



## **Global goals ignore needs of the South**

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The United Nations at its 70<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly and leaders the world over have endorsed the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or Global Goals, as the post-2015 development agenda for the next 15 years – SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were adopted in year 2000 through the Millennium Declaration at the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, convened as the Millennium Assembly.

The SDGs demonstrate, among other things, that our leaders continue to miss the point regarding what the global human society desperately needs, or what is to be done to advance wellbeing globally. Put differently, leaders are too comfortable to appreciate the fundamental challenges that the global human society face. The development agenda has to be about transforming the world we live in, which has become a lot more uncertain and dangerous, instead of adding ‘new’ goals and targets to the MDGs which were themselves poorly crafted and were not based on deeper thinking about what the global human society needs.

Remarks by Pope Francis at the UN Assembly that has endorsed the SDGs confirm that the world we live in is no longer bearable, no matter the resilience levels, and that something needs to be done. It is in this context that the dominant paradigm, which is based on the hegemony of neoliberal perspectives that have shaped development or caused underdevelopment, and is informed by what David Harvey terms *accumulation by dispossession*, is being challenged. Capitalism, or monopoly capitalism to be specific to the current conjuncture, benefits a few at the expense of the many – we are increasingly also seeing the re-emergence of *primitive accumulation* that Karl Marx theorised about.

The predominance of the United States of America and European countries has maintained the peripheralisation of the global south. This has added salt to injury—the ramifications of the many centuries of brutal enslavement, colonialism,

imperialism,plunderandtheexploitationoftheglobalsouth,andAfricain particular, have been followed by further plunder, imperialism and coloniality. The skewed distribution of power, globally, has ensured that the interests of the so-called developed countries trump effective and inclusive development in the global south. It is in this context that the Global Goals or the processes leading to SDGs fall short because what is desperately needed and overdue is the transformation of the world disorder that is in place. Our leaders, as Claude Ake warned in 1996, appear to have surrendered the development process to the logic of global capital.

China, seeing another opportunity in the pursuit of its national interest of becoming a global superpower, has jumped to the bandwagon announcing that it would drive the effort of the global south towards meeting SDGs. As various reports have indicated, it has been largely due to China and India that most targets were met regarding MDGs. Africa effectively missed all the targets that were set in the Millennium Declaration. It is easy to see why China made significant gains while the African continent remained behind. China is increasingly becoming a new but different colonialist. China is leading the second scramble for African resources and wealth. China is however doing it better, or discreetly, than Europeans did through the Berlin conference –the Americans do it through bombing and plundering, imposing themselves as global superpower. China seems to understand global power dynamics and the obtaining global disorder. Africa or our leaders seem to have no idea at all, hence China is grabbing large amounts of land on the African continent and when pursuing infrastructure projects it brings its own labour.

I would like to insist that the central issue pertaining to Africa’s development has to do with the manner in which Africa, or different countries in Africa, advance or retard socio-economic development. Africa has relied of approaches that have failed even from the countries Africa borrows such approaches. Africa needs its own socio-economic development approach, informed by a new vision for the African economy. The African Union’s Agenda 2063 is a step in the right direction but it falls short in many accounts, also that 2063 is too far. Similarly, what is needed, fundamentally, is a philosophical framework that can underpin Global Goals. The UN appears to have been very close to distilling the needed conceptual approach that should have guided the long list of SDGs. The theme of *Transforming Our World* would indeed have culminated a robust socio-economic development approach. Only if those who were leading the SDGs processes or our leaders cared to listen to what Samir Amin has been saying for the past five decades or so.

It is important that the global south broadly and Africa in particular ensure that our world is effectively transformed from the current disorder. The long list of Global Goals and wild targets will not help. For Africa, many seasoned scholars such as Thandika Mkandawire, Adebayo Adedeji and the late Archie Mafeje, among others, have given pointers. Some of us are improving on what they have demonstrated and or argued and we are elaborating an approach that could work for Africa and the global south broadly. Among the main issues for Africa is that without pan-African unity, Africa will not go very far. It might very well be that colonialism and imperialism affected us so much such that we are unable to be proud of who we are and we are unable to celebrate our glorious past, let alone reclaiming our stolen legacy.

In conclusion, leadership is critical and in particular thought leadership would go a long way in transforming our world – simply put, thought leadership refers to leadership that involves a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena at hand and the leadership that is alert to possible reasons why things are not improving as well as what can be done. Thought leadership should be coupled with critical consciousness and it must be linked to decolonising the minds of Africans, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Molefi Kete Asante, Ama Mazama and Chinweizu Ibekwe, among others, have argued.