

SDGs reinforce the war on poverty and income inequality

By UNDP with inputs from Klaus Schade

Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. While the number of people living in extreme poverty globally has dropped by more than half between 1990 and 2015 (1.9 billion to 836 million), too many people are still struggling for access to the most basic human needs.

The new sustainable development agenda, which has the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, is designed to provide development focus until 2030 and calls for global action to eradicate poverty and to save the planet.

Every UN member state, including Namibia has committed to achieving the 17 SDGs. This involves targeting the most vulnerable, increasing access to basic resources and services, and supporting communities affected by conflict and climate-related disasters.

The 2030 Agenda recognises that we can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty, just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet.

SDG 1 (*No poverty*) aims to end poverty everywhere, in all its forms, by 2030. Although the global extreme poverty rate, (the share of the population living on less than US\$1.25 per day) has been cut in half, there are currently approximately 1.2 billion people globally who continue to live below the poverty threshold of USD1.90 per day.

The challenge in tackling poverty is worsened by factors such as climate change, population growth and migration, which are putting disproportionate pressure on livelihoods especially in rural areas where poverty is entrenched and people often have the least resilience.

Namibia has good stories to tell when it comes to development. By 2010, the number of poor people in the country was reduced from seven (in 1994) to three out of every ten people according to the Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Surveys. Thus, the country has succeeded in halving poverty since the Millennium Declaration was signed in 2000, much ahead of 2015 for which the target was set. It should, however, be noted that the definition of poverty was changed from the food consumption ratio (the share of total consumption that households spend on food) to the basic needs approach. The basic needs approach calculates the value of basic food, clothing and other items that a person / household needs.

Poverty levels are higher in rural areas as compared to urban centres. 27% of households in rural areas were classified as poor and 14% as severely poor in 2010, compared with 10% and 4% respectively in urban areas. Furthermore, female-headed households were more often affected by poverty (22%) than male-headed households (16%). The elderly was more likely to live in poverty (poverty rate of above 24% for persons older than 55 years of age) than younger age groups. Poverty had also a regional profile. While 43% of households in the Kavango region were classified as poor, this was only the case for 5% in the Erongo region. Education plays an important role in addressing poverty. 0.6% of households whose head completed tertiary education were poor compared to 33.9% of households whose head had not completed any formal education.

While Namibia has made progress in reducing poverty, inequality remains still high. The Gini coefficient of 0.597 in 2010 had hardly changed since 2004 (0.600). It is clear we have unfinished business with SDG 10, which focuses on reduced inequalities.

Namibia's social safety net, in particular the social grants, have contributed to the reduction in poverty. Persons 60 years of age and older in 2016 receive a monthly Old Age Grant of N\$1,100. The grant was increased in 2015 by N\$400 per month to N\$1,000 and in 2016 by another N\$100 per month. The coverage of the grant increased as well from about 101,000 beneficiaries at the beginning of 2002 to about 148,000 in 2014. The grants not only benefit the recipients, but also help children who stay with their grandparents, particularly in rural areas. Hence the grants contribute to alleviating child poverty.

People with disabilities who are older than 16 years of age receive the Disability Grant. The number of recipients had more than doubled from some 11,700 beginning of 2002 to 29,550 in May 2014. Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Namibia are eligible for a Maintenance Grant, Foster Care Grant, Special Maintenance Grant (children with disabilities under the age of 16 years) or Vulnerability Grant. While the grant was set at N\$200 per month in 2000 and increased in 2014 to N\$250, the coverage has increased substantially. In 2003 less than 20,000 children received the grant compared to almost 236,000 in September 2016.

UNDP's contribution to Namibia's development

UNDP Namibia's largest programme is focused on energy and environment, and through this programme we have helped channel over US\$70 million since the mid-90s to this sector and expect to channel an additional US\$33 million over the next five years. UNDP Namibia's overall support includes: strengthening the management of national parks and conservancies, thereby expanding protected areas by over 60,000 sq. km; and enhancing resilience activities to climate change for over 50,000 people, especially women.

UNDP is also implementing the SCORE project that targets SDG 13 (*Climate Action*) and delivers multiple development benefits. Through this project the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Namibia are strengthening the adaptive capacity to climate change and reducing the vulnerability of 4,000 households (approximately 25,000 people) to floods and drought.

This is achieved by strengthening smallholder adaptive capacity for climate resilient agricultural production practices, the restoration of wells and enhancement of floodwater pools for food and mainstreaming climate change into national agricultural strategy/sector policy, including adjustments to budgets for replication and up-scaling. 80% of the households that are benefiting are female headed.

Looking forward

UNDP administrator, Helen Clark, in her statement at the International Day of Eradication of Poverty, mentioned that the end of poverty can only be achieved with the end of gender-based discrimination. All over the world, gender inequality makes and keeps women poor, depriving them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being.

Gender inequality remains a key challenge, as does the widespread shortage of decent work. Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, volatile commodity markets, spiralling conflicts, and violent extremism, terrorism, and related crises have all impacted adversely on the development progress of the recent decades.

Eradicating poverty requires economic growth that is inclusive and sustainable (SDG 8 – *Decent work and economic growth*). It requires well-designed social protection systems that enable people to sustain basic living standards even when shocks occur. These systems also help children stay in school, enable families to get enough nutritious food, and provide a stable foundation on which people can build a better future.

Each country faces specific challenges in its pursuit of sustainable development. The most vulnerable countries and, in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states receive special attention, as do countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

As Namibia moves forward in accelerating development and eradicating poverty, new partnerships are vital to bring on board knowledge, expertise, innovations, and new technology to address long standing challenges. Effective partnerships require dedicated frameworks, policies and strategies, to help governments and the private sector work together.

SDG 17 (*Partnerships for the Goals*), which calls on us to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, speaks to global partnerships for achieving the SDGs.

UNDP Namibia remains committed to the continued development of Namibia and all its citizens so that no woman, man or child is left behind. Winning the war on poverty is a difficult, but not impossible, task.