Section I: Africa’s Recent MDG Performance

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target date of 2015 approaches, it is essential to take stock of Africa’s progress. This 2013 MDG report reveals a mixed pattern—successes and failures, improvements and challenges, innovations and obstacles. Africa’s substantial progress toward many goals, targets and indicators is beyond doubt. But serious challenges remain, especially in translating economic growth into decent job opportunities, improving service delivery and minimizing income, gender and spatial inequalities.

Africa’s slow progress on social indicators can be linked to policymakers’ inability to solve the continent’s food insecurity problem, the theme of this report. Africa’s food insecurity predates the MDGs. Since the mid-1980s, the number of food emergencies in African countries has tripled, and emerging challenges like climate change and underdeveloped agriculture have only made the problem worse. How does this phenomenon affect other MDGs, particularly those for health? And how would a concerted effort to improve agriculture, food distribution and nutrition fast-track progress towards other MDGs?

Table 1 summarizes Africa’s MDG performance and identifies the best performing countries by indicator. The best performers are not necessarily those that have reached the target but those that have made the greatest improvements from their initial conditions.

When measured by effort, African countries have made substantial progress on the MDGs. Table 2 shows the top 20 performers based on efforts towards the goals as opposed to how far they fall short.

Measured by effort, three African countries—Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Namibia—lead the way in accelerating progress for 16 of the 22 indicators accessed.

Many countries in Southern, East, Central and West Africa have substantially improved their rate of progress and figure among the top 20 countries, and in most indicators progress has sped up. In North Africa, Egypt led the way, accelerating or maintaining its rate of progress in 11 indicators, followed by Morocco with 9 and Tunisia with 8. In the rest of Africa, by contrast, 40 of 50 countries have accelerated or maintained the rate of progress in at least 11 indicators between the pre- and post-2000 periods. The analysis confirms the commitment and commendable effort that African countries are making towards the MDGs and the need to revisit the metric of progress in this context.

Poverty reduction lags behind growth
Africa is the world’s second fastest growing region. Poverty has declined faster since 2005 than over 1990–2005—but not fast enough to reach the target by 2015. Most workers are employed in vulnerable jobs with low wages and low productivity. High inequality and the enclave structure of most African economies have tempered the nexus

1 This analysis is based on the United Nations Children’s Fund’s annual average rate of reduction method, which quantifies the rate of change of a given indicator from a baseline to the current year. When estimates are available for multiple years, this method allows the annual average rate of reduction to be calculated using a regression analysis.
between growth and poverty reduction. Still, the continent’s growth acceleration provides it with a unique opportunity to reduce poverty and create jobs through proactive policy interventions. Creating more decent jobs faster calls for a structural transformation of African economies—with bold industrial policies that promote value addition and economic diversification.

Africa’s food insecurity challenge is manifested by high prevalence of hunger and malnutrition, particularly among children. African countries must build on existing initiatives, such as the African Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme, and focus on the multidimensional aspects of food security to accelerate progress towards halving hunger and ensuring food security.

**Attending primary school is becoming the norm, but the quality of education remains a challenge**

Most countries have achieved universal primary enrolment, with rates above 90 per cent. As a result, the continent as a whole is expected to achieve Goal 2. Low completion and high grade repetition remain a challenge, however. Indeed, one in three pupils enrolled in a primary school will dropout. Reasons include late entry, poverty, poor quality of education and a lack of awareness of the importance of schools. Some 30 per cent of students with

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Best performing countries, selected targets and indicators</th>
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| Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | Off-track | Target 1A: Egypt, Gabon, Guinea, Morocco, Tunisia  
Target 1B: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Togo, Zimbabwe  
Target 1C: Algeria, Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, South Africa, Tunisia |
| Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education | On-track | Indicator 2.1: Algeria, Egypt, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe  
Indicator 2.2: Ghana, Morocco, Tanzania, Zambia |
| Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women | On-track | Indicator 3.1: The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe  
Indicator 3.2: Botswana, Ethiopia, South Africa  
Indicator 3.3: Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa |
| Goal 4: Reduce child mortality | Off-track | Indicators 4.1 and 4.2: Egypt, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia |
| Goal 5: Improve maternal health | Off-track | Target 5A: Equatorial Guinea, Egypt, Eritrea, Libya, Mauritius, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tunisia  
Target 5B: Egypt, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland |
| Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases | On-track | Target 6A: Côte d’Ivoire, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe  
Target 6B: Botswana, Comoros, Namibia, Rwanda  
Target 6C: Algeria, Cape Verde, Egypt, Libya, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Tunisia |
| Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability | Off-track | Target 7A: Egypt, Gabon, Morocco, Nigeria  
Target 7C: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Swaziland |
| Goal 8: Global partnership for development | Off-track | Target 8F: Kenya, Libya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia |

*Source: Authors.*
six years of schooling cannot read a sentence, and
girls are more likely to drop out than boys. Some
good news — school feeding programmes and ac-
cess to preschools have been instrumental in reduc-
ing dropout rates.

Encouraging progress toward gender parity
Women across Africa are becoming more empow-
ered, with more girls attending both primary and
secondary school and more women in positions of
political power. Nearly half the countries in Africa
have achieved gender parity in primary school, and
while parity at the secondary and tertiary levels has

Table 2. Acceleration in MDG performance: top 20 countries, 2012

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<th>Country</th>
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<th>Underweight children</th>
<th>Primary enrolment</th>
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<th>Primary completion</th>
<th>Gender primary</th>
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<th>Under-five mortality</th>
<th>Infant mortality</th>
<th>Maternal mortality</th>
<th>Skilled birth attendance</th>
<th>Antenatal care (≥ 1 visit)</th>
<th>HIV prevalence</th>
<th>Tuberculosis incidence</th>
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<th>Forest cover</th>
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Source: Based on data from the United Nations Millennium Development Goal database.

a = accelerated rate of progress; m = maintained rate of progress; s = slowed rate of progress.

ODP is ozone-depletion potential.
improved, limited data makes measuring progress difficult. At nearly 20 per cent in 2012, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in Africa is surpassed only in Latin America and the Caribbean. While Africa is making great strides towards Goal 3, early marriage, household power dynamics and low economic opportunities for women, are slowing progress. These challenges must be addressed for Africa to reach all the targets and indicators by 2015.

**Despite good progress, Africa still has the greatest burden of child and maternal deaths**

In recent years, both Africa’s under-five mortality rate and its maternal mortality rate have declined significantly. Over 1990–2011, the continent reduced its under-five mortality rate 47 per cent. But an inexorable amount of children and pregnant women still die every year from preventable causes. To fast-track progress, integrated maternal and child health interventions focusing on infant mortality, as well as holistic policies to address the underlying causes of maternal and child deaths, will be important.

**Africa has halted the spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria**

Africa has halted and reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS, with a drop in prevalence rates from 5.9 per cent in 2001 to 4.9 per cent in 2011, due to strong political will, focused interventions and the antiretroviral therapy available for the majority of the population. While tuberculosis and malaria remain serious health threats, Africa as a whole has halted the spread of both. Tuberculosis infections and deaths have fallen sharply in recent years, as have malaria cases and deaths. Improved prevention and treatment played a large role in the declines.

**Ensuring environmental sustainability—mixed progress**

Achieving and sustaining environmental sustainability is a challenge, especially with the emerging threat of climate change. And Africa is doing well in limiting CO$_2$ emissions and ozone-depleting substances, yet forest cover is shrinking, and most countries struggle to meet targets on water and sanitation. To improve access to water and sanitation, countries must concentrate efforts in rural areas and low-income groups, as urban–rural income disparities in access are holding back progress.

**Medium-term prospects for official development assistance flows are dim**

Donors, still well short of their official development assistance (ODA) commitments to developing countries and least developed countries, are unlikely to substantially increase funding in the short to medium term. As a percentage of their combined gross national incomes, ODA to developing countries and least developed countries in general declined 4 per cent in real terms in 2012 following a 3 per cent decline in 2011. In real terms, bilateral ODA to Africa also declined in 2012. Total ODA to all African landlocked developing countries increased an average of only 2 per cent in nominal terms over 2009–2010. These trends can be attributed in part to the sovereign debt crisis and are likely to continue into 2016. Cutbacks in ODA were evident in highly affected Eurozone crisis countries such as Spain and Portugal.

**Mobile communication, an incipient revolution in Africa**

The number of mobile cellular subscribers in African countries continues to grow steadily, increasing an average of 17 per cent between 2010 and 2011. Africa is the world’s fastest growing mobile market. The increasing use of smartphones and falling Internet costs have contributed much to Africa’s rising number of Internet users. Further, through innovations in
money transfer systems, mobile phones have revolutionized the continent’s financial transactions.

**Africa’s share of global trade remains marginal**

Efforts to increase Africa’s marginal share of global trade through Aid for Trade and preferential market access initiatives have yielded mixed results. Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements to Africa have been increasing in the past few years, but disbursements have always fallen short of commitments. Further, the proportion of developed country imports from Africa (admitted duty free) has generally stagnated but increased more than 50 per cent for 14 African countries. Overall, Africa’s contribution to global trade remains largely unchanged since 2000, at around 3 per cent.

**Food insecurity—a recurring challenge**

Africa has yet to face its food insecurity, despite the huge impact on the population’s productive capacities. In 2012, African countries, particularly those in the Southern, East, Central and West regions had the world’s second highest Global Hunger Index, and most of the region was identified as having serious to alarming levels of hunger. Increasing climate variability, natural disasters, widespread political instabilities, surging populations, an increasing number of refugees in various regions and the inability to access humanitarian assistance have undermined recovery efforts. Regional and national programmes to tackle Africa’s food security challenge have shown that food security is an intersectoral problem that calls for an integrated approach. However, the responses have been undermined by weak political ownership, the limited scope of programmes and weak private sector and civil society involvement.

**Moving forward**

Africa has, without a doubt, come a long way since 2000, making substantial progress toward several of the MDGs. Benin, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Malawi and Rwanda are making especially impressive progress. While not all the interventions that have worked in these countries can be applied everywhere, best practices and successful policy interventions can indeed inform interventions elsewhere. It is thus imperative that countries continue learning from each other so that they can emulate successes and avoid failures. In short, countries with sustained, equitable growth, political stability and human development-oriented policies are doing well in most of the goals.

**Beyond the MDGs**

With less than 1,000 days until 2015, the discourse is shifting from an exclusive focus on achieving the MDGs to reflections and debate on the defining elements of the successor framework—the post-2015 development agenda (ECA et al., forthcoming). Africa’s performance on the MDGs provides useful pointers for the agenda. Indeed, Africa regional consultations led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Union Commission, African Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme confirm that health, education, water and sanitation and the environment remain high priorities for African countries. In addition, stakeholders would like to see inclusive growth that creates employment and livelihood opportunities, especially for the continent’s young. Stakeholders have identified structural economic transformation, human development, financing and partnerships, and technology and innovation as the priority areas for responding to these challenges in the post-2015 development agenda.
As countries everywhere assess their priorities for the post-2015 agenda, they should look at how the MDGs have brought about positive developments—and at where they have fallen short. Countries must reflect on their successes and shortcomings of the past 15 years, both to prepare for a new development agenda and to speed progress towards the MDGs. With less than three years to go, and with more eyes on the post-2015 agenda, Africa must not lose focus on attaining the MDGs.