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PERSPECTIVE

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Socio- economic development and child survival

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Abstract: Of the 8.8million deaths of children under 5 in the world in 2008, 4.5million were from Africa, especially West and Central Africa. Also, high maternal mortality rates, low life expectancy, and increasing food prices make the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals related to child survival unlikely for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Soon after independence in the 1950's and 60's many African countries suffered political unrest, social upheaval and economic instability with military coups and or civil wars, leaving 20 million internally displaced or refugees, and adversely affecting child survival by the 1980's.

Though the potential for economic growth exists and foreign investments are increasing, the African economy lacks adequate human resources, institutions, and physical infrastructures to ensure the growth that would improve child survival. African countries have the challenge of finding solutions for economic growth and development to enhance child survival. Possible ways include avoiding the commodity trap; reducing reliance on Official Development Assistance (ODA); and mobilizing domestic resource and stopping capital flight. prudent and judicious use of available resources and implementation of measures that address the structural causes of poverty, can improve child survival even in the prevailing conditions.

Introduction

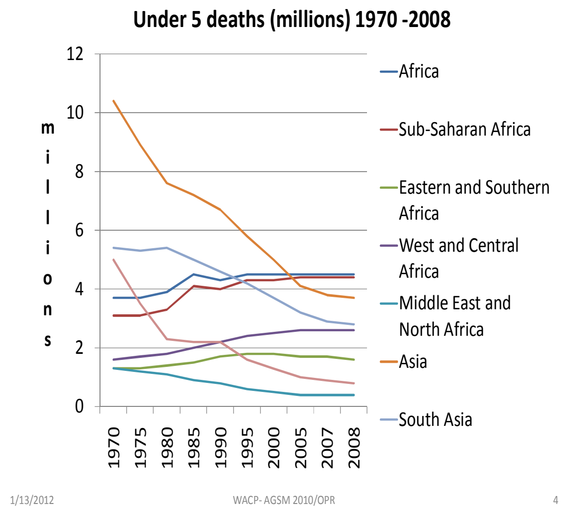
A nation's socio-economic development is intricately linked with the survival of its children, as some statistics comparing developed nations with the developing show. Africa has a young population with 70% of her one billion people aged 30 years or less.[1] The Gross National Income per person (GNI) in 2007 for Sub-saharan Africa was a mere $1109, compared with $40772 for Industrialized countries[2]; 53% of the population live below the international poverty line of US$1.25 per day; the Official Development Assistance (ODA) inflow in Ghana in 2007 was US$1151 millions, compared with a negative inflow (outflow) of US$-131 in Saudi Arabia. Of the 8.8 million deaths of children under -5 in the world in 2008, 4.5 million were from Africa. and while many countries in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa had shown a marked decline, in under- 5 mortality, West and Central Africa had actually shown an increase.

In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, more than 900 women die for every 100,000 live births, compared to just 8 per 100,000 in the industrialised world.[3] In Niger one woman out of every seven is likely to die from a pregnancy related cause during the course of her life time, contrasted with one out of every 48,000 Irish women. The Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) in Sweden is 3 compared with 219 in Liberia. The life expectancy at birth for a child born in Japan today is 83yrs against 48 years for Nigeria or Sierra Leone.2 And the list goes on. In 2000, the countries of the world ratified 8 targets to be met by 2015 - the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's).[4]

Millennium Development Goals 1,4,5, and 6 are directly related to child survival. MDG1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; MDG4, to reduce by two-thirds, the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR); MDG5 to reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate (MMR), MDG6 to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other serious diseases. Sub-Saharan Africa is least on course to achieve any of the goals.

Figure 1 shows the relative trend of under 5 deaths in Africa, compared with Asia, since 1970.[5]

Fig 1: Under 5 Mortality in Africa and The World 1970 to 2008



Source : UNICEF The State of the World's Children Special Edition 2010

So how did we get here? Africa in history

A trip down memory lane would help to answer the question "How did we get here?' In the 1950's and 60's African nations achieved independence with great enthusiasm. However the euphoric 'wind of change' soon became a 'hurricane of chaos' with power-hungry, despotic or inept Heads of States and their one-party de facto rule, nationalization of industries, and other atrocities. This opened the way for military men to cease power in one country after another. The sword became mightier than the pen, from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960 to the human tragedies of Rwanda, Darfur - Sudan, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Of the 85 coups in 33 countries between 1952 and 2000, 42 were in West Africa.[6]. This was a recipe for social upheaval and economic instability as few military men were able to transform themselves into effective statesmen. In addition, some countries became engaged in civil war, while others were overcome by natural disasters all of which adversely affected child survival. Indeed, of the 10 countries with the highest mortality in 2008, nine were in Africa, eight had armed conflict, and all had military coups and governments.

Table 1: Ten countries with the highest child mortality and their recent conflicts.

Country	U5MR (deaths per1,000 live Births)	Conflict
Sierra Leone	270	1991-2000
Angola	260	1975–2002
Afghanistan	257	1978–ongoing
Niger	253	1992–1997
Liberia	235	1989–2003
Mali	217	1990–1994
Chad	209	1988–ongoing
Equatorial Guinea	206	No armed conflicts
D.R Congo	205	1996–2001
Burkina Faso	204	No armed conflicts

Source Save The Children : Why Equity Matters 2008.

The 1980's and 1990's brought multiple transitions, from one-party to multi-party rule, from government-commanded economies to free markets, from apartheid to multi-racial rule. But a few countries went from peace to war, leaving 20 million Africans as internally displaced people and external refugees. All these had negative effect on the economy and ultimately on child survival.

The African economy in the 1990's grew by 2.2%, indicating a turn around, but on the downside. there were structural weaknesses in all key areas: inadequate capacities in human resources, institutions, and physical infrastructures. The United Nations Committee on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Economic Development in Africa report for 2001 stated that "African countries faced four main challenges: to accelerate and broaden economic growth; to achieve a sustainable balance in the population-food-environment nexus; to achieve good governance and put an end to conflicts; to cope with globalization and attain international competitiveness. They also had four main handicaps which are scarce economic resources, climatic uncertainties, uncertain world market developments with free market economies with no protectionist policies , and heavy indebtedness".[8]

"In order to ensure that Africa will be able to reduce poverty by half by 2015, in line with the MDGs, at the very least growth levels will have to double to some 7%-to-8% per annum for the next decade, the financial requirements of which are incompatible with present and projected levels of debt servicing. It is in this context that the Report concludes that under present conditions, the MDGs will remain elusive for the African continent".[8]

At the beginning of the millennium, Africa had a number of problems, oil and non-oil commodity prices of which 80% of Africa's trade consisted had declined.

For every dollar that flowed into Sub-saharan Africa (SSA),$1.50 flowed out to the rest of the world due to debt repayments, thus making Africa a net creditor to the rest of the world. African economies had insufficient resources to invest in its own people and businesses. Protectionism by advanced countries and exchange rate misalignments meant poor access to world markets for African producers despite rapid trade liberalization. It was with such uncertainty that African nations entered the new millennium and ratified the MDG's.

The 2001 UNCTAD report stated that "Africa was poorer than two decades earlier due to declining aid and terms of trade, mounting debt, ineffective structural adjustment policies. Her per capita income was 10% below 1980 level; 28 million Africans faced severe food shortages.[8] Many of these were children too young to fend for themselves.

Against the odds however, Africa grew faster than any other developing region in 2001, reflecting better macroeconomic management, strong agricultural production, and the cessation of conflicts in several countries. But the rate of growth was not enough for achievement of any of the MDG's which were related to child survival.[9] Thus poor economic growth negatively affects child survival.

Where are we now? Sub Saharan Africa today

Despite all the challenges however, from 2004 and 2008, sub Saharan Africa's annual economic growth averaged 5%, mainly due to oil exports, until the global economic downturn of 2008.[10] During the same period, considerable progress was made in some areas affecting child survival, such as reduction in U5MR from 160 in 2006 to 145 in 2007, increased primary school enrolment, measles vaccination, use of insecticide-treated bed nets, reductions in HIV prevalence rates in some countries, and improvements in some aspects of gender equality. Maternal mortality ratios (MMR's) have been stagnant. In 2005, the ratio stood at 900 per 100 000 live births, with some countries' MMRs exceeding 1000 per 100 000 live births, (including Chad, Niger Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and Nigeria).[13]

About 80 per cent of maternal deaths are preventable if women have access to essential maternity and basic health care services. Without the achievement of MDG 5, any success with MDG 4 remains hollow. In addition there has been very limited headway with poverty and hunger reduction, and the many disparities due to gender income, and disability. In 2009 the effects of the global recession became evident in Africa. On economic development, there was among other things, a significant deceleration in growth and high unemployment.[11]

Where are we going -what can Africa do for the future?

In 2010, Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was expected to increase to 4.3% which still fell far short of the 8% now expected to achieve the MDG's.[12] African countries have the challenge of finding ways of solving the triple problems of slow economic growth, high and rising unemployment and increasing poverty in a time of global economic crisis. Unless this can be done expeditiously, the African child will remain disadvantaged and his survival threatened. The United Nation's Economic Report for Africa for 2010 suggests a number of ways all of which if implemented would have a beneficial effect on child survival in the sub region. These are as follows:

Avoiding the commodity trap. Sub- Saharan Africa's heavy dependence on exports of primary commodities and low value-added products have been partly to blame for her poor performance in world trade. In 2004, Africa lost out on the boom merchandise trading when Asia's economy grew by 5% while non-oil commodity trade only grew by 0.6%.[13] Africa must find thus, a way to add value to her commodities moving into higher-value exports by upgrading technology and improving productivity. It can be done. Botswana's prudent management of her diamond resources, made her the fastest growing economy in the world between gaining independence 1966 and 1980,[14] a middle income country with a U5MR of 31, GNI $6470, able to provide 10 years free education for her children. Sierra Leone's diamonds on the other hand have scarcely benefitted her people. Her U5MR stood at 194, and the GNI at $320 in 2010.[15]

Reduced reliance on Official Development Assistance (ODA) : Africa has relied heavily on ODA's (foreign aid). In 2008, ODA's to Africa grew by 11%, but with the credit crunch, was expected to fall in 2010.[16] The decline has implications for achieving the MDG's, and so on child survival. In addition, a lot of Africa's scarce resources has gone into servicing debts, and also the terms and conditions for many such loans were unfavourable for socio- economic development and growth.[17]

Development- enhancing policy on Foreign Direct Investments (FDI's): FDI's could be a way of bringing in funding for development into the economy without incurring more debt. For such funds to be useful to develop the country however the products must be linked to the rest of the economy. At present, with most FDI's the products are taken in their raw state out of the country with the investors making huge profits with no benefit to the nations' economy. The UNCTAD report of 2005 called for a "rethinking of the one-sided emphasis on attracting FDI and its replacement with a more balanced and more strategic approach tailored to African socio-economic conditions and development challenges."[17]

Domestic resource mobilization; Mobilizing "hidden" African domestic financial resources can be done in a number of ways, such as improving tax collection, formalization of the informal sector economic activities, and channeling more workers remittances through the formal banking systems. In 2004 officially recorded remittances alone reached $16 billion. 18 Such remittances are usually stable sources of income, they do not generate debt, have no conditions attached, and are subject to fewer 'leakages'.

Stopping Capital flight: If these funds were used for productive investments at home, they could create jobs and provide the incomes of large segments of the population now unemployed or underemployed. It has been estimated that the stock of capital flight from Africa is higher than the stock of the continent´s debt.

Strengthening regional economic integration for Africa's development: This would help build stronger and more resilient economies promote African economies.

Increased South-South collaboration: offers new opportunities for transforming African economies linking up with China, Brazil, and India.

Climate change issues - integration of issues into national decision making: Climate change is a global phenomenon affecting all countries but more so the poor, vulnerable countries of Africa and elsewhere that are the least responsible for it. The issues need to be given a higher level of political priority and integrated into national decision-making so as to reduce the negative effects on resources, livelihoods and the wider economy.

However, while child survival is intimately linked with socio-economic development, economic growth alone will not improve child survival. in other words, nations do not have to wait for favourable economic conditions to promote child survival issues. Prudent and judicious use of available resources and implementation of measures that address the structural causes of poverty, can improve child survival even in the prevailing conditions. This is well-demonstrated by the Save the Children's Wealth and Survival Index [19], which shows how countries perform on child mortality in relation to their level of income).
In Table 2, the 'excess mortality ' column represents the difference between a country's actual child mortality and the 'expected' mortality rate given its income level. It shows that countries with comparable levels of income can differ markedly in their performance on child survival. For example, in 2005 Ghana's GNI per capita was $2480, with Angola's only marginally lower at $2335. But Ghana's U5M rate was just 119 per 1000 compared with Angola's 260, which was more than double Ghana's.

Table 2: Wealth and Survival Index for selected African Countries 2005 .

Country	GNI per capita	U5MR	Excess Mortality
Guinea	2,316	165	66.57
Ghana	2,480	119	24.13
Sudan	2083	90	-13.96
Côte d'Ivoire	1,648	129	12.83
Senegal	1,792	119	7.21
Mali	1,033	218	77.52
Burkina Faso	1,213	203	70.89
Nigeria	1,128	194	58.08
Eritrea	1,109.	78	-58.81
Kenya	1240	120	-10.97
Togo	1506	111	-9.86
Sierra Leone	806	271	117.58
Niger	781	256	100.94
Tanzania	744	122	-35.56
Angola	2335	260	162.00

Source: Save the Children lives Why Equity matters

Conclusion

More effort is needed for African policy makers to improve child survival. For the sake of the survival and development of the African Child, policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa need to be men and women of vision who see that the future of the sub- continent depends on the survival and proper development of the children inhabiting it today.

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