



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS)



Report

Research Workshop on

**New Directions for the African Learning
Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies
and the Millennium Development Goals**

(PRS/MDGs-LG)



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
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ECA/ACGS/MDGsPAM/AEGM/REP/ 2008/2

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List of Abbreviations

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
ACGS	African Centre for Gender and Social Development
AfDB	African Development Bank
APF	African Partnership Forum
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AUC	African Union Commission
CoP	Communities of Practice
DESA	United Nations Depart for Economic and Social Affairs
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FGPRSs	First Generation Poverty Reduction Strategies
GDN	Global Development Network
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Deficiency Syndrome
FGPRS	First Generation Poverty Reduction Strategies
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IADB	Inter American development Bank
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LACEA	Latin American and Caribbean Economics Association
LAMES	Latin American Meetings of the Econometrics Society
LG	Learning Group
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NBER	National Bureau of Economic Research
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NISER	Nigerian Institute for Economic and Social Research
NY	New York
PCMS	ECA Publications and Conference Management Section
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

PRS/MDGs-LG	African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies/ The Millennium Development Goals
PRSP-LG	African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SGPRS	Second Generation PRSs
SPA	Strategic Partnership with Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
VPF	Virtual Poverty Fund
YAPs	Young African Professionals

I. Background

The African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (PRS/MDGs-LG)¹, an initiative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), was established in February 2001 as the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP-LG) at the urging of member States and following multi-country missions for extensive consultations with stakeholders. The impetus for the establishment of the Learning Group (LG) came from the 1999 decision of the Bretton Woods institutions requiring the preparation of a country-owned Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as a pre-requisite for debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC). Following that decision, the ECA, together with the World Bank, convened a consultative group of African countries in 2000 to explore the implications of the PRSP for countries of the region.

The purpose of the PRSP-LG was to provide a forum for African peer-learning, experience-sharing and the articulation of an African voice on the PRSP and its process. The LG executed its objectives primarily through: i) in-house research; ii) annual consultations (meetings) with African senior policy-makers, PRSP experts, key Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs); iii) case studies reviewing the experience of selected countries with the PRSP content and process, and iv) advocacy. The country studies and annual deliberations were organized around five clusters of issues: - i) the comprehensiveness of growth strategies underpinning the PRSPs; ii) PRSP-related financing and public expenditure management issues; iii) the depth and legitimacy of the PRSP participatory process; iv) national capacity needs; and v) the extent to which donors are adjusting their aid policies and practices in line with the principles underlying the PRSP approach.

The LG held three annual meetings and commissioned 24 country studies. In December 2003 a stock-taking exercise was undertaken to comprehensively review the experience of the Learning Group. The main conclusion of the stock-taking exercise was while the PRSPs had had positive effects on the content and process of development planning, African governments needed to do more to articulate pro-poor policies and programmes, address HIV/AIDS, address the missing middle - from growth strategies to poverty reduction; improve public sector financial management; address capacity issues; institutionalize consultation mechanisms; and improve aid management, aid predictability and harmonization of donor programmes.

Complimentary to the annual meetings, the ECA launched in 2005 the web-based *Enhancing Knowledge Sharing to Support the Poverty Reduction Process in Africa* project to create a mechanism for enhanced sharing of existing knowledge, while at the same time encouraging the creation of new knowledge on poverty reduction strategies.

Maintaining the momentum gathered in Africa

Building on the outcome of the stock-taking exercise and in response to the resolution in the Outcome document of the 2005 UN World Summit and mid-term review of the Millennium Development Goals that countries with extreme poverty adopt and implement MDGs-based poverty reduction strategies/national development plans, the ECA convened in Cairo, Egypt, in March 2006, joint with the African Union Commission (AUC) and in collaboration with the UNDP and the African Development Bank (AfDB), a high-level regional dialogue – the Cairo African Plenary on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (<http://www.uneca.org/>

¹ Visit www.uneca.org/prsp

prsp/Cairo/Default.html) - to review the implementation of First Generation Poverty Reduction Strategies (FGPRSs), assess progress towards the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by African countries, and to make recommendations to guide the formulation and implementation of the next cycle of PRSs, hereafter called Second Generation PRSs (SGPRSs). The Plenary urged that policy dialogue be sustained and in this regard called on ECA to broaden the mandate of the PRSP-LG to be broadened to include learning on the MDG. It further urged the ECA to strengthen the LG secretariat and to rename the Learning Group the PRS-MDG Learning Group to better capture its new mandate. The Plenary also urged the Learning Group to establish links with key policy-shaping fora and institutions particularly the AUC and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Programme, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the Africa Partnership Forum, (APF) the Strategic Partnership with Africa (SPA), the spring meetings of the International Finance Institutions and The Big Table (<http://www.uneca.org/prsp/Cairo/OutCome.html>).

II. Objectives and Expected Results of the Meeting

This meeting was designed to chart new directions for the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (PRS/MDGs-LG) consistent with its broadened mandate.

The objectives of the research workshop are as follows:

- Identify key new areas for research that will enhance the value of the Learning Group as an important arena for knowledge and experience sharing on poverty reduction strategies and the MDGs;
- Broaden the contribution of the LG to capacity building on PRSs/MDGs;
- Identify African and non-African research institutions that could constitute a Learning Network, not only on PRS/MDGs but also on the broader issue of economic development and poverty reduction;
- Make recommendations on the way forward.

Among the outcomes of the Meeting will be a report, to be widely disseminated - on re-launching the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals, including new directions for research. The report of the meeting and other background documents may be used by ECA and African countries in their endeavours to scale up the contribution of peer-learning and experience-sharing to efforts to accelerate progress on poverty reduction and the achievement of the targets of the MDGs. Countries also may use the outcome of the meeting to initiate PRS/MDGs learning group meetings of their own as a means for mobilizing support for the MDGs and poverty reduction strategies.

III. Participation

There were 21 participants comprising senior policy makers from African governments, key research institutions in Africa such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, and the Nigerian Institute for Economic and Social Research (NISER); African policy and development institutions such as the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the AUC, and the AfDB, Africans in the Diaspora and some development partners such as the World Bank, The UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) have also been invited. The full list of participants is at Annex 1 to this report.

IV. Organization of Workshop

The two-day research workshop was organized as follows: plenary presentations followed by general discussions and recommendations. Four papers were presented ranging from theoretical papers to empirical to a country case study. Each of the papers addressed an identified theme and provided context for the discussions that followed. The Programme of work of the research workshop is at Annex 2.

V. Opening Ceremony, Presentations and Discussions

1. Opening Ceremony

Mr. Kasirim Nwuke, Chief, MDGs/Poverty Analysis & Monitoring Section, African Centre for Gender & Social Development (ACGS), ECA, welcomed all participants to the workshop. He thanked the UNDP Mauritius Country Office for facilitating the meeting and the participants for honoring ECA's invitation.

He explained that the research workshop underscores ECA's heightened attention to the vital importance of knowledge generation and sharing for addressing Africa's development challenges. The contribution of knowledge to poverty reduction and economic growth is no longer a subject of debate either in the economics literature or in policy circles. What is critical at the moment is its diffusion. It is for this reason that the ECA is promoting knowledge sharing; peer learning through experience sharing through the instrumentality of media such as information and communication technology, research webs and meetings among African countries. For these initiatives to succeed, national and African ownership, a key element in national poverty reduction strategies, is critical.

Referring to the workshop, Mr. Nwuke explained that the expectation is that it will suggest new research directions for the African Learning Group. To aid this process, the ECA had identified three main areas for research and advocacy for the LG that reflect the broad challenges that Africa faces in poverty reduction and achieving the targets of the MDGs. The first is the role of sub-national jurisdictions in the efforts to meet the MDGs, seen particularly through the lenses of mapping

local government expenditure against poverty reduction and MDGs outcomes amid large within-country variations in progress towards the targets of the MDGs. The second area is social protection, with health and health care, (including health insurance², health equity), and conditional cash transfers as the primary focus. The third area is the nexus of growth, poverty and inequality, which has been an important area in the development debate. The nexus is explored through the experience of Nigeria³.

After these brief remarks, Mr. Nwuke invited the representative of the UNDP in Mauritius to make a short opening remark.

Mr. Yan Hookoomsing, representing the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, in his remarks welcomed participants to Mauritius. He reiterated the critical importance of knowledge generation and sharing in the efforts to meet the targets of the MDGs. He applauded the timeliness of the research workshop and welcomed the collaboration with the ECA. He expressed the hope that this collaboration will be deepened and broadened in the broader interest of the region.

Following these opening remarks and brief introduction of participants, Mr. Nwuke made a brief presentation. Entitled "*A Brief Report on the African Learning Group on PRSPs and on the Future of the PRS/MDGs-LG*", the presentation aimed to provide context and guidance to the workshop discussions.,

The PRSP-LG was established in February 2001 as the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers at the urging of member States and following multi-country missions for extensive consultations with stakeholders. The impetus for the establishment of the LG came from the 1999 decision of the Bretton Woods institutions requiring the preparation of a country-owned PRSP as a pre-requisite for debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative. Following that decision, the ECA, together with the World Bank, convened a consultative group of African countries in 2000 to explore the implications of the PRSP for countries of the region.

Once established, the LG has served as a forum for African peer learning and information sharing on the PRSP experience and the articulation of African perspectives on the PRSP and its processes. The LG organized three annual meetings from 2001 to 2003, undertook 24 country studies and produced three reports exploring and documenting the African PRSP experience (see www.uneca.org/prs). Meetings of the LG were held back-to-back with meetings of the SPA, thus enabling insinuation of African perspectives into major international discussions/debates on the PRSP. Through these activities, LG generated new policy and research ideas to strengthen knowledge sharing and peer-learning.

Mr. Kasirim Nwuke went on to discuss the Enhanced Knowledge sharing project, established in 2005, to provide an electronic platform to promote peer-learning and experience sharing among African member states. Financially supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) United Nations Headquarters, this programme was implemented from 2005-2007 and built on the knowledge generation and sharing activities already implemented.

He listed the main outputs of the Enhanced knowledge sharing project. Among these is a report of an audit of PRS/MDGs knowledge in 15 countries. The purpose of the knowledge audit was to obtain concrete evidence on knowledge gaps, constraints to knowledge sharing and to learn from countries their ideas about how knowledge gaps can be bridged and knowledge sharing pro-

2 ECA commissioned work "*Achieving Health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa: The role of National Health Insurance Schemes*" G.Mwabu, University of Nairobi

3 ECA commissioned work "*Growth, Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria*", Professor.B.Aigbokhan, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria

moted. This report is based on a questionnaire, covering the five thematic areas of the PRSP and was administered in person. The findings of the audit were extremely important as they assisted in the identification of key areas where knowledge gaps were present and the set of interventions that could be marshaled to address them. It also reinforced the relevance of the Communities of Practice (CoP) that had been created to strengthened African ownership of PRS process. The full knowledge audit report is available at <http://www.uneca.org/africanprsp/docupld/Knowledge%20Audit%20Full%20Report.pdf>

Further to the knowledge audit, electronic discussions (four in total) were conducted under the auspices of the project, on a variety of issues – fiscal space, aid effectiveness, etc. Participation in the e-discussions has been rich and robust and provided evidence of the need to scale up knowledge generation and sharing on the design and implementation of poverty reduction strategies or national development plans in Africa. For this, capacity building, the third area of focus of the project, is critical. Pursuant to this, a number of training workshops on knowledge sharing have been organized. These training workshops were well attended and applauded by participants as an effective instrument for reinforcing/building capacity in MDGs/PRS-critical areas.

Finally, Mr. Nwuke mentioned the MDG Mapper an innovative tool developed by the ECA for dynamic mapping of comparative progress by African countries towards achieving the MDGs. Using data provided by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), it enables speedy acquisition of up-to-date information on which countries have made the most progress and which are making the least progress at current rates of progress? For countries making the least progress, the Mapper enables the calculation of the extent to which they are off target⁴.

Many participants at the workshop recalled the ECA's previous work on knowledge-sharing and its high quality. They in particular, applauded the LG and hoped that this workshop will contribute in significant ways to its re-launch. Participants urged the ECA to strengthen its communication and media and outreach strategy for PRS/MDGs in view of the urgent need to diffuse knowledge and strengthen the articulation of an African perspective on these international processes. Various stakeholders should be part of this outreach. Furthermore, many participants expressed the view that that the outputs of the Learning Group should be considered strategic materials and should be widely disseminated.

2. Plenary Sessions

Session 1: Broadening the research web

The near absence of knowledge networks is one of the major constraints to organized knowledge-sharing in Africa. Prof. Yaw Nyarko's presentation drawn from the background paper⁵ he was commissioned to write for this workshop explored the feasibility learning networks in Africa. He advanced the notion of a knowledge network with the ECA as the hub and think-tanks as the spoke. This knowledge network would work to increase/expand African ownership of the generation of ideas through a series of initiatives such as the organization of "summer" schools, research visits, annual or biannual meetings, the issuance of working paper series and possible collaboration

4 The Mapper is available at www.uneca.org/prsp or at <http://geoinfo.uneca.org:8777/cf/mdg/#>

5 Yaw Nyarko, 2008, *A Concept Note on learning Networks*, being paper commissioned by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

with scholarly journals. The purpose of the activities will be to establish a structured forum where researchers, academics and policy makers interact on poverty reduction strategies and MDGs.

ECA, Prof. Nyarko submitted, is well placed both in terms of internal capacity and funding to harness these initiatives. To this end, he recommended that the ECA be “a holding company” of the range of learning networks, providing guidance to the activities of these networks with respect to poverty reduction strategies and policies and MDGs as well as capacity building. The existing capacity of academics on the continent, African academics in the Diaspora, non-African academics working on Africa, the Young African Professionals (YAPs) Programme and international institutions should be harnessed towards the establishment of the Learning Groups.

He underscored the importance of incentives for the effective functioning of the LGs. To this end, he argued that incentives for participation in such Learning Groups could be garnered through paying close attention to real-life African problems, fruitful interaction with policy makers, papers in prestigious journals, access to co-authors, learning/(acquiring competence in) latest analytical tools and techniques, meeting tourism and finally financial rewards. A re-direction of existing funds, especially consultancy funds to this objective by the ECA could be initiated.

Prof. Nyarko emphasized that the learning network must also propose indicators of success for the Learning Groups to include the following: ability to provide direction to research, relevance; and sustainability. These are implementation by policy leaders, adoption of specific outputs of Learning Group, internal generation of new question/solutions, quotations and solicitations abroad, and publication in top journals.

Prof Nyarko used the example of Latin America to emphasize what is achievable where the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) had played a catalytic role in mediating the growth of research networks in collaboration/partnership with the Inter American development Bank (IADB). The outcomes of these efforts were the founding, on a very sound and credible footing, of the Latin American Meetings of the Econometrics Society (LAMES), the Latin American and Caribbean Economics Association (LACEA) and a prestigious journal “Economía”. Initial funding for these efforts came from the Global Development Network (GDN), the World Bank and IADB.

Experts concurred with the proposals and emphasized that it could serve as a framework for an expanded Learning Group. However, care must be exercised to avoid duplication and unnecessary overlap with other research programmes and competition for funding. Some participants pointed out that there is some work underway by International Development Research Center (IDRC) on the evaluation of African research networks and think-tanks. Lessons from previous efforts must also be internalized in order to not to repeat mistakes of those efforts. A number of participants argued that, given the capacity needs of policy makers, further collaboration with specific African capacity building institutions, such as the ACBF, are necessary.

Responding to these comments, Mr. Nwuke thanked participants for their contribution to the discussion of the Concept Note. He expressed interest in the notion that consultancies can be used as a strategic tool to advance the objectives of the LG and Learning Networks and emphasized that the ECA seek collaboration with African institutions to enhance the effectiveness of the contribution of knowledge to poverty reduction strategies and to the efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Session 2: MDG Expenditure targeting and tracking

A number of countries in Africa have set up specialized institutions, such as MDGs Office, to track, monitor and evaluate MDGs-specific expenditures. These specialized institutions, which are in actuality, Virtual Poverty Funds (VPFs) are a response to weak public expenditure management systems. Uganda led the way when it established the Uganda's Poverty Action Fund. Nigeria, also set up a similar Fund (the MDGs Office) when it was granted debt relief by the Paris Club to track and monitor and ensure that debt relief resources are spent in a manner supportive of accelerated efforts to meet the targets of the MDGs.

A presentation by Mr. Lawal Aboki of the Nigerian MDGs entitled, "MDG-Specific Expenditure Targeting and tracking: The Case of Nigeria's Virtual Poverty Fund" was not made because Mr. Aboki could not be present due to flight and visa difficulties. However, he sent his paper that provided some guidance to the discussion. The discussion was led by Mr. Udo Etukudo, UNDP/RBA Southern Africa Regional Centre.

The discussion began with a general review of VPFs as an accounting contrivance to tag and track expenditures on priority sectors. VPFs are a type of "budget support" that provide special treatment for specific pro-poor/MDGs-specific sectors. They provide additional resources for these sectors and also match resources to expenditures. In addition, they protect disbursements to these sectors from budgetary cuts. To be effective, a VPF must be strong on reporting, transparency, and monitoring and evaluation. A VPF set on with debt relief savings (and donor resources) operates by ensuring that an amount equivalent to debt relief savings is transferred as additional allocation to MDGs and pro-poor sectors.

Mr. Etukudo emphasized the centrality of planning and monitoring and evaluation for the success of VPFs. He pointed out some similarities between the VPF and the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) as well as the dissimilarities. The absence of a fiscal framework, based on valid projections for broad fiscal aggregates that are consistent with key macroeconomic variables such inflation, growth and policy measures is a key weakness of VPFs. Another weakness of VPFs is the fact that key stakeholders such as the private sector and the civil society are not involved at the planning and accounting stages. In addition, they can skew budgets, priorities and allocations and lead to the creation of parallel processes. But they can, if run well, help mobilize additional resources from development partners for these priority sectors.

During the discussion that ensued, some experts wondered whether a project-based funding approach is more adequate than a programme-driven funding scheme. In response to this, a participant from Nigeria recalled the context under which the VPF was established and its purpose, which is to ensure that debt relief savings are used to accelerate progress towards reaching the targets of the MDGs. He then added that, given the fact that Nigeria is a federation, it would be essential to know how the activities of the Fund are affecting the ability of sub-national governments to expand social service delivery. Mr. Kasirim Nwuke followed up on the remark made by Mr. Udo Etukudo on the non-participation of major stakeholders at the planning and accounting stages. He underscored the potential tension between promoting accountable policy-making and attempts to involve non-elected stakeholders, such as the private sector and NGOs, who are not accountable to the electorate, at all stages of the policy-making process. Mr. Servus Sagday, Tanzania, shared the experience of Tanzania in engaging all major stakeholders and all layers of government in the preparation of Tanzania's MTEF. Similarly, Dr. Zafar Iqbal, Islamic Development Bank, similarly shared experience from Pakistan on the contribution of the political leadership, through intense debates in the parliament, in shaping both the content and scope of Pakistan's poverty reduction strategy.

The last part of the discussions focused on lessons that can be learnt from the way the fund operates in Nigeria. On the question raised by Dr. Kerfalla Yansane, Guinea, as whether the disbursement of the fund's resources follows the same execution and reporting rules as those guiding the use of regular budget resources, the answer was yes. Prof. Bernard Aigbokhan, Ambrose Ali University, Nigeria, pointed out that any disbursement of the Fund's resources is scrutinized of the Office of Due Process. Prof. Ishmael Kalule-Sabiti, North West University, South Africa, underscored the potential conflict of interest in the functioning of the Fund and recommended that independent researchers should undertake the evaluation. In sum, participants agreed the Fund as a specific scheme, designed for a specific purpose, which is to assure the donor community that the debt relief savings are properly targeted and spent on pro-poor and MDGs-specific interventions.

Session 3: Growth, inequality and poverty

The third plenary session explored the nexus between growth, inequality and poverty. Prof. Bernard Aigbokhan; explored the theme using Nigeria's experience.

The presentation started with a quick review of Nigeria's growth performance and structural composition of production over the past 30 years. During this period, economic growth has been uneven: sluggish in the early 1980s, relatively mild at the end of the 1980s and buoyant from the 1990s and onwards. This marked improvement in growth performance was driven in part by bold economic and institutional reforms. One key feature of the recent economic revival is the growing contribution of the non-oil sector, namely agriculture and services, as a major source of growth.

Initial conditions matter for growth and poverty reduction. Given the importance of initial level of income and asset distribution on the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction, the paper also examined the trends in inequality in Nigeria. The Gini coefficient increased, from 0.41 in 1992 to 0.49 in 1999, and then stabilized at that level, meaning that inequality has increased in Nigeria over time. Further, an assessment of the incidence and dimension of poverty in Nigeria shows that for the period 1980 to 1996, national and regional, sector-specific poverty headcounts generally trended upwards, albeit with some short-lived episodes of poverty reduction as was experienced in the beginning of the 1990s. However, poverty headcount has declined since 1996, although at a moderate pace. The analysis also shows the major determinants of poverty in Nigeria to be education, age, household size, and place of residence – rural or urban.

The last part of the presentation explored the nexus of growth, inequality and poverty dynamics. The paper attempted to relate meager gains in poverty reduction, despite buoyant economic expansion, to the trends in inequality. He presented the findings of his empirical analysis, which builds strongly on an approach developed by Ravallion (2001). Such an approach consists in estimating the growth elasticity of poverty reduction. In order to gauge the effect of inequality on the relationship between poverty and growth, Prof. Aigbokhan reverted to "distribution-corrected growth rate". Two elasticities were then estimated: the first using ordinary growth rate and the second relying on the distribution-corrected growth rate. The distribution -corrected growth elasticity turns to be higher, thus implying that growing inequality hampers the potential of growth to translate into meaningful poverty reduction.

He concluded by saying the recent acceleration in growth has not translated into commensurate gains in poverty reduction largely because of the stubbornly high level of inequality. Nigerian authorities should therefore create an enabling environment for pro-poor growth to take hold. This requires a two-pronged strategy, which should be supported by growth and income distribution

policies and interventions. These policies and interventions should aim at decreasing the disparities in access to human and physical capital and reducing differences in asset or factor returns.

The presentation was followed by interactive discussions. Prof. Nyarko concurred with the main finding, namely that unfavorable initial conditions explain the lower-than-expected growth elasticity of poverty found in Nigeria. Mr. Udo Etukudo felt that national development strategies failed to achieve strong and sustainable growth and significant poverty reduction because of their narrow focus on macroeconomic stability. Such a bias to macroeconomic stability discouraged public investment, thus limiting structural change and the diversification of production and export basis. Mr. Oumar Diallo, ECA, viewed the time horizon, along with structural changes and initial conditions, as an essential determinant of the nexus between growth, inequality and poverty. Mr. Servus Sagday shared the experience of Tanzania with respect to growth, inequality and poverty reduction and indicated that experience was similar to that of Nigeria, with strong economic growth failing to generate significant reduction in poverty. In response Dr. Zafar Iqbal's concern over the apparent discrepancy between the poverty data used in the presentation and those published by the UNDP, Prof. Aigbokan and Mr. Kasirim Nwuke indicated that the sources of the differences could be both methodological in nature and/or be driven by the type of surveys used in the analysis. Nonetheless, all participants underscored the crucial importance of data.

On policy recommendations, Prof. Ishmael Kalule-Sabiti suggested the importance of coming up with specific and appropriate recommendations instead of blanket proposals, while Boniface Yemba, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), argued that any credible and effective national development strategy must identify the main growth engines and select, accordingly, the policies needed to advance growth and reduce poverty. Mr. Yan Hookoomsing shared the experience of Mauritius with respect to growth and poverty reduction. He described what Mauritius had done as successful and recommended that the Learning Group undertake comparative studies so as to identify/codify good practices that can be replicated elsewhere on the continent.

Session 4: Achieving health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa: the role of national health insurance schemes

This session was based on the commissioned paper prepared by Prof. Mwabu who was unable to attend due to conflicting schedules. Mr. Adrian Gauci of the ECA made a presentation based on the paper on achieving the health MDGs: the role of national insurance schemes

The paper recognizes that the poor health status of the African population is a serious impediment to poverty reduction and economic growth. It argued that the application in Africa of interventions that have been proved to work elsewhere could help the region achieve the health MDGs. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that health MDGs are achieved with equity. Attaining MDGs with equity requires that attention be paid to the hotly debated and controversial issue of how health services should be financed. Health insurance is one financing option.

The paper then reviews and compares a number of other options including user fees. There is evidence that, in Africa, user fees contribute to poverty, and is therefore not a viable option. Other barriers include distance from health provider, transport costs required to arrive at a health provider and lack of information, all aspects that are not always considered in national insurance schemes but are important determinants of health outcomes. The paper identified three criteria that can together determine whether a particular financing method should be preferred over another as: a) feasibility of implementation; b) the extent to which it is cost-effective; and c) the degree to which it mobilizes additional resources for the poor while at the same time offering protection to the poor

against exclusion from basic care. Prof. Mwabu argued that a national health insurance scheme is ideally consistent with the third criterion but might not satisfy the first and second in most African countries. The paper therefore proposed a social health insurance and community-based insurance schemes for Africa.

But evidence suggests that insurance schemes have not fared especially well in Africa. A survey of insurance schemes undertaken in the 90s in 23 sub-Saharan African countries showed that health spending was low in areas where the poor live and for services demanded by the poor. The studies also showed that social insurance schemes are prone to the problem of cost escalation and do not provide equity in access. Structural factors (large informal sectors, administrative and political constraints, weak tax bases, poor health infrastructure including staff shortages) present major difficulties in expanding insurance coverage. Available insurance schemes are thus used to finance health care services at higher levels of the public health system, and in the private health sector.

According to Mr Gauci, Prof. Mwabu then argues that in view of the above, African policy makers should not spend the “next seven years in attempts to scale up or implement social health insurance schemes if the objective is to achieve the targets of the health MDGs but to spend the seven years in seeking ways to spend more of government and donor resources to provide basic health care free-of-charge at peripheral health facilities in rural and slum areas.”

Other recommendations of the paper include: i) a reallocation of health budgets to lower level public health facilities with no user fees, ii) and a financing of health services at higher levels using social insurance schemes. In addition, there should be a strengthening of referral systems so that the poor can be treated free of charge, legislative reforms to create incentives for greater coverage, on-the-job training and subsidization of user fees in countries or communities, where they are a major source of health finance and where direct government provision is not possible.

In the ensuing discussion, participants acknowledged the relevance and timeliness of the arguments of the paper. Many participants, with policy-making background, recalled that the progress towards the health MDGs is slow and responses to policy interventions are sluggish. The participants considered brain drain, particularly of health personnel, a major constraint to progress towards achieving the targets of the MDGs. In addition, the participants felt that an issue of relevance is alternative care provision and the way to finance it. They also pointed out the necessity of centers of excellence in the supply of health personnel. Some participants highlighted that brain circulation rather than drain has a positive effect on the status of health personnel even in the recipient country.

Session 5: The role of sub-national jurisdiction- open forum

The fifth session was an open forum on one of the thematic research areas of research proposed by ECA - sub-national jurisdictions and their role in achieving the MDGs. Mr. Oumar Diallo made a presentation based on a concept note prepared for the Workshop. The concept note defines the problematique - the role of sub-national jurisdictions in the efforts to achieve the MDGs -, surfaces the increasing role and possibilities of sub-national governments in efforts to achieve the MDGs, and presents possible areas of research for discussion and agreement.

For purposes of illustration as well as for emphasis, Mr. Diallo presented evidence on within-country variations in progress towards the MDGs in selected African countries, namely Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia. Using the MDG Mapper, sub-national data were used to show spatially different rates of progress towards some of the MDGs in the selected countries. These developments are set against the strong emphasis on decentralization in the development community

and the growing importance of sub-national jurisdictions in many African countries, in terms of in terms of revenue and expenditure responsibilities. This has made them key actors in the efforts to secure high and sustainable growth and to reach the targets of the MDGs.

Mr. Diallo then focused on two main researchable questions that the workshop should consider: i) What does the scorecard on the contribution of sub-national governments to efforts towards reaching the MDGs in Africa look like? ii) How can sub-national jurisdictions play a more effective role in efforts to achieve the MDGs? On the first question, Mr Diallo identified two possible areas: i) the expansion of public service delivery by sub-national governments and ii) the promotion of local empowerment. On the second question, he identified four possible areas that lend themselves to deeper investigation: a) sub-national governments and macro-economic stability; b) capacity building and well-trained personnel, c) financial management and harmonized and up-to-date system of budget classification and accounting for all levels of government, and effective monitoring, evaluation and control systems; d) design of transfer mechanisms to address issues of vertical and horizontal imbalances; and e) policy coordination and policy coherence.

In summary, Mr. Diallo identified the following broad key areas i) Fiscal policy at the sub-national level, ii) Constitutions as a coordination constraint, iii) Capacity constraints, iv) within-country disparities in terms of progress toward the MDGs.

Participants highly appreciated the Concept Note and the timeliness of the proposed research. They added that the type of State has an important bearing on sub-national configurations and policies and proposed some distinction between federal or unitary States. Participants also emphasized the importance of internally generated revenues as critical for success on the MDGs. They pointed out that little is known about the internal revenue generating capacities of sub-national governments and how that affects their expenditure behaviour. This is therefore, they concluded, a critical new area for research. In this regard, some participants cautioned that the MDGs could distort incentives at both the national and sub-national levels, for example skewing capacity needs towards only the activities relating to the MDGs. Yet capacity requirements are crucially important at the local level. In this regard, the ACBF recommended that capacity needs assessment be conducted prior to the operationalization of the research agenda on sub-national jurisdictions and reiterated the willingness of the ACBF to collaborate with the ECA on capacity building as well on other themes of foremost importance identified by the learning networks.

Session 6: The PRS/MDGs-LG: way forward

The way forward session was presided by Prof. Nyarko and moderated by Mr. R. Humphries. There were two broad areas of discussion: the process to carry the agenda forward and the content aspects.

The participants appreciated the re-launching of the African Learning Group and indicated that research networking could become an important substantive tool for poverty reduction and achieving the targets of MDGs. The participants recognized the validity of the process suggested to harness research work, especially through “summer” schools, consultancies, the African Economic Conference. The participants also highlighted the need for an interface between research institutes and policy makers.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendations were made in the four broad areas of discussion as identified in the programme of work.

Process:

- Promote sustainability of the LG by building close collaboration with institutions and by engaging institutions for consultancies instead of individuals.
- Other existing knowledge networks, MDG-net for example and the UNDP Advisory Group on PRSs and MDGs should be brought to the attention of all stakeholders in the Learning Group.
- Ensure the policy orientation of the research agenda of the LG. In other words, the outputs of the Learning Group should help guide African decision-makers in their policy choices.
- Match demand-driven research agenda with an effective communication Strategy.
- The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) meetings and outputs could be used as a possible model for the African Learning Group.

Content:

1. Poverty growth & inequality

- Commission comparative country studies on the growth-poverty-inequality to elicit experiences and best practices.
- Explore, investigate and interrogate the sources of growth in African countries;
- Research on domestic resource mobilization, should be pursued, including research on micro-credit as a tool for poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs;
- Research topics could also include:
 - » Gaps in policy design and analysis and progress towards the MDGs;
 - » Poverty, growth and inequality in a cross-country of African countries

2. Health MDGs

- Broaden research to include other interventions;
- Consider institutions and regulations;
- Consider inter-national trade agreements and their impact on health in Africa;
- Possible research topics could include:
 - » Institutional capacity and human capacity for achieving the health MDGs in Africa at both the national and sub-national levels
 - » What are the capacity needs for achieving the health MDGs

3. Sub-national jurisdictions

- Analysis must distinguish between unitary and federal states as the role of sub national governments in the efforts to achieve the MDGs might not be regime independent;
- Explore indepth, both horizontal and vertical policy coherence;
- Research must consider the inter revenue generation capacity of sub-national governments as well as capacity constraints;
- Adopt a mix of macro and sectoral perspective in the analysis;
- Possible areas of research could include:
- Corruption, nepotism, and affirmative action and progress towards the targets of the Millennium Development Goals'
- Nepotism, accountability systems and progress towards the MDGs
- Incentive design;
- Are there limits to decentralization in Africa?

4. Capacity

Research should:

Focus on analysis of capacity building and retention programmes in Africa.

Undertake a capacity needs assessment as an essential first step towards identifying adequate policies and interventions to address capacity constraints.

Encourage and scale up the YAPs programme as an essential contribution to building and strengthening capacity in the area of health MDGs and analysis of poverty, growth and inequality.

Agreements reached:

The following agreements were reached as essential first steps to advance the outcomes of the research workshop.

- ECA to re-convene the Learning Group as soon as possible
- ACBF will collaborate with the ECA on the study of in the sub-national jurisdictions building on its just concluded capacity needs assessment for second generation PRSs (the results of which will be disseminated to all participants);
- HSRC agreed to share with participants the report of the IDRC study on the effectiveness of research networks/think-tanks in Africa
- ACBF offered to collaborate with ECA on a training workshop on health interventions for African parliamentarians;

- ECA will circulate Terms of Reference for the country studies on MDG consistent-poverty reduction strategies/national development plans to all participants for comments and steers to suitable and qualified consultants.

VII. Closing Session

The ECA secretariat thanked participants for their very active engagement in the expert group workshop and assured them that ECA will follow up on their suggestions and recommendations. The Secretariat further informed the meeting that a report of the workshop and the participant list will shortly be circulated to all. Participants expressed gratitude to the ECA for inviting them to participate in “a very engaging research workshop” and encouraged the ECA to re-launch the African Learning Group in the shortest possible time, given the immense possibility of knowledge sharing through this forum to contribute to improvements in policy formulation and policy management and thus to accelerating Africa’s progress towards poverty reduction and the targets of the MDGs.

VIII. Evaluation

ECA conducted an evaluation by participants of the logistics, and relevance and quality of the substantive issues (See appendix 3).

Summary of responses

- Logistics- Ninety percent of participants rated the logistical arrangements very good or excellent. The remainder that rated the workshop good or fair reported that the hotels seemed to lack experience in conducting conferences/workshops.
- Quality - Ninety five percent rated the research workshop excellent or very good both in reference to the background papers as well as the presentations.
- Relevance- Ninety five percent considered growth, inequality and poverty theme as the most relevant, closely followed by sub-national jurisdiction, MDG expenditure and tracking (virtual poverty funds) , and health MDGs.
- Relevance to participants work- All participants found the workshop relevant both for their own work and knowledge sharing. Participants did ask ECA to initiate a bold communication strategy, which is essential for the dissemination the findings and outputs of the African Learning Group as well as for peer learning.

Appendix 1

Agenda for the Research Workshop on New Directions for the PRS/MDGs-LG “The African Learning group on Poverty reduction Strategies & the Millennium Development Goals”

Grand Bay, Mauritius, June 19-20, 2008

8:30-9:00	Registration
9:00	Opening
Chair:	Mr Yansane Kerfalla International Consultant to World Bank
Rapporteur:	Adrian Gauci
9:00-9:30	Welcome Address by the Executive Secretary or his representative (Kasirim Nwuke Chief of Section, MDGS Poverty Analysis and Monitoring Section (MPAMS) in African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS) Remarks by UNDP Resident Representative
9:30-9:45	“A Brief Report on the African Learning Group on PRSPs and on the Future of the PRS/MDGs-LG” – Mr. <i>Kasirim NWUKE</i> , Chief, MDGs/ Poverty Analysis & Monitoring, ACGS
0945-1015:	Discussion
10:15-10:45	Coffee break
Session 1	
11:00:12:00	Broadening the research web
Chair:	Mr.Z.Iqbal, Islamic Development Bank
Presenter:	Prof Yaw Nyarko, New York University
Rapporteur:	Mr. Adrian Gauci

This Session will be based on the Concept Note prepared for the workshop by Prof. Yaw Nyarko of New York University, NY, USA. The Concept Note explores more generally issues and questions surrounding the use of a Learning Group (LG) to enhance policy research on economic development in Africa and provides suggestions for possible use and extension of the existing PRS/MDGs-LG. The main idea of the note involves the concept of a Learning Group made up of a number of networks. It also explores a funding mechanism for such a learning network.

Discussion

Session 2

12:00- 13:00

MDG expenditure targeting and tracking

Chair:

Mr.Kasirim Nwuke, ECA

Presenter:

Mr. Udo Etukudo, Macroeconomist, UNDP

Rapporteur:

Oumar Diallo

One of the conditions for debt relief for many African countries was that debt relief should be spent on the social sector and in particular on MDGs-specific sectors such as education, health, and sanitation. In a number of countries, special units or offices were set up to ensure that relief resources are appropriately targeted and tracked. The Nigerian MDGs Office is one such example. How well has this approach worked? Is it an efficient way to allocate debt-relief resources to PRS and MDGs? Are there any issues and lessons amenable to research and for peer-learning arising from it?

12:30-13:00

Discussion

13:00-15:00

Lunch Break

Session 3

15:00-16:30

Growth, inequality, and poverty

Chair:

Professor Tunji Akande, NISER

Presenter:

Prof. B. Aigbokhan, Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, Nigeria

Rapporteur:

Oumar Diallo

Poverty reduction has been at the centre of the development debate for decades. It is recognized that rapid and broad based economic growth is critical for poverty reduction and the aggregate scorecard in Africa in recent years on growth has been impressive. However, the impact of growth on poverty has been at best minimal. The number of Africans living in extreme poverty remains very high. Based on this outcome, the meetings of the PRSP-LG concluded that growth is necessary but not sufficient for poverty reduction and for accelerating progress towards the targets of the MDGs. Complimentary policies such as on inequality, are necessary. This has led analysts to begin to investigate the “growth-poverty-inequality nexus. This Session will be based on the country case study of the growth-poverty-inequality nexus of Nigeria. It will discuss the feasibility of research on this topic in other African countries and what additional areas that research should look into.

15:30 – 16:30

Discussion

16:30- 16:45

Coffee break

16:45 – 17:15

Wrap-up of Day One discussions

DAY TWO: 20 June, 2008

**Session 4
09:00:10:30**

**Achieving Health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa:
The Role of National Health Insurance Schemes**

Chair: Mr.S.Sagday, Ministry of Finance, Tanzania
Presenter: Adrian Gauci, ECA
Rapporteur: Mr.O.Diallo,ECA

The health MDGs are proving very problematic for most countries in Africa. Indeed, the low ranking of most African countries in UNDP's Human Development Report rankings is attributable to the very poor health status of most Africans. For example, in all countries, there has been very little improvement in maternal mortality. Immunization coverage remains small. Overall, health inequalities are large. This calls for interventions to kindle and accelerate progress on the health MDGs. One such intervention is health insurance. This Session will be based on the background paper on national health insurance schemes prepared by Prof. Germano Mwabu. The paper links interventions to health outcomes and explores effective mechanisms for financing the intervention. The ECA analytical report, "Mainstreaming health equity in national development strategies" will provide context to the discussion of strategies to finance health MDGs.

09:30-10:30 Discussion

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

**Session 5
1100 – 1300**

The role of sub-national jurisdiction- Open forum

Chair: Dr. Kojo Appiah Kubi, Director, National Development Planning Commission, Ghana

Presenter: Oumar Diallo, ECA
Rapporteur: Adrian Gauci

For a variety of reasons and driven by different forces, many African countries, have in the recent past, initiated and implemented various forms of decentralization of administrative and economic responsibilities. These range from strengthening of the autonomy of federating units in countries with Federal constitutions to deepened decentralization of government structures in countries with unitary constitutions and to fiscal decentralization in all irrespective of constitution. Decentralization is seen as a means not only for promoting and advancing national unity in the context of multi-ethnicity but also as a means of remedying "government failure" and of improving the provision of public goods and services to improve citizens' welfare. Evidence is scant on the role of sub-national jurisdictions in efforts to achieve the MDGs. In view of

the responsibilities devolved to sub-national governments, it is clear that their actions and the policies that they pursue, especially their tax and expenditure policies, can have a demonstrable impact on growth and development and on the rate of progress towards the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

11:30-13:00 Discussion

13:00-14:30 Lunch Break

Session 6

1430-1630

Chair:

Moderator:

Rapporteur:

African Learning Group-The PRS/MDGs-LG: Way forward

Mr.Y.Nyarko

Richard Humphries, HSRC, South Africa

Adrian Gauci

This session pulls together the discussions and sets a concrete plan to revamp the African Learning Group with the clear roles and agenda for all stakeholders involved.

16:30-16:45 Coffee Break

Session 7

16:45 – 17:00

Presenter:

Closing of workshop

Kasirim Nwuke, Chief, MDGs/Poverty Analysis & Monitoring, ECA

Appendix 2

List of Participants

Democratic Republic of Congo
Mr. Boniface Pepino Yemba
Coordinateur National Adjoint de l'UPPE-SRP
Ministere du Plan
Kinshasa, Republique Democratique du Congo
Mobile: +243815217475
E-mail: yembapepino@googlemail.com

Ghana
Dr. Kojo Appiah-Kubi
Director
National Development Planning Commission (NDPC)
Accra, Ghana
Tel.: +233 21 7730/244282043
Mobile: +233 24 4282043
Fax: +233 21 512504
Email: kojoappiah@yahoo.co.uk / kappiah@ug.edu.gh

Guinea
Dr. Kerfalla Yansane
International Development Consultant for World Bank
Conakry, Guinea
Mobile: +224 64 26 73 08/224 60 25 74 10
Email: kerfallay@gmail.com / kerfallay@hotmail.com

Kenya
Mr. Kavengo Matundu
Programme Associate
UN Millennium Campaign
P.O. Box 14205
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel.: 254-20-4453440
Fax: 254-20 4453444
Email: kavengo.matundu@undp.org

Mauritius
Mr. Yan Hookoomsing
UN Coordination Analyst
UNDP Mauritius/Seychelles
Port Louis, Mauritius
Tel.: 230 212 3726
Fax: 230 208 4871
Email: Yan.hookoomsing@undp.org

Dr. Farida Oodally
UNAIDS Focal Point
UNDP Office
Port Louis, Mauritius
Tel.: 230 208 2416
Fax : 230 208 4871
Email : farida.oodally@undp.org

Nigeria
Prof. Ben Aigbokhan
University Lecturer
Department of Economics
Ambrose Alli University
Ekpoma, Nigeria
Tel.: 234 805 716
Email: baigbokhan@yahoo.com

Prof. S.O. Akande
Director General
Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research
(NISER)
Ibadan, Nigeria
Tel.: 234 805 774 0789
Fax: 234 2 8101194
E-mail: stunjiakande@yahoo.com

Saudi Arabia
Dr. Zafar Iqbal
Economist
Islamic Development Bank
P.O. Box 5925
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Tel. +966-2-646 7428
Fax: +966-2-646 7478
Email: ziqbal@isdb.org

South Africa
Mr. Richard Humphries
Senior Research Specialist
Human Sciences Research Council
Pretoria 0001, South Africa
Tel.: +27-12-302 2707
Fax: +27-12-302 2701
E-mail: rhumphries@hsrc.ac.za /
rhumphriesrg@gmail.com

Prof. Ishmael Kalule-Sabiti
Director
School of Research and Postgraduate Studies
Faculty of Human and Social Sciences
North West University
Mmabatho 2735, South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 18-389 2333
Fax: + 27(0)18-389 2228
Email: Ishmael.Kalulesabiti@nwu.ac.za

Mr. Udo Etukudo
Macroeconomic Specialist
UNDP Regional Service Centre for Eastern and
Southern Africa
Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: +27-11-603 5052
Fax: +27-11-603 5071
E-mail: udo.etukudo@undp.org

Tanzania
Mr. Servus Sagday
Director
Poverty Eradication Division
Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
P.O. Box 59242
Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania
Tel.: 255-22-2124109
Fax : 255-22-2124108
Email: sagdayss@yahoo.co.uk

USA
Prof. Yaw Nyarko
Professor
New York University
New York City, NY10012, USA
Tel.: 212-533-0202
Fax: 212-995-4186
Email: yaw.nyarko@nyu.edu

Zimbabwe
Dr. Roger B. Atindehou
Program Officer
The African Capacity Building Foundation
P.O. Box 1562
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel: (263-4) 702931/2
Fax: (263-4) 702915
Email: r.atindehou@acbf-pact.org

ECA Secretariat
Mr. Kasirim Nwuke
Chief, MDGs, Poverty Analysis & Monitoring Section
African Center for Gender & Social Development
(ACGS)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel.: 251-11) 5443375
Fax: (251-11) 5512785
Email: knwuke@uneca.org

Mr. Adrian Gauci
Economic Affairs Officer
MDGs, Poverty Analysis & Monitoring Section
African Center for Gender & Social Development
(ACGS)
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
(UNECA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel.: (251-11) 5443313
Fax: (251-11) 5512785
Email: agauci@uneca.org

Mr. Oumar Diallo
Economic Affairs Officer
MDGs, Poverty Analysis & Monitoring Section
African Center for Gender & Social Development
(ACGS)
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
(UNECA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel.: (251-11) 5443016
Fax: (251-11) 5512785
Email: dialloo@un.org

Azeb Moguesse
Staff Assistant
MDGs, Poverty Analysis & Monitoring Section
African Center for Gender & Social Development
(ACGS)
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
(UNECA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel.: (251-11) 5445271
Fax: (251-11) 5512785
Email: amoges@uneca.org

Appendix 3

Evaluation form for MPAMS Research Workshop

Title: Research expert workshop

Date: 19th -20th May 2008

Venue: Mauritius

1. Please rate the logistical arrangements by ECA for this research workshop :

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

2. Please rate the overall quality of Aide Memoire:

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

3. Please rate the overall quality of background papers:

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

4. Please rate the overall quality of presentations and discussions of learning group:

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

5. Which topics were most relevant for you? _____

6. Are the presentations, discussions for further research provided at this workshop useful for your ongoing work? Yes No

If yes, are these suitable for promoting peer learning and experience sharing among countries

7. We are also grateful for any other comments or suggestions for future improvements:
