Africa accounts for an overwhelming 71% of the virus globally, with South Africa having the highest number of cases (6.3 million) followed by Nigeria (3.2 million), according to UNAIDS.

On malaria, there has been a 54% reduction in deaths since 2000, according to a 2013 WHO report. Insecticide-treated mosquito nets and artemisinin-based malaria therapy contributed to a decline in cases.

Even so, about 90% of all malaria fatalities in the world still occur in Africa, states WHO. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to half the malaria cases worldwide, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria accounting for a staggering 34% and 39% respectively of all malaria deaths. A lack of effective anti-malaria policies and populations impacted by conflicts impedes progress on the malaria front.

North African countries, including Morocco and Egypt, eliminated malaria even before the MDGs came into force. Cape Verde and Algeria have reached pre-elimination and elimination stages, respectively. Botswana, Eritrea, Namibia Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa and Swaziland reduced malaria rates by more than 75%.

On tuberculosis, although cases have decreased in sub-Saharan Africa to between 15% and 26% in countries such as Central African Republic, Egypt, Eritrea and Ghana through treatments such as the Directly Observed Treatment Short course (DOTS), new incidences of the disease are up by 14% in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho and Liberia, among others. WHO has concluded that this could be due to strains of tuberculosis becoming increasingly drug-resistant.

Experts point out that countries facing security challenges may be less likely to commit resources to health issues than countries which are not.

Nevertheless, all African countries have signed off on the just-launched global Sustainable Development Goals, which means that the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases will continue.

A woman has her blood taken for a test at a clinic in Freetown, Sierra Leone. *Panos/ Giacomo Pirozzi*

MDG 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Light at the end of the tunnel

BY **RICHARD MUNANG** AND **ROBERT MGENDI**

Environmental sustainability is crucial to Africa's development. As the target date for achieving the MDGs comes to a close, achieving environmental sustainability remains a challenge.

While African countries made great efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the use of ozone-depleting substances while strengthening the protection of their territorial and marine areas, more forest cover in the region was lost — either through devastation by natural causes or because the land was converted to other uses.

As for ensuring safe drinking water, the rest of the world met the target by 2010, but 45 countries — 18 of them in Africa — did not meet the 2015 deadline. Still, improvement was registered. According to the 2014 MDGs report, by 2012, 69% of the African population had access to an improved drinking water source, up from 48% in 1990, and about 14% of countries that met the water target in 2012 were in Africa, while a further six countries, Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Morocco, were on track.

Urban areas tended to have better access to water distribution than rural areas, although with exceptions. For example, in Angola, Chad, Niger, Djibouti and Guinea-Bissau, access to safe drinking water has increased more in urban areas than in rural areas, while rural coverage has increased faster than urban coverage in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Uganda.

Enhancing access to piped drinking water on premises has been the strategy applied globally to ensure safe drinking water for the population. Only 16% of the population in Africa is connected to piped water on their premises — the lowest in the world.

On sanitation, Africa was off track. Between 1990 and 2010, sanitation coverage increased by just 4%, to reach about a third of the population. The number of Africans without an improved sanitation facility increased by almost 200 million people — to 612 million. In most rural areas of Africa, sanitation coverage is still below 50%. Even in urban areas, where coverage is better, the expansion of slum areas continues to pose a challenge to achieving this goal.

Logged plantation in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *AMO/David Larsen*

Thirty-two countries reached the target of having at least 10% of their territorial and marine areas protected, compared to 19 countries in 1990. Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Republic of Congo, Morocco and Namibia registered the most remarkable progress.

Although Africa's emissions are negligible, the region accounts for 20% of global net annual CO2 emissions derived from land use — that is CO2 emissions resulting from changes in the use of land. Africa registered remarkable progress in reducing the use of ozone-depleting substances, such as commercial and domestic refrigerants, domestic air conditioning, motor vehicle air conditioners, and non-medical aerosol propellants and solvents. The MDGs report observes that in the period 2000-2011, more than half of African countries achieved reductions in ozone depletion of over 50%. Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa emitted the most CO2, while Lesotho emitted the least. Countries that reduced their CO2 emissions were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Rwanda, and Zambia, while significant emission increases were registered in Algeria, Angola and Nigeria.

To avoid trading off productivity for degradation, Africa has to harmonize industrial development with environmental sustainability, contrary to taking the "pollute first, clean up later" approach that most industrialized countries took.

Finally, as Africa transitions with the rest of the world to the Sustainable Development Goals, its priorities should centre around environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive industrial development.

MDG 8: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

How did partnerships work for Africa?

BY **TIM WALL**

A newly tested vaccine against Ebola and a giant drone that can beam Internet access to poor isolated areas — two projects announced just a few months to the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — exemplify the initiatives unleashed by the goal on global partnership for development. But multiple frustrations have also accompanied the 15-year effort to advance the partnership.

Results of a trial vaccine developed by two pharmaceuticals and field-tested by the World Health Organization and Médecins Sans Frontières, a non-governmental organization that provides health care in poor countries, indicate a possible, but far from guaranteed, end to Ebola.

Drug development to defeat the Ebola virus had been negligible until the outbreak in three West African countries, as deaths prior to 2014 never went above the triple-digit range and the lack of a guaranteed market forestalled necessary research and development that might have found a solution. Currently, clinical trials for several candidate vaccines are in various phases and a safe and effective vaccine is hoped for by the end of 2015.

As regards the internet project, Facebook, the social media tech firm, has purchased Ascenta and Titan Aerospace, manufacturers of high-altitude solar-powered drones with the wingspan of a Boeing 737 and the weight of a standard car to bring the Internet to places where access is only a dream. Its very existence illustrates value of the MDG 8 target of making available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications, developed by the private sector.

The lightning-like spread of mobile phones in Africa made possible by government liberalization and private ingenuity, including many African firms, is well known. So is the impact: more shared knowledge, support for small-scale companies and farmers, and an expansion of economic and social liberties for many women.

Still, according to the International Telecommunications Union, barely more than 20% of Africans were online by late 2015 and this number is skewed by country. Nigeria, for example, was a top 10 Internet country in 2015 with 92% penetration, according to Internet World Stats. Tunisia was at the bottom with 5.2%. Further, the annual price of basic broadband in 20 countries, most of them sub-Saharan, was more than 50% of average personal income in 2013.

Strong progress has been seen on the MDG 8 target of providing access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies. But growth in this area depends on the natural forces of innovation and competition; the prospect of markets assured by donor countries, multilateral institutions and multi-sector partnerships; the goodwill of companies; and supporting companies based in countries where costs are lower and consumers are closer.

Reduction in the costs of medicines (as distinguished from vaccines) differs from disease to disease, according to the UN's *MDG Gap Task Force Report 2015* and in some cases it has been spectacular. At the start of the MDGs, adopted in 2000, the annual cost of antiretrovirals to fight HIV

Together in a stronger partnership. UNDP

was $10,000 and fewer than one million Africans were receiving treatment. But partnership efforts, including those led by UNAIDS, a coalition comprised of 10 UN agencies against AIDS, using legal challenges to intellectual property and license rights, brought the cost down to $100 and some 10.7 million in sub-Saharan Africa now are being treated.

According to a recent UNDP report, the availability of essential medicines is still low in developing countries. According to the data on medicine availability and prices collected in 26 surveys from 2007 to 2014 in a sample of low- and middle-income countries, generic medicines were available on average in 58.1% of public sector facilities and in 66.6% of private sector facilities.

Nevertheless, there have been efforts to increase treatment access, in particular for some diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, largely owing to a massive influx of national and international funding, such as from the Global Fund.

It should be noted that these outcomes are skewed by country. In Mali, for example, a 50% cost reduction in ARVs translates into about 45,000 CFA per month (about US$88). Yet, given that the cost is higher than the average monthly household income, ARVs are still inaccessible to 90% of the HIV-infected population of Mali.

Trade, finance and debt

For years, trade has been the key that unlocks new wealth, new technologies, and new ideas. By all appearances, the system was stacked in favour of the richest countries. The first MDG 8 target therefore was to "develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system".

Creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1996 replaced a previous trade pact — the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade — with a more extensive guideline and rulebook covering trade relations. The African Growth and Opportunity Act instituted in 2000 by the US created openings for African products in US markets. According the UN's MDG Report 2015, the margin of trade preference allotted to sub-Saharan Africa in the clothing sector in 2014 topped that of all other developing regions.

But protectionist measures persist, including suspiciously high standards of entry for imports from poor countries, and farm subsidies in rich countries that hold back African farmers who want to export.

Developing countries received duty-free treatment on only 65% of their exports to developed countries in 2000, but on 79% in 2014 (excluding arms). Duty-free imports from least developed countries increased from 70% to 84% of their trade over the same period, reports UNDP.

But, the merchandise exports of least developed countries accounted for only 1.17% of world trade in 2013. According to the report, there is the need for developed countries to eliminate more barriers to trade, while the remaining Doha Round issues need to be tackled.

Due to visible economic and political progress, investors have been eyeing Africa with more optimism. The UN Conference on Trade and Development annual reports show foreign direct investment to Africa rising from $9 billion in 2000 to $55 billion in 2014.

Freeing countries from crippling debt was another MDG 8 target. Under an initiative for heavily indebted poor countries spearheaded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, debt relief has reduced financial pressures for 36 countries out of 39 highly indebted poor countries, 30 of them African, and achieved $76 billion in debt cancellations.

Only three countries—Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan—have yet to start the debt-relief process. The overall ratio of external debt to gross domestic product (GDP) of developing countries has declined over the past decade, but it has been increasing in some countries in recent years.

However, a number of developing countries, particularly small states, continue to face some of the highest debt-to-GDP ratios in the world, and their underlying economic problems warrant further attention. An urgent need remains for the international community to assist countries to enhance their policies towards debt-crisis prevention and to facilitate resolution of crises.

The partnership effect

As this review of targets indicates, MDG 8 was a "partnership" in fact as well as name, including North-South and public-private.

More generous official development assistance (ODA) for countries committed to poverty reduction is also listed in this target. ODA to the continent grew from less than $20 billion in 2000 to $56 billion in 2013. This is an increase that might have been considered utopian in 2000, but falls well short of promises made outside the MDGs framework.

WTO's Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh points out that among the soft spots in the global partnership were weak regulatory regimes in Africa itself.

"Countries were moving quickly from centralized economies to market-based systems," he told *Africa Renewal*. "But they often failed to realize that when you liberalize you actually need to regulate more, provide more guidance, because the government is no longer carrying out all the economic functions on its own."

The governance effect, good or bad, can be seen in areas like trade, investment and productive capacity.

IN MEMORY OF TIMOTHY WALL

26 January 1950 – 4 November 2015

Timothy Wall, a long-time United Nations public information officer and a regular contributor to *Africa Renewal* on economic development issues, passed away on 4 November. He will be missed by many, including his colleagues at the United Nations. Tim is survived by his wife and a son. He submitted this story shortly after the September Summit on Sustainable Development. May His Soul Rest In Peace.

digits since the resolution was passed. The results have had a devastating impact on women's lives: over half the world's maternal deaths occur in conflict and fragile countries; about half of out-of-school children of primary school age live in conflict areas; and girls' net enrolment rate in primary education is 17 points below the global rate. In these conflict areas, the risk of sexual violence, child marriage and HIV infection has increased since 2000.

UN Women wants urgent action to increase women's active participation in peace and security matters. "This anniversary must mark that threshold moment where words become action," says Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the head of UN Women.

The resolution was passed on the eve of International Women's Day in 2000 after "extensive stonewalling" by some members, recalls Anwarul Chowdhury, a former permanent representative of Bangladesh to the UN, who was the president of the UN Security Council at the time.

As the world marked the resolution's fifteenth anniversary in October, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the global study on resolution 1325, carried out to determine how it has been implemented since its inception. According to the study, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*, the resolution has had a remarkable impact on women's participation in all areas of peace and security. "I have highlighted women's leadership in peacebuilding as a priority. I have asked 15% of all peacebuilding funds to be devoted to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment," said the secretary-general during the launch of the report. "We have made some advances but we must do much more, and we must do it faster."

Achievements in Africa

Several African countries have embraced resolution 1325, and 16 states now have relevant national action plans in place. The African Union (AU) has also made significant efforts to integrate commitments to the idea of women, peace and security into its own security, crisis-response, human rights and peacebuilding efforts. The organization trains women as peace mediators, election observers and gender advisers.

In January 2014 the AU appointed its first special envoy for women, peace and security. Bineta Diop helped coordinate Africa's efforts in implementing 1325. Since her appointment, Ms. Diop has worked closely with the UN, touring conflict areas in Africa. In the Central African Republic, the plan is to dedicate funding to support women's participation in the forthcoming elections, rule-of-law reform and transitional justice mechanisms.

At the same time, both the AU and the UN have increased the number of women military and police officers in peacekeeping missions, which has in turn improved the reporting of sexual assaults. They have also set up units that provide protection to civilian victims of abuse. Similar units that shelter victims of gender-based violence also exist in Somalia and the Darfur region of Sudan. In Rwanda, Liberia and the DRC, the UN provides support to survivors of gender-based violence.

Challenges

Despite impressive efforts on the ground, there are still challenges when it comes to women, peace and security in Africa. Ten years after resolution 1325, the DRC went through a horrific conflict in which hundreds of women were raped. Horrified by the magnitude of the situation, the then-UN special representative for sexual violence in conflict, Margot Wallström, described the country as the "rape capital of the world."

"The recent cases in South Sudan have compounded the reality that indeed progress has been slow and that women continue to bear the brunt of violence during times of war, and unfortunately even during times of peace," said Ms. Diop, the AU envoy, speaking at a high-level meeting held at UN headquarters recently.

Moreover, the lack of time-bound targets for achieving the goals of the resolution may have slowed action, as countries were not under pressure to beat a set deadline. Also not spelt out was how countries would monitor and evaluate women, peace and security initiatives to provide evidence of progress. "Reporting mechanisms through the Security Council or [a] watch list of countries failing to meet the resolution's objectives were not established," said Namibia's deputy prime minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah during Africa Week, last October.

Where is the money?

Despite some progress, gaps in the implementation of resolution 1325 persist in Africa, in part because of lack of funds. "We have made some advances, but we must do much more, and we must do it faster," Mr. Ban told reporters at the launch of the global study, which was commissioned by the UN Security Council.

The study found that unpredictable and insufficient funding, lack of data analysis on gender issues and also lack of technical expertise on gender, attitudinal obstacles, and insufficient mapping of needs in planning and budgeting have harmed the long-term effectiveness of interventions for peace and security, humanitarian causes and development.

"The most immediate solution is to divide the funding pie more equitably," says Africa Development Bank (AfDB)'s special envoy on gender, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. "It is important to expand the funding pie for women, peace and security so that gender is not seen as a zero-sum game."

The AfDB has since established a fund—the Global Acceleration Instrument for Women, Peace and Security (GAI-WPS)—to provide flexible rapid support to governments and organizations responding to emergencies. "The GAI-WPS aims to raise $100 million between 2015 and 2020," Ms. Fraser says.

The way forward in Africa

Meanwhile, Ms. Diop is urging countries to create national action plans on implementing 1325. "So far only 16 countries have action plans. Where are the rest?" she asks, adding that monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the resolution was also not systematic. She emphasizes the need to regularly remind countries of their commitments and accountability.

African countries can also look into information sharing and documenting good practices, regional training, as well as monitoring and reporting on progress in the implementation of the resolution.

Nelson Mandela Prize winners ...
from page 12

our refugee camp said, 'No way! We don't need fashion designers in an independent Namibia,'" she recalled in an interview with *Africa Renewal*. "'We need doctors, and I want you to be a doctor.'"

After graduating from medical school in Germany, Dr. Ndume returned to an independent Namibia. "One doctor in the refugee camp who had been like a mother to me during the struggle for liberation advised me, 'With these little hands, you must go for ophthalmology.' So I went back to Germany and did ophthalmology, even though it was not really what I had wanted. But today when I look back I say, 'Thank God I had these guiding angels that have now enabled me to give back to the poor today.'"

Dr. Ndume's husband, Dr. Solomon Guramatunhu, also an eye specialist, was instrumental in introducing her to US organization Surgical Eye Expeditions (SEE). Later, while attending a medical conference in the United States in 1995, she visited SEE's booth and registered to join the organization's roster of over 600 volunteer eye surgeons. She soon started to organize ophthalmological treatment camps throughout Namibia. As a result, a number of volunteers from groups like SEE and Seeing Without Borders have travelled to Namibia every year, dedicating their time and employing their expertise to care for the eyes of the underprivileged.

The success of her eye camps in Namibia led Dr. Ndume to expand her project to neighbouring Angola. She currently serves as head of ophthalmology at the Windhoek Central Hospital and has received numerous international honours.

"I have participated in international political affairs because I'm a believer in diplomacy, cooperation and multilateralism," President Sampaio said of the significance he attached to the award, adding that he wished to share his prize with all those who work in modest ways, without any publicity, to fulfil promises and to improve the lives of the poor and the marginalized.

Dr. Ndume could be an example of those who work in modest ways, having teamed up with international organizations to restore, at no cost, vision to thousands of cataract-affected people in Africa. She says, "People have helped us to be where we are today, that is why we have to give back to communities." Besides, she adds, "No money can pay for the joy of a blind person who can now see."

The two Mandela Prize laureates pose for a group photo at the event. From left: Dr. Ndume; Jesse Jackson, Sr., civil rights leader in the United States; Ruhakana Rugunda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda; Susana Malcorra, Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary-General; Sam Kutesa, President of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly; Mr. Branco Sampaio. *UN/Rick Bajornas*

Financing Africa's development ...
from page 9

How do you see the future of financing for development in Africa?

The future for Africa is basically domestic resource mobilization, so we go back to the need for Africans to define a strategy for themselves. That's the real ownership — it is when you increase your taxes and you become more efficient in collecting and using them. So you get to fund your own development. Basically, you put your money where your mouth is, and you become less dependent on other flows that are very important and welcome, but are not a replacement of what you need to do. Right now Africa is very keen on domestic resource mobilization. This has been expressed by African ministers in many different circumstances and documents, including at the ECA. For domestic resource mobilization, tax issues, which are one of the remaining sticking points, are very crucial and the way it is treated can have an impact on Africa's interests.

How does Africa plan to measure the SDGs' 17 goals and 169 targets?

If you don't have proper statistics, which a lot of African countries don't, you can easily be overwhelmed with 169 targets. Because we have insufficient information, from a statistical point of view, this invites all kinds of experts from other parts of the world to flock to Africa with their reports and monitoring. Putting in place the statistical machinery for planning is different from putting them in place for monitoring. I hope we don't make that mistake because that's what we did in the past. What we need is solid and methodologically sound statistics. An approach that is structured and not fragmented. The number of targets in the SDGs is a wake up call for us to not make the same mistake. It remains to be solved how to monitor the targets to make sure that people are not overwhelmed with too much reporting and crisscrossing agendas. This is what we must do in the next year or so.

New phone technology to help fight river blindness

BY **PAVITHRA RAO**

Using the popular iPhone smartphone, researchers at US-based Stanford University have created a simple, portable and inexpensive diagnostic tool to diagnose river blindness, a tropical disease caused by parasitic worm larvae from an infected fly.

An easy-to-set-up microscope called CellScope Loa is attached to an iPhone, making it possible to drop a patient's blood into the microscope's compartment for examination.

Every year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 18 million people in Africa and other parts of the world are affected by river blindness after being bitten by the Simulium fly. This fly, found in parts of Africa, the Middle East and South America, can easily be dismissed as an ordinary pesky insect. But by simply biting the skin, an infected fly can deposit parasitic worm larvae into the bloodstream. An infected person may suffer a litany of skin problems and, in the worst cases, blindness.

According to WHO, the Simulium fly is usually found swarming around rivers in remote areas and can carry worm larvae that cause a disease called onchocerciasis, commonly known as river blindness. This in turn causes spots on the skin that can resemble the rough skin of a lizard, as well as intense, almost unbearable itching when the hundreds of larvae nestled within the body die.

However, the most serious damage onchocerciasis can cause is damage to the optic nerve, often resulting in permanent loss of vision. According to WHO, this is the second most common infectious cause of blindness globally. No vaccines exist against the disease yet and patients must take the prescribed medication twice a year for 15 years. Every year pharmaceutical company Merck, WHO and other partners organize a donation programme in which the drug Mectizan is given to river blindness patients. Similar donation programmes in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda, among other countries, have been carried out to cure millions of those affected.

Unfortunately, many of these programmes have recently been halted because the drug may pose a risk to patients who suffer from two other parasitic diseases that are also commonly caused by insects found by rivers and are often mistaken for river blindness: lymphatic filariasis (also known as elephantiasis) and loaiasis, caused by the Loa loa worm.

Though Mectizan kills the worms that cause all three diseases, it can cause harm to patients who have too many Loa loa worms in their bloodstream by wiping them all out at once, causing haemorrhaging of the brain, according to WHO. The CellScope Loa was created to avoid the risk of misdiagnosis.

Testing of the mobile phone-based video microscope in Cameroon. NIAID

Lab technicians can examine blood smears and manually identify and count the worms, a process that can take most of a day. Given the number of patients to be tested, this is very time-consuming and often impractical.

Once the CellScope Loa—invented by Stanford University researchers Thomas Nutman and Dan Fletcher—is attached to an iPhone, a patient's blood can be dropped into the microscope's compartment for testing. Through use of the iPhone's internal camera, results of the test can be obtained within two minutes and can include the number of Loa loa worms present in the sample. Based on this procedure, it can be determined whether medication for river blindness needs be given to the infected patient.

The microscope can save precious time and because it works with a prompt-based interface, telling the user the exact steps to take, human error is minimized.

The Stanford University programme to manufacture these microscopes is being funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the US Agency for International Development and the Blum Center for Developing Economies at the University of California Berkeley.

The researchers are currently testing the devices and creating approximately 40 more. So far the results have been encouraging. An initial test was conducted in Cameroon. The second batch of microscopes is being tested in central Africa.

If future experiments with the smartphone microscope continue to produce accurate results, perhaps there is a future in point-of-care diagnoses, especially of tropical diseases.

"It demonstrates what technology can do to help fill a void for populations that are suffering from terrible, but treatable, diseases," says Mr. Fletcher.

ATM-operated water dispensers bring safe water to poor communities

BY **ELENI MOURDOUKOUTAS**

An automated teller machine (ATM) is the last piece of technology the residents of Mathare expected to see in their informal settlement in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, especially one that dispenses water, not money. However, ATM-operated water dispensers are starting to pop up across the community, to the delight of the residents.

The 'water ATMs' in Mathare work in a similar way as their traditional counterparts that dispense cash. Patrons use smart cards that can be easily topped up at a local kiosk or through a mobile phone, and simply swipe the cards at the ATM-style device.

The water that flows from the tap into jerry cans brought by the customers is up to 100 times cheaper than that from private vendors. It costs only half a Kenyan shilling (less than half a US cent) for 20 litres of water and is guaranteed to be clean and safe to drink. The public-private partnership that spawned the initiative, between the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company and the Danish engineering firm Grundfos is the first of its kind in a peri-urban area.

Maintaining security is typically the primary challenge to the success of water dispensers in informal settlements, a task this programme has allocated to groups of young people living in the community. They are responsible for ensuring that it is safe at all hours of the day for members of the community to draw water from the four dispensers that have thus far been installed. In informal settlements such as Mathare, residents are often unable to take advantage of amenities offered 24 hours a day due to security concerns, but because of the community's own security arrangements, the water can be drawn at any time, day or night.

In this way, the system offers greater safety and freedom to the residents. "It ensures that the people in the informal settlements have direct control over their water supply," says Phillip Gichuki, the managing director of the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company. In exchange, these community-based security groups receive 40% of Ksh25 (about 25 US cents) garnered for every cubic metre of water.

The youths also keep the water points clean and prevent vandals from tampering with the devices in a city where illegal car wash operations are rampant. In the absence of security, the main pipes supplying fresh water to the city are punctured to divert water to these illegal car wash setups. After use, the pipes are left to spill out until the reserves are depleted. This leads to widespread water shortages in many parts of the city.

Now that the new dispensers have provided an alternative water supply that is easily accessible and affordable, as well as security, those who were conducting illegal carwashes have been forced to collect the water they need legally from the taps instead of destroying valuable pipelines.

Youth using "water ATM" cards in Mathare, Nairobi, Kenya. *Verah Okeyo*

The implementation of the ATM water dispenser has not been without challenges. The system features a single tap with water flowing at a slow rate, which results in long queues. Residents report that it can take up to two minutes to fill a 20-litre container.

Grundfos, which is also providing technical support, is working to increase the water pressure on the taps to increase the speed of the water flow, a measure that is easy and not so costly, according to the company's director of global partnerships, Rasoul Mikkelsen.

One of the greatest assets of this technology in a settlement like Mathare is its ability to track revenue collection, which has always been a challenge to the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company. Installing an internal system in which no cash is physically exchanged helps to track monies collected more reliably, transparently and efficiently.

So what's next on the agenda for the ATM-water dispenser?

Mr. Gichuki says the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company has so far identified 611 more points to install the dispensers and aims to eventually install one every 100 metres throughout the city, especially within the informal settlements.

There are also plans to extent the technology to the rest of Africa. "There are already many potential partners from other African countries who have shown interest in the project," Mr. Mikkelsen told *Africa Renewal.* Already, the company has signed agreements to install the ATM water dispensers in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Tanzania.

"Ultimately, the project will have a huge positive impact on health. It is an affordable system with sustainable, good quality water," says Mr. Mikkelsen.

BOOK REVIEW

War, Politics and Justice in West Africa: Essays 2003-2014

by Lansana Gberie

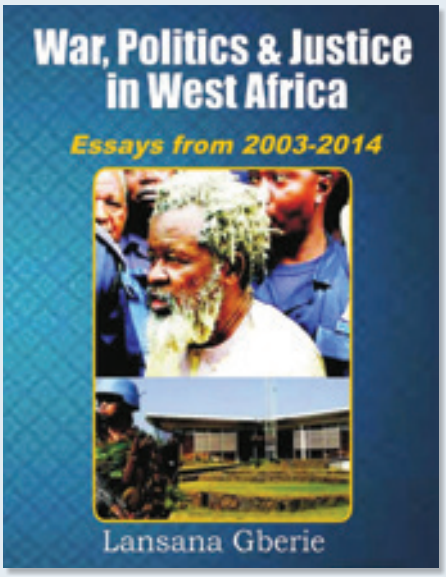
Sierra Leonean Writers Series, Freetown, Sierra Leone; 2015, 309pp; pb$ $38.56

Conflict is no stranger to West Africa. From Mali to Côte d'Ivoire, to Sierra Leone, to Liberia, the region has had its share of internal conflicts.

The motives for such wars are numerous and complex and often take time and intense dissection to comprehend. Understanding these conflicts from a personal experience is what author Lansana Gberie sets out to do in his book, *War, Politics and Justice in West Africa: Essay 2003-2014.*

Trained as a journalist, Mr. Gberie aims to showcase his own reaction to war, politics and justice in the region through a collection of essays and articles that he has written for various publications, including academic journals, magazines and newspapers.

Having attended university in his native Sierra Leone when civil war broke out, Mr. Gberie says the war captivated his attention, leaving him profoundly transformed by what he witnessed. He then decided to become a journalist so he could document the brutal war that unfolded before his eyes. The book chronicles, in vivid details, Mr. Gberie's



experiences during the rebel wars in the West African countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone, from 2002 until 2014.

"I became fully engaged in reporting the war partly as a way of understanding it; comprehension as social inquiry, as much as journalistic vocation and earning a living, was key motivation for me," he says.

Peter Penfold, former UK High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, praises Mr. Gberie's writing style in the book's foreword: "Mr. Gberie often focuses upon the individuals involved, which often adds flesh and colour to the stories told...The collection of articles is brought right up to date with a couple of articles about the latest scourge to affect Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea – Ebola. There are some interesting parallels between the Ebola crisis and the earlier conflicts."

The 309-page book has eight parts – each expanding upon a theme, such as 'War and Memory,' 'War on Trial' and 'Pawns and Players in Sierra Leone's War'.

A United Nations expert on West Africa, Mr. Gberie's other publications include *A Dirty War in West Africa; The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone;* and *Rescuing a Fragile State: Sierra Leone 2002-2008.*

— Pavithra Rao

APPOINTMENTS

UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed **Tegegnework Gettu** of Ethiopia as under-secretary-general and associate administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Mr. Gettu served as the under-secretary-general for General Assembly and Conference Management, and previously as UNDP assistant secretary-general and regional director of the Bureau for Africa from 2009 to 2013. He succeeds Maria Eugenia Casar of Mexico.

UN/Pierre-Michel Virot

Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi of Nigeria has been appointed as the joint special representative for Darfur and head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). He most recently served as founder and president of the Pan African Institute for Global Affairs and Strategy. He succeeds Abiodun Oluremi Bashua, also of Nigeria.

UN Photo/Mark Garten

The UN secretary-general has appointed **Maman S. Sidikou** of Niger as his special representative and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). He served most recently as his country's ambassador to the United States. Mr. Sidikou succeeds Martin Kobler of Germany.

UNMIL/Emmanuel Tobey

Waldemar Vrey of South Africa has been appointed as deputy special representative (Political and Rule of Law) for the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Most recently, Mr. Vrey served as director for the rule of law and security institutions group in the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). He succeeds Mark Kroeker of the United States.