

Evaluating the Success and Implementation of Millennium Development Goal Number One towards Eradicating Hunger and Poverty of Women and Children in South Africa

S. M Kang'ethe¹ and Dudzai Nyamutinga²

*University of Fort Hare, Department of Social Work and Social Development,
Private Bag X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: ¹<skangethe@ufh.ac.za>, ²<200909547@ufh.ac.za>*

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ABSTRACT The aim of this article is, through a review of literature, to evaluate the extent to which South Africa has fulfilled the Millennium Development Goal number one, which focuses on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The paper aims to summarize the recent trends with regards to the well being of women and children in South Africa on issues pertaining to poverty and hunger. The paper explains government efforts and programs put in place to achieve such a goal. It goes on to look into the factors that weigh down achievement towards ensuring a better life for all. Analyzing existing data on women and children's status so as to provide information on their rights and to identify areas and capacity gaps that need to be addressed by various stakeholders dealing with programs is also highlighted in this paper. Last but not least, the paper has highlighted on the progress made since the implementation of the MDGs in order to enhance the wellbeing of women and children towards eradicating extreme hunger and poverty in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Driven by the goal, objective and the need to expedite and track the pace of development of many developing countries that had either stagnated, or moving at a snail's pace, or experiencing a lagged out process, the United Nations in cohort with other development partners crafted eight international development goals to which many countries are signatory to. These goals came to be called Millennium Development Goals (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2013). They became not only the developmental benchmarks and thresholds, but also served as a reflection mirror for each country to gauge its economic and social development. The time frame for stock taking of each country's performance was pegged at year 2015 (RSA 2013). The goals inherent in the Millennium Development Goals include: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and maintaining global partnerships (Chopra et al. 2009; Ncayiyana 2010). Additionally, the Millennium Development Goals form a global advocacy platform to expedite and push individual countries to work to-

wards achieving these goals expeditiously. As a response to this challenge, many countries have crafted their own country specific Millennium Development Goals which they use to monitor and gauge their performance against the international ones. This article endeavors to evaluate the extent to which South Africa has achieved or is achieving MDG goal number one that envisages to see countries overcome extreme hunger and poverty of especially women and children (RSA 2013)

Problem Statement

Since year 2001 when 189 countries especially of the developing part of the world committed to work, fulfill and implement the eight internationally identified development goals, the so called Millennium Development Goals, there has been a great concern of how these MDGs are performing to address poverty and extreme hunger, especially of women and children. This is because many global vulnerabilities and miseries associated with food fall heavily on these two categories of the population, more so in the developing part of the world. Incontrovertibly also, underdevelopment generally appears to negatively affect the lives of children more than the adults, and women more than their male counterparts. This is probably because of skewed

power dynamics and patriarchal power systems that most countries of the developing world embrace. However, it is key to note that although MDG goal number one affects all the people, but apparently it is the lives of children and women who are more prone to various types of vulnerabilities more than men. Therefore, making a selective investigation of the state of children and women in terms of poverty and food access in South Africa and therefore making an autopsy of how much of this goal is being achieved, or making progress, remains the pivotal interest of these researchers. The results of this investigation are likely to add impetus and momentum to advocacy and lobbying processes to the government, NGOs and even international donors to expeditiously work towards strengthening strategies and interventions that empower women economically and also ensuring that programs for food sustainability are in place.

**FACTORS SUPPORTING THE
FULFILMENT OF MDG NUMBER
ONE IN SOUTH AFRICA IN
ERADICATING EXTREME POVERTY AND
HUNGER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

**South Africa Embraces World Class
Agricultural Mechanization**

In the global map, South Africa is one of the countries with super mega agricultural production. Although only a section of its population especially the White community is involved, the production is high to meet most of the local demands for food. It also exports a lot, not only to the western world, but also to the African region. For example in many urban settings, most of the maize meal is sifted in South Africa from the maize grown locally. This is because of mechanization that embraces both effectiveness and efficiency (Greenberg 2010). Although mechanization has hugely cut the population that could be employed, it is by and large one of the country's big employer and therefore contribute immensely to the food production and food security. Commercial farming has had a significant contribution to both livestock and various crop production especially wheat. The country boasts of nearly 14 million heads of cattle. The South African cattle herd has increased by about six million head since 1970s and now stands at

near 14 Million (Palmer and Ainslie 2006). Furthermore, wheat production is also on the rise to the extent that South Africa imported only 1.6 million tons of wheat in the year 2011. The improvement in the produce is also facilitated by the dual agriculture economy with both well developed commercial farming and smaller scale communal farming (Du Plessis 2010).

**The National School Nutrition Program a
Score towards Achieving Goal Number One**

The government of South Africa is working towards eradicating extreme poverty and hunger within households as well as the nation at large (Koch 2011). This is done through the school nutrition programs. In this program, the targeted population consists of nutritionally vulnerable communities and groups. The priority target groups for nutritional interventions have been identified as children under six years of age, at risk pregnant and lactating women, primary school children from poor households, the elderly people and those suffering from chronic diseases (Koch 2011).

On a positive note, by March 2009, the National School Nutrition Program supported some 5.6 million students in about 18000 schools on a daily basis during school terms at a cost of US \$0.21 per child per day (Koch 2011). The schools in which the programs operated are mainly located in the poorest rural regions of the country. Such nutritional programmes were allocated a budget of about US\$ 500 million in 2010/11 (Koch 2011). The program aims to provide well balanced meals to students in the hope that their concentration and performance levels will improve and ultimately influence their learning process. The program is an important part of the government's interventions that seek to create a better life for all and it can help South Africa meet the MDGs especially in halving poverty and making education accessible to the population by 2015 (Koch 2011).

The proportion of malnourished children in Africa has only declined slightly between 1990 and 2009, despite a reduction in the poverty rate (UNICEF 2009). Well nourished children have strong immune systems which reduce their chances of dying prematurely from communicable diseases (RSA 2013). Undernourishment in infants can affect them to an extent of making them to suffer irreparable damage to their phys-

ical, psycho-emotional and mental development especially in the first 36 months of their life (Csaky 2009; Kang'ethe & Makuyana 2013). In order to address this, a school program on school nutrition has been implemented to curb this phenomenon (RSA 2013).

Provision of Food Grants to Cushion Food Insecurity

In order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in South Africa, the government is working tirelessly with different stakeholders to improve food security within households and the country at large (Greenberg 2010). The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) also provides food security grant which covers the provision of food parcels to the most vulnerable people in order to alleviate poverty (SASSA 2009). This is meant to help children, the elderly, the orphaned, female headed households and HIV/AIDS infected and affected households. All these efforts are done in order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. However, the question of how sustainable these remedial approaches will be effectuated glaringly remains unanswered. Perhaps accompanying these remedial measures with some kind of developmental plans like having these beneficiaries also engage in some kind of training or apprenticeship could possibly give hope that these people are likely to exit from the dependence trap (Kang'ethe 2013a,b).

The Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa

The vision of the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (IFSS) is a food security plan offered by the Food Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The vision is to attain universal physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food by all South Africans in order to attain an active healthy life (Van Der Merwe 2011). This is pivotal in accomplishing MDG number one. Increasing household production and improvement on nutrition and food safety is the key focus. However, this does not overlook national food security. On a brighter note, accomplishing this plan, therefore, implies that there will be increased investment in health, education and nutrition with the overarching aim

of increasing economic growth and development as a poverty alleviation measure (Van Der Merwe 2011).

Notably, the country has been making improvements in enhancing food security. This is due to wise operationalization of policies and encouraging people to engage in agriculture. This has seen the proportion of the population living below the poverty datum line of R250 per month dropping from 31% in 1995 down to 23% in 2005 (UNICEF 2009). More so, access to basic services such as water and sanitation has made significant improvement (UNICEF 2009). However, the country's pace of poverty reduction still continues to move at a snail's pace. This is unacceptable considering that the country has immense resources, is one of the biggest economic power house in Africa and has a well developed world class agricultural sector.

This is why the poor, the elderly, the destitute and other cadres of people who have not been productive have been accessing various types of grants. This is to ensure they have food and other basic needs of life (White Paper For Social Development 1997). This, from a social work perspective, means that the country ensures that some of the physiological aspects according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs such as the food, clothing and sometimes shelter are adequately covered (Cherry 2013). Due to the fact that more than half the population of South Africans lives below the poverty datum line, the amount that the government uses for welfare is very high. For example in 2009, the government spent 89 billion on welfare only. To a greater extent, this welfare, although it is creating a dependence syndrome which is retrogressive to development, is safeguarding children and women from hunger and starvation (Kang'ethe 2013a).

Social Security by the Government of South Africa

White Paper for Social Welfare 1997 clearly states that a social security system is essential for a healthy economic development in a rapidly changing economy and will contribute actively to the development process. Social security through grants is important for the immediate alleviation of poverty and is a mechanism for active redistribution of services to the people (White Paper for Social Welfare 1997). The use

of the grant system is another measure implemented by the government of South Africa in order to eradicate poverty (Moloi 2012). However, these researchers question the sustainability of this measure in eradicating poverty because of its capacity to create dependency among the people. Perhaps entrepreneurship among these grant beneficiaries can be a remedy to the poverty situation in South Africa (Zhaio and Siebetap 2006). The grant system has increased from 2.5 million beneficiaries in 1998 to 12.3 million in 2008 (SASSA 2009). This increase can be credited to the increase in poor children below the age of 7 to 14 years. In 2008, the child support grant (CSG) reached over 8 million children. Receiving the grant, therefore, entitles the child to automatic fee waiver for schooling up to grade 12 and to free health (SASSA 2009). Racial inequality in children's poverty status persists as well as inequalities between urban and rural areas across provinces (Gyekaye and Ak-inboade 2003). However, poor households are not in the reach for some of the CSG. Lack of birth certificates, therefore, becomes another hindrance. Social grants are assisting children in clothing and food.

The National Plan of Action

According to National Plan of Action (NPA) (2009), South Africa has endorsed the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) and South Africa's constitution recognizes the Rights of the child (UNCRC 1989). These include the right to name, nationality, survival development and protection from abuse., right to education and parental love to care and to nurturing. All these are meant to protect the rights of a child and ensure that the child's wellbeing is being taken care of very well. The 2009 to 2012 National Plan of Action is intended to ensure that children receive support and services that will ensure that their child's rights are protected and that they receive food and adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care, education, psychosocial support, adequate legal protection against abuse and exploitation. When children get access to all these services, it therefore defines a better wellbeing for them and thereby achieving the MDGs. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological needs are considered very important in the hierarchy of needs (Cherry 2013). Physiological

needs are the most basic needs that are vital to survival, and includes water, air, food, and sleep. Maslow believed that these needs are the most basic and instinctive needs in the hierarchy because all the other needs are secondary until these physiological needs are met. It is therefore fundamental that these physiological needs are met within the lives of children and women for them to achieve their goals in life (Cherry 2013). Access to economic opportunities strengthens households for security and economic capacity. The government of South Africa is willing to achieve this by creating an enabling environment within which relate structures and sector departments can operate effectively by establishing a memoranda of understanding with the different stakeholders

Government Efforts Towards Increasing Food Security in South Africa

Climate change is one of the challenges observed in threatening agricultural productivity as well as decreasing yields (Vincent, Cull, Magrath and Johnson 2011). Despite this challenge, the government of South Africa and other stakeholders have managed to come up with strategies to increase agriculture production (Knox, Hess and Deccache 2011). These strategies include changing planting dates, planting different varieties, dry planting, modifying crop type and varieties, micro irrigation and intercropping (Nhemachena and Hassan 2007). However, most Small scale farmers cannot afford these mechanisms because they are capital intensive and they require higher technological application which becomes a very big challenge to them (Vincent et al 2011). Due to their inability to access credit, farmers find it difficult to adapt to changing weather patterns leading to low productivity (Knox et al. 2011).

THREATS TO THE FULFILLMENT OF MDG NUMBER ONE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THEREBY COMPROMISING FOOD SECURITY TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Food Production Is in the Hands of Only a Few South Africans

The unfortunate state of affairs is that it is only a small fraction of South African population that is agriculturally involved in food pro-

duction. Although this small population has significantly contributed to the state of food security, the people who are left out in the production process and therefore living in the periphery of the mainstream economy face severe food insecurity; and apparently swimming in a sea of poverty. The agricultural profile largely mirrors the erstwhile apartheid architecture in which the blacks, though many years back were pushed from the fertile land to the unfertile one. Therefore, this state of societal segmentation and differentiation can still be blamed to the historical injustices of apartheid (Nicholas et al. 2010).

Labour Exploitation in South Africa

One of the important revelations from the current spate of labour unrests that have been sweeping the country is that the workers especially in the mines and the farms usually owned by the whites have been miserably exploited. This exploitation has been a source of permanent poverty, despondency and disillusionment from the side of the workers. Lack of adequate purchasing power has hugely affected food security. The current labour unrests bedeviling the country has revealed that most of the farm labourers are paid peanuts, some as low as R65. This, in these researchers' contention drive them to think that farm wage employment especially in the big farms; and also in mining is an avenue of underemployment and exploitation and that unless wages are adjusted to tarry with higher rates of inflation, working in the farms is tantamount to signing a life lease of poverty. These are conditions that may permanently explain the vicious circle of poverty that most of the South African Blacks have immersed into. This also explains a state that has driven these farm workers to be food insecure, house insecure as well as socially, psychologically and socially insecure (Baiphethi and Jacobs 2009). It is these researchers' further contention that the government of South Africa needs to affirmatively work out strategies, approaches and interventions especially in the agricultural sector to ensure that the Blacks get back fertile patches of arable land which they can do their domestic farming. This is because as it stands now, with unrelenting states of labour unrests, unemployment and economic recession, this segment of the population may continue to be food insecure. This could explain the situation of feminization of

poverty as well as the poverty of children. These are factors that strongly make South Africa not to score significantly in the MDG goal number one.

A Chunk of South Africans Are Food Insecure

According to Van Der Merwe (2011), food security can be defined as physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious foods which meet an individual's dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. The goal of ensuring food security forms the most important agenda among all the countries' development agenda (Vincent et al 2011). This is because governments have the obligation to ensure that its people do not suffer hunger and starvation (White Paper for Social Welfare 1997). To this end, section 27 (1) of the South African constitution states clearly that "Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water." (Koch 2011). This therefore puts obligation to the state to take reasonable legislative and other measures to achieve progressive realization of each of these rights. The pertinent solution to achieve this, in these researchers' contention, is to ensure food security within households and the whole country at large.

Statistically, approximately 14% of the South African population is estimated to be food insecure and 25% of the children under the age of six are reckoned to have malnutrition and suffering stunted growth (Human Sciences Research Council [HRSC] 2004 in Koch 2011). This therefore prompts the need to engage in different measures aimed at achieving food security for this population. In these researchers' contention, South Africa being an economic powerhouse needs to mobilize resources and empower the vulnerable population to grow their own food for domestic consumption. People should be urged to effectuate backyard gardening. Perhaps also the fact that many South African believe in white collar employment poses challenge of food insecurity. People need to be educated to undergo a paradigm shift to the effect that they start growing various food parcels at least for their domestic consumption. This state of affairs, therefore, implies that as the year 2015 nears when countries will take stock of their achievements in the fulfillment of these goals, South Africa will be found to be short of fulfilling goal number one. However, and overall,

South African agricultural mechanization and development which is globally known to work towards food security, but only a few people are engaged in it, is usually predominated by the Whites. Therefore, overall, the country's position of fulfilling MDG one may not achieve a significant score. However, the problem with South Africa is that although it embraces many races as a rainbow nation, its economic stratification also depicts a rainbow phenomenon in which only the whites possess the lion's share of the economy (UNICEF 2009).

Reliance on Grants Makes the Country Food Insecure

Further, the revelation that almost a third of the South African population relies on grants as the only source of income for their livelihood casts doubt whether it is fair to indicate South Africa is scoring significantly in the Millennium Development Goal number one (Monama 2006; Kang'ethe 2013a). Yes, these people may be getting grants to just feed themselves for the day, but this is a serious and an unsustainable way of life. It is also not visionary for government to go the route of financing grants. This is because in the medium or long-term, the process may be unsustainable and also creates dependence syndrome. For example statistics in 2009 indicated that the country spent 89 billion on welfare, a big chunk of it going to financing of grants (Kang'ethe 2013a). Social assistance and redistribution of wealth accounts for 3.5 percent of South African GDP (Potts 2011). South Africa has the highest expenditure on social assistance in the world, which further emphasizes the massive scale of the country's welfare system. Currently, the social assistance in South Africa is accessible to more beneficiaries than ever. The government has significantly increased its spending on social grants from R16 027 million in 1998 to R71, 161 in 2009 (Van Der Berg and Siebrits 2010). Today, one quarter of the population receives a state grant and this number is continuing to grow (Potts 2011). Of course if the government is using the remedial approach to bolster the lives of the poor, it must define the exit point in which the grant beneficiary should exit from receiving the grant (Nicholas et al. 2010). The residual approach to welfare was implemented during the apartheid era. This was characterized by minimum state interven-

tion in providing social welfare services to people. Under this approach, in black communities, the state only intervened when the family and community were in crisis (Nicholas et al 2010). However, on the other hand, according to 1997 White Paper, social development is bringing about sustained improvement in the wellbeing of the individuals, families, groups and communities and the society at large. The reduction or eradication of hunger, massive poverty and inequality are a score to goal number one and also indicator of social progress. There needs to be developmentally grounded options that need to be undertaken. For example, training people massively in various technical and manually grounded skills is perhaps a better option that could make people employable and possibly win back their economic sustainability (Kang'ethe 2013b). Otherwise, as things are, more needs to be done to make people developmental if South Africa is to significantly win a better score in achieving Millennium Development Goal number one.

Subsistence Farming Contributes a Lower Score in Achieving MDG Goal Number One

Many farmers in Africa are subsistence based only engaging in farming to support their domestic consumption (Baiphethi and Jacobs 2009). This is the situation of most Black majority farmers in South Africa as they engage in farming for consumption and little for sale. This is because of the size of the land, lack of machinery to mechanize, and even lack of skills and knowledge required for mechanization and production for sale (Van Der Merwe 2011). Lack of water to irrigate land and other infrastructure in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa makes farmers to engage in subsistence. It leads to poverty and compromises food security (Van Der Merwe 2011). Primarily, subsistence form of farming is neither commercialized, nor monetized. A subsistence farmer or peasant farmer's goal is to produce food for his/her family rather than for profit (Van Der Merwe 2011). If farming in many poor countries is to bolster food security, then these farmers need to be helped to upgrade their skills, funded to take water to their farms and be helped to source for market of their products. This is to avoid a market glut and yet they may not have adequate storage facilities. Perhaps having the

government help small holders to start a government subsidized cooperative society that will be providing farm inputs, loans to pay school fees etc would be a pivotal step towards changing the state of subsistence farmers to pseudo cash crop farmers. Along the same vein, building up farmer-state trust is one of the ways to reassure small-land holder farmers about creating livelihoods based on agricultural innovations. These are some of the measures to bolster food security (Greenberg 2010). The life of small holder farmers needs to be turned around if food security is to improve. This is because subsistence farming which is more common in rural areas of South Africa lacks technological and financial input, and is therefore more vulnerable to disasters such as droughts and flooding. This sharply contrasts with mechanized and big commercial farming which is profit driven and can either enhance food security if food is sold locally; or negatively affects it if food is produced for external market. If sufficient amounts of food are not produced domestically, it implies that countries need to import from other countries. This in turn will increase the price of food which will in turn lead to higher levels of food insecurity (Van Der Merwe 2011). These researchers worry that some of the big farmers in South Africa are interested in serving foreign markets other than channeling it for local market and consumption. Although the government would like such ventures because of boosting the country's foreign exchange reserves, this has to be balanced to ensure that there is enough food for domestic market.

Inefficient and Ineffective Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture is one of the alternatives for ensuring urban food security and also a way of ensuring that people in urban areas have sufficient food resources. It provides good access to food both for domestic consumption and for sale. However, inadequate land with secure tenure to individuals living in the urban areas forms a huge obstacle for municipalities and local governments (Van Der Merwe 2011). Urban zoning is an important aspect to consider since sufficient vacant land is needed in order to successfully promote urban agriculture. Access to sufficient water resources is another constraint which makes urban agricul-

ture difficult to pursue. Lack of commitment is also another challenge as well as lack of skills. Due to all these constraints, it therefore becomes difficult to promote urban agriculture although it is important to ensure an increased food production in order to increase food security within a nation (Van Der Merwe 2011; Greenberg 2010).

Climate Change Hindering Agricultural Productivity Especially to Small Scale Farmers

Change in climate is one of the barriers or hindrances to food security in South Africa thereby weighing down MDG number one which aims at eradicating poverty and extreme hunger (Vincent et al. 2011). The change in climate is witnessed by the distribution and intensity of rainfall (Knox et al. 2011). It is evident that climate change is a barrier towards the increase in food security because it has a negative effect on crop production and it decreases the yield (Knox et al. 2011). A recent review of the impacts on crop productivity under climate change for Africa suggested significant yield decreases in food crops like maize, wheat and rice which make staple foods for a number of countries (Vincent et al. 2011). This phenomenon is likely to lead to an increase in the prices of food especially to those people who achieve food security through purchasing rather than growing their own produce. It is estimated that with the continuous change in climate, prices for most staple foods like maize, wheat, rice and potatoes will continue to increase. This will have a devastating impact to women and children as they struggle to meet the basic needs. Due to this climate change, it is mostly the small scale farmers that will very much be affected in their production despite the fact that they contribute hugely to food production and also towards

Lack of Capital to Afford Farm Infrastructure

Being able to access credit is mandatory to small scale farmers. This will enable them to harvest water for irrigation, buy improved inputs like fertilizers, chemicals and hybrid seed varieties. Due to their inability to access credit, it therefore becomes an uphill task which then prompts the need for government intervention

in order to address these phenomena. Government support will help farmers to diversify and increase yields as they keep abreast with technology. However, there is not enough government support as far as small scale farmers are concerned in South Africa. Instead, large scale farmers have more access to the resources. However small scale farming employs large numbers of people across South Africa and in Southern Africa (Vincent et al. 2011). This therefore make these researchers to think that there is need for a paradigm shift regarding the state's involvement towards equipping small scale farmers as the country moves towards achieving goal number one.

CONCLUSION

South Africa may slowly slide to a state of food insecure. This is because it is only a fewer people especially the white farmers who are seriously engaged in agricultural production. Perhaps why the country may slide into a state of food insecurity is the fact that many people who should engage in domestic farming for food production have opted to rely on the government welfare grants. This explains why 33% of the country's population relies on welfare as their means of livelihood. The government needs to mobilize and assist especially the poor people to be motivated to produce food for their consumption. This is the only way to fulfill the much desired Millennium Development Goal number one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Income Generation in Both Urban Areas/ Inner Cities Critical

Strategies of researching new forms of generating income for people in urban areas as well as in rural area needs to be mooted. This is pivotal in ensuring that people have enough food to sustain themselves. The crops grown could also be a source of money that they could use to supplement their food needs..

Augmenting Subsistence Farming within the Rural Areas

This is critical to achieve production effectiveness and efficiency. Farmers need to be

trained to change to relatively newer and effective ways of doing farming. This can be achieved through improvement of equipment and newer technologies.

Efficient Fund Allocation

There is also need for efficient allocation of funds for food supplementation programs and nutrition education programs to ensure that even the most disadvantaged and the marginalized groups of people in the society attain the resources.

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