



Executive Summary

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Problem Statement and Research Objectives

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the UN Member States have committed to a set of development aims that should be reached until 2015. These have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both developing and developed countries are asked to make special efforts to move towards the Goals. Pakistan as a developing country faces many challenges on the way to their achievement.

The thesis shows the genesis and formulation process of the MDGs, and then examines how this internationally agreed development agenda enters the national policy-making process in Pakistan. The first research hypothesis states that the Goals do not have a direct impact on development practice, but are used to ensure political and financial support from donors. The second hypothesis predicates that successful development practice is not primarily driven by good policy, as it is a complex process of interactions and shaped by values and relationships of the actors.

Methodology

The research is carried out as a case study. Due to its focus on Pakistan, it admits of analysing the specific situation in depth, allowing for the complexity of the processes, but may fail to deliver universally valid results that can be easily assigned to other settings and countries. Documents of government agencies, international organisations, bilateral donors and non-governmental organisations have been used as sources, along with expert interviews conducted in Pakistan during August and September 2006.

Results

The MDGs have not been set up from scratch at the Millennium Summit in 2000. The idea of international development goals has evolved at the global conferences held by the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and other panels in the 1990s. Civil society organisations strived for greater participation at these conferences and gained more influence over the years. In 1996, the OECD issued a report which outlined a set of international development goals which were to a large extent absorbed in the MDGs.

In 2001, the Secretary General of the United Nations issued a report outlining a strategy on how the Millennium Declaration can be implemented. Furthermore, the latter commissioned an independent advisory body, called the Millennium Project, to recommend a concrete action plan for the achievement of the MDGs. The report of the Secretary General and the final report of the Millennium Project are meant to serve as guidelines for the translation and implementation into national development policies.

Pakistan has decided to adopt the eight global Goals and 13 of 18 global targets for its own development strategy. Due to issues of data availability and statistics, Pakistan has adapted or left out several of the global poverty indicators. The MDGs have not immediately found their way into the national policies. The national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was the first development policy referring to the Goals. By and by, all important national planning policies mentioned the MDGs as the long-term perspective within which they defined short-term or medium-term targets. Nevertheless, the MDGs have not brought about essential changes to the work of the line ministries responsible for putting the development plans into action.

After its commitment to the Goals, the Government of Pakistan has set up two autonomous bodies to deal with poverty issues: the Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution (CRPRID) and the National Commission on Human Development (NCHD). The CRPRID is a research and monitoring facility for poverty analysis which is also responsible for the assessment of progress towards the Goals through the annual MDG Reports. NCHD, on the other side, implements development interventions at district and provincial level. Their focus has been on income generation as well as improvement of social services (education, health), the latter being more emphasized recently.

UN agencies in Pakistan have put the MDGs at the forefront of their programmes. However, little change has taken place at the operational stage. The Goals are used as a common point of reference, but did not cause an overhaul of the functioning of the UN agencies. There is a large number of NGOs working in Pakistan. Even though the biggest NGOs in the country are aware of the MDGs, they don't refer to them in their policies; the MDGs are conceived as national Goals, thus exceeding the scope of the NGOs. Some Bilateral Donors give the MDGs a high priority in their programmes. Others are seeing them more as a new point of reference with the potential to improve monitoring. Cooperation and communication between the government, donors and civil society has intensified to some extent in the recent past, which may partly be due to the common discourse encouraged by the MDGs.

The first hypothesis has a certain validity, as the MDGs did not bring about the changes necessary if the Goals are to be reached. Nevertheless, some efforts may have been influenced by the MDG discourse which has unified the strategies of the different development actors to some extent. As the government agencies of the different levels are primarily occupied with maintaining their position, top-down policies do not constitute efficient means for improving the livelihood of the poor. Development interventions which are independent of existing power relations have thus proven to be most successful. This indicates that good policy does not automatically lead to successful development. Power relations of policy makers at the different levels of government, of decision makers, and the people at the grassroots are highly important. Therefore, the second research hypothesis has been affirmed by the findings and thus could not be dismissed.