

Key elements and messages from the discussion included the following:

MDGs and national and local governance

The neglect or underestimation of governance and institutions, in particular, can undermine policy reforms and progress for the Millennium Development Goals. Both the Millennium Declaration and the Annual Reviews of the UN Secretary General on the MDGs underpinned the importance of governance and of institutions in securing steady and sustainable progress to agreed international commitments and objectives. To some speakers separating policies from the institutional and governmental context is not only impractical but may also lead developing countries to experience poor outcomes because of such an arbitrary division.

Political commitment and will is the first step before the consideration of technical and administrative matters. In this light, the unequal distribution of power and increased inequalities, particularly at the national level, were factors impacting adversely on good governance and on securing shared socio-economic objectives. It was pointed out that trust and partnerships must characterize not only national processes but international relations. A panellist pointed out that while emphasis is placed on the national authorities in rooting out corruption, there is reluctance to agree on repatriation of wealth that was siphoned off abroad through corruption. This appears as double standards for the ethical principles underpinning the combating of malfeasance to be equally applicable at the national and international levels. Further, Official Development Assistance, ODA, is not totally free of conditionalities, and often is subjected to the bureaucratic procedures of the various donors. Thus, while transparency and accountability for ODA is justly sought, this should be applied to all partners.

MDGs and international governance

Reference was made to international governance and the contracting effects of structural adjustment and of the economic liberalization of the last 25 years. This was contrasted with the period of relatively high growth and greater equality that were sustained for the first 25 years subsequent to the Second World War. Though structural adjustment has been formally supplanted by Poverty Reduction Strategy for the Bretton Woods Institutions, the macro economic policy stance has not materially changed. Targeting inflation has generally had an adverse effect on economic expansion for developing countries while the secular worsening of the terms of trade has continued. The impact of economic liberalization seems to have also reduced the policy space for the national governments while the openness of their economies has meant greater volatility and uncertainty in economic performance. The increase in income inequalities, coupled with the decrease in policy space and the concentration of foreign direct investment primarily in mineral extraction and resource exploitation, does not portend well for many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

MDGs and institutions and institutional capacity with focus on NEPAD

In the case of Africa, which was explicitly recognised as meriting a special case in the Millennium Declaration, it is increasingly appreciated that for policy purpose, one size does not fit all. It is found that the diverse traditional practices of communities are compatible with the principles of inclusiveness and participation, and therefore, offer the opportunities of cooperation with institution-building processes of good governance. Further, and taking into cognizance various cultural nuances, it is important to keep in mind that while measuring governance progress, the donor indices may not always reveal the real picture nor would they be helpful in securing progress. In this regard, mention was made of the recent initiatives taken by the Africa Union to review progress through a peer review mechanism.

MDGs and human resources capacity

The intertwined importance of capacity building and that of human resource development were emphasized by several speakers. Clearly, human resource development, particularly those that pertain to planning and implementation, should not be confined to the public sector alone. Many NGOs and the private sector currently partner with government in the provision of public services. In this, there is a two way process, on the one hand, to equip government to deal with partners, including the private sector and NGOs; and on the other, to upgrade the capacities of civil society in dialoguing with government. Several speakers also stressed the importance of monitoring the progress of health and education of the population.

The importance of human resource development was also reaffirmed in the discussion, which together with human rights, were powerful antidotes to inequity, extremism and intolerance. While it was recognized that “one size does not fit all” this did not obviate the need to learn from each other, to search and be aware of the various options available, and to strengthen the discussions and analysis of the challenges ahead.

MDGs and human rights

There was a large measure of congruence that human rights were not purely objectives of the MDGs but are means or adjuncts by which MDGs can be solidly secured. Thus, concurrently, human rights, including economic and social rights, are fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration. Increasingly it is appreciated that these developmental rights also serve as the conduits for securing the eight Millennium Development Goals. In a graphic sense, human rights determine both the height, including such attributes as good governance, stability and security, as well as the base of the development pyramid.

Prerequisites for strong and effective government

Subsequent speakers focused on the elements or prerequisites for strong and effective government. Four elements were singled out for special consideration:

- Efficient and effective public administration that includes an enabling regulatory framework for investment and the privat

administration that adheres to equity principles and is corruption-resistant, will enable an increase of the tax to GDP ratio;

- An equitable decision-making process – inclusive, pro-poor, sensitive to civil society, and accountable;