

Decisive action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals

The challenge to the Southern African Development Community

Southern African countries are amongst those which have the greatest challenge in meeting the needs of the population for urgent improvements in health and well-being. Their people stand to benefit most from improved interventions in HIV/AIDS, malaria, and education and health systems.

Regional bodies as well as international agencies have identified Africa as the continent most likely to benefit from improved human services, particularly in water, sanitation, education and health systems. Southern Africa, which is making the slowest progress in improving the Human Development Index, would also benefit most from purposeful change.

Although critics of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) argue that Africa has been set up for 'near-certain failure', progress is not only possible, but necessary.

How can this progress be achieved in southern Africa? While the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has set social goals and targets for the region, a key question is how to ensure that the development strategy of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the targets of the MDG, which are incorporated, will be met.

Although there is periodic assessment of progress towards these goals and targets, reporting is not sufficiently rigorous for countries to reassess priorities and reallocate resources to focus attention on key areas.

Recent progress in advancing maternal health outcomes (Hogan et al. 2010) and other ongoing efforts, as reported in the HSRC study below, are laying the basis for continuous development that will lead to real change in the lives of the poor in the southern region of the continent. For MDG targets to be met, acceleration in delivery is needed over the next five years.

A set of studies undertaken by the HSRC and research partners in Botswana, Malawi, and Tanzania in 2009–2010 reviewed 51 MDG targets. It found that 18 targets would be reached by 2015 but that the pace of change was too slow in 22 others. In 11 targets no progress was recorded.

Results from research

The results from the research presented in the table below show that the most progress will be in meeting basic human needs in water and sanitation.

Table 1: Progress in four countries across four sectors

Sectors	South Africa	Malawi	Botswana	Tanzania
1. Water				
2. Sanitation				
3. Education				
4. Health				

Key

0	No progress in meeting targets
1 to 4	Little or very little progress overall
5	Some progress, but will not meet MDG targets
6 to 9	Progress, some targets met
10	Targets will be met in 2015

Water and sanitation

Of the four countries, all will meet the MDG targets of access to improved water source. While all four countries will meet the target for the more broadly defined improved sanitation, sanitation defined at the higher level (Ventilated Pit Latrines and above) is lagging. There are still considerable challenges in water quality.

Education

In the education sector there has been surprisingly uneven development given its priority. South Africa and Botswana have made progress with some targets being met, Tanzania shows some progress and Malawi shows little progress. There is intense

debate on how to resolve questions of quality when access is widened.

Health

The health sector is the greatest challenge and an imbalance was found between countries. An important aspect is that health outcomes are not always directly related to health infrastructure. Two countries, Malawi and South Africa, have shown some progress in meeting the health targets, whilst the remaining two show little to very little progress made to meet targets. Malawi is celebrated for being on course to achieve the target in reducing child mortality. All four countries showed some progress in reversing the number of HIV/AIDS infections, and two (Botswana and South Africa) of the four countries will meet the target of births attended to by skilled staff.

The reasons for the differences in the health sector across these countries need to be assessed in further research. Although the reasons may be complex, the role of state intervention is crucial.

What we've learned

Health impact results not only from improved health infrastructure itself, but also from improvements in water, sanitation and education.

- Better monitoring, evaluation and reporting on progress are vital to accelerating progress at both country and SADC level. The challenges will become clear from the data itself and the evaluation of interventions. Analysis and examination of the data will show how resources need to be reallocated to achieve the greatest impact.
- Wider reporting and debate on these results would increase public interest and support for more resources to be directed to key points.
- This would work to increase civil society participation and support from wide-ranging civil society organisations nationally and internationally to improve results.
- In some countries service delivery issues are gaining a critically important dimension and are headlined in the media, as in South Africa.

Recommendations

1. Delivery would be improved if SADC would take on reporting on progress towards the MDG targets, possibly with a set of workshops preliminary to a summit on the question. SADC members have much to learn from each other to benefit their people. The results could then be presented to a meeting of ministers and other similar platforms.

2. Ongoing research should be combined with SADC initiatives to build capacity and close interaction between governments, universities and research bodies. It is proposed that there should be a meeting of experts to set up a database together with researchers in southern Africa. To encourage social progress the SADC should continuously review progress on the distance to targets.

References/sources

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