

SATURDAY NATION

Kenya has to meet
UN growth targets

Eight years ago, leaders from 189 countries met in New York under the auspices of the United Nations, and agreed on ways to radically improve human life by 2015. The package that was to be known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), was seen as the world's best response to current and emerging challenges.

The targets were eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women as well as reducing child mortality. The others were improving maternal health, combating HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global development partnership.

Essentially, the targets which represent the growth challenges facing all nations, were not new, extraordinary or crafted from another planet. In rallying the nations to commit themselves to tackling the challenges, the UN sought to achieve a simple feat — making governments do what they are elected to do. It was a call to action — going beyond political rhetoric to deliver on development needs. For example, even before the UN summit, Kenya had been tackling the challenges. At independence in 1963, the new government committed itself to fighting poverty, ignorance and disease. The focus was later expanded and coded into national development plans. Simply put, Kenya, like other nations, has always pursued the MDGs agenda.

When Kenya and other nations signed the Millennium Declaration, the understanding was that they would put in place systems to achieve the targets. This week, however, Planning minister Wycliffe Oparanya spilled the beans when he declared that, except two, Kenya would not meet the goals, after all. And that was not surprising. What is baffling, however, is that he was quick to blame the development partners for, according to him, failing to give resources needed to drive the MDGs agenda.

Clearly, this is not the way to look at the matter. This begs for fundamental questions. For instance, why can't Kenya meet the goals? Does it have the right political, economic and social systems to address them? The country does not need donors to feed, educate or provide medical care for the people or fight poverty. The Government must find ways to meet the development challenges, because this is the contract it has with the citizens.

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