

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Providing legal identity, a step to good governance

Corruption last year cost the world more than \$1 trillion. A study shows that corruption in Kenya costs each citizen \$140 each year. And corruption is only part of the problem of poor governance — many countries are run ineffectively, lacking accountability, transparency and rule of law.

Running countries better would have obvious benefits. It would not only reduce corruption but governments would provide more services and at better quality. It is also likely that economic growth would increase.

In a recent UN survey of seven million people around the world, an honest and responsive government was fourth in the list of people's priorities, with only education and healthcare and better jobs being rated higher. Survey participants from East Africa placed it sixth, before access to clean water and freedom from discrimination.

At the turn of the century, the international community agreed on a far-reaching set of targets to improve the lives of the world's poorest people by 2015: the Millennium Development Goals. They focused on health, poverty and education and did a great deal of good. But they didn't mention governance.

This September, the world's 193 nations aim to set the next set of targets for the year 2030. They want to look across all major areas, from health and nutrition, to environment, conflicts and education, and they want to include some targets on good governance.

Without it, tackling problems like nutrition and environment becomes harder — if there is corruption, most of the money for food may go elsewhere, and if there is little institutional control, ambitious environmental rules may just be flouted.

It is vitally important that we



Residents of Muhoroni in Kenya queue to apply for identity cards during the launch of mobile registration. Providing legal identification is good governance. Pic: File

COMMENTARY DR BJØRN LOMBORG

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choose the best targets. Right now, there are 169 proposed targets but not all of them are good. To help the world's governments pick the best targets, the Copenhagen Consensus Centre, has asked 60 teams of experts

to do an economic analysis of the more promising proposals, showing which targets will cost little and do much good — and which ones will cost lots but do little good, essentially providing a level playing field to compare widely different targets.

Mary E. Hilderbrand of the Centre for International Development at Harvard has written the main paper on improving governance. As she points out, it is obvious that well-governed nations are better than ill-governed ones. But there are two problems.

The first problem revolves around whether good govern-

ance is a prerequisite for development or a consequence of it.

Historical analyses have shown that good institutions like security of property rights are the single most important factor behind the variation in wealth of countries, and that more corruption goes together with less economic growth. That seems to suggest that better secured property rights and less corruption will generate more wealth. However, further analyses have shown that it could just as easily be that higher wealth and economic growth lead to better governance. For now, it is hard to say that good governance is the main way to start a virtuous circle.

The second problem is that we don't know much about how to get good governance. A study of 80 countries where the World Bank had programmes to improve governance showed that governance improved in 39 per cent of countries but worsened in 25 per cent — what could look like a moderate success.

However, countries the World Bank didn't help had similar success and failure rates — suggesting that the World Bank programmes had made no difference.

The simple point is that while everyone can agree it would be great to have more transparent and accountable government, we often know very little about how to achieve it. That is why proposed targets like "Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms" sound great, but are well-meaning slogans with little content.

Indeed, Ms Hilderbrand finds that many proposed targets are too generalised and some even a poor use of resources.

However, she does find one target that would do a lot of good for each dollar spent. "By 2030 provide legal identity for all, including birth registra-

tion." This may sound like a very unambitious step to those of us lucky enough to live in democracies where such things are taken for granted, but it would be a major step for many developing countries.

Importantly, this is a measurable outcome, so progress can be monitored. It also means that there must be functioning public services to provide registration facilities and maintain records. Building this capacity in a single well-defined area would provide a clear model for how other services can be provided effectively. It is also unlikely in any case that a registration service would exist in a vacuum; an effective one would almost certainly be a sign of an emerging public service competence.

There are real benefits to each citizen of having a proper legal identity. It helps them to claim their legal rights, for example, and would certainly also help to establish property rights, which are vital to allow individuals to prosper and the economy to grow. Elections become less vulnerable to corruption when voters are properly registered. And, as an economy grows, a proper legal identity is essential for opening a bank account or getting a driving licence.

Good governance is important. But instead of platitudes we should focus on measurable, attainable targets that will actually make a big difference for the next 15 years.

Dr Bjørn Lomborg, an adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School, directs the Copenhagen Consensus Centre, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He is the author of The Skeptical Environmentalist and Cool It. His new book is How To Spend \$75 Billion to Make the World a Better Place.

Ethiopian dam to affect pastoralists in Turkana — study

By PAUL REDFERN
Special Correspondent

VULNERABLE PASTORALIST communities living in and around Lake Turkana have not been consulted about the effects of a new dam in Ethiopia scheduled to be up and running later this year.

A report by International Rivers, based on research on the effects of the Gibe III hydroelectric dam on the Turkana Basin carried out by the African Resources Working Group (ARWG), "indicates more potential risk to the environment and the indigenous communities than that suggested by the environmental impact assessment done by the Ethiopian government."

The report predicts that during

the first five years of the dam that Lake Turkana's water level will fall by up to seven metres, lake salinity will increase and the destruction of aquatic organisms will increase.

The report says that many people who depend on Lake Turkana for their livelihood will be severely affected and that the dam threatens their human rights.

"The Kenyan government must do more to protect the interests of the peoples of northwest Kenya, and the ecosystems that they depend upon," the report says.

"The agreement with the Ethiopian government needs to be made public. We need to know if the impact on Lake Turkana was even considered before the agreement was signed.

"The Ministries of Energy, Water, and Northern Kenya must account for their plans to preserve the environment and livelihoods of the region. The Members of Parliament representing Northern Kenya need to know what is planned, and have a chance to voice their communities' concerns."

Fishermen, farmers, teachers and others living nearby say that Lake Turkana's volume has reduced significantly over the past 30 years because of higher temperatures and changing weather patterns. But few of the 100 people interviewed by a Kenyan researcher for International Rivers said they had been consulted or warned about what could happen when the reservoir of the Gibe III dam, one of Africa's largest

hydropower projects, is completely filled in about three years.

The \$1.8 billion construction project, which is 90 per cent complete, will start limited power generation in June.

A report in the *Guardian* newspaper says that the downstream impact of the dam "is hotly contested." It adds that some hydrologists have predicted that Ethiopia's expansion of sugar and cotton plantations on the Omo river, which the Gibe III dam will allow, could reduce water flow to Lake Turkana by up to 70 per cent.

But both the Kenyan and Ethiopian governments have strongly backed the dam, which they maintain will promote development by providing more electricity.



The Gibe III dam under construction. Picture: File