



Overseas Development
Institute

Formative
Review of
the Millennium
Villages Project:
Synthesis
Report



**Beyond the village: The transition from rural
investments to national plans to reach the MDGs
Sustaining and scaling up the Millennium Villages**

Kent Buse, Eva Ludi and Marcella Vigneri

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November 2008

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The authors (and not their institutions) alone are responsible for the findings and opinions expressed.

Cover photo: Schooling in Koraro Millennium Village, Ethiopia. May 2008 by Kent Buse, ODI.

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Acronyms

AEA	Agricultural Extension Agent (Ghana)	MVP	Millennium Villages Project
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	MWK	Malawi Kwacha (US\$ 1 = 144.46 MWK, 01.09.08)
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy	NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Service (Uganda)
AWARB	Amansie West Rural Bank (Ghana)	NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
CBO	Community Based Organisation	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
CD	Community Development	NHIS	National Health Insurance System (Ghana)
CHEW	Community Health Extension Worker	ODA	Official Development Assistance
CHW	Community Health Worker (Ethiopia, Uganda)	ODI	Overseas Development Institute
CNHDE	Centre for National Health Development for Ethiopia	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DFID	UK Department for International Development	OECD/DAC	OECD/Development Assistance Committee
ETB	Ethiopian Birr (1US\$ = 9.93 ETB, 01.09.08)	OPD	Out Patient Department
EC	European Commission	OSI	Open Society Institute
EU	European Union	PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (Ethiopia)
FBO	Farmer Based Organisations	PfA	Prosperity for All (Uganda)
FFS	Farmer Field Schools (Ghana)	PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	R&D	Research and Development
FSP	Fertiliser Subsidy Programme (Malawi)	SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation (Uganda)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
GHC	Ghana Cedi (US\$ 1 = 11,773 GHC, 01.09.08)	SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
GNI	Gross National Income	TB	Tuberculosis
HEW	Health Extension Worker (Ethiopia – government)	TBA	Trained Birth Attendant
HH	Households	t/ha	Tons per Hectare
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	UShs	Ugandan Shilling (US\$ 1 = 1,656 UShs, 01.09.08)
HSA	Health Surveillance Assistants (Malawi)	UN	United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization	UNDP	UN Development Programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund	UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
IRD	Integrated rural development	UNMP	UN Millennium Project
KII	Key Informant Interview	USAID	US Agency for International Development
LLIN	Long-lasting Insecticide-treated Bed-nets	UYAAS	Uganda Youth Anti-AIDS Association
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
MCI	Millennium Cities Initiative	VHW	Village Health Worker
MDG	Millennium Development Goal	WDR	World Development Report
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	WFP	World Food Programme
MSDP	Model Sub-county Development Programme (Uganda)	WHO	World Health Organization
MV	Millennium Village		

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Executive Summary

Key Messages

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) has achieved remarkable results and has demonstrated the impact of greater investment in evidence-based, low-cost interventions at the village level to make progress on the Millennium Development Goals.

The MVP points to, but cannot address given its limited budget, the many upstream investments, rural–urban linkages, infrastructure and institutions required to scale up village-level investments.

Countries need to situate MVP scale-up in the context of a national development strategy. Donors should give special support to at least one country, which, having successfully implemented the MVP, now wants to take it to national scale.

Scaling up rural investment depends on donors living up to their commitments. When plans are vertically linked and adequately embedded, donors should support them and the MVP to provide facilitation.

Many countries are not on track to meet a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the international community. This has serious consequences for the world's poor – many of whom reside in Africa. If Africa's rural poor are plagued by poverty traps, can a concerted effort enable them to break free and propel their communities towards growth, development and prosperity? The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) is an ambitious attempt to test this proposition. In 80 villages across Africa, the project is supporting pilots in which an integrated package of tried and tested interventions – including better seed and fertiliser, insecticide-treated bed-nets and school feeding programmes, among others – has been introduced to lift the inhabitants above the threshold of deep poverty and to set them on the road to development. The MVP aims to demonstrate that

meeting the MDGs is possible, across a range of disadvantaged remote rural communities, within the present aid commitments and well within the established timeframe. The experiment is important as it concentrates resources at the community level and prioritises these investments, at least initially, over complementary rural–urban linkages (such as infrastructure and market access) and institutional reform. Although it is early days, as the village project dates from 2006, it is not too early to ask if there is evidence that the approach is working and, more pertinently, whether the model is sustainable and scalable.

To answer these questions, the Open Society Institute (OSI) commissioned the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in January 2008 to undertake a formative review of the sustainability and scalability of the MVP. As a major financial supporter of the MVP, OSI sought to understand the opportunities, challenges and possible pathways to ensure the sustainability of MVP-supported interventions in the villages and the scaling up of similar investments across Africa.

The review was conducted in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, representing different regions and agro-ecological zones across the continent as well as some differences in project implementation. Agriculture and health were selected as representative of productive and social sectors, respectively, that would face distinct challenges and opportunities. Close interaction with the researchers responsible for the design and implementation of the project was maintained throughout the process to ensure credible and forward-looking recommendations. Qualitative insights gathered from fieldwork were complemented by reviews of secondary material.

The analysis has limitations, most notably in the selection of just four countries and two sectors. Generalisation beyond these contexts requires caution. Moreover, the review was carried out at an early stage of the MVP experiment and the full dynamics of the processes may not yet be clear. Despite the best efforts of the national research

teams, the findings rely on a limited number of stakeholders sharing their experiences and perceptions of the MVP. Data collection for the review was carried out only in MVP villages, not in control villages, and no systematic effort was made to assess impact, effectiveness and efficiency of individual interventions.

The Millennium Villages Project

The MVP, the brainchild of the Earth Institute headed by Jeffrey Sachs, endeavours to provide ‘proof of concept’ of the feasibility of achieving the MDGs through community-led development strategies. The demonstration project aims to achieve quick wins by implementing interventions recommended by the UN Millennium Project in a multi-layered, multi-sectoral and integrated manner. The MVP network spans a variety of technical, scientific and operational tasks across different levels. In each country, highly qualified project staff link the community with local and national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), intergovernmental organisations and development professionals. MDG advisors, based in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) office, provide a bridge between the MVP and national policy-makers. Two regional MDG Centres, in Nairobi, Kenya, and Bamako, Mali, provide scientific, technical and policy support to governments and other stakeholders. Finally, in New York, a team of scientists and managers from The Earth Institute and Millennium Promise, and UNDP coordinate the technical and operational aspects of the project.

A Millennium Village (MV) comprises a group of rural communities of approximately 5,000 people. Each country programme includes a cluster of adjacent communities with up to 11 villages. Launched on 1 June 2006 as a five-year project, as of early 2008, the MVP covered 80 villages across 14 sites in 10 countries in Africa, reaching a total population of around 500,000.

In a typical rural community, the programme invests an estimated average of \$110 per capita a year over a five-to-10-year period. An additional \$10 per villager per year is budgeted for management.

Of the \$120 per capita per year, \$60 will be MVP-financed. Local and national governments contribute \$30, partner organisations \$20 and villagers \$10. Of these funds, roughly 30% is invested in health, 20% in infrastructure, 20% in education, 15% in agriculture and nutrition and 15% in water, sanitation and environment.

The MVP sees the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to cash crops - accompanied by value-added activities - as central to achieving sustainability, with all that is needed to accompany this transformation, such as the development of agribusinesses and infrastructure and local institution building. By 2011, the MVP expects that national and local governments will provide more and better services to all rural communities, backed by progress on the promised doubling of official development assistance (ODA), to which donors committed themselves in 2005 in Gleneagles. The goal of the project in Years 1 to 5 (through 2011) is to achieve the non-income MDG outcomes, such as progress on health and education, while the focus in Years 6 to 10 will be on securing the cluster-based institutions necessary for long-term economic development. According to the MVP, if donors live up to their promises of increased aid, it should be possible to scale up the experiences of the MVP through six specific pathways.

Achievements of the MVP

Since its launch in 2006, the MVP has recorded remarkable achievements on the ground. Observers cannot fail to be impressed by the establishment, staffing and implementation of a complex demonstration project in largely remote and difficult villages by a dedicated and hard working team of national experts. There is considerable evidence of significant improvements at household and village levels in the health and agriculture sectors, as well as in a number of crosscutting domains. The interventions are valued highly by communities, and a number of low-cost interventions are being adopted and scaled up by districts. MVP interventions are closely aligned with the poverty reduction strategies of governments and facilitate the implementation of those strategies in contexts where governments are constrained from doing

so, although some differences in the strategies used to implement them exist.

Increased yields, thanks to the use of subsidised fertilisers and improved seeds, an intensified agricultural extension system and improvements in natural resource management are particularly visible and spectacular. A more diverse range of crops are grown, contributing to improvements in nutrition and income.

In health, impressive results have been achieved, partly through the intensive use and professionalisation of community health workers. Improved community-based prevention and treatment of common illnesses were found in all MVs, with a special emphasis on malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. The project supported upgrading and strengthening of clinics and referral services through in-service training, support for additional staff, improvements in physical infrastructure and provision of supplies.

There is early evidence of synergies. For example, increased yields enable communities to support school meals programmes, leading to increased enrolment and better nutrition. The MVP finds that the reduction of the malaria burden has increased the labour productivity of adults, for example at harvest time, and boosted school attendance.

The MVP invests in community development, mainly through on-the-job training and capacity building, and includes government staff in training activities. An array of capacity development and training activities are provided in both agriculture and health. Skills, knowledge and expertise represent benefits that are highly valued and will persist and which, if applied, will continue to make significant contributions towards achieving the MDGs.

A strong sense of ownership of interventions was found among individuals and households in the villages. Evidence of ownership was progressively less visible at the district, regional and national levels.

The model has been adapted in terms of sequencing, sectoral emphasis and policy innovation in

response to the preferences of different stakeholders, local circumstances and different administrative and political realities, while at the same time maintaining the principle of multi-sectoral and integrated investments.

MVP-type interventions in rural economies in Africa are patently and urgently needed to achieve the MDGs and the efforts of the MVP are to be highly commended – not least for enabling governments to implement stated policy and for piloting different strategies to enable them to do so more efficiently. As a testament to its early achievements, a number of governments have requested support to replicate such rural investments outside the present MVs. Moreover, additional countries have requested support to launch their own MVs.

The project leadership's continuous advocacy, urging rich countries to live up to the commitments they have made on aid, to finance such interventions more widely to attain the MDGs, and the project's global and national policy dialogue on the art of the possible in relation to difficult reforms, are also highly admirable. The continued and scaled-up success of interventions, as piloted by the MVP, depends on donors meeting their commitments, and it is only right that donors should do so.

Sustaining the Millennium Villages

Stakeholders have identified some interventions as sustainable. Examples include pot drip irrigation, planting patterns, community health action planning and outreach antenatal services. These are considered sustainable because they are low cost and do not require extra efforts by government extension agents. Not all of the interventions are quite so low cost or capable of being implemented with current public staffing. The financial resources available to the MVP are considerably higher than current district budgets. This allows the MVP to employ a staff of highly qualified sector coordinators and a large expert team.

Concerns raised by stakeholders about opportunity costs, such as the time spent participating in committee meetings, require attention. A number

of village residents complained that the modality of project input delivery has, in some cases, perpetuated or exacerbated social divisions and disharmony, for example in relation to control over assets, such as vehicles or grain mills, resulting from unequal power relations within the villages. Moreover, the perceived hurry to move from one project activity to the next has not allowed sufficient time to embed interventions and associated processes and to learn from the experiment.

The investments in MVs can be sustained if: (i) donors are willing to underwrite the \$60 once the MVP withdraws its funding, either directly or through national programmes; (ii) host governments are willing and able to support the project with more funds, and more and better qualified staff than apply in other villages; and (iii) the MVP is able to raise an additional \$10–20 per capita per year to pay for management beyond 2011.

Interventions owned by beneficiaries and other stakeholders are more likely to be sustained than those perceived as ‘external’. Ownership of project activities was found to be strong at the village level in all four countries, given the tangible benefits. However, there was little evidence in any of the countries that the successes, challenges and issues concerning the MVP are debated in national fora. An MDG advisory post was established in each country’s UNDP office to help address this problem, but this approach is not yet having the required traction.

Recommendations relating to sustainability

Long-term commitment. Long-term institutional change should not be used as a pretext to delay much-needed targeted investments in rural communities. Yet in a number of cases, a timeframe of longer than the five or 10 years will be necessary to: (i) deepen efforts made in institutional development and confront deep-rooted social norms, or adverse power or gender relations; (ii) build capacity beyond the village level; (iii) facilitate economic transformation; (iv) learn lessons from the MVP and adjust national policies and service-delivery mechanisms; and (v) mobilise the necessary aid.

Integration. Integration of MVP management – including planning, budgeting, executing, monitoring and evaluating – into government systems is one of the key ingredients of sustainability. Ensuring that achievements are lasting requires recognition that inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination are not simply technically, but also politically, challenging, requiring strong interest from the district leadership.

Strengthening village institutions, rules and procedures and linking them to government structures is part of the integration agenda. Project efforts to ensure that village institutions are representative, transparent and capable of equitably resolving conflicts and guarding against elite capture, both inevitable by-products of external investment, should be redoubled. While project-led, sector specific committees have proven useful in many instances, overall, less emphasis should go on such committees, which often have no official recognition and may not, therefore, be sustainable, doing little to promote local accountability as they are accountable only to the project.

Adaptation of the model. Flexibility in budget allocation between sectors to reflect local conditions and accommodate site-specific needs should be maintained as a guiding principle for the second phase. The balance between interventions and investments in the villages and those made at district or higher levels may need adjustment – although it will be important not to retreat on promises made to the communities. Investments in infrastructure seem to be spread too thinly and threaten to leave present village-level investments vulnerable once the MVP pulls out.

The MVP should explore minimum conditions for sustaining MVP investments. This might involve adaptation of interventions (e.g. different combinations of chemical and organic fertilisers) or service delivery (e.g. staffing quality and quantity), subsidy levels, minimising indirect costs to beneficiaries, etc. As part of the experimentation on developing ‘adapted MVs’ – assuming that not all of the necessary aid is available by 2015 – the MVP could develop a set of indicators that track progress in creating the conditions for sustainability.

Engage national governments. Governments should be encouraged to allocate resources in: (i) government personnel; and (ii) the required vertical linkages (e.g. roads, markets, electricity) to complement the village-level investments by the MVP, within a publicly justified framework that balances geographical equity considerations with the public interest of sustaining this policy experiment.

Scaling up MVP-type interventions

The MVP has elected to concentrate its efforts at the village level to demonstrate that the MDGs can be reached in rural communities in a short period of time. Testing the viability of a vertically integrated model to deliver sustainable development outcomes is outside the current financial and staffing envelope of the MVP. We recommend that the Open Society Institute, other private philanthropists, donors and the private sector consider funding to expand these complementary investments in a number of the present MVP countries over the medium term.

The project scale-up depends on ensuring the sustainability of interventions (e.g. bed nets) as well as best practices (e.g. home visits by community health workers) as discussed above. MVP interventions are generally well aligned with government policies and those that are cost-effective ought to be scaled up within national programmes. Scaling up support for rural investment entails increased funding, a supportive national policy framework and learning from the pilot villages. It requires a focus on additional factors external to the target villages and is predicated on more and better aid and the ability of governments to absorb it. The MVP expects progress on the committed doubling of aid to Africa between 2005 and 2010 but recognises that, given the recent trajectory of aid, this is uncertain.

Recommendations on project scale-up

Build upon the MVP model. The move from sustaining to scaling interventions should be undertaken in a sequenced manner. Interventions that need little adaptation to local conditions, with few

or minor reforms to institutions, should be scaled up first. Most prominent are those that have been replicated without additional funding – for example, pot drip irrigation and school feeding programmes once surplus yields are produced. A second set of interventions is the provision of competitive salaries for frontline government staff that motivate them to work in remote and difficult environments. It may, however, take time to convince and enable governments to support such reforms and deal with the ensuing political opposition – for example to higher salaries.

Include more outward oriented learning and policy engagement. Successful rural development programmes progress through three stages in moving from being pilots to being delivered at scale. The MVP is currently in stage one, that of learning to be effective. The project should experiment and identify which of the interventions are most responsive to beneficiaries' needs and contribute most to reaching the MDGs in different contexts. In stage two, that of learning to be efficient, which could start towards the end of the present phase (in 2011), the focus should be on simplifying and adapting the programme, and adjusting the manner in which interventions are delivered, to ensure that they are cost-effective in a particular context. Stage three, expansion, should focus on identifying ways to reduce operating procedures to those strictly necessary and to simplifying procedures so that they can be operated by the staff likely to be available in sufficient numbers at local and district levels. During all three stages, the learning process should involve identifying which of the second-order investments and institutions pose the most serious bottlenecks to successful implementation.

When moving to scale, an 'enhanced MVP' should also be concerned with managing the political consequences of financing and rolling out interventions that affect the lives of different stakeholders, both positively and negatively. A clearer understanding of the politics of who is likely to oppose project scale-up on the basis of their underlying interests would enable the project to craft political strategies to deal with possible opposition, as well as to encourage support.

Sustaining the achievements and taking them to scale beyond the present clusters require national champions who believe in the project's philosophy and the need for the institutional and structural reforms, and who are capable of taking the MVP agenda forward over the longer term, lobbying for funds for pro-poor sectors and rural areas. Champions should help to raise the project's visibility through any number of nationally appropriate means, not just discussions in development fora but also through advocacy campaigns. Public affairs and ongoing engagement with policy-makers at various levels should not wait until the full results of the proof of concept experiment are available, but should receive early attention.

As interventions are scaled up, much greater joint learning and integration into processes at regional and national levels will be required. This will entail more interaction with additional state and non-state partners, both domestic and international, such as agricultural input dealers, national agricultural research organisations and medical associations, to name a few. The MVP requires additional resources to establish and cultivate functional working relationships with these partners.

Move beyond the model. While recognising that the MVP's strategy includes some upstream elements, its scale-up will require moving beyond the focus on village interventions towards making upstream investments in the expansion of human resources, strengthening vertical rural–urban linkages and reforming and strengthening institutions.

The following complementary investments are important determinants of the sustainability of MVP interventions and their successful scale-up:

- Production, training and deployment of front-line staff at the intensity and skill level the project demonstrates is required;
- Infrastructure and institutions linking rural and urban areas (e.g. roads beyond the village level, communication and information, power generation and distribution, banking and insurance systems, training and research facilities ranging from vocational training institutes to universities, etc.); and

- Ongoing support for institutional reforms related to: (a) progress in effective participatory, equitable and decentralised planning, implementation and monitoring of multi-sector public programmes at the district and village levels; (b) improvement in the business environment to support the emergence of the vibrant private sector that is necessary to drive economic growth; (c) the development and strengthening of commodity, financial and labour markets; and (d) longer-term challenges, such as clarification of property rights to support pro-poor growth and provide the necessary security for small-scale farmers, or addressing inequality and adverse gender relations.

The MVP architects acknowledge that village-level investments are just one piece of the larger development puzzle and support auxiliary efforts and champion other development partners to invest more heavily in these areas.

Past experience with integrated multi-sectoral development, taken to scale, suggests that it is administratively demanding and requires close coordination across ministries, particularly at the district level, and carries high transaction costs. This will inevitably require the use of government systems which, even in the relatively well-governed countries selected by the MVP, require considerable capacity building and institutional reforms. Project deliverables are important, but so too are the processes through which those deliverables are generated. Such processes include planning and budgeting, financial management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Capacity in these areas is often thin at district level and expertise difficult to retain, something donors need to address.

When governments want to emulate the MVP by making increased investments in basic development interventions at the village level, donors should support them. Moreover, both governments and donors should consider how such investments can be sustained and scaled up. This will involve consideration of the adaptation of MVP interventions and the complementary investments. Deliberation on scaling up should take

place in wider policy debates, including Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) dialogues and linked to relevant pan-African initiatives. There is also a role for civil society to hold governments to account for progress on MDGs and to monitor the plans to take the project to scale. It would be useful to develop an analytical plan that sets out both direct investments at village level plus complementary investments in infrastructure, enhanced public sector capacity at district and field level and institutional reform. This would help to identify the obstacles, resources and policy reforms needed – in the context of MDG road-maps. The same plan, implemented through government mechanisms but with private sector participation, can help set targets and milestones to allow stakeholders – including civil society – to monitor progress.

In this context, an important role for the MVP in particular, alongside its support to the ongoing implementation and demonstration of the integrated package of investments in the current MVs, is in its continued engagement in national and global policy dialogues, to share the experience that it has gained through the village-level interventions to date and in advocating the merits not only of MVP-type investments, but also of complementary investments. It would be unrealistic to expect the MVP to engage at the level required within the context of its present budget and, therefore, further funding is merited.

Conclusions

The MVP has demonstrated the impact of greater investments in evidence-based, low-cost interventions at the village level on progress towards the MDGs. Efforts need to be made to sustain these commendable pilots as important national policy experiments and to adapt them as required. The MVP points to, but cannot address under its funding limitations, the many complementary upstream investments required to sustain and scale up village-level interventions. We advocate that, in those sites where governments have expressed their intention to introduce or scale up MVP-type investments, development partners should support them with additional finance. Such efforts should be located within

national development strategies, such as poverty reduction strategy (PRS) processes and national development plans and, indeed, should be key components of them. While we are not advocating more talk and less action, we think that these plans need to be developed, implemented and monitored on the basis of an ongoing dialogue and analysis, involving a watchful civil society, in the wider political and institutional environment. There is much that can be learned from piloting a more vertically integrated model in keeping with the ambitions of the planners of the MVP to support communities to achieve the MDGs.

Summary recommendations

For the MVP:

- Invest time in communicating more at national level. Look for local champions who can take the idea forward as a personal commitment;
- Engage in national policy dialogue and planning that will help adapt and embed science-based, low-cost rural interventions as a key part of national MDG and poverty reduction strategies; and
- Provide, at least in some pilot countries, support to help governments and development partners plan for scaling up.

For governments:

- Learn from the MVP. Governments should be ambitious and plan to scale up the things that work in their countries – with a special focus on the vertical linkages and institutional reforms required to sustain rural investments; and
- Request development partners to supply the additional funds required to scale up MVP-type rural investments.

For donors:

- Engage with, and support, governments that want to introduce or scale up MVP-type rural investments. Mali's plan to expand the programme to 166 communes makes it a promising candidate for donor action;
- In scaling up the village-based interventions, place specific emphasis on the vertical linkages and institutional reforms that are required to support village-level investments;

- Support governments that want to join or emulate the MVP by providing financing and by engaging in PRSP policy dialogue to identify necessary complementary investments to be embedded in national strategies and linked to relevant pan-African initiatives;
- Live up to overall aid commitments, on which the recipient countries must rely to achieve the MDGs;
- Recognise that, while all innovations imply risks, the risks of not acting – in terms of the continuing costs of poverty to individuals and nations – are unacceptable in the 21st century.