

Are you searching for the needle in the deep well?

ADDRESS BY THE ARCHBISHOP NJONGONKULU NDUNGANE AT THE POST 2015 CSO ENGAGEMENT IN PARK INN HOTEL-JOHANNESBURG

For many years I have worked in this continent on issues of social and economic justice. I have been gravely concerned by what I refer to as 'development without the people'. A plethora of development efforts that have been implemented in our continent have largely excluded the poor by failing to ask the critical question – what does the ordinary African citizen want? What are their aspirations, hopes and dreams? Results from our work shows that the development community is content to view ordinary citizens as mere passive recipients of development inputs, instead of active and critical players in Africa's development agenda.

As you will recall, the Millennium Development Goals were an effort by the global development community to benchmark minimum standards for global development. They were founded on a larger premise that a world that perpetrates poverty and inequality is no longer acceptable. I believe that MDGs have been a useful framework for addressing critical issues in our countries. The MDG framework has directed attention towards the most vulnerable amongst us, at a time when our economies were structurally incapable of meeting the needs of the majority. Thus the MDG framework provided an internationally accepted framework for not just talking about poverty reduction, but actually doing something about it. While the results in achieving the MDGs have been mixed, and for Africa unsatisfactory; the importance of a global consensus and framework to eradicate poverty cannot be underestimated.

The question we must now ask ourselves is, did we miss the mark with MDGs; or were we on the right track, but need to add a few aspects to make the impact more tangible? We know for instance that Africa has performed particularly poorly on MDG 1, which aimed to half poverty by 2015. This process is therefore critical for us to seriously think how we can end poverty for once and for all. It is clear to me that these critical questions that the global community is grappling with cannot be adequately addressed without proper and meaningful engagement of ordinary citizens. At African Monitor we believe that nothing can be done for the people without the people. This is in line with Amartya Sen's assertion that there can be no development without the people whom it is meant to serve.

A people centred post 2015 development framework is what we need, both in terms of content, and in terms of process. As we deliberate here today, we need to be clear in our minds about the role of the people in all this. It is this belief that inspired us to collaborate with like-minded organizations to conduct poverty hearings and citizens consultations across Africa. To date the poverty hearings methodology initiated by African Monitor and partners, has become a recognized tool and approach for engaging with the reality and aspirations of ordinary citizens. The issue facing us today as we deliberate is not about when or if we should involve the people, but how best to involve them - especially given the time and resource constraints. We need to go where communities are, in their own settings and not assume that somehow, the message will diffuse downwards.

As we undertake consultations at national, regional and continental levels, let's remember to bring on board additional voices to the post 2015 agenda. The youth, disabled, faith communities, informal sector, among others should be heard loudly and clearly in this post MDG process. This way we will strengthen and widen the constituency for owning and implementing the post MDG agenda. The challenge of bringing grassroots to the post MDG agenda can best be summarized by the following African proverb, "when a needle falls into a deep well, many people will look into the well, but few will be ready to go down after it". Indeed several stakeholders to the post 2015 process acknowledge the importance of involving ordinary people, but very few are actually involving them. We as civil society, should be at the forefront of bringing this voice to the post 2015 agenda.

A second critical question we must ask ourselves is "what purpose should the post 2015 framework serve? Is it going to be another framework to benchmark minimum standards? Is it going to be a resource mobilization framework to guide national development expenditure? Or is it going to be a framework to guide decisive action on poverty reduction, and economic growth?

For us at African Monitor the answer is simple; it should be a framework that provides a basis for decisive action to meet the realities and aspirations of ordinary people at national, regional and international levels. African Monitor's work with grassroots communities across the continent has given us a glimpse of what grassroots communities want in terms of their development and sustainability. Firstly there is a consistent message from communities across the continent that they are not looking for hand-outs; but rather seek the where-withal to eke out their living.

What does this mean in terms of Africa's development model and policy? It means that the persistent perception that grassroots communities are helpless passive recipients of development delivery is grossly incorrect. It means that African social, economic and political structures need to be redesigned in a way that recognizes that ordinary citizens are a critical instrument to generate and drive Africa's progress.

At the moment, African economies are still designed as if they are meant to serve the colonial masters they served decades ago; they are still designed to extract and sell to the West and rising Asia; they are still designed to promote the wealth of a few. This must come to an end.

This message is loud and clear from youth across the continent with whom we have worked. Young people express deep frustration with systematic exclusion from development processes, especially economic exclusion. They believe that the current economic and political environment does not enable inclusive development. They also believe that they should have the capacity and ability to influence the nature, course and process of development. They view development as a shared responsibility between themselves on one hand and government and business on the other.