

Session II, "NVP reviews: what were the missing elements?"

The objective of this session is to discuss strengths and gaps of national-level aspects of the NVP exercise in its different steps: preparation, review and follow-up.

Key questions:

- To what extent the NVP guidelines and exercise encouraged a more holistic approach to the MDGs?
- Did the NVP exercise provide a mechanism for nation-wide consultation, coordination and follow-up?
- Did it create opportunities for broad-based engagement, policy dialogue and learning?
- Did it contribute to accelerate implementation at the country level?

Strengths

The NVP exercise helps countries not only to assess and analyze the impact of the implementation of their national development strategies to achieve the IADGs/MDGs in using a comprehensive, diagnostic approach to the binding constraints on economic and social development, including policy interactions and coherence, but also to identify areas and priority needs for cooperation where the support of the international community is needed and suggests the means by which it can intervene.

In fact, the NVP review implicitly incorporates the IADG priorities that are not explicitly included in the MDGs, particularly growth and employment, structural transformation and sustainable development.

The NVP report highlights:

- Key features of national development strategies and their links with International Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs;
- Areas of strength of progress achieved in the implementation of national development strategies, including national priorities and the analysis of policies used;
- Key lessons learned and challenges in the implementation of policies and strategies;
- Strategic key successes and lessons learned that could be replicated elsewhere;
- A concise general assessment on the support of the international community;
- The NVP report could also address the impact of international policies and indicate whether a country is moving towards achieving the goals set in the National Development Strategies or is lagging behind.

Gaps and policy recommendations

Since the NVP process started only in 2007, just at the end of the first generation of PRSPs, UNECOSOC should have first adapted its support in helping countries how to better mainstream IADGs/MDGs to the countries' policies and development strategies through the capacity building of appropriate stakeholders directly involved in the achievement of the IADGs/MDG process.

Furthermore, the use of the communication and advocacy tools to stimulate political commitment to the NVP process was not quite efficient to produce the expected results.

In Mali, at the inception phase of the MDGs, both UNDP and the Government did not consider what should and can be scaled up from the outset. Indeed, instead of trying to implement simultaneously all of the 8 MDGs at the beginning of the MDG agenda, taking into account the constraints in the mobilization of financing resources, UNDP and the government could have yielded a better result in using the MAF approach. UNDP has not been efficient enough in its advocacy role to instill a culture of MDGs among donors and make the government accountable in relation to MDG process.

To have a visible technical assistance, UNDESA could provide development assistance in a more coordinated way at the country level, especially with UNDP which seems to be the pilot leader in the MDG process within the UN System. This could avoid duplication of efforts and wasting of precious resources, scale up joint UN efforts and provide more efficient, demand-driven support to national and local partners for greater efficiency and impact. It is evident that through effective implementation of the 'Delivering as One' agenda, the UN agencies can truly scale up coordinated support and substantially enhance impact on the ground.

Another drawback resides in the fact that the consultant who formulated the NVP report and the participants in the NVP report validation workshop are left out from the process and did not receive any appropriate feedback from the Annual Ministerial review. UNDESA should not only facilitate the coordination between national experts and the UN country offices, but also with the government unit in charge of monitoring and evaluating the MDG process.

The MDG long and sustained campaigns to ensure that fundamental information is available to key stakeholders, including grassroots communities started effectively with the design of the MAF and the implementation of a capacity building program in local planning; sensitization of local elected officials on MDG issues, and MDGs mainstreaming into the communities' economic, social and cultural development program.

In fact, grassroots were not aware of the MDGs for quite a while; they were seen as "targets" for development assistance but not as partners. The MAF highlighted the need for more intensive awareness campaigns that relate MDGs to local development efforts by underscoring grassroots involvement and participation as critical for the MDGs achievement.

Addressing national ownership alongside the MAF approach is the cornerstone of the achievement of the MDGs and their sustainability even after the withdrawal of UN agencies.

However, conferring greater local decision-making on poor communities without giving them resources or the power to generate resources is unlikely to make a dent in accelerating progress for MDG achievements.

The issues of financing the MDGs still remain one of the main factors that slowed their achievements. In Mali, the contrast between the efforts engaged in the design and the capacity building for implementing the MAF and the difficulties encountered in the financing issues of the MAF implementation stage illustrates this ambivalence relation at the donor level.

It should be noted that estimating the costs of implementing programs needed for MDG achievements did not mean that finances for this purpose had been secured, or that development assistance had increased by quantum leaps. The case of the Gleneagles' scenario is a concrete example to the extent that this alternative remained without funding.

Mali is facing rigid limitations in mobilizing its own domestic resources for investment. The concern for lack of financial resources becomes even more critical, because of the risk of diversion of resources to war and conflicts and post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction, which is currently the case in northern Mali. This situation led the country into an economic recession with an economic growth forecast of -1.5% in 2012 against a growth rate of 5.6% initially planned with the IMF mission.

There is genuine concern that MDGs do not make the link between peace and development more explicit. Increased militarization diverts spending and may overshadow and prevent any advance towards poverty reduction. It is important to ensure that war on terrorism does not take place at the expense of the war on poverty.

The idea that achieving a growth rate of 7% is likely to significantly reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs is not entirely founded. Indeed, economic progress alone is not enough to guarantee that a society is "headed in the right direction". Per capita GDP is a fairly crude measure, too. As an average, it does not address issues of distribution benefits of economic productivity which may go disproportionately to only a small percentage of a population, even though the average looks good.

The mitigated results of MDG based planning do not only stem from the fact that poverty reduction strategies have placed the emphasis on the social sector at the expense of the productive sector thereby raising questions about the sustainability of the framework, but also because of several challenges and gaps faced by African planners and policy makers in policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The shortcomings of the M&E system in most African countries' development planning department have prevented policy makers to benefit from a feedback loop in order to take corrective measures during policy implementation. Building country capacity to produce reliable data must be an institutional priority for African countries.

In order to monitor and evaluate IADGs in national plan, African policy makers need to identify IADGs indicators and adapt them objectively to the socioeconomic context of African countries. The reliability of these indicators, in turn, must comply with collecting, disaggregating and analyzing data according to international standards, which enable cross country comparisons and analysis of trends over time.

It should be pointed out that institutional bottlenecks, a shortage of technical know-how, limited management systems, skills deficiencies and a lack of retention and placement

strategies to attract skilled human resources to less serviced areas were identified as important functional capacity constraints that slowed implementation of key national initiatives aimed at MDG achievements. Capacity-building efforts are acutely needed in all of these areas.