

EDITORIAL

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Tinker, tailor, wise man, madman, taxman – please!

1.6, 2.5, 6, 7.2, 9, 11... These numbers represent the human population in billions during the course of the last century during the years 1900, 1950 and 2000. The latter three are the current estimate and projections for the years 2030 and 2100, respectively. Though estimates differ according to model assumptions and scenarios used (cf. Gerland et al. 2014, or Samir and Lutz 2015), these are remarkable, if not alarming numbers. Consider how much of the planet's resources are been used currently (some 1.5 Earths, cf. Global Footprint Network 2013), and how these dwindling resources will need to serve ever more people in the future. Technological advancement and innovations may, with luck, increase the degree of efficiency, or slow down the resource consumption rate (cf. Randers' (2012) book '2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years' in which social and environmental scenarios are outlined concerning how future resource consumption may take place). According to Davidson and Andrews (2013), resources exploitation can lead to increased ecological impact despite overall consumption levels remaining constant since accessibility will become more difficult (law of diminishing returns). In terms of resource users, the human population will eventually reach a plateau. For this, the current global fertility rate of women needs to start decreasing faster than it is currently doing: just at a glance, India with 2.5 children per woman ranks at 81st place out of 224 countries, Madagascar is on 33rd with 4.28, and Niger ranks top with the globally highest fertility rate at 6.81 children per woman.

An estimated 2.2 billion people live currently on less than US\$ 2 per day; access to education, healthcare, electricity, potable water and other critical services remains problematic for many people living in developing economies (World Bank 2014). In the year 2000, 189 countries met at the UN and in their United Nations Millennium Declaration (Resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000) they shared a vision and responsibility to ensure worldwide economic and social development, human dignity and equity. The declaration lists eight goals to be achieved by the year 2015; these Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are rooted in the concept of sustainable development: 1. eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. achieve universal primary education; 3. promote gender equality and empower women; 4. reduce child mortality; 5. improve maternal health; 6. combat HIV/aids, malaria and other diseases; 7. ensure environmental sustainability; 8. develop a global partnership for development (United Nations 2014a).

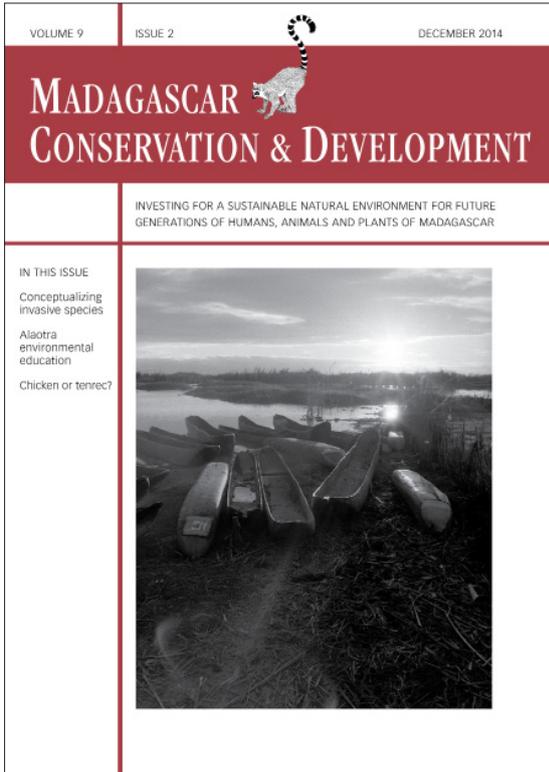
These are, admittedly, highly ambitious goals and formulating this collective responsibility across the globe within the time frame of 15 years will not be an easy task. Nonetheless, enormous progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs by the end of 2015. Global poverty continues to decline, with an estimated 700 million people being lifted out of extreme poverty (e.g., Indonesia's extreme poverty rate has been reduced by

70%). More children than ever are attending primary school (from 102 million in 2000 to 58 million out of school children of primary school age in 2012). Child deaths (under-five mortality rate) have dropped dramatically (it has been almost halved since 1990, which means that more than six million fewer children died in 2013 than in 1990). But despite substantial progress, about 1 in 5 people still live on less than US\$ 1.25 per day in many developing regions (United Nations 2014a). Bangladesh, for example, has reduced the proportion of underweight children from 62% in 1990 to 37% in 2011. However, globally, still 1 in 8 or 842 million children under age five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Efforts to build on the MDGs and to achieve a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace will have to continue unabated (with the post-2015 development agenda talks being in full swing now). The UN further states that "(...) MDGs are making a real difference in people's lives and, with 'strong leadership' and 'accountability' [emphasize added], this progress can be expanded in most of the world's countries by the target date of 2015" (United Nations 2014b).

Madagascar has been through five years under the regime of a transitional administration (the High Authority of Transition), a period of economic disorder and international isolation (e.g., Ploch and Cook 2012, Randrianja 2012). Presidential and legislative elections took place in Madagascar in December 2013. Hery Rajaonarimampianina was elected president and assumed his role on 25 January 2014. Immediately, the African Union and Southern African Development Community lifted their suspensions, and the European Union's development program, as well as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund started reinstating development funds. Since last June, Madagascar was again eligible for the AGOA (African Growth and Opportunities Act) (IRIN 2014). This is a vital step for Madagascar's economy and development as according to Fukunishi (2013) the political turmoil led to a reduction of over 64% in US-trade only, affecting mainly unskilled workers. In 2010, over 228,000 jobs have been lost as a direct consequence of the aid decline and blocked trade agreements (Chatham House 2013).

The high uncertainty linked to the period of political instability and the consequent lack of investment had severe economic and social consequences for Madagascar. According to the 1,200 Malagasy participants of the Afrobarometer (2013), an independent research consortium assessing social, political and economic atmosphere in sub-Saharan Africa, development of the country deteriorated during the past five years. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2014) ranks Madagascar 151 out of 186 countries in its Human Development Index (a measure similar to the better known Gross Domestic Product GDP), down from 143 in 2008 (prior the crisis). This translates to 93% of Malagasy living below the \$US 2 per day poverty line, which is a 4-point increase from 89% in 2001; 43% live below the \$US 1.25 per day extreme poverty line, a steep increase from 26.5% in 2005 (World Bank 2014).

Madagascar managed to stay on track during the period 2002–2006 in terms of achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDG Monitor 2007). Improvements mainly in the health and education sectors were responsible for a drop in poverty. The increased and continuous spending on health during the 2002–2008 period, from 113–245 billion Ariary showed demon-



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strable results. Immunization coverage increased significantly for measles and DPT3 (diphtheria, pertussis and tuberculosis). The under-five mortality rate dropped from 161‰ in 1990 to 86‰ in 2004 (UNICEF et al. 2011). In 2005, the Malagasy government committed to achieve the objectives of the Education for All act by 2015. Public expenditure for education increased from 243–585 billion Ariary from 2002–2008 (BTI 2014). Consequently, the net primary school enrollment increased steadily to over 87% (MDG Monitor 2007). With the onset of the political crisis these expenditures came to an abrupt halt. During the crisis period, the number of out-of-school children increased by more than 600,000 (World Bank 2013). The lack of governmental funding forced many parents to shoulder the costs of schooling. Many teachers, as for example in the case of the Alaotra no longer received regular training (Reibelt et al. 2014). The quality of learning continuously decreased, e.g., primary completion rate is now at 68.8% versus the 100% as stated goal (MDG Monitor 2014). Many healthcare centers have been closed down. According to these trends, it seems unlikely that Madagascar can achieve the UN MDGs by 2015, something affirmed by Madagascar's new president.

The challenges for Madagascar are manifold. According to a recent report by the International Crisis Group (2014), an independent non-partisan institution sees Madagascar on a fragile path since “the election was a cosmetic shift of power, not a fundamental transformation of a system that needs more than just a makeover”. The new government is currently facing several issues that require immediate addressing. A locust plague has spread across Madagascar putting several million people at risk of experiencing famine (FAO 2014). As a legacy of the transition period, where there has been a severe lack of law enforcement, gangs of well-armed cattle thieves have taken massive advantage. The new government started to take action by creating more presence in previously neglected regions, and according to Hery Rajaonarimampianina's speech on 25 September 2014 in front of the UN General Assembly, his government has also opened a greater number of health care centers in the past few months. These are promising signs and necessary actions showing that the new government is already looking beyond the Millennium Development Goals: “Our primary goal is to bring our people out of their precarious situation” (...) “the aim is not only to improve livelihoods at home, but to transform Madagascar into a ‘food hub’ in the region” referring to increased investments into agriculture. We can hope that this will not risk turning into facilitating land grabbing of larger proportions bringing scrupulous companies back into Madagascar (e.g., Franchi et al. 2013, Neimark 2013).

Strong leadership and particularly accountability are two salient ingredients of governance that have been sorely lacking during the transition period. We only can hope that the current government is strong and willing enough to fully commit to upscale its efforts towards the post-2015 development agenda, for the uplifting of the most vulnerable of its citizens. The good news in Madagascar is, that due to its large-scale agricultural dependence (over 83% of the people live in rural areas and 64% of these households earn their livelihood from agricultural activities), the country seems to be more resilient than the figures might suggest, thereby preventing the country as a whole from sliding into a larger scale catastrophe.

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