

Short Article

Millennium Development Goals and Good Governance

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed by 191 nations in 2000, resolved to spare no effort to free the world from the dehumanizing conditions of poverty. The Declaration gave rise to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are a set of targets and indicators that attempt to measure progress in achieving a significant reduction of poverty towards 2015. Progress towards the Goals is mixed in Asia and the Pacific and the current global financial crisis will undoubtedly have an impact.

In order to achieve the MDGs, an effective provision of basic services is essential. These include primary education and health, water and sanitation and the prevention, care and treatment of major diseases. Because the MDGs and their targets are mostly expressed in percentages, there is a tendency to try to achieve the Goals by concentrating on people that are more easily reachable. As progress is made toward development targets, it will become increasingly difficult to reach those remaining un- or under-served. They include people living in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and women and girls.

Several calls have been made on the governments of the world and of the region to increase their budgets to achieve the MDGs. While it is important that governments make more resources available, financial resources alone are not sufficient to make an impact. Governments need to adopt good governance principles, such as inclusiveness and equity, the rule of law, participatory decision-making, transparency and accountability.

Many population groups face immense barriers when trying to access basic services. These barriers are physical, legal, financial and socio-cultural in nature. Moreover, the poor are not a homogenous group; different groups face different barriers and many groups face multiple barriers. The inability of the poor to pay is a major financial barrier to access, and there are almost always costs involved even if the service is free. Barriers include the remote location of many poor groups, the low capacity of service providers and low quality of the service.

Some poor face legal barriers to accessing basic services if they lack birth certificates or other forms of registration. Gender discrimination in the wider society, but also inside the household, acts as a barrier against equal access to basic services by girls and women. Persons with disabilities are often denied access to basic services because of physical and social barriers, while people living with HIV/AIDS face discrimination. Governments need to be inclusive in their policies and to find ways for people to overcome these barriers.

Overcoming barriers to improving the provision of services requires a variety of strategies because different groups often confront different barriers and local conditions vary. First, it is important to match services to the unique conditions and needs of the users and this can only be achieved by involving the users of a service in the decision-making. This requires decentralization of decision-making to lower levels as well as transparency and accountability by the service provider. Second, governments need to broaden the range of basic services providers to include community organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. In some cases, the most appropriate role of the government is to provide an enabling environment, i.e., one that promotes the involvement of a range of providers, but sets standards and monitors service provision.

Public-private partnership is an option for service provision, as it combines the public interest and social responsibility of the government with the efficiency of the private sector. However, one can also think about partnerships between local government and civil society organizations. Such organizations often provide services in the absence of State provision and partnership with local government could increase their effectiveness. Many civil society organizations promote alternative models of service provision and bring innovation to service delivery to the poor. Traditional institutions that have authority in the local community, such as temples, mosques and churches, should not be overlooked. They can provide services, if recognized as partners.

Broadening the range of providers does not release governments from their fundamental responsibility to ensure that all people have access to basic services. Adherence to good governance is essential to make strategies for basic service provision and poverty reduction effective and sustainable. Good governance implies that the poor and other disadvantaged groups are included in decision-making about providing services that affect their lives and about the objectives of the resulting policies and programmes. This will empower them to become agents of their own development and to participate in other relevant areas. Good governance also means that society recognizes the contributions of the poor in development and that the poor share in the benefits of development. ■

Summarized by Yap Kioe Sheng, Officer-in-Charge, UNESCAP-CAPSA, Bogor, Indonesia.

This short article summarizes the ESCAP publication "Access to Basic Services: The Importance of Good Governance", <http://www.unescap.org/publications/detail.asp?id=1212>.

Breaking News

India Debuts "Agricultural Wikipedia"

Indian scientists have launched an "Agricultural Wikipedia", Agropedia, to act as an on-line repository of agricultural information in the country. The website currently contains information on nine crops – rice, wheat, chickpea, pigeon pea, vegetable pea, lychee, sugar cane, ground-nut and sorghum – and will be continually updated. The site also houses blogs and forums where participants can exchange knowledge. India is considered a global leader in promoting innovative ways of using technology for farm and rural outreach. In the last five years, close to 12,000 information technology-enabled rural information centres – some with Internet access – have been established. It is hoped that even where farmers have no access to the Internet, the Agropedia information can be used as a basis for radio plays.

Sreelata, M., 2009. India Debuts 'Agricultural Wikipedia'. Scidev Net, <http://www.scidev.net/> (21 January 2009).

Biofuel from Corn Residue Need Updated Environmental Protections

In a report released last January, the World Resources Institute (WRI) notes that building an ethanol industry that relies on corn stover – the leaves and stalks that remain behind when corn grain has been harvested – has environmental drawbacks. Corn stover's use as a feedstock for biofuels production is promising. Because it is a residue of an existing use of the land, there is less competition between land allocated to food versus fuel crops, and it places less pressure on agriculture to expand its use of acreage to produce fuel crops. However, increasing harvest of stover can exacerbate soil erosion, reduce surface-water quality, and increase agriculture-related greenhouse gas emissions. Further research is needed to mitigate its negative side effects and to make it sustainable.

Mackie, P., 2009. Biofuel from Corn Residue Need Updated Environmental Protections, WRI Recommends. WRI, <http://www.wri.org/> (27 January 2009).

Events

WBI Course: Food and Agricultural Trade Policy and Negotiation

29 May-5 June 2009

Rome, Italy

<http://web.worldbank.org/>

9th Agricultural Science Congress: Technological and Institutional Innovations for Enhancing Agricultural Income

22-24 June 2009

Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, India

<http://www.skuastkashmir.ac.in/>

Farming Must Change to Feed the World

The world's farmers must quickly switch to more sustainable and productive farming systems to grow the food needed by a swelling world population and respond to climate change. In a keynote speech at the IVth World Congress on Conservation Agriculture (CA) in New Delhi, Shivaji Pandey, Director of FAO's Plant Production and Protection Division, endorsed CA as an essential part of that change. Conservation agriculture could not only help bring yields back up but also deliver several important environmental benefits. It could further mitigate climate change by helping sequester carbon in the soil and also potentially save 1,200 km³ of water a year by 2030. He urged governments, donors and other stakeholders to provide policy and financial support to ensure early, wider uptake of CA.

FAO Newsroom, 2009. Farming Must Change to Feed the World: FAO Expert Urges More Sustainable Approach, <http://www.fao.org/> (4 February 2009).

In Vanuatu, Food Self-sufficiency is Founded on Crop Diversity

An inventory of the root and tuber crop panel in ten villages in Vanuatu identifies more than 1,000 varieties of thirteen species. The primary aim of farming in the archipelago is to ensure food self-sufficiency. The diversity of these plants lies behind the food security strategy adopted by the islands' inhabitants. In New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands, the introduction by Europeans of new root and tuber species, combined with the arrival of a market economy has totally disrupted the existing systems. Ancestral species have disappeared and food crop production has become uniform, making the production systems more fragile and reducing the quality of the local diet. Conversely, in Vanuatu, the new plants the local populations are increasingly accepting and growing have had to fit into the existing agro-biodiverse systems. In the most fragile zones, they even help to overcome the shortages resulting from the seasonal nature of traditional crops.

CIRAD, 2009. In Vanuatu, Food Self-sufficiency is Founded on Crop Diversity, <http://www.cirad.fr/> (12 February 2009).

Global Conference on Global Warming 2009 (GCGW-09)

5-9 July 2009

Istambul, Turkey

<http://www.gcgw.org/>

Agricultural R&D Policy: A Tragedy of the International Commons

Over the past 50 years, public agricultural research has contributed enormously to humanity, enabling the supply of food to grow faster than demand in spite of a rapidly growing population, income growth, and shrinking natural resources. Nonetheless, in many countries we see waning public support for agricultural R&D and early warning signs of a slow-down in agricultural productivity. The world has continued to collectively under-invest in agricultural R&D because of domestic and international market failures. This tragedy of the international commons may be getting worse. In the past, developing countries benefited considerably from technological spillovers from developed countries, but because of changes occurring in developed countries, spillovers from developed countries may not be available to developing countries in the same ways or to the same extent. The recent reconfiguration of global food markets may prompt some governments to rethink their national and multinational agricultural R&D policies. Governments can take some initiatives in national agricultural R&D policy, such as enhancing intellectual property (IP) and tailoring the institutional and policy details of IP protection to best fit local circumstances; increasing the total amount of government funding for their national agricultural R&D systems; introducing institutional arrangements and incentives for private and joint public-private funding; and improving the processes by which agricultural R&D resources are administered and allocated. Higher food prices may yield some benefits worldwide if it prompts policymakers to take appropriate action to reform agricultural R&D policy. ■

Based on Pardey, P. G. *et al.*, 2008. Agricultural R&D Policy: A Tragedy of the International Commons. Staff Paper Series, Department of Applied Economics, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, University of Minnesota, <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/> (September 2008).

Solution for the World's Water Woes

Rising populations and growing demand is making the world a thirsty planet, says David Molden. Given the current rate of development. We will not be able to provide water for producers to grow enough food and sustain a healthy environment. The only solution is to learn how to live with less water by making much better use of what we have. We already know many of the ingredients to make this happen; the big question is why isn't it happening? The good news is that it does happen. People are reaching tools to produce more food with less water. They are adopting more precise irrigation practices, such as drip and sprinkle irrigation. But the bad news is that change isn't happening fast enough. Why is it that some areas use water so carelessly? One problem lies with public policies that fail to connect the interests of different user groups. For example, farmers may see little self-interest in being more conservative with water if the benefits flow to cities and not to them. Although, broadly speaking, water is a precious commodity. For many users its costs are negligible, so there is no incentive to conserve. Besides, many countries do not invest enough in water to enable poor rural communities to grow more food. Nonetheless, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and other research organizations have identified new and more affordable opportunities for low-cost water investment. While we think we know the answers. Unfortunately, the reality is more complex. ■

Based on Molden, D., 2009. Solution for the World's Water Woes. BBC, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> (10 February 2009).

Climate Change and Agriculture

Climate change has significant negative impact on agricultural production, prompting output reductions that will greatly affect the developing world. Agriculture also impacts climate changes significantly through livestock production and the conversion of forest to land cover that has low carbon sequestration potential. Nitrous oxide emissions from crop production and methane from rice production are also significant. To date, insufficient attention has been given to multiple stressors, like extreme weather events, pests and diseases. Only a limited number of studies have focused on the climate change and carbon fertilization effects related to crops of importance to the rural poor, such as root crops and millet. It is important to notice that climate change affect food security. And climate change alone is expected to increase the number of food insecure by 5 to 170 million people by 2080. Nevertheless, socio-economic policy, especially trade liberalization can mitigate some of the negative impacts. But mitigation efforts cannot be expected to make a significant difference in the short-term. Adaptation is therefore an imperative. Adaptation, including crop choice and timing, has the ability to partially compensate for production decline in all regions. Yet, many developing countries are lacking in sufficient adaptive capacity. Governments, international institutions and NGOs have a large role to play in building the necessary adaptive capacity and risk management structures. Adaptive measures should maximize the complementarities between existing rural and sustainable development objectives. ■

Based on Rosegrant, M.W., *et al.*, 2008. Climate Change and Agriculture: Threats and Opportunities. GTZ, <http://www.gtz.de/> (November 2008).

The Feeding of the Nine Billion

Global food prices have eased significantly from their record highs in the first part of 2008. As a worldwide economic downturn has gathered pace, commodity markets have weakened significantly. This does not mean that policymakers around the world can start to breathe a sigh of relief. Looking to the medium to longer term, food prices are poised to go up again. The potential impact of long term resource scarcity trends, notably climate change, energy security and falling water availability, together with competition for land and rising food demand due to a rising global population would be a major challenge for global food security. There is a real risk of a 'food crunch' at some point in the future, which would fall particularly hard on import-dependent countries and on poor people in the world. Policymakers should use the current period of easing in food prices as a moment of opportunity in which to identify and agree the key elements of a global food security strategy. To meet these objectives, a comprehensive global strategy for global food security is needed. There are some key recommendations; in developing countries and internationally. Action in developing countries include spend more on food and agriculture, invest in a 21st century Green Revolution, get the basics in place, focus on small farmers, and improve access to social protection. International actions are: consider an International Energy Agency (IEA) for food, improve technical assistance on long term security of supply agreements, push ahead with developed country agricultural liberalization, integrate security of supply into global trade rules, and agree on a comprehensive global deal on climate change. ■

Based on Evans, A. 2009. The Feeding of the Nine Billion: Global Food Security for the 21st Century. WFP, <http://beta.wfp.org/> (22 January 2009).

Making Poverty a History

Thomas Lines, Zed Books Ltd., London & New York, 2008. ISBN 978-1-84277-942-2

Many studies have been conducted, and many books have been written about poverty and poverty alleviation that rely on national macro policies. But there is very few which look at poverty from a historical perspective and connect it with international macro policies. This is precisely what this book is all about.

The author started by reviewing who and where the poorest people in the world are, and elaborate the reasons why some countries have trailed behind during the past twenty years of globalization. In chapter two, he examines historical background during the past centuries and discussed the international policies that bring about the recent situation. Chapter three scrutinizes the role of international commodity markets and their failures and inefficiencies in shaping the current poor countries' trade. Chapter four examines the growth of supermarkets that in most cases depressed agricultural prices leading to further poverty entrenchment. Before the summary of policy proposals in Chapter six, a new approach to development that argue how poor developing countries can be led out of poverty is elaborated in Chapter five.

Of the 1.2 billion people leaving on less than US\$ 1 a day, three quarters lived and work in rural areas and are in one way or another having agricultural related activities. Two third of them live in remote marginal areas. Contrary to population thoughts, many of them are still living in China and India. The majority of African countries are considered poor by that standard. In general, these countries can be characterized by the following: small population, remoteness from the world markets, dependency on commodity exports, and rural poverty with food imports. Based on these characteristics, the author argued that much of the causes of poverty have to do in one way or another with the conventional wisdom that if markets are allowed to work without hindrance, they will lift all people out of poverty. The author shows that such wisdom has in fact created the current persistent poverty in many countries such as in Africa with substantial evidence. He cited some of the international policy such as the structural adjustment policies, the export oriented strategies and he relates these policies to the history of global trade and imperialism.

The author further shows that as most export from these poor countries are either agricultural or mineral commodities, coupled with the 'fallacy of composition' in the doctrine of export-led growth, it has forced the poorest countries to run ever faster even in order to stay where they are. He listed some of the problems, which do not match supply and demand efficiently. Among others: unstable price, seasonality and unpredictability of crops, unresponsiveness of supply and demand to price changes, and speculation. The proposed solution is what the author called 'supply management', citing the success of OPEC countries in managing stability of price. One might needed to be precautionary however, as formation of such cartel is in itself a creation of monopoly power that could lead to market inefficiency. In the same spirit, the fast growing of supermarkets in developing countries could lead to concentration of power if it is not controlled closely.

What is then the solution to get out of this trap? First, the author proposes that the countries should not let themselves completely dependent on export of commodities for their development and import food for their population. Instead, they should pursue food security strategy and stop farmers being displaced from their own national markets, that is the market for those staple crops that are produced or consumed by poor people. Secondly, he suggests building up domestic and regional linkages first as opposed to linking with global markets. By this way, surplus can be shipped to fill deficits in neighbouring poor developing countries.

Six main policy combined were put forward which are: (1) restoring governments' power to determine their own policies; (2) ending any requirement for export orientation; (3) restoring international prices for agricultural products; (4) restoring balance of power along international supply chains; (5) supporting domestic agriculture and production of staple food; and (6) promoting domestic and regional trade, especially in staple food.

This book provides alternative explanation and solution to poverty alleviation and resourceful collection of alternative hypothesis that need further clarifications for researchers as well as students in the area. ■

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