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**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: ADDRESSING SOCIO-
ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH
AFRICA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (2000-2015)**

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ABSTRACT

The practice of the apartheid system in South Africa has been widely condemned for perpetuating enduring socio-economic inequality and for its detrimental impacts on the lives of millions of citizens. While many studies have strongly affirmed this assertion, socio-economic inequality continues to arguably engender a long-lasting struggle among the black and colored communities in post-apartheid South Africa. This places a burden on the country's successive governments to implement long-term policies that can rectify the plight of the people. Consequently, the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 becomes an important reference tool for the African National Congress (ANC)-dominated government, which has initiated and implemented policies to combat inequality in the post-apartheid era. This study examines the roles and measures taken by

the ANC government to address racially discriminated economic and social inequality within the framework of the MDGs. Using qualitative research methods, the study explores the background framework of the MDGs and analyzes socio-economic measures implemented by successive ANC governments between 2000 and 2015, focusing on areas such as education, poverty eradication, and healthcare. Primary and secondary sources are utilized to provide insights and support the analysis. The findings reveal that the ANC-dominated government effectively incorporated the frameworks of the MDGs into its formulation and execution of policy measures to eradicate social inequality in South Africa. The study concludes that the effective implementation of these measures has yielded considerable progress, effectively addressing multifaceted issues such as poverty, healthcare, education, and unemployment. This conclusion aligns with the official South African MDG report, which unequivocally highlights the several achievements of MDG targets through policy implementation from 2000 to 2015.

Keywords: Apartheid system, education, governance, social inequality, Millennium Development Goals, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The unequal distribution of basic infrastructure and public amenities remains a perennial challenge in post-apartheid South Africa. Historically, the root causes of this appalling phenomenon can be traced back to the systematic exclusion of the black majority from having access to basic infrastructure during the era of the oppressive apartheid system (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2004). Despite the abolition of this system, political factors continue to foster social inequality by creating advantaged and disadvantaged political groups within the broader societal framework. This systematic race-based marginalization of certain communities created deep-rooted socio-economic disparities that persists to this day. Such a sad state of affairs has exacerbated the vulnerability of the Black majority. The black population has continued to endure poor living conditions amidst dilapidated infrastructure (Gelb, 2003).

In response to the social inequalities, the South African government has carried out a series of legal reforms to address the appalling situation and fulfil the basic needs of the affected sectors of society (Nelson

Mandela Foundation, 2004). The constitution of post-apartheid South Africa has espoused the unwavering principles of human rights, social justice, and the boundless potential of every citizen, marking a significant milestone in the dismantling of the apartheid system (Meredith, 2011). The new constitutional framework arguably serves as a beacon of hope and progress, guiding South Africa towards a future where equality and fairness, regardless of skin colour, are not just lofty ideals, but fundamental rights that will help shape the collective destiny of the nation.

Both decolonization and the liberalization of the economy were the main policy frameworks adopted by the ANC. The process began following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and with the establishment of anti-discrimination laws against segregation. These laws paved the way for a representative government, with the ANC holding a majority in parliament. The special focus of the ANC in parliament is to improve the livelihoods of people who were marginalized for decades under the apartheid system (Meredith, 2004). It is noteworthy that the ANC-dominated government implemented a range of programs that aligned with the transformative agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) introduced by the United Nations. These programs, firmly grounded in the principles of good governance, enhance the standard of living and elevated social welfare for all. The essence of good governance lies in the government's steadfast commitment to envisioning a better future through the effective implementation of its policies (Republic of South Africa, 2013). By prioritizing effective policy implementation, the ANC government demonstrates its resolute determination to create a future where fairness, prosperity, and well-being are accessible to all South Africans.

The MDGs were recommended by the United Nations (UN) in 2000 to address the shortcomings observed in several developing countries during the past three decades of their post-colonial history. Throughout this period, the UN alleged that the governing elites in third-world countries had failed to cultivate the values and nuances of democracy and good governance (United Nations, 2005). Good governance entails the responsible exercise of political power to effectively manage a nation's affairs in accordance with the constitution. Genuine practice of good governance is intrinsically tied to public accountability of government officials, transparency in government procedures, adherence to the rule of law, and effective

management of public funds and resources (United Nations, 2005). Consequently, these requirements underscore the necessity for political representation to be pursued through free and fair elections, irrespective of the ideological backgrounds of politicians and the preferences of the electorates.

Regrettably, the African continent has witnessed a multitude of conflicts that can be attributed to bad governance. Corrupt leaders in many countries prioritize their selfish interests and shield other state officials from accounting for their actions in political offices. This personalized approach to politics enables leaders to maintain their grip on power in Africa (Lame & Dabin, 2000). For example, President Jacob Zuma was indicted for corruption and personalization of office and this contributed to his impeachment in 2018. Lack of accountability and the absence of transparency have crippled the administrations of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi. These political leaders have presided over persistent crises, either leading to military takeovers or their impeachment (Emmanuel & Mutangi, 2022).

In its MDGs proposal of 2000, the United Nations anticipated that by 2015, progress in various areas would have left impacts on developing countries. In addition to infrastructure, key areas requiring attention include poverty and hunger, universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and global partnership. Furthermore, other significant concerns under the purview of the MDGs encompass environmental pollution, global warming, child labour, human rights violations, the decline of social standards, and corruption. According to the UNDP (2005), developing countries find themselves at the midpoint of development, as significant economic progress that can sustain development in their respective countries has not been achieved. These prevailing socio-economic challenges, along with political issues under the democratic system, are consequences of poor governance. Regrettably, this has hindered advancements in health, education, poverty eradication, and various other domains. For example, the over-concentration of power by successive governments after the death of President Mandela has overwhelmingly challenged the basic infrastructure of South Africa (Saka, 2020).

Another intended outcome of the MDGs is to promote the enormous benefits of democracy across the global continents and ensure that

people reap the advantages stemming from democratically elected leadership and government (Lomazzi et al., 2014). Democratically elected leaders and governments are generally receptive to open policies that impact humanity. This process grants voters the privilege of bestowing political legitimacy upon the winning party during elections while retaining the power to withdraw it whenever necessary. Therefore, MDGs and their goals have consistently remained focal points of political campaigns for parties vying for electoral power (Huntington, 1991). Furthermore, the objectives of the MDGs frequently align with strategies aimed at ensuring that the dividends of democracy are accessible to all through the effective formulation and implementation of public policies.

The MDGs program firmly upholds the fundamental principles of good governance, which find embodiment in competitive elections within a democratic society (United Nations, 2013). Free and fair elections stand as the cornerstone of any democratic society, representing the most significant means of ensuring government accountability to its citizens. This practice strengthens the pursuit of the MDGs' objectives, which can be attained through the interplay of good governance, democracy, and development (UNDP, 2010). An illustrative example can be seen in 2015 when the South African parliamentarians gathered at Freedom House to engage in extensive deliberations regarding the challenges to youth and children's welfare in the aftermath of the apartheid system (United Nations, 2015). The focal point of these discussions revolved around the enduring issue of social inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. Guided by the principles of representative democracy, the parliamentarians unanimously acknowledged the imperative for the MDGs objectives to guide the government's efforts in addressing the welfare of all citizens. There was consensus that these objectives had to be incorporated into government policies.

After the end of the apartheid system in 1994, South Africa witnessed the emergence of racial politics, which posed a significant challenge to the nation's unity. The transition to democracy resulted in fragmented democratic representation, as various civil society groups within Parliament sought to assert their influence over the country's affairs. Consequently, political clashes often occurred during deliberations, particularly when addressing infrastructure-related issues. The South African parliamentarians witnessed frequent big arguments between the majority political party ANC and the minority political parties, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkhatha Freedom Party

(IFP), as well as the Economic Freedom Fighter (EFF). Heated arguments also ensued whenever parliamentarians deliberated on issues such as equality in wealth distribution and the deregulation of the economy (Saka, 2020). However, amidst these challenges, South African institutions have demonstrated an unwavering determination to pursue policy formulation and implementation that benefits the country's citizens irrespective of ethnic affiliations. This resilience is further fuelled by the transformative shift in leadership, transitioning from a minority white population to a majority black representation, empowering the country's pursuit of socio-economic progress and development (Saka, 2020).

Ethnicity exerts a significant influence on African democratic institutions and processes, presenting substantial challenges to democracy in the continent (Grugel, 2002). Between 2000 and 2015, the political dynamics in South Africa were deeply influenced by ethnic-based civil society groups, typically embedded in African norms and values (Orvis, 2001). It is worth noting that during the apartheid era, the white-controlled South African government deliberately oppressed the black majority population by depriving them of basic infrastructure. Segregation laws imposed strict restrictions on the movement of black individuals, particularly in provinces like Johannesburg and Cape Town (Gelb, 2003).

Historically, legislation in South Africa was based on racial segregation, with residents enjoying different rights and privileges based on their race. One of the first laws passed by the former Nationalist government was the Population Registration Act (No. 30) of 1950, which facilitated the identification of South Africans by race and required passes for black individuals to enter any province (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2004). Both Political and economic power rested firmly in the hands of the minority white population. Despite peaceful and violent resistance against the white government, the African National Congress (ANC) faced setbacks in realizing its mission due to the arrest and trial of prominent leaders on charges of felonies and treason (Saka, 2020). The immorality of the National Party (NP) government, led by President Botha, compelled the anti-apartheid group to unite for the struggle towards freedom for the black majority. The struggle for freedom through violence culminated in civil unrest and led to the arrest of prominent figures, including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, Albertina Sisulu, and Govern Mbeki (Worger & Nancy, 2004). In contrast, the post-apartheid era

has seen marginalized black and colored populations rise to assert their rights, exerting pressure on the ANC-led government under the democratic system to restore their long-lost dignity from the previous discriminatory regime (Atuahene, 2014).

It worth noting that social inequality in South Africa is closely intertwined with socio-economic marginalization among different racial groups, resulting in the characterization of the country as being racist and oppressive. Inequality refers to the differential treatment of certain groups of people based on factors such as race, colour, religion, and/or culture within the same environment (Botha & Gore, 2022). The black population, marginalized for decades, had demanded an economic policy capable of addressing injustice under a democratically-elected government (Meredith, 2011). To alleviate social inequality, each successive government had placed priority on improving the socio-economic well-being of the people, directly aligning with the objectives of the MDGs. President Nelson Mandela's assumption of office in 1994 marked the beginning of policies aimed at eradicating poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender inequality, and other forms of discrimination. This period represented a time for healing social wounds through freedom, with the parliament enacting laws to dismantle the remnants of the apartheid era (Jahn, 2022). In terms of government policy, every successive administration in post-apartheid South Africa has consistently initiated extensive development projects in both rural and urban areas across the country. The ANC remains steadfast in its focus on achieving the MDGs' objectives, intent on providing essential benefits to the people (South Africa Report, 2007).

The fight to end the apartheid system in South Africa was a daunting challenge that required the resolute and unwavering struggle of the black population. The apartheid system, which traces its origins back to the colonial period when South Africa was previously under the colonial rule of President Botha. The majority of the black population played an active role in their country's struggle for independence. The resilient black population waged a struggle that involved a series of guerrilla warfare engagements. Armed struggle tactics were deployed to challenge the white government in South Africa. The spirit of the ANC as a political party had transformed itself into an armed force inclined towards a mission of violent struggle against socio-political injustice. They confronted difficult circumstances in pursuit of freedom (Saka, 2020).

In the context of the contemporary struggle against racially based oppression, the ANC, despite numerous challenges, remained steadfast in its efforts to confront and overcome the apartheid system. In response, the new leaders of the ANC formed a Joint Planning Council, aimed at challenging the oppressive laws enforced by the white government through mass media platforms. The efforts of Oliver Tambo, Albertina Sisulu, Govern Mbeki, and other ANC leaders mobilized the people to resist the immoral government of the National Party (NP). In an attempt to end this opposition to apartheid rule, the white government in power sought to eliminate anti-apartheid activists living within and outside South Africa. The neighbouring countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe responded to the struggle for the freedom of the black population (Worger & Clark, 2004). In response, President de Klerk's administration implemented measures such as banning key leaders and newspapers affiliated with the Suppression of Communism Union (Worger & Nancy, 2004).

The struggle to end the apartheid system gradually gained considerable momentum in the wake of a series of major events in international relations. Notably, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the demise of the Cold War in 1990 played an influential role in expediting South Africa's political transformation (Guelke, 1996). These events not only symbolized the shifting dynamics of ideology and power on a global scale (Keohane et al., 1993), but also inspired and emboldened anti-apartheid movements advocating for freedom, equality, and democracy. Another pivotal moment that served as a crucial turning point and propelled the movement forward occurred in 1990 when Nelson Mandela, a prominent critic of the regime, was vindicated and subsequently released from prison. This momentous domestic event further ignited efforts to dismantle the apartheid system in the country. It was not until four years after Mandela's release from incarceration that the apartheid system was ultimately brought to an end, marking a monumental moment in the nation's history (The Republic of South Africa, 2013). This momentous event heralded the beginning of a new era characterized by the pursuit of equality, justice, and democratic governance.

There have been numerous intervention measures in the form of a broad-based economic reform by the ANC government after the inauguration of democracy in 1994. The eras of Presidents Mandela and Thabo Mbeki served as the background for socio-economic transformation in South Africa. The policies of these former presidents

aligned with the general objectives of the MDGs introduced by the United Nations in 2000 (Gumede, 2015). This new development was succinctly manifested in the governments of Presidents Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa. In light of this new development, overcoming past challenges in achieving socio-economic development has been the target of successive ANC governments. Each successive government aims to eradicate extreme poverty, achieve universal basic primary education, provide employment, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (South Africa Government, 2019). The special priority of the ANC government is focused on the aforementioned infrastructure, which becomes the campaign promises of each democratic leader. The ANC has adopted a range of measures in parliament to implement these policies. In the process, legal reforms were undertaken through legislative, institutional, and administrative frameworks to ensure maximum improvement in the lives of the people in South Africa (South Africa, 2007).

In the context of monetary allocation, ANC governments have also extended the fiscal annual budget to support and implement MDG projects each year. For example, there were allocations for employment, healthcare delivery, education, and poverty reduction through palliative measures. The plan to check the inflation of goods and services was also addressed by the government in power. Each democratic government spends trillions of Rand to achieve the MDGs agenda in South Africa. In 2015, the general spending was aimed at successfully achieving all MDGs objectives (South African Government, 2019).

Problem Statement

One of the key principles of the MDGs revolves around the delivery of good governance to the people through a representative government. Building upon this principle, this study posits that the performance of the ANC government in addressing social inequality and enhancing the economic well-being of the black majority population in South Africa can be evaluated through specific indicators under the framework of the MDGs, including education, the eradication of HIV/AIDS, and the development of physical infrastructure. However, despite the party's efforts, the post-apartheid South African government fell short of fully implementing the MDGs agenda and did not meet the designated

targets set for 2015. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore all possible solutions to transform the socio-economic lives of the South African population by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2022).

The rationale for choosing the year 2030 reflects on the struggle of successive governments since the apartheid era, which divided the country into rich and poor. The black majority has been denied the right to social well-being, generating challenging conditions for blacks in the past. However, successive ANC governments have formulated and implemented socio-economic policies aimed at bridging this gap after the demise of the apartheid system. In this context, the ANC's target on socio-economic well-being was not fully realized in 2015. This is due to divided opinions within the ANC on how to address social inequality at all costs. Therefore, the vision for 2030 is scheduled as the timeframe for fully realizing the MDGs. The agenda is working towards meeting the basic needs of the black majority that were marginalized for decades (Gelb, 2004).

The South African government had a vision and mission to bring about this transformation through its policies, to heal the wounds and alleviate the pain caused by the apartheid system (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2004). In relation to this, the United Nations, as the architect of the MDGs, had closely monitored the performance of African democratic leaders, including the ANC leaders, ensuring that they deliver the dividends of democracy to their respective people (South African Government, 2019). Thus, the objectives of the MDGs can intersect with the statutory policies introduced by the ANC-led governments.

However, there is a dearth of scholarly literature examining government initiatives to eliminate social inequality and improve socio-economic well-being within the framework of the MDGs in South Africa. Several works have addressed this, including those by Worger and Nancy (2004), Emmanuel and Mutangi (2022), Warwick-Booth (2013), Sao (2008), and Atuahene (2014). However, this study has taken a different approach from the general treatment of MDGs and social inequality as separate topics. Instead, it was aimed at examining the nexus between the MDGs agenda and the ANC's efforts in eliminating socio-economic inequality in South Africa. The study has explored the societal, policy, and institutional challenges confronting successive ANC governments and leaders in their efforts

to drive political and economic transformation in the country, with a particular focus on the legacy of the apartheid system. The past setbacks are consequences of mass poverty, limited access to quality education, unemployment, and inadequate healthcare support (South African Government, 2019).

The discussions in this article will be divided into three parts. The first part provides the background of the MDGs, exploring their framework and analyzing the socio-economic measures implemented by successive ANC governments from 2000 to 2015. Secondly, this article examines socio-economic inequality in post-apartheid South Africa within the framework of the MDGs. Finally, this article identifies and analyzes good governance as the prerequisite approach for the successful implementation of MDGs programs. This study uses a qualitative approach and primary data was gathered from all available documents to extract the required information.

Background Framework of MDGs

The United Nations Millennium Declaration set forth a dual economic objective within the MDGs, aimed transparently at developing countries with potential. It is structured around principles of development and poverty eradication, human rights, democracy, good governance, meeting the specific needs of populations, and environmental protection. These principles are evidently aimed at sustaining democratic governance in third-world countries (South Africa Government, 2019). The inception of the MDGs can be traced back to the United Nations Millennium Declaration (UNMD), endorsed under General Assembly Resolution 55/2 and signed on September 8, 2000. The Declaration was adopted with the objective of promoting peace, stability, and human development prospects in developing countries (Birchall, 2004). Central to the UNMD is the aspiration to improve living standards, as outlined in its Vision 2015 document, which articulates a variety of policies specifically tailored to address challenges faced by countries dealing with natural disasters, conflicts, and famine (South Africa Government, 2019). The underlying objective behind the adoption of the UNMD is to combat poverty by ensuring access to primary education for disadvantaged children, promoting gender equality, improving healthcare delivery, addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, fostering environmental sustainability, and forming partnerships with international stakeholders (Gumeda, 2015). Developing countries worldwide are grappling with socio-economic

challenges that have hindered development across all levels. The urgent intervention of the United Nations in addressing humanity's needs prompted the establishment of the MDGs in 2000. After approximately 15 years of active implementation, the MDGs were succeeded by the more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, comprising a comprehensive set of 17 goals (South Africa Government, 2019). South Africa, in particular, has made strides in implementing the SDGs as of 2019, aligning with its National Development Plan aimed at achieving visionary objectives by 2030. The SDGs present significant opportunities for enhancing socio-economic development efficiently, with their attributes interlinked with realizing integrated policy responses to improve people's lives. The SDGs are often viewed as a continuous policy framework that can be sustained by future leaders in South Africa (South Africa Government, 2019).

As illustrated in Table 1 below, the MDGs encompassed eight goals, each accompanied by specific targets and corresponding indicators for assessing progress by 2015.

Table 1

Goal 8: General Objectives of the MDG

Target	Content
Target A	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by creating employment opportunities for job seekers
Target B	Achieve universal primary education is a fundamental agenda of the ANC, incorporating children in the rural areas and the urban centres across the country
Target C	Promote gender equality by training and empowerment of women through participation and representation for national development
Target D	Reduce child mortality through immunization of children starting from one-year old across the country
Target E	Improve maternal health through clinical examination in the rural areas and the urban centres
Target F	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other communicable diseases across the country
Target G	Ensure environmental sustainability by strengthening the national climate change response environment

Note. Source is from The Republic of South Africa (2013) and Ajayi (2018).

Table 1 presented above provides an overview of the eight goals of the MDGs, along with their corresponding targets. The goals were intended to be achieved by 2015. This framework of objectives underscores the importance of fostering bilateral relations among developing countries, enabling them to pool their resources to promote human development across borders. In addition to political relations, there exists an international policy on debt cancellation or relief for debtor countries in Africa, which is facilitated by the Paris Club of London (Imam, 2018). This arrangement serves to strengthen bilateral partnerships between developed and developing nations and foster collaboration in various capacities.

The global policy of the United Nations regarding MDGs aims to bring about a paradigm shift in meeting the basic needs of developing countries, including South Africa. This objective aligns with the fundamental principles of the UN, which seek to represent people from diverse global continents, irrespective of race, religion, language, or culture. The campaign to implement the MDGs has become a global development imperative, addressing pressing socio-economic and political challenges faced by developing countries (UNDP, 2010). MDGs have played a significant role in shaping and guiding the poverty reduction policies and programs of developing countries in the African continent, South Africa included. The success of these initiatives is rooted in the principles of accountability, transparency, and policy-driven actions, all reinforced by the framework of representative democracy (United Nations, 2015).

Recognizing the value of democracy, the United Nations has taken a proactive stance, aiming to address and support developing countries in transitioning from authoritarian regimes of the past to democratic systems (United Nations, 2015). This commitment is reflected in the objectives and framework of the MDGs for developing countries worldwide. In the twenty-first century, the transformation of authoritarian regimes into more participatory and competitive systems holds significant importance in meeting the diverse needs of people in developing nations.

Historical events such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1990 acted as catalysts that reshaped global political behaviour, fostering capacity building and development (Fukuyama, 1992). These pivotal moments transformed the democratic processes involved in appointing leaders worldwide, including South Africa.

The achievement of democracy in South Africa is evidenced by its transition from a white-dominated dictatorship to a participatory government that upholds the rights of all individuals to access socio-economic benefits, irrespective of their skin colour.

The effectiveness and performance of governments in countries participating in the MDGs are closely tied to human capacity development. The MDGs prioritizes the attainment of a high standard of living and the fulfillment of basic socio-economic conditions as crucial elements of human development. Ultimately, every governmental policy aims to meet the expectations and aspirations of the citizens (Lomazzi et al., 2014). Developing countries, including South Africa, have arguably emerged as primary beneficiaries of poverty alleviation schemes within the framework of the MDGs (Osauohein & Efobi, 2012).

The objectives of the MDGs can be considered to reflect good governance. Therefore, economic performance serves as a mechanism for meeting the expectations of people at the grassroots level. It is necessary to formulate reasonable socio-economic policies and directly implement and assess the progress of each developing country, including South Africa, under this framework. The establishment of the MDGs in 2000 was a response to the failure of socio-economic performance in developing countries, including South Africa, after a successful transition to democracy (United Nations, 2015). The MDGs aims to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality rates, and combat HIV/AIDS through global partnerships. Achieving these objectives requires a transformation from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones, which necessitates a change in leadership behavior toward addressing pre-existing socio-economic inequality.

Initiatives of the ANC in Eradicating Socio-Economic Inequality through the MDGs

South Africa, along with other developing countries, has achieved a consensus that the MDGs embody articulated principles capable of enhancing people's lives (Republic of South Africa, 2013). These nations view the MDGs as exemplifying good governance and a commitment to serving humanity. The tangible development framework has had a notable impact on crucial areas such as education, health, poverty reduction, and employment (UNDP, 2010). In the South African context, a report released by the National Planning

Commission (NPC) in 2015 showcased the success of the MDGs under the administration of President Jacob Zuma. The commission's oversight efforts confirmed the positive performance of the MDGs, reflecting South Africa's commitment to improving people's lives through government projects (UNDP, 2010). Similarly, Nigeria, under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, achieved significant strides in poverty reduction, expansion of healthcare facilities, and provision of clean drinking water nationwide (Olobade et al., 2014). African leaders, in line with contingency plans, are accelerating efforts to enhance basic infrastructure for socio-economic development in both rural areas and urban centers. The performance of democratic governments is laying the groundwork for sustainable development in the future (Saka, 2020).

After the restoration of democracy following the collapse of the apartheid system, successive ANC-led governments formulated policies to address social inequality in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2013). The MDGs serves as an alternative solution to accelerate socio-economic and political development in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. The MDGs provide a framework for successive governments to work towards achieving 'Vision 2030' and making significant strides in poverty reduction. The Republic of South Africa (2013) aptly revealed that:

By 2030, we seek to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality. We seek a country wherein all citizens have the capacity to grasp the ever-broadening opportunities available. Our plan is to change the life chances of millions of our people, especially the youth: life chances that remain stunted by our apartheid history. (p. 2)

Amidst concerns surrounding the detrimental impacts of rapid global population growth, developing countries bear the brunt of these effects as they grapple with challenges arising from limited access to family planning services and a range of other social issues. This has led to a myriad of challenges, including hunger, infant mortality, inadequate access to clean water, insufficient commitment to education, economic crises, and low per capita income (UNDP, 2010). In the context of South Africa under the ANC government, countless efforts have been made to implement the objectives of the MDGs with the interests of the people at the forefront of policy making. These efforts have translated into significant improvements in the aforementioned

challenges. In the areas of basic infrastructure, education, water, health, and employment, there have been tremendous improvements. Successive ANC governments are both radically and gradually pushing forward to alleviate poverty, which disproportionately affects the black population (South Africa Government, 2019).

Nonetheless, the United Nations' report has highlighted the challenges faced by developing countries, particularly in Africa (United Nations, 2006). Developing countries across the globe are confronted with a range of challenges that have devastated socio-economic development. The current government lacks a policy framework to address issues such as malnutrition, poverty, corruption, conflict, and the problem of pandemic unemployment. The circumstances leading to these challenges vary among developing countries. In Africa, the lack of good governance is often responsible for socio-economic difficulties. However, the UN, in collaboration with civil society groups, has been campaigning for democratization in third-world countries. This approach is recognized as a benchmark that could facilitate economic development through improved leadership performance and the fulfillment of campaign promises (United Nations, 2006).

Addressing these challenges necessitates the implementation of relevant policies designed to improve the well-being of the population (United Nations, 2015). In developing countries, numerous efforts have been made to promote human development and bridge the gap between developing and developed nations through the principles of good governance (UNDP, 2005). However, the effectiveness of such efforts often hinges upon leadership performance and the fulfillment of campaign promises, which are crucial aspects of realizing the dividends of democracy in Africa. The task ahead, following the inauguration of democracy, is to transition from authoritarian policies to a more liberal economy that serves the people's interests (Saka, 2020). Consequently, developing countries are identified as prime candidates for initiatives aimed at promoting human development and facilitating progress towards bridging the gap in terms of human welfare with their more developed counterparts. In this process, good governance plays a crucial role as a catalyst.

The objectives of the MDGs are also directed toward providing education and training for children of different generations to foster their personal growth. An accessible education system is believed

to improve the welfare of all people, regardless of their racial background. To address educational injustice, particularly in tertiary institutions, it is essential to review the country's constitution on higher education, ensuring equal opportunities and productivity for all citizens. Inequality has long hindered access to the basic needs of the people, but ongoing reforms are transforming society into one that is free and equal, where everybody can learn without discrimination (South Africa Government, 2019).

General Concept of Inequality

Inequality not only reflects the exclusion of socio-economic rights, but also hinders people from accessing their basic needs. The declaration of ANC governments was grounded in a set of fundamental values which include freedom, equality, tolerance, and solidarity. Fortunately, the social justice agenda was translated into actionable initiatives focused on achieving the objectives of the MDGs, such as poverty eradication, universal basic education, employment opportunities, and access to healthcare. To address these values and meet the needs of the people, the ANC governments implemented institutional, legislative, and administrative measures aimed at bridging the wide gap of social inequality in South Africa (Emmanuel & Mutangi, 2022).

The general concept of inequality is feasibly characterized by forces of nature in the environment we live. This phenomenon constitutes unequal or unfair distribution of opportunities. Inequality indicates differences in the socio-economic and political interrelation, which is common among different ethnic groups. Inequality can be objectively situated in the realm of natural action, event, time, place, and group of people. According to Warwick-Booth (2013, p. 5), "social inequalities are differences in income, resources, power, and status within a group of society. Such inequalities are maintained by those in power positions via institutions and social processes".

Inequalities manifest as intangible social relations among ethnic groups within societies, are often determined by factors such as social and economic position, development, poverty, injustice, and levels of education. These elements serve as social indicators of the class struggle among groups in human societies. Inequality is also deeply emotional, capable of creating socio-political cleavages among people of diverse backgrounds (Jinadu, 2005).

Leadership and followership among multinational ethnic groups in the political environment often create political struggles among them. Ethnicity fosters emotional investment in determining leadership and obedience within the political landscape. Ideally, political power is inevitable as racial groups vie for control, often to the advantage of one race over others within the state (Saka, 2020). Social inequality spurred the Black majority in South Africa to resist the apartheid system that persisted for decades. Similarly, social inequality in South Africa precipitated the transition from a white authoritarian regime to a representative democracy in 1994 (Meredith, 2011).

The conceptual meaning of inequality revolves around the social well-being of the people. Human well-being encompasses various issues determined by social relations. Key among these issues are the distribution of state resources between majority and minority ethnic groups (Ake, 2001), which ties into power dynamics over property and perceptions of societal status within ethnic groups. The emphasis on social well-being is influenced by the socio-economic leverage of one ethnic group over others. In essence, social inequality often manifests as disparities in standard of living, income/wealth, education, health, nutrition, opportunities, and employment (UNDP, 2013).

The struggle among different political groups forms the basis of inequality in Africa. Therefore, it is justifiable to reiterate that xenophobic events in South Africa were motivated by social and economic marginalization of certain disadvantaged groups, particularly the black majority. Meanwhile, education plays a crucial role in human development, starting from childhood to adulthood.

The Chicago school of sociology views the concept of social inequality from a distinct perspective. The political society naturally made up of interrelated people that must live in harmony. Inequality exists because society needs the coexistence of the “haves” and “have not” Koh (2020). Livesey (2009) explains human differences through two basic perspectives: natural or biological differences, such as mental and physical attributes, and social or cultural differences, such as income, status, and power. These differences often evolve into social inequality within society. In practice, the concept of inequality intersects with ideology and power within representative democracy (Livesey, 2009). Ideology refers to belief in certain principles, while power denotes the ability to effect change or influence others. In a

political context, ideology and power contribute to social stratification, wherein positions are distributed based on racial affinity within the state (Gaubas, 2003). The concept of moral ethnicity and patron-client networks is considered a norm in Africa, serving as instruments of governance with regard to the economic interests of particular political groups over others (Thomson, 2010).

Xenophobia is recognized by some political analysts as a form of aggression directed towards foreigners who are working in the country for their livelihood (Claassen, 2017). The actions of xenophobic attacks by Black South Africans were openly demonstrated on the streets of the country in 2015 and 2019. Globally, xenophobia is condemned as an inhumane act, leading to diplomatic repercussions and tarnishing international reputation (Ogunnoiki, 2019).

Racial affinity and ideology were evident during the transition to democratic rule in South Africa in 1994. Before the transition, the White minority dominated the representative democracy, marginalizing the Black majority for decades. After the transition, similar political dynamics persisted, with the Black majority maintaining ideological power through the African National Congress (ANC). However, it was the politics of social inequality that became a tool for electoral domination following the end of the apartheid system (Seo, 2008).

Social inequality in the African continent was profoundly influenced by colonialism, which forcefully integrated heterogeneous societies under the leadership of majority and minority ethnic groups. This socio-political identity triggered a new class struggle post-colonialism, with ideological class becoming a tool for power domination and oppression. Democratic power in Africa often correlates with vulnerability when it incorporates elements of racial segregation, ethnic morality, or religiosity (Meredith, 2011). Sudan, for instance, experienced polarization into Northern and Southern Sudan in 2010 due to ethnic morality, while Burundi and Burkina Faso faced political instability in 2015. South Africa, as a case study, grappled with social inequality during the apartheid system. The Black majority established pressure groups and approaches to counter the authoritarian policies after Nelson Mandela assumed office in 1994. Successive ANC governments were committed, post-apartheid to formulating and implementing policies aimed at transforming the lives of the disadvantaged.

The United Nations established the MDGs to transform the socio-economic environment, with poverty eradication and hunger alleviation being primary objectives. Household living standards have been the focus of successive South African governments, with efforts made to create employment opportunities in both private and public sectors. However, gross inequality in salary structures persists, leading to significant disparities among workers in different organizations (Andrew, 2021). Income inequality remains a form of injustice, particularly between 1993 and 2017, with many South African households living on low incomes and experiencing unstable debt (Chatterjee et al., 2021). In recent times, rising inequality has caused disillusionment among the populace.

Rising inequality in some African countries reflects the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020. Before the pandemic, inequality manifested in various forms across individual African countries, but the pandemic exacerbated these disparities (International Labour Organization, 2021). In South Africa, movement restrictions imposed by government policies during the pandemic adversely affected workers, with some compelled to work from home regardless of gender and race. During the early stages of the pandemic, workers who could work from home earned significantly more than those unable to do so due to the nature of their jobs.

Equal Access to Universal Primary Education

In the pursuit of meeting the MDGs target on education, the ANC government introduced compulsory free education for all children aged seven to thirteen. The 2003 budget allocated an estimated R88 million to facilitate universal basic primary education (South Africa Government, 2019). Since the end of apartheid, the South African democratic government has made significant efforts to align with the objectives of the MDGs, prioritizing the well-being of its citizens. The Vision 2030 scheme, has in particular been aimed at addressing the needs of its youth and children, two groups who constitute a substantial portion of the population (Chinhowu & Hulm, 2015). Vision 2030 is touted as a special plan unique to the country, diligently working toward achieving all the goals, objectives and strategies of its blueprint. It draws upon the policies of successive ANC governments, from President Mandela to President Ramaphosa, aimed at transforming the economy and improving human dignity.

The end of apartheid in 1994 compelled the ANC to adopt a radical approach in projecting Vision 2030, focusing on poverty elimination and inequality reduction in South Africa. The achievement of this Vision underscores the importance of economic growth and development. Moreover, Vision 2030 serves as a long-term strategy to increase employment, enhance children's enrollment in schools, improve healthcare delivery, and provide housing schemes for the people (South Africa Government, 2019).

To assess whether successive ANC-led governments in the early post-apartheid era truly supported the MDGs' objectives for the benefit of youth and children, it is crucial to examine the state of education before and after apartheid. Only adults can truly comprehend the magnitude and profound impact of apartheid on the democratic government and the basic needs of the people (United Nations, 2015). Today's adults eagerly anticipate future leadership that guarantees equality in all aspects. Furthermore, different generations are beginning to question the advantages they gain from the age of eighteen. The youth and children, who make up the largest percentage of the population, have been identified as a generation that needs to be prioritized in Vision 2030. Finally, the youth express their readiness to contribute to the development of the state, and the quality of education in the country plays a pivotal role in determining their success.

With the transition to democracy in South Africa, education became a primary focus. Special recognition was given to the educational opportunities that black children and adults lacked during the apartheid era. The South African government, led by the ANC, evaluated the enrolment of students in primary and tertiary institutions in 2004, revealing some challenges in the education sector. The main challenge remains rebuilding the basic education system in the Republic of South Africa after the initiation of democracy in 1994. To start with, the basic education sector under the apartheid system was devastating to human dignity, incapacitating millions of people who were marginalized in the decision-making process (South Africa Government, 2019). Consequently, the ANC plans to further improve the educational system to positively impact the lives of all citizens (South Africa Report, 2011).

The first policy implemented by President Mandela, after his release from prison, was directed at education reform. The South African

Constitution underlines the critical role of education in society's transformation, enshrining education as a human right for the public good. In the preamble, a commitment to establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights is underscored (South Africa Government, 2019). This proactive approach is grounded in the belief that education is the foundation of leadership, a notion consistent with the goals of the MDGs (United Nations, 2013). Education is a powerful tool that can change the world, and without protecting the right to education, effective change-making is impossible. In line with this assumption, education holds significance for all generations in South Africa, working toward human empowerment, transformation, and development (Gumede, 2015). The education policy played a crucial role in alleviating the historical tension experienced by the black majority in the country. Access to education is seen as a gradual solution to past problems. The success of the education system reflects the policy trajectory of successive governments, which have emphasized a policy of non-discrimination (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2004).

The majority of the black population believes that education is a crucial strategy to mitigate social inequality in South Africa (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2004). Evidence in rural areas highlights the historical lack of formal education among adults and children, given that the apartheid government restricted the movement of black individuals in Cape Town, and Johannesburg, with only women working as house cleaners granted more freedom (Clark & Worger, 2004). The collapse of apartheid led to the reconciliation between President Mandela and de Klerk, providing new opportunities for young black adults to access tertiary education. Constitutional reforms paved the way for the enactment of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) to ensure non-discriminatory access to basic education for all children. Since then, President Nelson Mandela had employed various strategies to stimulate and expedite the education development of the black majority. The immediate policy, which provides free education at both the primary and secondary school levels, marks the starting point for this moment; allowing South Africa to reflect with pride on its achievement in creating democratic settings in the field of education. Education is seen as a measure for creating a conducive learning environment in South Africa, regardless of color. In addition to this achievement, scholarships and bursaries are provided for tertiary

students (Prew, 2019). This legacy subsequently became the guiding principle for successive governments in a representative democracy. Education became a top priority for the ANC and subsequent governments, serving as a means to address social inequality and yield positive outcomes in various aspects of people's lives (South Africa MDG Report, 2007). It is noteworthy that the party's commitment to educational policies aligns with the objectives of the MDGs (Chinhowu & Hulm, 2015).

The transition to a democratic government in 1994 marked the establishment of a government with defined public policies. However, the education system faced challenges in the subsequent decade. Immediate obstacles included a shortage of teachers, lower enrollment rates in schools, inadequate means of communication, unqualified teachers, poor teaching performance, lack of classroom discipline, and insufficient infrastructure in primary and secondary schools, particularly in rural areas (Prew, 2009). Additionally, the government was criticized for not adequately monitoring teachers' productivity, particularly in rural primary schools, due to a lack of critical support for pedagogical training through conferences and seminars.

These challenges in the education sector were largely attributed to the legacy of the apartheid system. The adoption of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction post-apartheid was particularly contentious, especially among the black majority (Ramas, 2009). Consequently, there was a transformation in the educational sector, including the statutory merging of tertiary institutions in the country, where students were trained in various disciplines (Botha & Gore, 2022). This transformation instilled confidence in the democratic government among the populace. Most notably, administrative bodies were established at every level to enhance the quality of education and maintain standards in student training for skill acquisition (Ramas, 2009). Consequently, the purpose of education, as affirmed by the Constitution and educational legislation, aligns with contemporary ideas regarding the relationship between education, freedoms, democracy, and development (South Africa Government, 2019).

Good Governance: A Pre-requisite for the Successful Implementation of the MDGs

The ANC project prioritizes basic infrastructural development to alleviate the suffering of those who endured the apartheid system,

aligning with campaign promises, leadership performance, and the deepening of democracy. These efforts also contribute to good governance, particularly in sectors such as education, health, employment, and poverty eradication, which are in line with the general objectives of the MDGs (Emmanuel & Mutangi, 2022). However, the implementation of these projects faces immediate challenges, including a shortage of teachers, low school enrollment rates, inadequate means of communication, unqualified teachers, poor teaching performance, lack of classroom discipline, and insufficient infrastructure in rural primary and secondary schools (Prew, 2003). Corruption also poses a significant challenge to MDG projects, as evidenced by public reprimands of political figures like President Jacob Zuma and Nkosazama Dlamini-Zuma in South Africa (Saka, 2020).

Good governance plays a crucial role in achieving MDG goals by directing government policies and implementing infrastructure projects. In South Africa, democratic governance offers hope for citizens regardless of their political affiliations, as democracy is seen as essential for development in Africa (Adejumobi, 2000). Democratic governance aligns with the principles of liberal democracy and the vision and mission of the MDGs, focusing on the policy-making process (United Nations, 2015). It involves an incremental process that responds to citizens' needs and seeks to empower them through socio-political interactions before and after elections (Gaub, 2003).

Resolving social inequality requires effective governance, as countries that prioritize selfish interests or ethnic morality in socio-economic interactions tend to fail in leadership performance (Momoh, 2006). Good governance ensures that the government focuses on the people's major expectations and involves them in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to collective improvement in the state (Adejumobi, 2006). Governance also plays a critical role in nation-building, encompassing competence, efficiency, effectiveness, and the capacity to provide citizens with essential services and amenities such as security, healthcare, education, and clean water (Plowden & Jekins, 2006). These elements are directly aligned with the objectives of the MDGs as outlined by the United Nations.

Table 2

Facts and Figures in South Africa's MDG

Indicators	1994 Baseline	2010 Status	2013 Status	2015 Target	Target Achievability	Indicator Type
Poverty Gap	5.4	2.3	1.9	2.7	Achieved	MDG
Primary Education Enrolment	96.5	98.5	98.8	98.9	Likely	Domesticated
Enrolment in Tertiary Institutions	15	19	22	20	Achieved	Domesticated
Proportion of Population with Advanced HIV Infection with Access to Antiretroviral Drug	13.9	41.6	75.2	80	Likely	MDG
Employment/ work to Population	44.1	42.5	40.8	50-70	Unlikely	MDG

Note. Source from the Republic of South Africa MDG Reports 2015

Table 2 above presents the 2015 report, reflecting the MDGs targets in South Africa. The report evaluates the following four criteria: poverty, education, health, and employment/work. According to the report, poverty rates in South Africa decreased between 1994 and 2015 due to proactive policies implemented by successive governments. Primary education is progressing towards MDG targets, evidenced by the increased enrolment in both rural and urban areas. Tertiary education enrolment has also been achieved through the merging of universities across the country. In the health sector, successive governments have improved HIV/AIDS management by ensuring adequate drug supply to infected individuals in both rural and urban areas. Additionally, employment levels were on the rise, with policies aimed at creating more jobs to meet MDGs targets in the long term. Thus, there has been a general improvement attributed to the government's commitment following the transition to democracy.

The leadership of the ANC is deemed capable of implementing and achieving MDGs targets in the country post-apartheid. The present

article has provided detailed backgrounds of specific laws and policies adopted by the ANC government to meet MDGs targets. Successive governments are found to have delivered on and achieved MDGs objectives. The method the ANC government has adopted is socialism, serving as the mechanism for restructuring towards MDGs attainment. Socialism, an ideology combating economic oppression, underpins the government's proactive policies aimed at societal equality (Ake, 2002). The transformation from capitalism to socialism is enshrined in the South African Constitution. President Mandela's executive focus on basic infrastructure upon assuming office in 1994 informed a unified education system to combat educational inequality based on race. Education, established as a right for every citizen in the Constitution, is further underscored by the Bill of Rights (2: 29), guaranteeing equal access to basic education for children. This constitutional balance in human rights and social justice supports each child's learning and growth for future development. Subsequent presidents, such as Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, have followed President Mandela's policy formulation and implementation legacy, envisioning the actualization of MDGs in the country. The continuous focus of successive governments on MDGs targets, extending to 2030, remains a priority in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, South Africa has witnessed significant and coordinated public policy efforts in implementing the MDGs. Successive ANC governments have diligently invested in the country's productivity through special interventions under the MDG scheme. The pursuit of the eight MDG objectives has clearly demonstrated South Africa's commitment to its own developmental aspirations, particularly in the aftermath of the apartheid era. These efforts underscore the government's contributions to fostering stable socio-economic development.

However, persistent social inequality remains a formidable challenge in the country, posing a threat to its political stability. It is imperative that all racial groups in South Africa have access to their basic needs without discrimination, fostering an open and inclusive society. The MDGs represent an expanded vision and mission for socio-economic development, vigorously promoting human development and

sustaining social and economic progress in South Africa. They have been widely embraced as a policy framework by successive ANC administrations to address social inequality.

The ANC's proactive measures to eradicate extreme poverty, increase children's enrolment in basic education, provide healthcare, and ensure employment opportunities for all are commendable approaches facilitated through the MDGs. These targets were set in the wake of democratic inauguration in South Africa, and the leadership of the ANC across all institutional levels - legislative, executive, and judiciary - is working collaboratively to uphold the economy within the MDG framework, ultimately aiming to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The achievements made reflect the fulfilment of campaign promises, effective leadership performance, and the deepening of democracy, which are intertwined with principles of good governance in the country.

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