

NORRAG NEWS NO 36

Policy Brief



2005 - WAS IT A DEVELOPMENT YEAR? A STATUS REPORT ON THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT, WORLD SUMMIT, COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, AND G8 SCOTLAND

Introduction

Development issues have been very prominent on the international political agenda throughout 2005. In NN36 Norrag members and other invited analysts took stock of what was achieved and what was not. Here is a summary of their findings. We have translated these into statements and propositions that can be used for further policy debate. NN36 has 40 short articles covering these themes in 70 pages.

Main findings

The *Millennium Report* of Jeffery Sachs provoked the strongest reactions. The most positive side of this is the analytical conclusion: that if we are to reach the MDGs they need to be embedded in a much wider set of interventions in institutional development, inter-sectoral projects and economic growth. However, the creative part, Sachs' proposed way forward, is considered by several NN36 authors as naive and old-fashioned. Development is seen as yet another large scale investment project to be delivered by outside experts leaving little room for local initiative and national ownership. His approach is rather technocratic; socio-political aspects are given less weight and stakeholder analysis is lacking.

On education, the *Millennium Report* comes to the long overdue correction of the idea that Universal Primary Education could be a panacea for all human development ills. There is strong commitment in the Report for capacity building, and research is assessed as crucially necessary as well. On the negative side, education is presented too instrumentally as a mechanism to enhance skills, and insufficiently as a way to enhance social cohesion by promoting common values and vital traditions.

The positive aspects of the report of the *Commission for Africa* are that it gives much more attention to political aspects than the Millennium Report, particularly the weak 'capacity to deliver' of African states, and it also puts higher education back on the development agenda. It even provides some concrete budgetary targets, like 5 billion USD to revitalise African universities, and 3 billion USD for African Institutes of Technology.

Despite some differences, both reports are based on an economic development model of 'export led growth with a human face'. Some argue that it is exactly this model that has pushed most of the least developed countries into an international poverty trap. They rely too much on a single commodity or on a few isolated pockets of growth (e.g. based on tourism). The reports ignore the debate on 'post-liberal' development strategies; one element of this is that they focus on an optimal utilisation of (national) production capacities (maximising productive employment) rather than on an optimal allocation of financial resources. More attention to productive capacities has important consequences for international policies on skills development.

Both reports also coincide in their calls for a massive scaling-up of aid. Some contributors to NN36 have expressed their concern about this. One problem is that it reinforces the idea that aid is the answer to all problems; ignoring the crucial role of international policies on trade, technology transfer, private capital flows and migration of skilled people. Others stress that more capacity building is needed to make effective use of the additional aid; if this is not done, more aid will only lead to more dependency on foreign expertise. Again others conclude that traditional capacity building efforts lead too often to a huge capacity 'to manipulate the fashionable jargon of the day' and that 'the trend of the donors to offer courses on ever-more sophisticated approaches will do little to build capacity in the South; actually it might reduce it'.

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In NN36 one also gets a glimpse of the recently published World Bank (WB) Education Sector Strategy Update. It explains that the WB aims to support countries in attaining the MDGs on education *and* on strengthening education for the knowledge economy. The three themes are:

- Education as a key part of the overall (economic) development strategy of a country
- Applying a system wide approach (including all types and levels of education and training)
- Becoming more result oriented (also in terms of education outcomes).

Several authors in NN36 explain the impact of the Commission for Africa and Millennium Report in their country, particularly in the field of funding for education. Despite some optimistic articles, most conclude that the pledges for more aid were not followed through in their country nor at the major international meetings: the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, the World Summit in New York and the WTO-meeting in Hong Kong. Although on most occasions new money is pledged, it is often unclear whether this is really new money and the total amount remained behind expectations. Worst of all, no progress was made on trade issues.

Emerging from this very contentious Issue of NN – here are some Statements for Debate

Money is only one element in the development debate. As important, or even more important, are underlying notions of what development entails and how education and training can contribute to it. Based on the contribution to NN36 we can extract four propositions for further discussions.

The relation between national development strategies and education

In the major aid documents of 2005, education systems are too much seen as a tool to enhance skills (needed on the labour market) and insufficiently as a way to enhance national values and national cohesion. The experience of the emerging Asian economies shows that they used the education system first to install a cohesive national identity. The social capital created this way laid the foundation for the initial economic growth. Next the education system was transformed to generate the required (economic) skills. Can this experience be translated to Africa? If yes: how?

Capacity Building: the need and the limitations

Increased aid is needed to attain the MDGs. Additional capacity building is needed to use the additional aid effectively. Traditional capacity building efforts tend to be focused on too sophisticated approaches that 'deskill' Africans as much as they 'skill' them. Some argue that it only makes them more fit for 'skilled migration'. What could be new ways of capacity building that are firmly grounded in local realities and that lead to capacities that are locally relevant?

Education and the neo-liberal agenda

The key 2005 reports are based on 'export led growth with a human face', but this ignores the fact that most LDCs have fallen in an international poverty trap. They rely too much on a single commodity or on a few isolated pockets of growth (e.g. based on tourism). One of the steps to get out of this trap is to stimulate skills development for maximum productive capacity. How can this be realised?

A system wide approach within the education sector?

The international players now increasingly recognise that the strong, 15 year old focus on UPE distorts the balance in education systems. In several countries secondary education does get more funding these days. Yet, at national level, most PRSPs still have a bias towards primary education, and many donors also have. How can research findings on the balance between different elements in the educational system be plugged into the PRSP negotiations and into other strategic policy discussions?

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