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Full Length Research Paper

African local governments and the MDGs: Constraints and policy alternatives

Innocent Chirisa

Senior Lecturer, Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe
E-mail: chirisa.innocent@gmail.com

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The year 2000 saw governments adopting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, their implementation in the initial years failed to realise the role of the local government, being at the cutting edge of service delivery to the citizens. With time local government has been taken aboard in many regions as the first port of call for accountability and programmes and projects implementation. Focussing on Africa, the majority of local governments are largely too incapacitated to effectively and efficiently play the emerging roles towards attaining MDGs, a fact attributable to the failure of decentralized governance. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the challenges faced local government in Africa in achieving MDGs. Specifically it intends to broaden and deepen on the understanding of the situation on the ground (baseline conditions) for successful implementation of MDGs by local authorities in Africa, to appraise and reflect on the capacity of African local authorities to spearhead development and management of project activities in consultation of other players towards achieving MDGs by 2015, and to show the minimum conditions necessary for local government in Africa to play a meaningful role in the attainment of MDGs. The paper makes use of case studies drawn from across the region.

Keywords: Capacity, poverty, development, governance, accountability

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The introduction and adoption of the MDGs in the year 2000 has put governments in the limelight calling for the engagement of pro-active and interactive means and race together with others to produce a 'common good' – a healthy globe where sustainable development is the pillar. To obtain high-quality results in the area of MDGs in Africa, the local government, being at the cutting edge of service delivery to the citizens, needs not only to be adaptive but also innovative implying must get fine-tuned to the extent that they assume new roles other than just the common one of just service delivery to communities under their jurisdictions. The real challenge had been noted as "...to ensure programmes that are fully owned by African stakeholders are also interconnected,

and respond to Africa's development needs, in a comprehensive, timely, sustainable and realistic manner"(Economic Commission for Africa, 2005:3). One critic remarked that the work of local government is not just about keeping the streets clean, the roads paved or public safety. It is about people and community building where people can live healthy and fulfilling lives (Kisauji, 2006: 12). The same laments that relatively little investment has been made to enhance operational capacity in terms of coordination, planning, monitoring, and evaluation at the local level hence the need to support effective scaling-up and better management of services and support systems. Thus, the majority of local governments in Africa are largely too incapacitated

Table 1. South Africa National/ Rural Comparisons

Indicator	National (%)	Rural Areas (%)
Unemployment Rate (official definition)	26.4	33.9
Unemployment Rate (expanded definition *)	37.0	52.2
Proportion of households with piped water	65.7	24.3
Proportion of households with access to safe water	79.4	40.3
Proportion of households using mainly wood for cooking	19.6	53.8
Proportion of households using mainly candles for lighting	20.0	41.9
Proportion of people with medical or health insurance	16.2	5.6
Proportion of households which depends on remittances as the main source of income	13.8	23.5
Proportion of households which never have a problem satisfying their food needs	50.9	35.2

Source: Garrity Meghan (2007:5)

to effectively and efficiently play the emerging roles towards attaining MDGs, a fact attributable to the failure of decentralized governance (Olowu et.al, 2004).

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the challenges faced local government in Africa in achieving MDGs. At the end of this paper, the reader must be able to:

- have a broad and in-depth understanding of the situation on the ground (baseline conditions) for successful implementation of MDGs by local authorities in Africa,
- appraise and reflect on the capacity of African local authorities to spearhead development and management of project activities in consultation of other players towards achieving MDGs by 2015,
- appreciate the minimum conditions necessary for local government in Africa to play a meaningful role in the attainment of MDGs, as well as,
- overall, justify the central role local government has in achieving the MDGs.

The author makes use of case studies, both the bad examples and those showing best practice.

Why involve local government in MDGs?

The local government system is better placed to spearhead the delivery of MDGs as it represents the decentralization thrust which tries to ensure that there is accountability, equity, transparency and the rule of law in matters pertaining to service delivery to local citizens. When services are made available to citizens and they are pleased with the delivery they become more and more committed to the government such that they trust its business (IISD, 2006; Kristina, Yinger, Dios, Worley and Fikree, 2006). As a lower tier of government, local government enjoys closeness to people (the grassroots)

which are the effective agents and actors for change on the ground. As such local authorities are often so close to the people that the risks and vulnerabilities of such events as flooding, disease outbreaks or other kinds of disasters as well being fought against by the MDGs do not escape their direct observation. It has been noted that central governments are unlikely to have the capacity to assess the diversity of local conditions or local requirements and capabilities. Their staff is more trained and experimented, but their services are also more remote and costly....On the contrary, local governments, with their legal mandate to manage local development and municipal finances, have comparative advantages in terms of knowledge of local situations, especially as far as marginal and poor people are concerned..." (UNCDF, 2005:4).

In this regard, the institution of local government is better placed in terms of monitoring or steering the grassroots to action towards achieving the set targets of the MDGs. For these MDGs to be attainable, the local government institution has the obligation to put on new and relevant roles which on its own is but a challenge. Rural and local governments are never alike. For example the problem of poverty reduction is greater in rural areas where it is estimated that seventy percent of the absolute poor live in rural areas (cf. Table 1). That is a clear indication that context and capacities have to be taken aboard in addressing MDGs with local government spearheading the process.

What roles are local governments in Africa to play in achieving MDGs?

Africa has a tradition of relying on external aid. The continent has a bad record of challenges to be addressed in the framework of MDGs (see Box 1). One researcher

Box 1. Development and MDGs in Africa: Some statistical pointers

- The rate of people living in extreme poverty was 58 per cent in 1999 and fell to 50 per cent in 2005. However, the number of Africans living in poverty actually increased, by 100 million between 1990 and 2005 and half of Africa's poor lived on only 70 cents a day in 2005.
- In 2006, 71 per cent of children were enrolled in primary school, up from 54 per cent in 1991; almost 30 per cent of children are not enrolled (some 38 million in 2006).
- Almost 49 per cent of parliamentary seats in Rwanda are held by women. In sub-Saharan Africa, contraceptive use by women who are married or in stable unions increased from 12.3 per cent in 1990 to 21.3 per cent in 2005.
- Three quarters of all global AIDS deaths annually are in Africa (1.4 million). And some 1.9 million Africans are newly-infected with HIV each year. The demand for anti-retroviral therapy far outstrips availability in many countries.
- African forests suffered the second highest rate of deforestation in the world, losing nearly 64 million hectares, between 1990 and 2005.
- In 2005, 62 per cent of sub-Saharan African urban dwellers lived in slums, and half of those lived in extreme deprivation.
- In 2007, the average ratio of ODA to national income among donor countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was 0.28 per cent. The total external debt of sub-Saharan Africa, to both public and private creditors, declined from \$240.4 billion in 2000 to \$200.9 billion in 2007. Debt service, which absorbed nearly 5 per cent annually of the sub-continent's gross domestic product in 2000, now accounts for 2.9 per cent.

Source: United Nations Department of Public Information (22 September 2008).

has outlined the "seven deadly sins" of the over-reliance on foreign aid in the administration of local issues which governments in the developing countries must overcome lest they impinge on fulfilling the MDGs whose background in Africa (Constantino-David, 2002:105ff). These sins are:

- project pushers,
- bureaucratic straitjackets,
- parasitic expertise,
- cultural blindness,
- insensitive conditionalities,
- negative acculturation and
- direction without risk.

Against the distasteful background of deprivation, suffering and incapacities, the following are the roles that local governments in Africa have to put on if the implementation of the MDGs in the region is to produce the intended targets and the expected indicators are to be visible:

Local governments as community mobilizers

Local government areas in Africa are inhabited by people of different social, economic, political and religious backgrounds showing the cosmopolitan nature of communities in the region. Bringing together these people for common projects and activities like fundraising, implementing environmental conservation strategies and maintaining a road network for easy transportation of goods and services, is quite a mammoth

task. Conflicts are to be solved and pathways to be paved in making progress a reality. It is quite a community building task in which the actors must be driven by a voluntary spirit yet sometimes from a background of hostility or irreconcilable motives and interests perpetrated along gender, age, ethnic and vocational beliefs and values. Community mobilization at its best does not merely raise community awareness about an issue or persuade people to participate in activities that have been prioritized and planned by others" but is a comprehensive cycle involving: carrying out formative research in order to understand the community context and design the process of entering the community and establishing credibility and trust; raising community awareness about the situation at hand, working with all relevant stakeholders, exploring the issues, setting priorities, planning, implementing the community plan, and monitoring and evaluating progress (USAID/ACCESS, 2007:7).

Thus, MDGs though an international policy level initiative, require a local level translation and positive interpretation which the local government is better placed to carry out. It understands its local context better than any other institution given that:

In each city and town, there will be a local reality to be taken into consideration, and indeed the MDGs should be adapted to meet this reality. [Also] experience has shown that national plans must be linked with both local realities and the people they serve to be successful. (Oyeyinka Oyebanji cited in UNDP/SNV, 2007:6).

Local governments as leaders and vision carriers

As leaders, local governments in Africa need to embrace all stakeholders (civil society organizations, bilateral agencies, government agencies and parastatals) in their operational environment in a bid to make them work for the best of the community (influence). Some of these organizations have a temporary mandate in a local government area; others may be pushing totally different agendas. By taking on a leadership role in the implementation of MDGs, local governments are expected to engage their strategic thinking capacities this foster the space for strategic partnerships (UNDP, 2002). It has been observed that the development and service-delivery challenges currently bedeviling local government in Africa has a lot to do with types of existing mindset especially among local-level leadership (Magadela, undated) of which bad attitudes and perceptions tend to stifle local level development let alone the expectation of meeting the MDGs. Other scholars have observed that leaders tend to shift the burden of service delivery to poor citizens willy-nilly as reflected in this quotation:

A more profound understanding of the issue in the continent is poverty of a developmental vision by African political elites and a complete surrender of their developmental role to the market – hence their citizens are conceived as users rather than citizens with rights and obligations. In this conception, they accept the liberal discourse of participatory governance and by so doing shift participation from something that is built around citizenship to users with an emphasis on consumption and markets as the effective agents of service provision (Omano, 2004:18).

Local governments as resource mobilizers

A multiplicity of reasons is cited for the incapacity of local government to engage in vigorous revenue generation by property taxation from the citizens including: the general politicization of the local taxes, wide reluctance among the population to pay tax due to arbitrary, regressive and sometimes forceful collection practices, lack of awareness of taxpayers, and lack of administrative capacity at local level (Omano, 2004). As such, residents' contribution in most local governments remains a big challenge facing the successful implementation for MDGs. Eyes thus remain focussed on 'outsiders' intervention' and the question of financial sustainability go unanswered., it is argued that scores of local governments in Africa "...do not generate their own revenue, but depend on central governments, giving real power to those who fund them" (Mutume, 2005:4). In most cases, in Africa, except for large metropolitan centres, local authorities have very limited capacity to

raise revenue from local sources, especially the citizens (Stren, 2008). Financial shortages are rooted in the central and local government relations with estimation that: 30 percent of the total budget is... transferred to local governments as intergovernmental grants and about 27 percent of total public expenditures are spent at the local level collection of local taxes and fees is extremely low, about one third to one half below the potential (Lwendo, 2009:3).

Income generating activities, by local authorities themselves show up as a promising source of local government finance yet citizen participation should not be totally removed from the picture (Lemanski, 2008).

Local governments as development coordinators

For co-ordination of efforts between local government, central government, civil society, and UN agencies, it is mandatory that legislative provisions be set relating to issues of governance, citizen ownership of the processes and outcomes, environmental management, among others. Capacity building remains at the core of the promising solutions in different African countries. Traditional leadership, with respect to rural areas, should be given a central role in helping local government achieve the demands of its role of facilitation and oversight over MDGs' attainment. It has been noted that with sufficient science, we are able to make lots of progress in many areas, but the element of falsehood is that, assuming that economic development is successful; solving the problems of sustainability will become increasingly difficult. The critical step is bringing together public policy with the ecological, earth, and health sciences (Sachs, 2005:20).

Thus co-ordination by local government in the implementation of MDGs is necessary so that there is no duplication of effort by development actors which may manifest in resource wastages depriving other sectors.

Local governments as programme harmonizers

Traditionally, local development has been delivered through sector wide approaches and but the success of MDGs hinges on greater coordination and coherence and to promote coherence, the mandates of different players need to be clear and understood by all including resource flows and accountability mechanisms. Harmonization involves aligning and re-aligning programme activities by different actors so that at the end of the process all the stakeholders can perceive very clearly why each activity has been placed where it belongs. The underlying assumption of harmonization is that before a goal or mandate was pronounced, players were already in action. Africa has ever been an action ground with different actors intervening in different

sectors at local level. The coming in of MDGs should not be seen as 'disturbing' the processes which were already in action but to show that every activity at a local level leads to the overall global impact. Unless actors are made to account for their actions, development will continue to be piecemeal and disjointed hence without impact.

What are the necessary minimum conditions for local governments' in the implementation of MDGs?

A number of factors supporting community participation must be put to recognition by policymakers like local government and communities alike if MDGs are to be achieved in Africa, benchmarking some of the minimum conditions for the success. These include: the right and duty of people to participate in public and community affairs; having political and administrative systems that promote and accept decentralization and regional/local authority for decision-making; institutional flexibility, responsiveness to stakeholders' creativity; having structures promoting inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability; responsive information transmission by the media and other communication systems; enlightened citizens about issues affecting them; effective and supportive facilitation structures which has sufficient timeframes for activities; and visible and perceivable improvements on the ground (Kristina et al. 2006:3). In particular, the primary factors for the success of local government in MDGs' implementation include: the buy-in from the population of communities (through participatory planning), a sound legal framework achieved through decentralisation reform, an accurate analysis of what already exists, a functioning system of service delivery, and synergies or partnerships across different levels and stakeholders as well as an administrative level where local and national planning meet (UNDP/SNV, 2007:2). It is equally in these factors that aspects of gender, political will, trust and civic education come in. In brief programmes must be marked by: comprehensiveness, trust and other aspects of good governance, a gendered approach and sound information dissemination achievable especially through rigorous campaigns.

Comprehensiveness: It must be asserted that by taking aboard all the environmental, social, economic, technological, institutional and political factors, local governments will create a context in which critical success factors for MDGs in the region will be enumerated, measured and accounted for. The primary problem with some local authorities is of solving problems as they come or putting resources towards one fashionable issue. For instance, recently the outbreak of cholera in Zimbabwe saw all player both local and national committing most of resources to the diseases

rather at the expense of other burning societal issues.

A gendered and social justice approach: Some researchers have asserted that social exclusion is one of the principal hindrances to MDGs. They have noted that often social groups like women, older persons, persons with disabilities, the youth, people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA), the poor, street children, refugees and internally displaced people, and some ethnic groups are excluded in development programmes (Mutangadura, 2008). Yet, the reduction of social marginalisation can be achieved through the integration of economic, social, political and natural processes. In Africa, women have a history of marginalization and exclusion from mainstream economic development and politics but many researchers have indicated that they have a very clear and succinct developmental role. For example, it is estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise 60% of the informal sector; they provide about 70% of the total agricultural labour and produce about 90% of the food. But the question becomes: If women contribute about 70% of total agricultural labour, why do they receive less than 10% of the credit given to small farmers? Also, if 50% of Nigerian small and medium-sized firms are run by women, then why do they only get 27% of the credit available from community banks? (Ryan, 2004:1). Evidence shows that the link between women's participation in governance, gender advancement and achieving the MDGs has long been underestimated. Nevertheless the leadership shown by women "...in the world's poorest communities is a vital tool for achieving the goals, and increasing their number in local decision-making is therefore important not only for women but for men, children and all humanity." (Gateau, 2005:2). Including the gender and social justice factors in the attainment of MDGs in Africa involves local governments accounting for the situation in their local areas, identifying the gaps and pulling together resources to address the unfolding challenges and constraints.

Financial and trust capital, good governance and political will

Many local governments in Africa are cash-strapped, generating little or no local resources and never getting enough to deliver on the millennium programmes. Two fundamental shifts are needed if the MDGs are to be delivered by 2015. The first one is that local governments must be properly resourced both financially and technically. Secondly, they need to be truly local by being fully accountable and transparent to the people they serve. Without these elements, it has been argued, "...they will remain parasitic representatives of the national Government at the local level without legitimacy where they are and of little influence with the higher

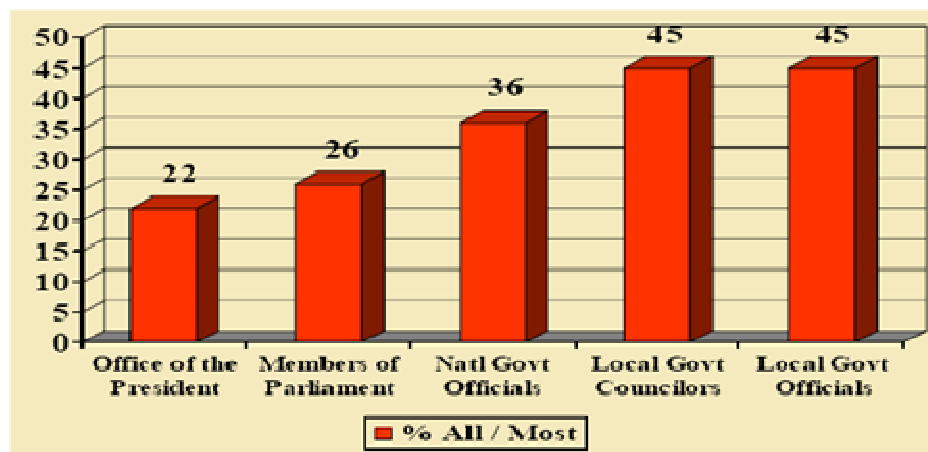


Figure 1. Perceptions of Government Corruption by citizens in South Africa
Source: Afrobarometer, Resurgent Perceptions of Corruption in South Africa
 Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 43, June 2006 page 2

authorities at the national level" (Raheem, 2008:2). Technical and financial capacities are needed so that trust of the local government by citizens is built and enhanced. This is achievable by local government investing in good governance. Changing people's perceptions about local government credibility in conducting its business may pose some daunting challenges. For example in a study conducted by Afrobarometer in South Africa for the period between 1995 and 2000, around one half of South Africans felt that "all" or "most" officials in national or local government were involved in corruption (Figure 1).

Civic education and awareness campaigns

Central to the communication debate is the demystification of the MDGs so that even the least literate of society can understand, and be spurred to action towards achieving the MDGs. The means of placing communication into the inter-localisation process for the MDGs is noted as hinging on the fact that "... multi-way communication flows between citizens and policy makers and between the central administration and the local context" (Pagliani, 2007:3) remove barriers of suspicion, distrust and indifference. Communication should thus be viewed as a tool to achieving MDGs instead of merely regarding it as an object of them (Pagliani, 2007). This whole process includes reducing or levelling the plane against communication barriers including discrimination against the socially excluded in communities so that they are placed at the centre of policy dialogue. Once communication is enhanced along good governance principles, then the citizens will probably also trust their local governments. Not only will progress be noted on the ground but ownership of the programmes will be achieved (Economic Commission for

Africa, 2005). When the above minimum conditions are met, there is no doubt that innovativeness in various sectors addressed through the MDGs will be attained; local government will act more as a development stimulator than anything else. By their nature the 8 MDGs are interconnected and achieving strides in one will have ripple effects on the rest.

What are the capacity issues to be addressed?

Capacity is simply defined as "... capacity will be simply defined as the ability to achieve set goals" (Matovu, 2008:36). Capacity building has been defined as "...the business of equipping all actors to perform effectively both in doing their own thing in their own field and level of operation, and in working in collaboration or partnership with others operating in other fields and at other levels." (Wakely, undated: 2). It is expressed as an essential component of both empowerment and enabling. An effective decentralised framework where functions, powers and skills and competences, means and resources best appropriated would be where all these are transferred to lower levels of government in a co-ordinated way. This is in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity where the greatest good benefit of the greatest number. Local governments should not be left to devise and improvise their own means for survival, without the state government enabling them to do so. The primary capacity issues are human and financial resources in terms of their sourcing, management and sustainability.

Human resources and technical capacity

It has been put across that human development is "...not

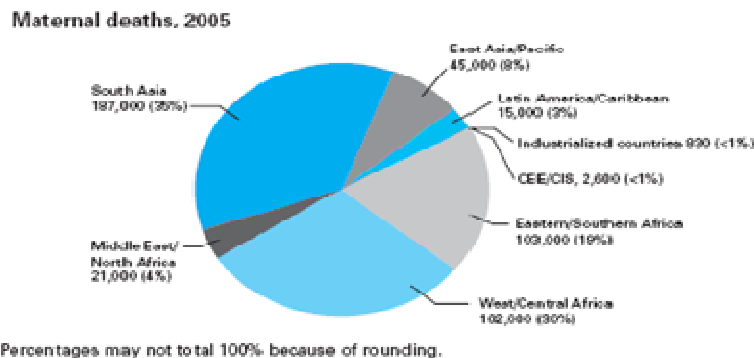


Figure 2. Regional distribution of maternal deaths
Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2008:6

only about the formation of human capabilities...but is about the use people can make of their acquired capabilities. If these two sides do not move in unison, human frustration will spread." (DESA, 2000: 10). With MDGs, local governments in their new roles of community mobilization, leadership, resource mobilization, co-ordination and harmonization must not only hire the qualified personnel like gender, HIV/AIDS and local economic development experts but also have resources to attract and retain them. One researcher also made the observation for South Africa that often local government workers are employed for their politics, not their skills. Friends or family are often hired regardless of experience or qualifications; this is especially true in the Eastern Cape. Municipalities often hire expensive outside consultants to deal with financial matters, draining money from the government and in turn the LDAs. Many problems result from the mismanagement of local and provincial government resources. Often the ineffective allocation of funding leads to waste (Garrity, 2007:18).

In most cases, rural local authorities often go without the qualified personnel. The issue also goes further into reducing ratios of workers per subject of observation, for example having the ratio of nurses to mothers in maternity against the background that Africa has the highest number of maternal deaths (Figure 2).

Technical capacity entails the investment requirement for new methods, techniques and equipment to deal with issues affecting the daily running of local government business. It has been pointed out that ninety percent (90%) of local government business is land and property-orientated (Hicken, undated). Thus Geographic Information Systems (GIS) become a useful tool in establishing preparedness say for hazards when they affect certain localities. With reference to disaster management it has been pointed out that "... the ability of local governments to play an effective part in the recovery effort will in large part depend on their capacity prior to a disaster"(UNDP, 2006:16).

The implication is that local governments should be well equipped with such equipment ambulances, life

jackets, first aid equipment and the like. This is because the context in which MDGs have been shaped is marked by multiple disasters including climate change ushering in cyclones and floods, famine-induced hunger, to mention but a few. Human resources are often motivated by the type of equipment that they use in conducting their business.

Development finance and institutional capacity

Finance is critical for any meaningful development to take shape and this goes with the nature of local government financial framework in place. The basic ingredients for a strong local government financial framework as put across by a number of research programmes on decentralisation and municipal finance include: clear assignment of responsibilities, authority to adjust revenues to the needed expenditures, authority to generate sufficient local government own revenue sources and to develop strong positive incentives to strengthen this, strong financial management and accountability systems and procedures, developing an appropriate mix in expenditures and in revenues, efficient, democratic and accountable budget procedures, appropriate financial relationships between central and local governments, an appropriate level of re-distribution, efficient and timely transfers from central to local government, and effective revenue collection.

MDGs, by virtue of their comprehensiveness require that local governments in Africa be efficient and effective resource mobilisers as well as credible stewards for mobilised resources.

Selected case studies

The water question and MDGs in Zimbabwe

Water and sewer were centralised in Zimbabwe in 2007 and the takeover by the state parastatal, Zimbabwe

Table 2. Cholera impacts by province in Zimbabwe as at 5 February 2009

PROVINCE / AREA	CUMMULATIVE SUSPECTED & CONFIRMED CASES	TOTAL DEATHS	CFR (%)
Harare Urban	14,513	604	4.2
Mashonaland Central	4,505	173	3.8
Mashonaland East	4,991	352	7.1
Mashonaland West	15,359	725	4.7
Manicaland	9,671	515	5.3
Matabeleland South	5,032	156	3.1
Masvingo	7,969	561	7.0
Bulawayo Urban	429	18	4.2
Midlands	4,418	215	4.9
Matabeleland North	1,058	52	4.9
TOTAL	67,945	3,371	5.0

Source: WHO/MoHCW. More detailed statistics are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org/CholeraSituation/tabid/5147/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

National Water Authority (ZINWA) resulted in local authorities losing their revenue base ranging between 50-85 % of total income. For instance, Harare lost about 50% and the City of Bulawayo over 40% of its revenue base. Such a move was done against the tide (IRIN, 2007) especially in that it was done in the times when the MDG campaign was at its peak and whose thrust is the support of decentralized systems. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only a third of the population has access to clean drinking water; water-borne diseases kill an estimated five million people a year, many of them children, according to United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF. Water-borne diseases particularly in Zimbabwe resulted, being compounded by the economic meltdown experienced in the country. Water contamination and poor water treatment led specifically to a cholera outbreak, first reported in mid-2008, which, by mid-March 2009, had claimed lives of more than 3,000 people, with more than 80,000 reported cholera cases countrywide (refer to Table 2). This situation has had implications that Zimbabwe is highly unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 of halving the number of people suffering from poverty and hunger by 2015, due to a combination of factors linked to poor infrastructure, poor sanitation and lack of investment in water treatment systems. Poor water quality and sanitation will also make it difficult for the country to reach MDG3, reducing child. Water quality has been a concern in Zimbabwe not only in urban areas but rural areas alike.

Although the Government of Zimbabwe 2009 budget statement declared the handing over back of water and sewer responsibility to local authorities, the cholera problem has continued to wreak havoc in the country. It is a great lesson for central governments in the region that they ought not to tamper with decentralisation processes if they have committed themselves to the implementation of MDGs.

Millennium Villages, Poverty Reduction and Local Government

A number of Millennium Villages have emerged in Africa towards addressing especially MDG1. The first Millennium Village was launched in 2004 in Sauri, Kenya, as an integrated development initiative. Now the initiative has spread to Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Project sites are selected on the basis of their poverty indicators implying foreknowledge of Africa's different ecological and climate zones before implementation. Altogether, more than 400,000 people now live in villages chosen for the project. The Millennium Villages approach is based on two central ideas: making simple and inexpensive changes in nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, women's status, agriculture, communications, roads and electricity with the target of lifting, especially rural Africans out of severe poverty, and, combining community mobilization, government support and external aid. Most of the Millennium Village projects have been implemented by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and it has been noted that the programme does rely on significant inflows according to contribution average proportions indicated in Figure 3.

Project planners the Millennium Village projects stress that certain forms of aid will be steadily reduced and that governments and villagers will need to take up a greater share of the cost and this is in a bid to 'kill' the possibility of a dependency syndrome among the actors. Also project organizers encourage national and local government bodies to expand their presence by building roads, extending electricity connections and sending in more teachers, health care workers and agricultural extension advisers. Building up community institutions and a spirit of self-help has been noted as vital for long-term sustainability.

Local residents regularly participate in the construction of new schools, teachers' quarters, clinics and community

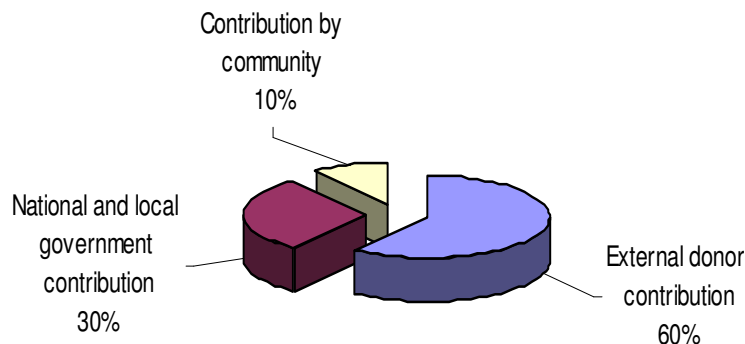


Figure 3. Financing Millennium Projects in Africa (Average contribution)
Source: Adapted from Harsch

centres by providing labour and contributing sand, stones, timber and other construction materials. Several “facilitators” are involved in helping strengthen school management committees, parents’ associations, water committees and other bodies, and to engage traditional chiefs, who play a major role in mobilizing people (Harsch, 2008). Rather than focusing on just one or two sectors, the project’s designers want to show that poverty can be attacked across a wide front. In this approach to MDGs, it can be noted that the functions discussed in this paper for local governments will be very vital in stimulating meaningful development for communities. Urban local authorities have the same mandate as rural ones as shown in this case. Local authorities in the entire continent can learn and adopt this approach to development towards accelerating local development towards attaining the MDGs by 2015.

Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme

At the announcement of UPE by the NRM government in 1996, there were about 2.3 million children attending Primary School. The figure rose to 5.6 million in 1997. By 2003, the figure had soared to close to 7 million (Golola, 2003). This decentralization of education in Uganda set forth a sound platform towards the achievement of MDGs in the country. Notably, today Local Government Councils in Uganda are fully-fledged representative structures with extensive legislative, planning, revenue collection; budgeting and development management responsibilities and powers. These powers are anchored in the 1995 constitution and the Local Governments Act, 1997, the two most authoritative documents on Uganda’s decentralisation policy and process (Golola, 2003:4)

In the Universal Primary Education programme four children per family can attend primary schools without the parents/guardians having to pay school fees. Such a sudden large increase in enrolment has had implications

that the government had to work out a strategic plan to mobilise resources and make wise choices in its allocation. To effectively handle the issue of UPE government produced the Education Sector Investment Programme (ESIP) which is fully owned by government and has been accepted by all development partners as a planning tool for mobilising allocating limited resources in strategic and priority areas. The ESIP has the responsibility of delivering basic social services decentralized to local governments; a significant share of resources is transferred to districts as conditional grants for teachers’ salaries; captivation and classroom construction, and the like. The effective implementation of ESIP depends most on the capacity of the local governments to co-ordinate and manages the education programmes (Golola, 2003). User fees for primary education have become common, as has the intervention of parent-teacher associations (PTAs), which requires further fees.

An analysis of the relationship between PTAs and local government in Jinja, Uganda, has demonstrated that the de facto decentralization of the provision of primary education to PTAs provides an opportunity for building political accountability; when parents bring resources to the table, governments must share resources and responsibility and relationships of accountability emerge. Although grants have been sent from the central government to districts primarily for the UPE, the amount of interest it has generated has involved the participation of parents in schools constructions, brick-making and provision of land for expansion.

Besides expanding on the classrooms from 52,000 and another 12,000 targeted to be completed before the end of the year 2008, Uganda as well targeted a textbook to pupil ratio of 1:1. Emphasis has also been laid on in-service training for teachers to equip them with skills to provide quality education. Further, emphasis will be on secondary education with the aim of having one secondary school in every sub-county (Elwana, 2000). In

all these cases, the place of local government involvement is very clear. UPE is a programme that started before the announcement of the MDGs; local governments have the role to harmonise past-initiated programmes with the MDGs and demonstrate competence in managing resources in the programmes' implementation.

Introducing good local governance – experiences in Indonesia and Albania

Indonesia: In 2001 the Indonesian government introduced laws on decentralization and regional autonomy that led to a shift in service delivery. Changes in municipal management such as modifying planning, programming, budgeting and financial management procedures have helped local government become more responsive, participative, transparent and accountable to citizen's needs. This process has been supported by the UNDP's Breakthrough Urban Initiatives for Local Development (BUILD) programme. Ten core guiding principles for good local governance were established (participation, rule of law, transparency, equality, vision, accountability, supervision, efficiency and professionalism) were later adopted by the Association of Municipalities at their annual meeting. During the meeting participants agreed that "the welfare of the people constitutes the most important objective for achieving sustainable development, to bring relief to those in poverty, who are disempowered, and who are dispossessed socially" (UNDP, 2005:17).

Albania: Albania has been moving from a nationally-driven poverty reduction process to adopting localised regional MDG strategies, with the aim of encouraging local residents to identify the needs and priorities of their own region. Some of the benefits of adopting a more localised approach have included: increasing regional awareness and mobilization around the MDGs; strengthening decentralized government capacity, including using regional training workshops; linking regional development plans to national plans, including the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP equivalent) and the EU Stabilization and Association process; developing trust and social cohesion amongst the citizens in local villages; building trust, ownership and cooperation between local government and citizens; increasing transparency and accountability at the local level – through local reporting, indicator development and target setting; linking community priorities with local government's planning and budgeting processes; and focusing donor attention on local needs. The work has mainly focused on the regional level but has included involvement of local actors including local government e.g. in the region of Kukes local capacity building has been an important component of the work, especially

where participatory planning is not the norm ((UNDP, 2005).

Capacity development for managing water and the environment in the Rio Grande

The State of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) in southern Brazil responded to governance problems by establishing an integrated environmental management system, linking water and other environmental aspects, as well as licensing processes (UNDP, 2005). The state developed core environment guidelines in 2000 involving participatory events across the region. Roles and responsibilities are shared between the regional state and local municipalities based on three guidelines: of cooperation and complementarity (between state and municipal actors to solve environmental problems); capacity development (recognizing that solving local problems requires sufficient legal structures and capacity at the municipal level); collective action (contributing to the joint regional strategy). It has been noted that the key elements to the success of the system include: allocation of roles and responsibilities, increasing capacity, linking water and environment, eliminating governance barriers, scaling-up good practice

CONCLUSION

Despite the short time left to completion of the MDG race (at 2015), with local governments taking the centre-stage, putting own a stewardship spirit and taking on the roles outlined in the short paper, it is possible to make significant progress in the attainment of MDGs. The best way is to follow as much as possible the best practice shown through addressing to principles of good local governance. Yet capacity issues need a quick redress in the continent. It is very possible to work and achieve MDGs; all stakeholders' involvement is very critical in the process and monitoring mechanisms must be apt to show notable changes on the ground.

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