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2015 and all that

So, the date that appeared so far off back in 2000 is with us. The target for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is upon us. Much has been achieved in the intervening period, even if progress has not been at quite the pace that had been hoped for. But progress there has been and for that the MDG campaigners need to be congratulated for focusing attention on such a key set of humanitarian issues. The period has also coincided with a period of unprecedented economic growth in Africa. It has been a positive period.

Whilst there is still time for some countries to get across the line on a few more of the MDG goals, over in New York the energy levels are rising towards defining what the successor goals are going to be. Committees are sitting, consultative groups are being established, lobbyists are feverishly advocating their agendas.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was mandated to come up with an initial document before Christmas, and then the dialogue process will continue until the World Sustainable Development Summit meets in September 2015 to adopt the next agenda.

What Ban Ki-moon presented was termed a synthesis report and called 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet'. Input is now being invited to this, and then (I imagine) a few hundred committee meetings later, a group will be invited to finalise the proposals to the Summit in September. These proposals will then be adopted and a significant amount of development expenditure will follow whatever this trail is for the next 15 years. So, it is rather important that the right choices are made.

The MDGs have proved good for healthcare in Africa. There can be no

doubt that significant gains have been made. Can this be capitalised on, or is it likely that for the next chapter, new areas will be selected? It isn't easy. The UN has identified 24 areas of interest which encompass the global agenda. These range from poverty eradication, healthcare and water and sanitation, substantially served by the MDGs through to a long list of seemingly deserving causes such as: food security and nutrition; desertification, land degradation and drought; employment, decent work and social protection; sustained and inclusive economic growth; sustainable development financing; human rights; sustainable cities and human settlements; transport; climate change; and the promotion of equality including social equity, gender equality and women. It is indeed a long list from which to make a few selective choices though given the nature of global flashpoints it is perhaps surprising that 'religious tolerance' hasn't found its way onto the agenda.

What should Africa's contribution to the debate be? The health investment has arguably reached a point now where further progress will be slow until in-built bottlenecks and obstructions are removed as you can only buy so much progress. Political bias, or inter-professional turf disputes can hugely affect progress.

And so the saga continues. What is disappointing is that it is politicians who are ascendant in the selection. It is a shame that Africa's health professions have not yet been able to find the platform to effectively voice where the agenda should go.

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