

UN DATA INDICATE ETHIOPIA'S PROGRESS ON MAJOR MDG TARGETS HAS LONG WAY TO GO

By Genet Mersha, 27 December, 2010

Part II

Part I of this article rang the bell that poverty and inequality have deepened in Ethiopia. With the help of data, it showed where Ethiopia stands in respect of attaining the three targets of Goal One of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The internationally defined objective of Goal One is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Its three targets have required governments and civil society to (a) halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. This target is borne of concern that higher food prices may push 100 million people deeper into poverty. Conflict leaves many displaced and impoverished; (b) achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. Nonetheless, it recognises that full employment remains a distant possibility and low-paying jobs leave one in five workers developing countries mired in poverty and half the world's workforce to toil in unstable and insecure jobs; and, therefore, (c) halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Not only the targets under Goal One but also again, measured by other indices, Ethiopia's progress is less certain in meeting the targets under the MD Goals 3-5, listed below. Poverty is not deprivation in the material sense only. It is also denial of opportunities, self-respect, and self-esteem of individuals and their capacity to break out of the vicious cycle of helplessness. With respect to inequality, Table 2, below, shows that the share in national consumption of 20.0 percent of those in the upper quintile stands at 51.42 percent, according to the findings of an Ethiopian researcher. Therefore, speaks of failure to improve opportunities for betterment and access to public services. Millions and millions of Ethiopians have limited access, while mostly those with opportunities and connections enjoy greater privileges.

The text box below helps the reader to understand what is expected of Ethiopia to attain the goals and targets of the MDG, enumerated below. At present, the problem is the disconnect between the people and regime because of its dissonant priorities and government bent on ruling by imposing fear and divisiveness. Clearly, the primary concern of government has been its stay in power. In that regard, Ethiopia's disadvantage has been the politics of distrust that has locked out better ideas, experts and resourceful elements of society as rivals. Fear and insecurity have become endemic in the country, conditions which are not favourable for development.

Goal 2:	Achieve universal primary education Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;
Goal 3:	Promote gender equality and empower women. The overall objective is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015;
Goal 4:	Reduce child mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015:

For one, this writer is discouraged by reports that, among others, in 2009 the number of Ethiopians fleeing to Yemen, risking their lives across Somalia and the treacherous sea and ocean, has doubled to 42,000 , according to the UN refugee agency widely quoted by the international media, as evidence of what is wrong in Ethiopia today. Strikingly, even the number of those escaping to Yemen from the ‘killing fields’ of Somalia has gone down, or remained much lower compared to 2008. The question is what drives those young Ethiopian men and women out into the unknown, if it were not lack of opportunities, fear and insecurity.

By simply comparing with the past the networks of roads now being built, power sources under construction (some of them with local resources), new schools standing and health assistants being trained to reach the rural infirm, politicians ignore the paramount preoccupation of those without options to make ends meet. People worry every single day how to let a day pass without slipping further into the jaws of hunger and heavy-handedness of the authorities. Instead, they ought to see that what is needed is realisation of the full essence of nation building, the tasks of which are enormous and go beyond mere inputs at the finance ministry and rhetoric at party headquarters. It requires willingness to remove obstacles imposed by political polarisation and lack of democracy.

Thus, today or tomorrow the choice before any government in Ethiopia is between continuing to preside over a divided nation and resentful public wallowing in poverty, or alternatively creating conditions that foster free, contented and proud citizenry. Such a public, of its own choice becomes loyal to its country, its laws and its national efforts to realize the aspirations of its people. Consequently, there is need to see the benefits of balanced growth, including mega infrastructures, without seeking to achieve them at the expense of worsening human conditions.

Table 1. Measurement of Ethiopia’s progress under MD Goals 1-5

	1990	1991	1995	1996	2000	2005	2007
Measurements							
Goal 1: Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment, decent work for all, including women and young people		1.5			28.3 (’04	4.1	19.5 (’06)
Goal 1: Share of unemployed youth to total unemployed,		58.5			49.3	47.0	46.8

					('99)		('06)
Goal 1: Share of youth unemployed to total unemployed, both sexes, %		58.5	56.4 ('04)	49.3 ('99)	21.6	47.0	46.6 ('06)
Goal 2: Percentage of pupils completing grade 1 through primary school					62.2	59.2 ('06)	56.7 ('06)
Goal 2: Primary school completion rate, both sexes					30.0	41.3	46.3
Goal 2: School attendance rate of pupils aged 10-14 both parents are alive, and live with at least one parent					43.5	58.9	
Goal 2: Literacy rate of 15-24 yrs, both sexes			33.6 ('04)			49.9 ('04)	
Goal 2: Total net enrolment ratio in primary education, girls					32.6	56.8	69.3
Goal 2: Total net enrolment ratio in primary education, boys					44.4	64.0	75.2
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Gender parity index in primary level enrolment		0.66			0.65 0.61 ('99)	0.83	0.88
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education		0.22			0.28	0.32	0.34
Goal 4: Infant mortality rate (0-1 yr) per 1,000 live births	122		107		92	80	75
Goal 4: Children 1 yr old immunized against measles	38.0	17.0	38.0	54.0	52.0	56.0	65.0
Goal 4: Children under 5 moderately or severely under weight		47.6			47.2	38.4	
Goal 4: Births attended by skilled health personnel, %					5.6	5.7	
Goal 5: Maternal mortality per 100,000 live births						720	

Compiled by the writer from UNSTAT/MILLENNIUM INDICATORS. **NB**—Ethiopia has 149 hospitals, of which 40 are in the capital city serviced by 1,205 doctors, 1,219 health officers servicing 1,517 health centres and, 13,011 nurses of all categories and 14,930 hospital beds in the country and 371 pharmacists and 2,059 clinics (source CSA abstract 2008)

Ethiopian and foreign experts begin to face problems of policies with greater candour

This writer is encouraged that a number of studies, mostly by Ethiopian experts, are showing similar concerns and recognition of the problem, which could help the authorities to look closely into the matter. For instance, in his 2009 research work Dr. Fekadu Gelaw of Haramaya University (Ethiopia) has concluded, “The poverty level in Ethiopia is generally higher.”

The researcher shows that the catch for government lies in its policies and strategies, which boldly claim the attainment of “very fast growth that creates equitable distribution as a means of achieving poverty reduction objective without clearly articulating the possible effects of attaining fast growth on income distribution.” In the table below, Dr. Fekadu Gelaw indicates that in the ten-year period from 1994 -2004 and 1999-2004, the share of the poorest 40.0 percent in total consumption has gone down from 13.75 to 13.10 and from 15.33 to 13.10, respectively.

Similarly, in the same periods, the share of the richest 20.0 percent has increased from 50.15 to 51.42 and from 45.80 to 51.42 percent, respectively. The share of the medium 40.0 percent group has gone down in

both instances. Consequently, the data suggest neither government policies nor economic growth have helped reduce both absolute and relative poverty and inequality amongst 80.0 percent of the population.

After seizing power in 1991, the present regime turned its attention to economic policy elaboration within the framework of structural adjustment programme of the IMF. As a result, it made the centrepiece of its policy to ensure economic growth and poverty reduction. In the nearly two decades since then, however, the structurally poor, nearly a fourth of Ethiopians in inaccessible and depleted areas, have remained on a life support system through the 'safety net' programme. Their number is increasing, instead of decreasing. At the same time, the number of those that could not afford beyond one meal a day in urban areas and in smaller pockets throughout the country have also been steadily increasing, ironically, as the economy has been growing significantly, measured in GDP terms.

Table 2. Level of inequality over the five survey periods using Gini & Thiel Indices & Variance log

Years	N	Gini Index	General Entropy (GEO)	Theil Index (GE(1))	Share of the group from total per capita consumption		
					Poorest 40%	Medium 40%	Richest 20%
1994a	1476	0.442	0.349	0.344	13.75	36.10	50.15
1995	1421	0.443	0.346	0.374	13.80	35.71	50.49
1997	1409	0.405	0.291	0.323	15.77	37.73	46.93
1999	1451	0.419	0.304	0.306	15.33	38.42	45.80
2004	1366	0.436	0.333	0.343	13.10	35.49	51.42

Source: *The Relationship Between Poverty, Inequality, and Growth in Rural Ethiopia: the Micro Evidence*, Table 3 Dr. Fekadu Gelaw's computation based on five survey rounds of Ethiopian Rural Household Survey (ERHS). NB-writer's note: Gini Index, Entropy and Theil Index measure income inequality and dispersion (distribution) through statistical & mathematical methods.

The number of unemployed or unemployable keeps on growing, especially of the young, just because of failures of government policies. The UN estimates the proportion of employed people living below \$1 (PPP) a day in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1997 -2007 was equal to 55.5 percent. This is the highest for any region. In Ethiopia, this situation is further induced, among others, by failure of government to facilitate conditions for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as the African Economic Conference was told at its December session held at Addis Ababa from 11 – 13 December 2009. The assessment of a research sponsored by the Fulbright Programme is wittingly harsh, but certainly not groundless. The researcher Zuzana Brixiova of the Czech Republic discloses,

When the current Ethiopian government came to power in 1991, it strived to create an enabling climate that would support private sector development. So far, however, the hopes that the private sector and SMEs would contribute to a decisive part of the Ethiopian output and become drivers of sustainable growth and poverty alleviation have not materialized. In fact, accounting for less than 50 percent of total employment in the formal urban sector, the private sector in Ethiopia remains underdeveloped, even

comparing to regional peers such as Tanzania or Uganda. In that context, the expectation that Ethiopia would undergo a transition from low productivity jobs to more productive ones also remains unmet. The lack of “good”, i.e. productive and well-paid jobs in the private sector discourages workers to acquire skills, out of fear that such asset would be mostly unutilized. And many of those who do obtain higher education end up emigrating to advanced economies, thus contributing to the “brain drain” problem. The recent growth, driven mostly by the commodity boom, notwithstanding, the country seems to remain stuck in a vicious circle of low productivity, low-paid jobs and extreme poverty. (*Modeling Determinants of SMEs in Ethiopia :Would subsidies matter?* 2009)

In the circumstances, one cannot help concluding that the situation is symptomatic of both policy failures and growth failing the poor. There is a growing sense that, despite the existence of poverty eradication policies and strategies in the country, the poor in Ethiopia have been orphaned. A number of economic researches have expressed increased concern about the negative implications of the terribly skewed relations between economic growth and the spread of poverty and inequalities in Ethiopia, as in a number of African countries without poverty eradication policies before the current global economic crisis that has hit the poor harder or even before that.

Such is the concern at the United Nations that, in welcoming the General Assembly's decision approving the holding of a new MDG Summit in September 2010, the UN Secretary-General informed member states that he intends to make 2010 the year of the MDGs. In that connection, he noted, “Just as now is the moment to act on climate change, the next half-decade must be the time to deliver on long-standing development promises to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, above all those in Africa.”

In a December 21 statement, Mr. Ban-Ki Moon expressed the hope that, coming as it [the GA decision] does amid mixed progress toward the Goals [MDG] and new crises that threaten the global effort to halve extreme poverty, the summit would be of crucial importance to redouble efforts to meet the Goals by the agreed deadline of 2015.

This writer is aware that Salil Shetty, the outgoing Director of the UNMDG Secretariat who resigned his post at the end of this month to become head of Amnesty International, has welcomed the remarkable progresses Ethiopia has made on poverty reduction, expansion of education and health service facilities. However, his 2008 press conference from Addis Ababa put emphasis on government “explicitly...talking about involving the citizens’ and peoples’ organizations much more actively in the process of achieving the MDGs. That is really where the work of the national campaign comes in and we hope we can support the process in that way.”

(to be continued)