



Policy Brief

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Addressing Issues of Social Inclusion in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

INTRODUCTION

The assumption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is that social rights are fundamental rights in themselves, and secondly that social justice and inclusion rather than inequality foster development. Social injustice is seen to undermine the environment for economic growth and rob a nation of social cohesion, peace and prosperity. This Policy Brief therefore raises questions on whether or not sufficient attention is given to social justice and inclusion in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The general observation is that in the bid to be generic to meet the expectations of the 189 members who signed the MDGs, the goals sacrificed some of the transformative contents that are needed to effect social change.

To illustrate the direct challenges that face the MDG with respect to social justice, and the bid to achieve social inclusion the Policy Brief comments on equity issues in the areas of livelihoods, education and gender empowerment. Other vulnerable groups that deserve mention in the pursuit of social inclusion are of course persons with disability, the elderly, children and youth, but they are not the focus of this piece. Most of the observations are drawn from administrative reports on vulnerable groups, as well the Ghana MDG reports as well as the Annual Progress Review of the Medium Term Development Programme (Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda - GSGDA). The Policy Brief is made up of the following sections: MDGs and Social Justice; MDGs and Gaps in Promoting Social Inclusion; MDGs and Inclusive Education; Gender Empowerment in MDGs.

MDGs and Social Justice

The MDGs have been lauded for the bold statement the goals make about the need for social equity across all socio-economic groups. So, the Goals push every nation to work to achieve a minimum standard of living in a more aggressive manner than the 1970s basic needs drive. Much has been achieved since the MDGs were launched in 2000, and with 2015 finally here a lot of stock taking is going on with special attention being given to the uneven progress that has been made and why. The post-2015 debate has given opportunity to analysts to study the persistent deprivations and exclusion among some social groups. Under the circumstances, efforts aimed at achieving inclusion have intensified and are seen as key to overcoming stark deprivation, weak governance and general abuse of rights in many parts of the world.

Critics suggest that the MDGs, as they are presently composed, do not go far enough to interrogate the underlying causes of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. Consequently, despite the MDGs the structural constraints on the enjoyment of human rights by all are virtually left intact in some countries. Part of the reason lies in the complexity of poverty and vulnerability, especially in the condition of intersecting inequalities faced by most deprived people in developing countries which leave them with multiple disadvantages (Kabeer, 2010).

Intersecting Inequalities

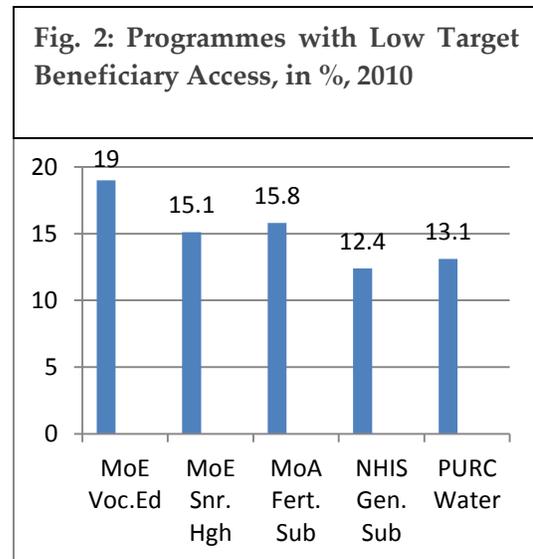
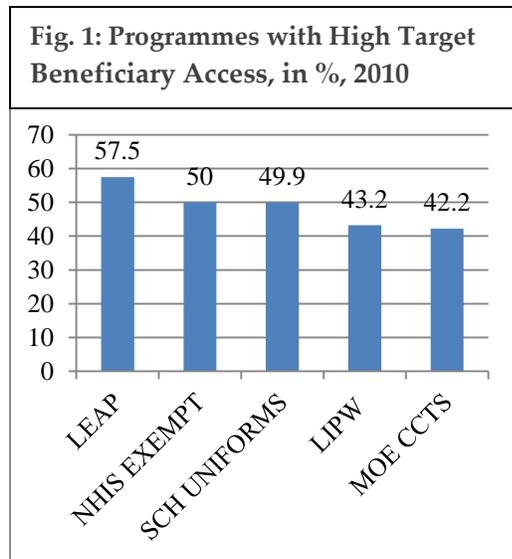
Intersecting inequalities occur through the interplay of vertical and horizontal inequalities. Vertical inequalities typically refer to class difference which is rooted in socio-economic disparities between people. Horizontal inequalities are, on the other hand, rooted in group-based experiences of discrimination linked to people's characteristics ascribed to them at birth which are largely irreversible, such as age, sex and race or place of origin. Under such circumstances intersecting inequalities emerge when people experience multiple material (vertical inequality) and relational forms (horizontal inequality) of deprivation, which interact to strip them of opportunities for well-being. Such an approach to understanding poverty forces one to see the poor as not only lacking in basic needs but also faced with discrimination, exclusion and information asymmetry. While the MDGs are strong on advocacy for reaching minimum standards, they fall short of institutional reform for a paradigm shift towards redistribution, equality and good governance.

The Policy Brief is based on research conducted under the Social Development thematic area of the EGN. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of the EGN or ISSER.

Though Ghana has been applauded for achieving MDG1 ahead of 2015 by halving poverty, the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 6) estimates that at least a quarter of Ghanaians remain below the poverty line (GSS, 2013). Forms of social exclusion which persist in Ghana and may cause the phenomenon of intersecting inequalities include for example:

- Chronic poverty
- Ignorance
- discrimination due to group-based characteristics
- Lack of access to basic social services
- Vulnerability to market failures
- Income insecurity

Since the launch of the MDGs in 2000, Ghana has made considerable progress in strengthening its institutions for the pursuit of social justice. There has been a successful transfer of power between political parties in 2000 followed by other successful multiparty elections, even if contentious at times. Several new pieces of legislation have been adopted to protect vulnerable groups in society such as the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (732) and Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 766). In addition, many policies have been passed and organizational bodies established to implement and regulate the implementation of new social protection provisions that seek to improve income distribution such as an increase in the percentage of the District Assemblies Common Fund from 5% to 7.5%; Capitation Grants for public basic schools; school feeding and other school supplies for deprived schools, and exemption policy for vulnerable groups under the National health insurance scheme. In 2007 a cash transfer programme was introduced known as Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) that currently reaches over 80,000 target households with selected vulnerable members. Needless to say the implementation of these norms and practices has faced challenges due to resource constraints and weak political and social mobilization to fight for the cause (NDPC, 2004ff). Figures 1 and 2 show the kinds of reasonably successful social transfers currently in operation and those that have been performing below expectation.



World Bank (2010:10; 13)

MDGs and Promotion of Livelihood Security

Livelihood security, in a nutshell, refers to processes that bring individuals and groups at risk of poverty and exclusion in contact with opportunities to give them a new lease on life. It is a multi-faceted concept but in this Brief it is limited to economic activity as a proxy for financial security. In addition, it is also about law reform and legislation to institutionalise equal opportunity, transparency, accountability and regulation which are not directly addressed in this write up. By the sheer fact that Ghana has halved poverty one can assume a certain level of livelihood security in the country. From the GLSS 6 (GSS, 2013) most people in the economically active age range are working, except for those in school. However, this masks a number of serious issues about the quality of the job market. About 80% of the workforce is in the informal economy which is unregulated and noted for seasonal or irregular incomes and poor job security. In addition, about one-third of children between 10 to 14 years are working. Though unemployment is said to be low overall, there is a serious youth unemployment challenge facing Ghana. Perhaps even more serious is the higher than average poverty levels in the North. In 2005 when the national poverty average was 28%, it was 88% in the Upper East, 70% in the Upper West and 52% in the Northern Region (NDPC, 2012). In these conditions the appearance of livelihood security and the attainment of MDG 1 could be described as superficial.

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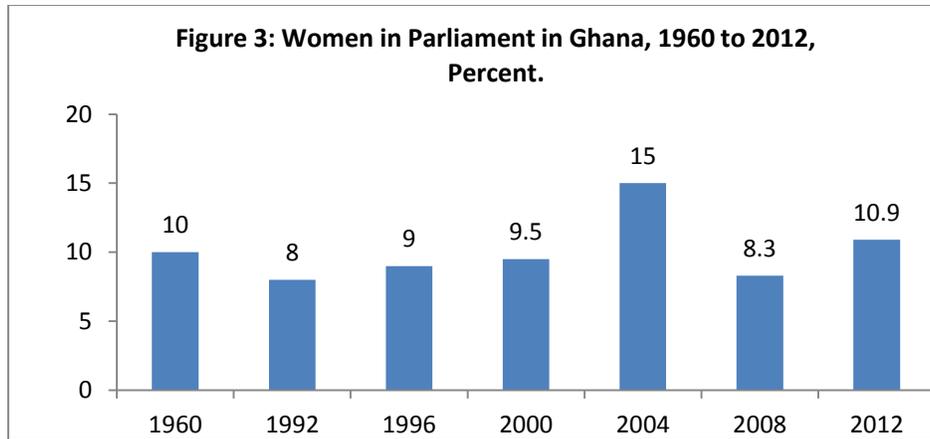
MDGs and Inclusive Education

With respect to MDG 2, in Ghana, several initiatives have been taken by the state and non-state actors to accelerate universal enrolment in basic school. Literacy levels traditionally are indicative of knowledge, skills and innovative ability. Though gross enrolment has improved over the years, in the latest GLSS it is reported that 36% of Ghanaians 15years and over have never been to school (GSS, 2013). Moreover, among workers, only about 14% have senior secondary school education or higher. Clearly, this is quite out of step with the lower middle income status of the country, and poses a serious skills challenge to the Ghanaian economy.

Government social spending on education, as noted, earlier has contributed immensely to the attainment of over 90 percent Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and (NER) Net Enrolment Rate in the excess of 80 percent. But there has been much concern about the quality of schooling outcomes, as many students leave basic school with mediocre grades. The MDG targets have not paid much attention to the quality issues of education. Moreover, other aspects of inclusive education, such as mainstreaming children with special needs in regular schools, have been woefully inadequate. Very few public schools have been resourced either in infrastructural development or in having qualified teachers to carry out this programme. Many of the 24 special education schools are seriously dilapidated and heavily dependent on charity.

Gender Empowerment

Though the various governments since 2000 have accepted the challenge of narrowing the gender gap in education and public office, serious differences remain, especially beyond basic school. Much of this has been attributed to entrenched socio-cultural norms and practices, which affect both customary and modern institutions of governance. They perpetuate the abuse of girls and women, such as the case of the witches camps in Northern Ghana, where women accused of witchcraft are exiled (Action Aid, 2012), and they reduce women's realization of their potential in professional skills development. Gender parity in education has improved considerably but there are much fewer highly qualified women to take up senior appointments in Government compared to men. Further, there is still strong resistance to women in leadership as is evident in parliamentary elections in the country (Figure 3).



Source: Torto (2013:44)

It appears that women tend to fare better in selection for appointed positions than in elected positions. This is partly explained by the Government's efforts at implementing its Affirmative Action Directive for women to occupy about 40% of public office appointments. But the reality is far from the expected as women have rarely exceeded 20% of government appointments at the district and central government levels.

One area of women's empowerment which fourteen years of pursuing MDGs has only modestly influenced is gender-based violence and the customary denial of women's constitutional rights of leadership positions in Ghana. This is not to deny that efforts have been made towards remedying the situation. For example, a Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) has been established within the Ghana Police Service and this has helped to unearth many abuses. In addition, a Domestic Violence Law, 2007 (Act 732) has been passed to back the criminalization of domestic violence. But highly controversial practices of witchcraft accusations; forced marriage and ritual slavery, physical assault, among others, persist across the country.

CONCLUSION

Social inclusion is high on everyone's agenda for the post-MDGs framework. Overall, analysts working towards the post-2015 agenda are paying more attention to critics who have described the MDGs as minimalist and lacking in transformative vision. Part of the reason is over-dependence on technocratic solutions, rather than ideological paradigm shifts that would require a reallocation of resources to reduce the inequality gap. While the MDGs set targets for reducing exclusion through reduced poverty and

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gender gap, as well as improved maternal and child health, they do not attack the fundamental structures that bring about these conditions. To do so would call for greater commitment to social inclusion in the post-2015 agenda.

RECOMMENDATION

The MDGs have been extremely useful at pointing all development practitioners and policy makers in the direction of monitoring the movement of statistics on well-being. Beyond 2015 more close attention is required in the assessment of quality of life and the appropriate indicators to monitor quality of life. Social inclusion needs to be properly examined in terms of the human rights elements of inclusion, and with respect to the institutional and infrastructural dimensions of inclusion. Proper indicators have to be adopted by Ghana to monitor changes and progress associated with inclusion in the lives of vulnerable groups. To some extent it can be argued that to successfully pursue the post-2015 SDGs societies must reform their institutions to create the necessary environment for socio-economic change.

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Written by:

Prof. Ellen Bortei-Doku Aryeetey, Social Development Analyst, and Subject Matter Specialist for the Social Development thematic area of the EGN

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The Economy of Ghana Network (www.egn.org.gh)
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The Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER)
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Tel: +233 302 501182 / +233 302 512504
www.isser.edu.gh
publications@isser.edu.gh/info@isser.edu.gh

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