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Africa: Social and Economic Development Goals

A Progress Report

During the 1998 Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II), a set of ambitious poverty reduction and human development goals were established for the Africa region, drawing on and reaffirming commitments made three years earlier at the First TICAD conference and at the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen. The TICAD II Agenda for Action dealt with three broad areas: social development; economic development; and basic foundations for development (good governance, conflict prevention and post-conflict development). Nine time-bound social and economic development goals form a key part of the agenda:

- Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Africa by 2015, with 80 percent completion by 2005;
- Halve the 1990 illiteracy rate by 2005, with an emphasis on improving female literacy rates;
- Gender equality in primary and secondary enrollments by 2005;
- Halve the 1990 maternal mortality rate by 2005, and by a further half by 2015;
- Reduce infant and child mortality rates to one-third of their 1990 levels by 2015;
- Universal access to reproductive health services by 2015;
- Halve the number of malnourished people by 2015;
- Safe water and sanitation for 80 percent of the population by 2005.
- Reduce the number of women living in poverty by two-thirds by 2015.

To what extent has progress been made on reaching the above mentioned education, health and nutrition goals adopted at Tokyo? The authors of *Can Africa Reach the International Targets for Human Development? An Assessment of Progress towards the Targets of the 1998 Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II)* explore the extent to which the first eight of the above targets will be achieved if trends during the 1990s were to continue until 2015. The data available did not permit assessment of progress towards the ninth target. The con-



Findings

clusion is that without a dramatic change in the pace of progress, Africa will miss most of the targets by a wide margin. Of course, comparing recent trends with rates of progress does not capture the starting points of countries nor their broader development context. Moreover, data on some indicators are incomplete, at times unreliable and often only available up to 1995 or 1996, meaning that it was not possible to track progress in the second half of the 1990s for some countries. However, in spite of these important caveats, there can be no doubt about the main conclusion. In sum:

- On no target are a majority of countries in the region on track;
- Only five of the 47 countries are on track for at least half the targets;
- No country is on track for all the targets it adopted at Tokyo and every country is seriously off track on at least one of the eight quantitative targets assessed;
- Twelve countries are off track on all the targets for which data are available.

This regional picture conceals important differences between countries and sectors. A small number of countries—principally in Southern Africa—are currently on track to reach several of the TICAD goals. These include middle-income countries such as Mauritius and Namibia but also low-income countries such as The Gambia and Tanzania. This demonstrates that positive results can be achieved even in the most resource constrained environments, provided the right policies and strong political commitment are in place.

However, the fact remains that most countries are off track on most of the targets and will need to increase the rate of progress. In approximately one-third of these cases, countries are moderately off track, and could reach the targets by less than a doubling of the current rate of progress. This means that the majority that are off track are seriously off track and need to at least double the current rate of progress to reach the TICAD goals. These countries are concentrated in West and Central Africa and the Horn of Africa, and include the most populous in the region. For many, especially those countries severely affected by civil conflict, political instability and AIDS, fundamental challenges in the broader development context need to be addressed before any sustainable progress towards the targets can be made.

The rate of progress towards individual targets varies greatly. In general, more progress has been made towards education goals than towards health and nutrition goals, while the least progress has been made in infant and child mortality and child malnutrition.

- On the basis of trends up to the mid-1990s, almost one-half of all countries are on track for achieving UPE by 2015 while 13 countries are seriously off track.
- Almost 90 percent of countries are either on track or moderately off track towards reaching the literacy targets for 2005.
- Approximately 80 percent of countries are off track for achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005.
- Almost every country is off track for achieving reductions in infant and child mortality.

- Approximately two-thirds are off track on meeting the TICAD goals on safe water and sanitation and of these the overwhelming majority are seriously off track.
- Only six countries out of 47 are currently on track for halving malnutrition by 2015, while 33 countries are seriously off track.

The reasons for poor performance regarding mortality and malnutrition targets vary. The ambitious nature of these targets may offer some explanation. However, the performance in other developing regions—especially South Asia—suggests that far more can be done to reduce mortality rates. Targeted immunization programs, clean water provision and reproductive health care can drastically reduce the numbers of infant and child deaths. More must be done to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and to protect children orphaned or neglected as a result of the virus. Indeed, the strong negative correlation between the incidence of HIV/AIDS and the rate of progress on infant and child mortality underscores the need to combat AIDS as part of national and regional strategies to reach the targets. Similarly, conflict-affected countries tend to have very high mortality rates and poor or negative progress towards reducing them, highlighting the importance of political and social stability for advances in human development.

In malnutrition, a similar picture emerges. Although South Africa achieved remarkable reductions in child malnutrition during the 1990s, other countries with a high incidence of HIV/AIDS and countries affected by conflict have experienced large increases in the

malnutrition rate. Addressing food security issues and nutritional needs is critical to progress on all the targets adopted at TICAD II.

Although the rate of progress in education is more encouraging than in health, there is no room for complacency. Over 70 percent of school-age children in Africa live in countries that are off track for meeting the 2015 UPE target, while millions of children who enter school receive an education that is too short or of such low quality that they never acquire functional literacy skills. The 30 percent increase expected in the regional school age population by 2015 poses further challenges not faced by other developing regions as does the projected increase in the number of children being orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS.

The gender disparity in primary and secondary school enrollments also demands urgent action. Although the gap has closed significantly in many countries, in much of West and Central Africa the gender gap remains large, particularly at the secondary level. Given the critical role of female education in improving a broad range of human development indicators, the limited progress towards gender equality in education risks overall progress towards the TICAD goals.

Despite the genuine challenges and setbacks, there is a window of opportunity for real progress. The good news is that a strong consensus exists on the basic conditions needed for achieving poverty reduction and economic development in the region. There is no doubt that achieving these goals will generate massive improvements in well-being and will help set the African continent on a trajectory of growth, stability and prosperity for the 21st

century. The potential bad news is that the beginnings of economic and social recovery that took hold in Africa in the second half of the 1990s cannot be sustained unless there is accelerated progress towards the development goals agreed to at Tokyo.

There is no blueprint for achieving progress: strategies and interventions in each country should reflect national conditions, needs, and priorities. Some countries need far reaching reforms beyond the human development sectors; others need to commit more resources for improving human development outcomes. In almost every country, there is substantial room for using resources more efficiently. In many countries, the HIPC Initiative is starting to release significant public resources through debt relief. On average, the HIPC countries have committed to use about 40 percent of these resources on basic education and about 25 percent on basic health interventions. If invested wisely, these resources could help lay the foundations for sustained growth and poverty reduction. Donors can also make a crucial contribution by providing increased financial support and ensuring that their assistance is used more effectively by working with governments and civil society in strategic partnerships. There is also a need for regional strategies and partnerships to combat HIV/AIDS, resolve and prevent conflicts, and generate economic growth needed to reduce poverty. Creating a stable development context and building the partnerships needed to improve the well-being of Africa's people are the critical challenges facing Africa as it moves deeper into the 21st century.

This article was written by Angel Mattimore and is based on the publication, *Can Africa reach the International Targets for Human Development ? An Assessment of Progress towards the Targets of the 1998 Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II)*, Africa Region Human Development Working Papers series, September 2001. For more information, e-mail afhdseries@worldbank.org

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