

BOOK REVIEW

Zondi, Siphamandla and Mthembu, Philani (eds), *From MDGs to Sustainable Development Goals: The Travails of International Development*. Cape Town: Institute for Global Dialogue and UNISA, 2017, pp 362.

The combination of two erudite, nationally and internationally renowned political scientists, Siphamandla Zondi and Philani Mthembu, as editors of this book can only produce one of the best academic publications on the issues covered in it. The title of this book clearly tells the readers what it sets out to cover right from the beginning-in-depth analysis and discussions on pertinent issues on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from an African perspective. It equally summarised all the international development efforts of the United Nations as ‘travails’ – a word that suggests an unpleasant hard work, experience or situation, especially of a painful or laborious nature.

All the contributions to this book published by the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) associated with UNISA are well researched, high-pitched and of rigorous academic standard. The book is a compendium of well-written contributions from African scholars emanating from diverse academic disciplines including Development Studies, Economics, Political Science, Global Studies, International Relations, Global Political Economy, Diplomatic Studies, Public, Constitutional and International Law, African Renaissance Studies and Geopolitical Studies. A careful reading of this interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary compendium reveals that it is a ground-breaking initiative which tends to promote African scholarship and participation in international development from African perspective. That Professor M S Makhanya, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of UNISA wrote the foreword to this book indicates the level of engagement and efforts that were put into publishing this book.

The Millennium Declaration established concrete and specific development goals and targets to free humanity from extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease in 2000 but did not achieve most of the targeted indicators by 2015 due to some complex weaknesses in implementing the agenda. Despite this, “the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs framework have inspired development efforts, helped set global and national priorities and focused on subsequent actions” (UN System Task Team on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 16 March 2012). Moreover, as stated in this book, MDGs discourse and processes helped to rein-

force human-centred idea of development (p 6). However, as it is rightly pointed out, the envisioned development in the MDGs and (I also add) in the new SDGs is commendable as they are but cannot be achieved with the continuous propagation of the world system that enshrines North-South dichotomy, historical injustice and master-servant relationship – keeping the North prosperous and the South generally poor and developing (p 2).

The post-2015 sustainable development agenda is a sequel of the MDGs agenda and sets to address the identified weaknesses of its precursor. However, 17 goals and 169 targets may be considered impossible and ambitious as was thought with the MDGs. Considering that there are specific regional and country level dynamics that can seriously hinder the realisation of the goals and targets, this book adds more valuable African scholarly voice to this debate.

This book contains the wide-ranging debates on the MDGs and addresses the attendant questions of international development relating to developing nations in general, and Africa in particular. The work is very insightful and rich in-depth, intelligent and far-sighted highlights and discussions on the various efforts employed in realising the MDGs, why they failed, and some avoidable international development lapses to deal with to realise the new SDGs agenda. It is therefore timely to draw international attention to the challenges that limited the success of MDGs and to address the pertinent issues that must be considered in the implementation of the SDGs, particularly, as it affects Africa and the developing world. The book is well structured, and its 15 chapters delved into various important thematic areas within international development – the MDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, particularly, as they affect Africa's development and power relationship with the industrialised world (pp 25, 57, 64, 74, 133-137). It is indeed a useful guide for those who want to have a good understanding of development and the international dynamics around it.

The outcomes on each of the MDGs development indicators vary from region to region. Africa did not experience impressive outcomes across MDG indicators, and this book addresses the limited African input in the new SDGs and promotes African contributions to the international discourse. It supports Afro-centric approaches and ideas to development – a word that means many things to many people and groups. Therefore, the authors' plan to publish a series around international development issues that will help readers comprehensively understand the diversity of African academic thinking around the MDGs, and the transition into the SDGs is a good decision in the right direction (p 10).

However, this book is blatantly inclined towards the developmental interests of Africa. It rightly described the development debate in Africa as “strange” and “neoliberal offensive” because it was largely dominated by concerns about the im-

plementation of the MDGs, and Africa's reliance on international organisations (pp 9-10, 172, 299), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and donor agencies, and rightly pointed out that the discussions in Africa are just the "rubber stamp" of the broad and dominant hegemonic discourses on development and the MDGs in the West. It argues that the poverty reduction recorded in Africa may not be sustainable due to much reliance on unstable external development assistance, and laudably recommends that all developing nations should rather "use other economic tools, such as trade, to lift themselves out of poverty" (pp 4, 108-109). Indeed, not only is external aid undependable, it is laden with strings (conditions) for continuous manipulation and dominance by the donor nation states.

The chapters of the book under review present very interesting global, regional and country level analyses to enable readers to better understand the political and strategic growth of the development sector. While strongly presenting African positions in the current global debates, the authors have individually and collectively posed and tackled key and enduring questions relating "to what has been achieved in the pursuit of MDGs, why there has not been resounding progress, and what Africa has contributed to the discussions about the post-2015 development agenda" (pp 11, 43, 76, 80-86, 122-132, 142-145, 153-155, 298-299).

One needs to read through this book to appreciate the various developmental issues raised, the depth of their discussion, and practical suggestions proffered in it. It is both educational and informative, and well edited with interesting writing style and cohesion between the chapters. It makes for interesting reading for both academics and non-academics who are keen in African development and participation in international development efforts, and others whose interest is in having good knowledge of international relations, development and other cognate fields. The work makes a valuable contribution by drawing attention to the often-unheard African voices in the current global efforts to end poverty and inequality. It is thus relevant to both practitioners and non-practitioners who are committed to ensuring the realisation of the United Nations' post-2015 agenda of ending poverty and addressing inequality through sustainable solutions such as found in this book (p 12). It is also an important resource for students in various academic disciplines in the social sciences and others interested in interdisciplinary studies. This book deserves a place in any public and private library. For readers who may be in a hurry to have a good grasp of the content of this book, its key contributions and the areas warranting further scrutiny are presented in the last chapter of this book (pp 305-311).

Christopher Maduabuchukwu Mbajiorgu
Department of Media, Communication and Information Studies
University of Limpopo