



Can African countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals without foreign aid?

A UN representative has said relying on foreign aid to achieve the Millennium Development Goals did a disservice to Africa, and has called on African governments to find alternative funding sources and clean up their act



Can the Millennium Development Goals be achieved without aid?

African countries need to find alternative sources to money to finance their national budgets, rather than rely on overseas aid, according to an official from the UN millennium campaign.

At a media workshop for journalists from east Africa, organised by the NGO Panos and the UN millennium campaign earlier this month, Sylvia Mwachuli, the UN millennium campaign communications coordinator, said depending on foreign aid to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did a disservice to Africa.

"African governments must find ways of financing development; we are calling for a paradigm shift in financing of development, not depending on donors," she said.

Once African governments are able to finance their national budgets without foreign aid, which usually comes with strings attached, they would be in a position to allocate resources according to local priorities and would make more headway in meeting the MDGs by 2015. However, Mwichuli warned that managing without aid would only be possible if governments stopped wasting money.

She pointed to Kenya as an example of a country that had cut back on foreign aid. Only around 6% of its budget is foreign funded. In Uganda, donor support will account for 32.6% of the country's resources in the 2009-10 financial year, according to the minister of finance's budget speech.

"I get disgusted with countries that entirely depend on donor budgets," said Mwichuli. "What then do we pride in as African countries, if we have no control over our own national budgets and affairs?"

She added: "In Tanzania, government was told to discuss and fight corruption as one of the conditions for donor funding. Why should we discuss corruption just because some donor is saying so? Can't we discuss corruption because we feel it is necessary?"

But while Mwichuli believes having control over national budgets will ultimately lead to the achievement of the MDGs, given the nature of African governments it is not an obvious leap.

Most African governments and key players in the field of development have repeatedly said that the MDGs will not be met by 2015.

According to Mwichuli, lack of financial resources and a hostile economic environment are the most visible hurdles. But little mention is made of the lack of political will and misuse of existing resources.

Under the Abuja declaration, countries agreed to increase funding for the agricultural sector to 10% of the national budget. However, the Ugandan government allocates less than 4% even though nearly 90% of its population earn a living through the land.

A big chunk of the budget goes to the defence ministry, buying luxury vehicles for ministers and meeting the salaries of resident district commissioners, who represent the interests of the president in every district, monitoring government programmes and chairing meetings. Some people see them as merely a burden on public expenditure.

The Ugandan government also spent billions of shillings on hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kampala in 2007.

"African governments' come with good plans but don't finance them. They need to follow up. Most ministries of health in east Africa do not spend 50% of their budgets. Why? The problem is procurement issues. For instance, in Uganda... when it comes to procuring drugs they talk about procurement procedures. Greed and corruption is taking billions in east Africa that would have helped develop the poor," added Mwichuli.

According to Panos's executive director for eastern Africa, Luther Anukur, the amount of money stolen in Uganda is equivalent to the foreign aid it receives.

This, he says, is a result of failed elections in east Africa, where "we have people in power, whom we are not sure that they should have really got there, but we have to just live with them. As a result corruption has been institutionalised".