This year’s report has been written against the backdrop of continued rapid economic growth in Africa, uprisings and transitions in North Africa, the festering sovereign debt crisis in the eurozone, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and the beginning of consultations on the post-2015 development agenda.

The findings of this year’s report confirm that steady economic growth and improvements in poverty reduction on the continent continue to have a positive impact on MDG progress. Africa has sustained progress toward several MDGs and is on track to achieve the targets of: universal primary education; gender parity at all levels of education; lower HIV/AIDS prevalence among 15-24 year olds; increased proportion of the population with access to antiretroviral drugs; and increased proportion of seats held by women in national parliament by 2015.

Even so, the report acknowledges that more needs to be done to address inequalities, including between women and men. It highlights the need to address the sub-standard quality and unequal distribution of social services between rural and urban areas. It suggests active steps to ensure that economic growth translates into new and adequate employment opportunities for Africa’s youthful and rapidly growing population, and social protection systems which grow the resilience and capabilities of poor and vulnerable households. The report urges policymakers to put greater emphasis on improving the quality of social services and ensuring that investments yield improved outcomes for the poor. Expanding access and improving the quality of social services are both imperative for MDG progress. A balance must be struck to move both objectives forward.

The report observes that high rates of population growth can strain countries’ ability to deliver vital public services and undercut progress. Africa needs to turn this dynamic on its head, to exploit a ‘demographic dividend’ which can help drive growth, innovation, and provide a clear competitive advantage. To do this the countries of Africa must invest in their greatest asset, their people - in particular, their growing number of young people - ensuring that they can be the productive, innovative, and engaged citizens who will help accelerate MDG progress and achieve sustainable human development.

Assessments of Africa’s progress must be anchored in timely and reliable data, and objective and effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Thus, African countries, with the support of development partners, should continue to strengthen the statistical monitoring and evaluation capacities needed to track MDG progress.

It is imperative that the lessons from Africa’s MDGs experience inform the Rio+20 negotiations and drive the post-2015 development agenda. Cognizant of the importance of ensuring that Africa’s priorities and development aspirations feature substantively in the negotiations on Internationally Agreed Development Goals, this year’s report highlights the inclusive and consultative process planned around formulation of the post-2015 development agenda. It points to a consensus emerging from wide-ranging and on-going consultations with African stakeholders on the need
We wish to thank all those who have contributed to the preparation of this report. We commend the authors for taking into account the views and experiences of the many leaders, policymakers, and development practitioners working daily to advance and achieve the MDGs in Africa.

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