Are There Synergies Between MDGs?

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Editor: Dr. Holger Seebens

The MDGs are designed as a set of independent goals. However, the issues covered by the MDGs are closely interlinked such that acceleration in one goal potentially speeds up progress in others. Such synergies bear implications for the debate on the post-2015 development agenda. If one MDG triggers another, one may reduce the number of MDGs to those that turn out to be key triggers. Although theoretically convincing, the extent to which these synergies are realized is an open question. Recent research addresses this issue by investigating the joint performance of MDG indicators.

In theory, MDGs are strongly interrelated...

Synergies between MDGs can take several forms. For example, closing the gender gap in education (MDG 3) may be regarded as a "leading" goal for achieving other MDGs. Girls' education further contributes to the prevention of neonatal and maternal deaths (MDG 5) (Lay and Robilliard 2009). Recent research (Klasen and Lo Bue, 2012) has investigated these synergies by looking at the three performance clusters. All world regions except for South Asia are represented among good performing countries. All countries in this group are middle-income countries, with the notable exception of Niger which is a low-income country.

The partial performers - the largest group – mainly consist of middle-income countries, too, except for some Subsahara African countries like Tanzania, Togo or Burkina Faso. Contrary to this, the group of poor performers is made up only from countries from Subsahara Africa. The analysis for other pairs of MDGs brought about similar results.

Strong institutions and growth improve MDG achievement

What factors determine country performance? Research results show that poor levels of government effectiveness expressed by low quality of public and civil services and low levels of political commitment by the government are particularly associated with partial and poor performance. Unsurprisingly, political violence causes the transmission mechanisms between MDGs to dysfunction and is associated with poor or partial performance countries. In addition, rising levels of inequality are strongly correlated with partial performance. Countries exhibiting high rates of economic growth and strong institutions tend to be good performers.

Conclusions

The results add much to the discussion of the post MDG agenda. Synergies between MDGs have only been found in a limited number of countries. Boiling down the number of MDGs is thus only meaningful for countries that have the capacity to utilize such synergies. Economic growth and sound institutions are strong determinants of synergies and thus need to be considered as complementary goals to the MDGs. The same applies to the settlement of conflicts. Focusing on MDGs only may therefore not bring about the desired results in the foreseeable future.

References


Table 1: Joint performance of MDG 3 and MDG 4 by selected countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Good Performers</th>
<th>Partial Performers</th>
<th>Poor Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>India, Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>China, Lao, Malaysia</td>
<td>Indonesia, Philippines, Tonga, Solomon Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td>Poland, Romania</td>
<td>Belarus, Bulgaria, Ukraine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>Bolivia, El Salvador</td>
<td>Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, St. Lucia, Uruguay, Venezuela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>Iran, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia</td>
<td>Algeria, Jordan</td>
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