

Agenda 2030 in sub-Saharan Africa: What the Millennium Development Goals' narrative teaches about poverty eradication

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Abstract

More than a year after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) deadline, experts and social commentators are divided on the outcome of the goals on poverty reduction. The UN Secretariat and its agencies, while acknowledging that the business of ending poverty is 'unfinished,' described the goals as globally successful notably for mobilising the world toward a global agenda; a claim sharply dismissed by many economists. Critics point to the persistent high levels of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and argue that the fall in global poverty is largely due to the significant reduction of poverty in China, India and East Asia. The MDGs' mixed success has been attributed to conceptual, methodological and implementation incoherence. These challenges, some of which are inherent in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), partly account for the high rate of poverty in SSA notwithstanding the MDGs' efforts. Meeting the SDGs target of ending poverty in SSA by 2030 will require a deeper understanding of the methodological and practical challenges that characterised the MDGs.

Keywords: Poverty eradication; Africa; Inequality; Millennium Development Goals; Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Introduction

Africa joined the rest of the world more than a year ago to work towards poverty eradication by 2030 per the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But the outcome of the SDGs' predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has been characterized by mixed reactions. The main actors such as the UN Secretariat, its agencies and the World Bank while acknowledging the 'unfinished business', have described the MDGs as largely successful, notably for mobilizing the world toward a global agenda.¹ The UN's MDGs' report shows a significant reduction in global poverty since 1990 largely attributable to the successes in China and India but noting well the high concentration of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Between 1990 and 2012, poverty in Africa reduced from fifty-six per cent to forty-three per cent respectively (Beegle, Christiaensen, Dabalen, and Gaddis, 2016). This fall in poverty has been offset by the effect of population growth, resulting in an increase in the absolute number of poor people by hundred million (Beegle *et al.*, 2016). This implies poverty reduction has not kept pace with population growth in the continent. The rise in absolute poverty has led many to doubt the success verdict passed on the MDGs. Hickel (2016), for instance, has questioned the "good news narrative" of the MDGs. Hickel points out that with the exception of China and East Asia; there has been little or no reduction in the number of poor people in the developing world. On aggregate, he believes poverty could be increasing in absolute terms in Africa. In fact, it is consistent with the UN's acknowledgement of the unfinished business that world leaders met in September 2015 to ratify the SDGs as the new global development goals.

The inability of the MDGs to deliver significant poverty reduction in SSA Africa is largely the result of the challenges that bedeviled the goals – conceptual, methodological and implementation challenges. However, existing studies have focused on the global perspective, ignoring the mixed trends across countries. For instance, Easterly (2007), Fukuda-Parr (2010) and Hickel (2016) all address the framing of the MDGs either to the disadvantage of Africa as Easterly suggests or the approach to measuring the goals as Fukuda-Parr argued. These papers have not assessed the outcome of the goals with reference to any specific region such as sub-Saharan Africa – something this paper will consider.

¹ See for instance the 2015 MDG Report from the UN and the World Bank's 2015/2016 *Global Monitoring Report*. The President of the World Bank and the Director of IMF in their foreword to the 2015/2016 *Global Monitoring Report* called on the world to celebrate the success of the MDGs.

Evaluating the achievement of the MDGs in sub-Saharan Africa is crucial to avoiding any potentially misleading conclusion drawn from the global account of poverty reduction. For instance, large poverty reduction from China has the potential to create the impression of a significant fall in poverty but this may not be representative of the global perspective. This paper, therefore, focuses on three main issues: one, evaluating the criticisms against the defunct MDGs and how those challenges affected the achievement of the goals. Two, analyzing the post-MDGs poverty levels in Africa. And three, drawing lessons from the MDGs' flaws towards ending poverty in SSA by 2030 as per the SDGs. To do this, I review the trend of poverty globally and in sub-Saharan Africa, relying on data from the World Bank's 2016 *Global Monitoring Report*, the Economic Commission for Africa MDG progress report and country statistics on the MDGs. This study contributes to a dearth of relevant empirical studies in sub-Saharan Africa even as the region is becoming increasingly important on the world stage (Tunyi & Ntim, 2016).

From the outset the MDGs framework was murky, causing disagreements among economists. The MDGs faced numerous challenges including the ambiguity of the approach to measuring the goals and the lack of clarity on whether the goals were to be measured at the global or national levels. Even the SDGs that have gone through wide consultation have met their own criticism only a year after their launch. My focus then is to analyze these challenges, and relying on the extent of poverty reduction in Africa, outline the resulting implications for eradicating poverty in SSA by 2030. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The next section explains the challenges that faced the MDGs and the current SDGs. The third section focuses on the post-MDGs' poverty levels in sub-Saharan Africa. Section four contains the lessons drawn from the MDG narrative.

2. The conceptual and measurement challenges

2.1. The MDGs

Conceptual challenges relate to those of how the MDGs were drawn up. They relate to the ideas on which the goals are built. Methodological/measurement issues relate to the approach used in assessing progress. However, both conceptual and measurement challenges overlap. A conceptual issue of whether the goals be drafted as national or global can translate into whether they are measured by global or national metrics.

First of all, there was confusion as to whether the MDGs were to be considered planned targets or benchmarks for measuring poverty reduction progress. Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein (2010) have argued that the goals be seen as benchmarks for assessing the speed of progress in poverty abatement rather than as targets to be met. If the former approach was adopted, then it becomes inevitable to measure the success or failure by the extent to which the targets have been met. The latter approach considers the MDGs as signposts, the purpose of which, Jan Vandemoortele, one of the architects of the MDGs insists was “meant to encourage the countries to strive for accelerated progress” (Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein 2010:2). Nevertheless, the authors note carefully the inconsistency between Vandemoortele’s observation and the UN’s own system, with its documents and economists that treated the goals as hard targets to be met.

But why does it matter whether the goals were considered planned targets or benchmarks for measuring global poverty? If the goals are treated as targets, the potential to concentrate on a narrow view of poverty (the consumption per day) is likely. In this instant, we are likely to sweep aside the poor’s ‘capacity to function’ which is not only related to daily consumption. If we consider the goals as signposts for assessing the fall of poverty, controversies emerge as to who is moving faster in poverty reduction than who. Or better still, if the goals are merely ‘inspirational’ then how do we know how good the progress in fighting global poverty is? But at least, this approach appeals more than the former method of attempting to summarize the result of the MDGs as either ‘met’ or ‘not met.’

Secondly, should the MDGs be judged at the global level or country-specific results? The MDGs were set out as global goals but succeeded in *getting lost in translation*² as national goals (Saith, 2006; Vandemoortele, 2012 and Gore, 2015). Addressing the issue of the wrong translation of the MDGs as national goals, Gore (2015a) acknowledged first of all that the MDGs were in fact global goals. The problem Gore sought to identify was what kind of global goals they were and how they were later integrated into national agendas. He argues that in bowing to the pressure from the international community to situate the goal of poverty eradication in their national agendas, Least Developed Countries undertook policies that deviated from the policies that have historically produced

² Saith (2006) observes that conceptual incoherence is evident in the transition from “human values, to dimensions of human development and then to targets and indicators” for misinterpretation of the MDGs as national goals, see Vandemoortele (2012).

significant and sustained poverty reduction in the developed countries. This has been true in the case of SSA countries. For instance, most SSA countries relied on GDP growth as an antidote in itself to cut down poverty which Obeng-Odoom (2013) rightly critiqued leading economists for relying on such traditional measures of development to construct a positive view of African development. No attention was paid to the inequalities that threatened the fight against poverty in the midst of the growing economies (Akolgo, 2017).

If the MDGs are considered as global goals as the UN's 2015 MDGs' report would have us believe, their success or failure will be judged by the global extent of poverty reduction. So that if China eradicated poverty completely or as the UN's report has shown the large reductions in poverty from China and India, the goal of halving poverty between 1990 and 2015 would be proclaimed fruitful even if poverty deepened in Africa. But this measure that was adopted raises a question of the universality of those goals if their progress is not felt across regions or countries.

But how global should 'global goals' be and why does it matter whether the goals are properly communicated as global or national goals? In the first case, should there not be a more inclusive measure of the 'global' attainment of the goal than treating the world as though it was borderless and poor people had no location? If we lump poor countries as the MDGs were broadly described as successful, we ignore the fact that poor people in Africa do not easily move to China to take advantage of its economic successes. In short, we ignore differences across the globe and celebrate 'a development success' even if others were dying elsewhere. In the second instance, if they are global goals, how do they gain national significance and attention from the various countries? Like Gore (2015, p.1) put in his presentation, 'our judgement of social justice is rooted in national frames of reference'. Global goals must therefore reflect national aspirations, development needs and national thinking. If global goals are far removed from what developing countries such as those of Africa, should be doing to eradicate poverty, then the goals risk two potential problems. One, they will either not be accepted by various countries in practice, through their national development policies. Or two, they goals will reflect different aims as opposed to those of the participating countries.

The third point has to do with the "play with numbers." The imputation of success by the UN has hinged on the rate of change in poverty, with little regard for the absolute numbers of poverty. While in most cases, the rate of poverty has reduced as in sub-Saharan Africa, the numbers of poor people have

increased. This has been mostly the result of population growth. But after 15 years we may have to answer the question Obeng-Odoom (2013) posed: “Is life in Africa getting better?” (p. 151). Whether the reliance is on rates or raw numbers, it is the improvement in peoples’ lives that ultimately becomes the center of discourse and the basis on which policy makers commit resources (Alagidede, 2012).

A fourth point that must be noted is inconsistencies relating to the scope of the poverty goal that the MDGs sought to achieve and the starting point for measuring the progress. The MDGs’ perceived success by the UN in the face of large numbers of poor people has been linked to its history of “shifting goalposts” (Pogge cited by Hickel, 2016:2). In 1996, the Rome World Food Summit pledged to tackle hunger by halving the number of undernourished people. But after a while, there was a shift from absolute figures to proportions. By the year 2000, the decision shifted after the Millennium Declaration to halving the proportion of the world living below the poverty threshold of \$1 per day.³ The sudden change in approach (from absolute figures to proportions), four years after the Rome Declaration, Hickel (2016) insists, made the achievement of MDG1 easier than the commitment of the Rome Declaration. This paper notes that besides the inconsistencies spanning from global/national nature of the MDGs to measurement of progress as against meeting targets, the focus of the MDG report on the rate of change in poverty while neglecting the absolute numbers amounts to an attempt to arrive at a positive outcome in the face of large poor populations. This is particularly worrying in the case of many countries in SSA.

A part of the goalposts shifting has been the question of the starting date of the MDGs. While the Millennium Declaration from which the MDGs were born was agreed in the year 2000, the starting date of the goals was shifted back to 1990. This was done to probably take advantage of the gains in poverty reduction, particularly significant were the gains from China (Hickel, 2016). By measuring the poverty reduction goal retrospectively, the extent of poverty reduction from the MDGs’ efforts was exaggerated than the goals actually achieved. The progress of any country towards ending poverty as Rippin (2013) observes, is explained by its initial position, which is the starting point for measuring the goal. The shift back to 1990 from 2000 disadvantaged SSA countries compared to other developing countries. The SDGs however have avoided this trap by being designed to take effect from the time they were agreed, which was in September, 2015.

³ See Hickel (2016) and Pogge (2004, 2009 and 2010) for a chronology of this goalposts shifting.

2.2. The SDGs

The conceptual/methodological incoherence is not only related to the defunct MDGs but the SDGs, though the latter agenda built on the weaknesses of the MDGs. Firstly, the SDGs risk being too many and overly ambitious. The MDGs were relatively easy to understand and manageable in number given the eight goals but the same cannot be said of the 17 SDGs. Less than a week after the goals were launched in September 2015, Easterly (2015) described most of the SDGs as “unactionable” “unquantifiable” and some, “unattainable.” For Easterly, a goal such as “end poverty in all its forms and dimensions” is utopian and wishful. While this claim may carry some weight, the deeper threat behind such exaggerated goal is not the inability to achieve it, for if it were given the necessary commitment and sacrifice of the world leaders, it could be realized in less time. Worse than its utopian nature is the attempt to provide room for the goalposts shifting to arrive at what is expected to be declared in 2030 – a successful global effort at ending poverty, regardless the reality. Not only does goal 1 appear overly ambitious, it is contradicted by one of its targets (1.2) which aims to “reduce by half men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions” (Loewe & Rippin, 2015).

Secondly, the SDGs continue the “pointillist” approach to development goal-setting as Kohler (2015) has rightly called it. This avoids the rigor of putting forward the complex relationships between and among the goals. The goal to end poverty in all its forms can be impeded if the relationship between it and those of the other 16 goals are not deeply understood by implementing agencies or countries. For instance, poverty eradication is inseparable from such issues as controlling inequality, ending hunger and promoting peace. The goals fall short of establishing the linkages between these goals and this could pose a challenge to effectively delivering their promises. A third challenge faced by the SDGs is the failure to clearly allocate responsibility for executing certain targets. The roles countries and the extent to which they are expected to contribute to the global agenda is not spelt out lucidly. Pogge & Sengupta (2015) commenting on the allocation of responsibility are of the view that the silence of the goals/targets to “formulate” and “specify” responsibilities creates room for main actors to deny their roles in meeting the targets. As they put it, there is an “inequitable allocation of burdens and blame (which) is precisely what happened to the MDGs” (p. 574). To avoid “shifting of blame” in sub-Saharan African countries, there must be obvious definition of whom or which

institution is responsible for which poverty eradication initiative and to what extent they are expected to go.

Thirdly, there is an absence of express commitment of developed countries' contribution in funding the new global agenda, especially for less resourced developing countries. The fact also that neoliberal ideologies such as Africa's trade with the West are threatened by the exit of Britain from the European Union (BREXIT) which may present new funding challenges for most African countries towards poverty eradication by 2030. Once the SDGs ratification failed to extract clear financial commitment from these powerful and resourced states, the door is opened for whoever is in the office to use discretion to either support the effort to end global poverty or not, after all the global accord is not binding. A fourth challenge that the SDGs face is the time frame within which goals, particularly poverty eradication is expected to be met. The MDGs were criticized for being short to medium term goals and not taking into account sustainability, an issue the SDGs have not addressed by relying on the 15-year time frame (Loewe, 2012). As already observed 15 years does not appear a realistic time period to "end poverty in all its form."

In an editorial earlier before the adoption of the SDGs, Gore (2015b) observed that the SDGs were flawed in some dimensions. Gore identifies four main problems with the SDGs from the papers in the special issue.⁴ (i) The SDGs are deficient in providing a coherent, underlying policy framework. (ii) Little attention is paid to articulating the goals within national priorities and processes. (iii) SDGs fail to focus on synergies and trade-offs between different goals. (iv) There is the failure to set new global rules such as those governing global governance and finance to match the new goals. Additionally, the success of the SDGs will require a deep understanding of Institutional Political Economy to our ability to build resilient and inclusive cities (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). For Obeng-Odoom, mainstream economics approaches have misunderstood the place of cities in development, a situation which is not supportive of the post-2015 urban context. Rather, he proposes Institutionalism, which "regards the urban as part of, not apart from, wider socio-economic and political processes."

The SDGs in their current state do not sufficiently address the above issues that were raised earlier before the September 2015 summit. Ending poverty in 2030 will only be achieved to the extent that the goals are integrated into

⁴ *Journal of International Development* 2015 Special Issue on the Post 2015 Moment. Specific papers on the special issue give details on the SDGs' weaknesses. For example those by Koehler (2015); Meagher, (2015); Kim, Kang, Leach and Moore (2015) .

country-level agendas. It is still early days and opportunities abound to rethink these goals in relation to national development plans particularly those of SSA.

3. Poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa

3.1. Post MDGs

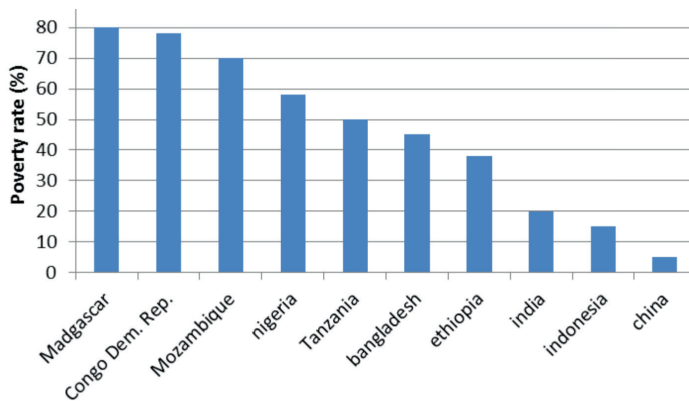
The MDGs have been hailed for their unparalleled success of having mobilized the world toward a common agenda (Fukuda-Parr & Greenstein 2010; Rippin 2013; and Higgins 2013). If the statistics generated by institutions like the UN, World Bank and IMF are anything to go by, then Africa is better today in terms of the rate of poverty in the continent. But that is not the case: the fall in the rate of poverty does not tell the entire story, plus the global picture hides at the background, the true state of poverty in the various countries.

TABLE 1: GLOBAL POVERTY ASSESSED WITH THE RE-ESTIMATED POVERTY LINE

Region	Historical headline projection				
	1990	1999	2011	2012	2015
<i>Share of population below \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP %)</i>					
East Asia and Pacific	60.6	37.5	8.5	7.2	14.1
Europe and Central Asia	1.9	7.8	2.4	2.1	1.7
Latin American/Caribbean	17.8	13.9	5.9	5.6	5.6
Middle East/N. Africa	-	-	-	-	-
South Asia	50.6	41.8	22.2	18.8	13.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	56.8	58.0	44.4	42.7	35.2
Developing World	44.4	34.3	16.5	14.9	11.9
World	37.1	29.1	14.1	12.7	9.6
<i>Millions of people below \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP)</i>					
East Asia and Pacific	995.5	689.4	173.1	147.2	82.6
Europe and Central Asia	8.8	36.8	11.4	10.1	4.4
Latin American/Caribbean	78.2	71.1	35.3	33.7	29.7
Middle East/N. Africa	-	-	-	-	-
South Asia	574.6	568.0	361.7	309.2	231.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	287.6	374.6	393.6	388.8	347.1
World	1958.6	1751.5	983.3	896.7	702.1

Source: World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report* (2016)

FIGURE 1: MAJORITY OF THE TOP TEN POOR COUNTRIES ARE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Source: World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report* (2016)

One striking feature of the UN's MDG report and the World Bank's estimates is that more people still live in extreme poverty in Africa than any other continent. For instance, 41 per cent of the region's population is projected to still live in extreme poverty by the end of 2015 (UN, 2015). The World Bank's global poverty estimates based on 2011 PPP prices does not equally look good for sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly 400 million people (about 42.7 per cent of SSA's population) are estimated to have lived in extreme poverty by the end of 2012 (Table 1). About 347.1 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are projected to be living in extreme poverty by the close of 2015 compared to 287.6 million in 1990, though the share of the population in poverty reduced within the same time. The result of the rise in population with the poverty reduction effort is that the number of poor people has consistently increased since the 1980s and has only fallen slightly between 2011 and 2015 (Table 1). SSA also appears to have witnessed a slower fall in poverty in comparison to the entire developing world. For instance, while poverty in the developing world fell by 32.5 per cent between 1990 and 2015 that of SSA fell by 21.6 per cent within the same period.

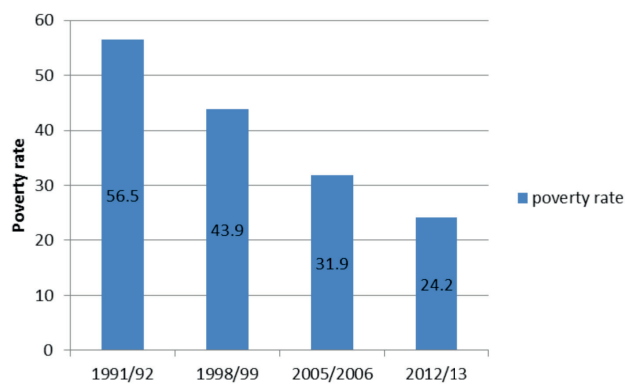
Africa's share of global poverty has seen a persistent increase from less than 20 percent in 1990 to nearly 50 percent in 2015 (World Bank, 2016). In contrast, East Asia, which accounted for over 50 per cent of the share of global poverty in 1990, is now responsible for less than 20 per cent. This clearly, is evidence that poverty is still a largely unsolved development problem in SSA. The poverty rates among the top 10 ten countries with the largest number of poor people who account for almost 70 per cent of global poverty (Cruz, *et al.* 2015), are further testimony of how deep and concentrated poverty is in

the continent. For instance, six countries (Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Ethiopia) out of the list are in sub-Saharan Africa, and these are the deeply poor among the list (Figure 1).

3.2. Country-level statistics shows uneven successes across SSA

Using the Africa-wide outlook on poverty does not tell the entire story. Country-level statistics show that while sub-Saharan Africa in general may not have met the 2015 target of halving the poor population between 1990 and 2015, some economies have achieved many of the targets in MDG1, yet others lagged behind (Economic Commission for Africa, 2014). South Africa, for instance, attained most of targets way before the deadline (Table 2). In Cameroon, while the government confessed that it was unlikely to meet the MDG1 target, civil society argued it was off track with the MDG poverty goal.

FIGURE 2: GHANA, NATIONAL POVERTY RATES, 1992-2013 (USING NEW POVERTY LINE)



Source: Cooke, Hague and McKay (2016)

TABLE 2: SOUTH AFRICA'S PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING MDG1

Goal 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger				
Target 1A: Halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day				
Indicators	1994 Baseline	Current Status (2013 or nearest year)	2015 Target	Target Achievability
Proportion of population Below \$1.00 (PPP) per day	11.3 (2000)	4.0 (2011)	5.2	Achieved
Proportion of population Below \$1.25 (PPP) per day	17.0 (2000)	7.4 (2011)	7.4	Achieved
Proportion of population Below \$2.00 (PPP) per day	33.5 (2000)	20.8 (2011)	16.8	Likely
Proportion of population Below \$2.50 (PPP) per day	42.4 (2000)	29.2 (2011)	21.1	Likely
Poverty gap ratio (\$1.00 PPP) per day	3.2 (2000)	1.0 (2011)	1.6	Achieved
Poverty gap ratio (\$1.25 PPP) per day	5.4 (2000)	1.9 (2001)	2.7	Achieved
Poverty gap ratio (\$2.00 PPP) per day	13.0 (2000)	6.5 (2011)	6.5	Achieved
Poverty gap ratio (\$2.50 PPP) per day	18.0 (2000)	10.3 (2011)	9.0	Likely
Share of the poorest quintile In national consumption	2.9 (2000)	2.7 (2001)	5.8	Unlikely

Source: South Africa Millennium Development Goals country report, 2013

Countries such as Mozambique, Burundi, Madagascar and the Central African Republic remain in extreme poverty. It appears not much has changed since the turn of this century and sometimes poverty has worsened (Economic Commission for Africa, 2014). For instance Nigeria's new government led by President Buhari is revealing government corruption that eroded the country's gains from its growth. Ghana halved its poor population by 2013 (Figure 2). As Figure 2 shows, the incidence of poverty has fallen consistently in Ghana. In Cameroon both the government and civil society admitted that it was unlikely to meet the MDG1 target (Commonwealth Foundation, 2013).

All this uneven country evidence go to support the argument that the MDGs were better off measured at the country level than at the global stage given the tendency for failure of some economies to be clouded by unprecedented successes in other economies. Such an approach for the SDGs can provide an intuitive basis for assessments. As Aryeetey *et al.* (2012, p. 18) have rightly

stated, 'Global goals become *de facto* national goals since getting to zero poverty worldwide implies getting to (or near) zero in every country'.

4. Agenda 2030: implications for poverty eradication

The world today faces a new set of goals aimed at realizing the dream of a 'world free of poverty.' The SDGs are geared toward eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 and promoting shared prosperity. These two commitments have been developed into 17 goals which are guiding the international community for the next 15 years. How effective the global community and more importantly the various African countries execute the planned projects toward meeting these goals will largely determine how many of the extremely poor can truly lift themselves out of their misery. For SSA countries to end extreme poverty by 2030, a few points should be noted.

One, poverty eradication requires adapting the SDGs to national policies and development frameworks taking into account the prevailing conditions and needs of the poorest population. This implies an assessment of the sectors, policies and initiatives that are broad-based and whose growth and/or implementation can deliver significant relief to the predominantly poor communities. Steven (2015) reports that participants in a reality check round table discussion on the SDGs acknowledged that the success of the SDGs (in this case the goal on poverty eradication) depends on the extent to which the goals are "Integrated into policy at national and local levels" (p. 12). The participants were also unanimous on the fact that achieving the SDGs will require mobilizing resources at national and international levels.

Two, the success of the 2030 agenda on poverty eradication in SSA is contingent on a deeper understanding of how economic growth, poverty and inequality interplay in the region. Obeng-Odoom (2015a) and Akolgo (2017) have demonstrated that the Afro-euphoria is a paradox given that the continent has witnessed a simultaneous rise in economic growth (the crux of the 'Africa rising narrative') and deteriorating living standards. The goals have already received praises for placing inequality at the centre of development though they remain unclear and abstract (Freistein and Mahlet, 2016). Ensuring that growth benefits the vulnerable and breaching the gaps between the rich and poor will be critical to eradicating poverty. The goal of eradicating extreme poverty is within reach. But this will require a paradigm shift in the prevailing development system in SSA. Positive structural reforms will be needed to propel higher economic

growth in the region, reduce the escalating inequalities, and maintain the level of poverty reduction achieved so far.

Three, the efficient management of financial aid. It is expected that at least some form of aid, as usual, will flow into Africa towards the 2030 agenda. Unless this is properly utilized, it may not succeed in eradicating poverty. From the point of foreign organizations that give this aid, it will be counterproductive if they continue to tie such aid to conditionalities that do not encourage job creation. The management of aid by African countries must as well be improved. Ensuring that aid reach the poor is important. In fact, waiting on aid to end poverty in 2030 should be a last option for African governments. If African countries are to depend on foreign aid: the large portion of which will likely be exhausted before the poor hear of it, then we can expect to have national statistics showing how far poverty has fallen in this continent while the living conditions of ordinary people grow from bad to worse.

Four, good governance. Promoting good governance and ending conflicts will be crucial to ending poverty in Africa. Acts of war and terrorism inhibit growth and development. SSA has witnessed so much turmoil over the last decade. Promoting democracy and good governance can play key roles in the fight against poverty. Good governance in the present times and for the attainment of the SDGs will also require improvement in the statistical capacities of all countries. More often than not, the statistics churned out by many African countries are scorned as “cooked data.” As long as accurate, timely and reliable data is not available, the poverty narrative in the region will remain subject to different interpretations even in the face of significant achievements. However, there is more to ending poverty than hunting data to prove the rate of poverty eradication. More resources must be committed to ending poverty than measuring it.

The new agenda also demands an understanding of Africa as a significant participant in the global fight against poverty in the continent and the rest of the world, not as an observer or subject of philanthropy. Obeng-Odoom (2015b) rightly put it when he wrote on the approach towards Africa’s post MDGs’ future cautioning that Africa should be viewed “from its own vantage point and experiences not as unique but as related to the world, in both history and place, and the resulting and continuing ramifications not only in material but also psychological terms ... in the post 2015 development agenda.” (p. 44). For instance, African countries should be given the commensurate price for resources such as gold, oil and cocoa. Where it is possible, partnering these less

developed countries in processing the raw materials can create more jobs and alleviate poverty among unemployed citizens.

5. Conclusion

In short, despite the various interventions in SSA, the region as a whole is home to large numbers of poor people as against general significant decline of poverty in the developing world. For instance, this paper has showed that the fall in poverty in SSA has been slower compared to the entire developing world. Country-level review however shows significant improvements in some African countries. The literature reveals a consensus that poverty is pervasive in the SSA region notwithstanding the MDGs' efforts. The MDGs discourse has witnessed diverse views on the success of the goal of poverty eradication. But the disagreements have largely been the result of methodological gaps – measuring rate of change as against absolute changes, the emphasis on the global picture as against country realities, and the disadvantage to SSA as a result of measuring the MDGs retroactively from 1990 instead of the year 2000. Once these methodological issues are set aside, it is clear that poverty is concentrating in SSA. It is possible to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 if not “end poverty in all its forms and dimensions” as the SDGs suggest. But that requires avoiding the challenges that bedeviled the MDGs. If African leaders fail to adopt pragmatic strategies towards poverty reduction by 2030, the goal of poverty eradication may fade into hopelessness, ushering in even larger numbers of poor people in the SSA region.

Biographical Notes

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Appendix:

Gore (2015) has set out the policy decisions that poor countries need to do to reduce poverty in a “multidimensional and substantial way” based on the existing experience of developed countries as follows:

1. Promote high GDP with increasing I/GDP, X/GDP and S/GDP
2. Increasing agricultural productivity and adequate food supplies for agricultural and non-agricultural population
3. Promote growth of formal employment opportunities outside agriculture at a rate faster than total population growth
4. Import/learn/adapt foreign technology
5. Pursue strategic integration with regional and global product and factor markets to accelerate capital accumulation, technology acquisition and structural transformation
6. Promote early demographic transition and ensure the urbanization rate is not too fast and not too spatially concentrated
7. Manage distribution for social cohesion and use social policy for productive ends
8. Build a developmental state with popular engagement in a shared national development project and close government-business relations.