



Commentary

The millennium village project and African development: problems and potentials

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Abstract: The Millennium Village Project (MVP) has come to embody hope for a new development path that might succeed where previous efforts have failed. A closer consideration of this project, however, suggests that this hope might be misplaced. Because of a general dearth of critical thought in key areas of project conceptualization, the MVP risks reproducing the problems of previous top-down, expert-driven development efforts. This article examines the conceptual issues raised by this absence of critical thought, and the reasons why project supporters have generally overlooked these issues. It then presents a critical grassroots framework which, if incorporated into existing MVP practices, might allow for the creation of a realistic, sustainable development path in Africa.

Keywords: millennium village project, development, critical grassroots approach, Africa.

I Introduction

The Millennium Village Project (MVP) is an effort of the UN Millennium Project to develop village-level means of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Described as ‘an integrated community-level development strategy to end extreme rural poverty’ (Millennium Promise n.d.: 2), which ‘is a “bottom up” approach to lifting developing country villages out of the poverty trap that afflicts more than a billion people worldwide’ (Millennium Villages Project n.d.), the MVP aims to bring together the best parts of

development thinking on local knowledge and sustainability to create a new approach to poverty alleviation. The MVP has been well-publicized, backed by the writing of Jeffrey Sachs (for example, Sachs 2005; Sachs and McArthur 2005; Sachs *et al.* 2004), endorsed by celebrities such as Bono, and funded by the likes of George Soros. It has, for some, come to embody hope for a new development path that might succeed where previous efforts have failed.

A closer consideration of the MVP, however, suggests that this hope might be misplaced.

Descriptions of the MVP as a 'bottom-up' approach are questionable, given the project's reliance on pre-conceived definitions of problems and pre-packaged solutions to address poverty at the village level. These pre-conceptions present serious challenges to understanding the actual problems faced by the people living in these villages. The project's claim to an integrated strategy for poverty alleviation belies what have, thus far, been in practice sectoral interventions. Finally, the 'fundability' and sustainability of this project have been overestimated.

Though problematic, the MVP reopens a long-standing conversation about what a truly 'bottom-up' development might look like. A shift in the emphasis of the MVP from a focus on known packages of interventions to a critical grassroots approach that not only identifies local definitions of and solutions for problems, but also critically evaluates the social and material impacts of those definitions and solutions to maximize human well-being, would create a project that is truly bottom-up, cross-sectoral, affordable and effective.

II Millennium village project: background

The MVP emerged from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a UN-led initiative to address extreme poverty by identifying key problems and laying out clear (quantifiable) goals and timetables for addressing them. In 2002 the UN evaluated progress towards the MDGs, and found that many of the poorest areas on Earth were not likely to achieve these goals by the 2015 target date. In response to this finding, Secretary-General Kofi Annan initiated a three-year advisory effort called the UN Millennium Project to find practical means of achieving the MDGs on schedule in all countries. Developed by the UN Millennium Project and the Earth Institute at Columbia University, the MVP is an initiative aimed at understanding how to best achieve the MDGs in practical ways at the village level.

The MVP has three main goals. First, it seeks to provide 'rigorous proof of concept for integrated, community-based, low-cost interventions' (Millennium Villages Project n.d.) that will serve as practical means to achieving the MDGs in rural Africa. Second, the project tries to identify means of scaling-up these interventions to support regional and national development strategies focused on the MDGs. Finally, the project seeks to expand its efforts over 10 years to examine further sites in Africa and other parts of the Global South.

The project takes as its starting point the MDGs in the framing of all local projects. For example, the Millennium Villages Project website (Millennium Villages Project n.d.) contains the following description of community participation:

An open dialogue [between MDG-trained teams and groups or committees of villagers] will cover topics such as local problems as related to the MDGs, constraints and opportunities for achieving the MDGs at their village level, initial discussions on possible solutions and approaches for achieving the MDGs, and general impressions/consensus on being included as a Millennium Villages Project site.

In this way, villagers are encouraged to frame their concerns in terms of the MDGs, which allows for the framing of cross-village understandings of the efficacy of particular interventions in achieving a shared set of goals, and potentially serves as a means of making village-level concerns intelligible to the national-level policy makers who use the MDGs as a framework for development policy.

The first of the Millennium Village projects was identified in Suari, Kenya, in 2004. Since then, Type I Millennium Villages have been identified in 11 new communities throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Type I villages, in which interventions and outcomes are closely monitored to establish proof-of-concept for the project, were selected on the basis of four criteria (Millennium Villages Project n.d.). First,

the prospective village should be located in a 'hunger hotspot', which is characterized by 'a high prevalence of hunger, which indicates deep poverty and is usually accompanied by poor health, water, sanitation and a degrading natural environment'. Second, prospective villages should be located in 'countries that are reasonably well-governed, at peace and have governments seriously committed to achieving the MDGs'. Third, these villages should be located in communities where the residents have 'successful on-going activities, well-established relationships and mutual trust' with development organizations, including NGOs and UN organizations. Finally, each village should 'represent a key agro-ecological zone that is representative of rural sub-Saharan Africa'.

Though still in the early stages of implementation, these initial 12 Type 1 villages have given rise to more than 63 Type 2 villages (Millennium Promise Website n.d.). Type 2 villages lie adjacent to Type 1 villages, and are used to scale up the findings of the Type 1 villages and identify new challenges at the district scale. The MVP also plans to implement Type 3 villages, which will be located outside the hunger hotspots containing Type 1 and Type 2 villages.

It is difficult to empirically evaluate the success of these projects, as data from the Type 1 villages are just now becoming available (there is no data available to the public for the Type 2 villages, and it is unclear if any Type 3 villages have yet been established). The 2005 Annual Report on Sauri is the most complete data source for any community available to the public at the time of writing. This report, which lists efforts to establish baseline data for long-term study and to identify key infrastructure and educational needs, is limited in its discussions of outcomes by the short duration of the project. It will therefore be some time before there is enough evidence to empirically assess the efficacy of the MVP in any of these sites, even in addressing immediate local needs.

III Conceptual challenges facing the MVP

While we cannot yet evaluate the MVP empirically, a careful reading of the project literature suggests that there are four conceptual challenges that the project needs to address if it is, in the long run, to achieve its goal of sustainable poverty eradication in the MVP villages: (i) accounting for the impact of pre-conceived frameworks and understandings on the identification of local problems and solutions; (ii) addressing the diversity of people and problems at the village scale; (iii) dealing with local problems and solutions as the products of inextricably linked sectoral issues; and (iv) ensuring the sustainability of project interventions.

The MVP does not represent the inductive approach to the problems of a particular place as it might seem, since it begins from preconceived notions both of what constitutes problems to be dealt with in a place and how to deal with those problems. Sachs and McArthur (2005: 347) state clearly that the MVP is built upon the 'core truth' that there are 'known packages of effective and generally low-cost interventions' that can and should be applied to the challenges of extreme poverty. Cabral *et al.* (2006) make a similar observation, noting that the MVP is a pilot project that seeks to 'provide successful evidence of how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)'. The focus on 'successful evidence' for the efficacy of these known packages of interventions, when considered alongside the heavy focus on the MDGs described above, suggests that the project has an interest in validating the problems identified in the MDGs and the interventions of the MVP, as well as in developing interventions in concert with the villagers. In the most dramatic cases, this dual focus of the project may result in a conflict of interest on the part of project workers when local concerns do not align with either the MDGs or preconceived interventions. In such situations, it is not possible to support both the MDGs and interventions of the MVP, and the

locally-identified problems. It is unclear how such conflicts will be resolved.

This issue is not just manifest in moments where the project frameworks and local ideas come into overt conflict. According to the MVP website (Millennium Villages Project n.d.), 'The list of candidate interventions derived from the U.N. Millennium Project serves as a template from which the villages can begin their assessment and project planning. The project team will encourage inclusion of other actions identified by the villagers.' When beginning with such a template, the project risks constraining the discussion of problems and solutions in a manner that may well preclude the discussion of the other problems and actions identified by villagers, as the conversation may not allow for such identification. This is not to suggest that those working on the MVP wish to restrict local responses, but that such a constraint may be an unintentional by-product of this approach.

The MVP faces another challenge to its identification of problems and solutions at the village scale in that its treatment of the local classification of problems and the local capacity for addressing problems runs contrary to much of the existing literature on rural development. Consider the following description of needs assessment and community engagement from the Millennium Village Project website (Millennium Villages Project n.d.), a description representative of the limited literature on this project.

Members of the Millennium Villages Project team will visit selected villages and conduct one to two needs assessments with the villagers. During this visit, the project team will discuss the MDGs with the villagers and will work with them to identify specific problems in the village, reasons for these problems, and attempts by the government, village or other groups or individuals to address these problems.

Here, villagers are referred to as an undifferentiated group whose concerns can be captured as a whole. This treatment runs

contrary to the vast literatures on development, especially gender and development (for example, Barrientos *et al.* 2005; Barry and Yoder 2002; Bassett 2002; Bhuyan and Tripathy 1988; Boserup 1970; Bryceson 1995; Carney 1996; Carr 2005; Chikwendu and Arokoyo 1997; Creevey 1986; Dixon 1982; Egharevba and Iweze 2004; Feldman and Welsh 1995; Ferguson 1994; Gairola and Todaria 1997; Goebel 2002; Goheen 1988; Grier 1992; Harrison 2001; Harriss-White 1998; Jackson 1993, 1998; Jha 2004; Leach and Fairhead 1995; Mama 2005; Mbata and Amadi 1993; Moser 1993; Peters 1995; Riley and Krogman 1993; Rocheleau *et al.* 1996), which argue that we cannot simply lump the residents of developing areas together, regardless of their social status or role, and hope to understand their behaviours in a meaningful way. The lessons of this literature suggest that unless the MVP thinks through the heterogeneity of village society and implements some means of identifying and bringing forth various voices in a given village, it is likely that the project will identify and focus only on the problems of the powerful, at the expense of the economically and socially marginal members of the village. The needs and desires of the powerful may have little to do with the welfare of the larger population, and therefore interventions that do not critically consider this issue could result in damage, for example, to the resilience of livelihoods crucial for the management of a particular local problem by marginal groups in these populations. Such interventions would create more problems for these groups, and perhaps for the larger population, than they solve.

Even if the MVP succeeds in identifying local problems and their solutions, its 'known packages of effective interventions' may not capture the complex linkages between sectoral issues that result in the local challenges identified as problems by villagers. While the MVP presents the various issues that development is meant to address as interlinked (for example, recognizing that birth rates, fertility, education

and income are in many ways interdependent), proposed interventions are currently conceived in a sectoral manner that fails to capture these interlinkages, and therefore cannot identify and manage the tradeoffs and synergies that will inevitably accompany MVP interventions. For example, while the MVP insists that it employs an 'integrated package of interventions' (Millennium Villages Project n.d.) to address issues of poverty at the village scale, the 2005 MVP Annual Report (Millennium Villages Project 2005) detailing the work in Sauri, Kenya, lists interventions under such headings as Agriculture, Health, Energy, Water, Schools, and Information and Communication Technology, with no discussion of how activities in one sector affect those in the others. There is no evidence in this report, the only one available to the public at the time of writing, of a consideration of the challenges and opportunities cross-sectoral linkages might present.

Finally, the MVP vision includes itemizing the cost of the various inputs needed to manage local problems, and then getting aid to pay for these inputs, at least at the outset. A number of studies have criticized the idea that larger amounts of aid are an effective means of addressing poverty issues in developing countries. Such studies focus, for example, on whether or not these countries have the capacity to absorb more aid and use it productively (most recently in Clemens *et al.* 2004; Clemens and Radelet 2003; de Renzio 2005), or whether development projects, due to their high administrative costs, are less efficient at meeting development and poverty alleviation goals than if money was simply given directly to the poor (for example, Hanlon 2004). These critiques of aid-led development aside, it is not realistic to assume that development spending will increase to the point that it will become a tenable anchor for development throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Even less realistic is the belief that the villages in this region will somehow be able to afford the inputs tied to most MVP interventions on

their own in a short period of time. Livelihoods, environmental quality, and ultimately human well-being in the Millennium Villages is therefore likely to rely on a constant flow of aid money in the foreseeable future. Such a situation is not sustainable development, and insofar as it promotes aid dependency, it works against the dignity of those trying to manage difficult circumstances.

IV Sources of support for the MVP

The above issues with the MVP are evident to many who work on questions of poverty, development and environment in Sub-Saharan Africa. One must ask, then, what has allowed this project to gain funding and support. While it is to some extent a product of the personalities associated with it (for example Jeffrey Sachs and Bono), the popularity of the MVP stems from two key sources: theoretical eclecticism, and the ways in which the MVP fits into the existing thinking on development.

The MVP literature makes no explicit theoretical statements about development. This does not, however, suggest that the MVP operates without theory. Instead, we must infer the theoretical influences behind this project through a careful reading of the existing MVP literature. Other authors in the development community have already employed this method in their efforts to evaluate the MVP. Some (Cabral *et al.* 2006; Easterly 2005) have noted that the MVP closely resembles the 'big push' development paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s. Others (Broad and Cavanaugh 2006: 21) have called the thinking behind the project a move 'backward to the era that began with the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl', an era of 'privatization, deregulation, and fewer barriers to trade and financial flows'.

Though recognizing very different theoretical antecedents for the project, these two perspectives do not capture the diversity of theoretical influences, ranging from modernization theory to dependency theory, that reverberate in the foundations of the MVP.

For example, a common theme in MVP documentation is the role of poor governance, often in the form of well-intentioned governments that 'lack the human resources management systems and infrastructure needed to run an efficient public administration' (Sachs and McArthur 2005: 349), in the failure of regions to meet the Millennium Development Goals. This focus, insofar as it does not consider the ways in which existing processes do function and places a priori weight on Western modes of administration and governance, echoes earlier, often ethnocentric, tenets of modernization theory, such as the need to convince societies to embrace new, Western forms of administration on their path to 'development'.¹ Thus, the MVP, in the absence of overt theoretical considerations, plucks 'useful' aspects of theory from their contexts, and amalgamates them into a single, hybrid approach to development that contains points of access and purchase for academics and policy makers of all theoretical persuasions: in other words, the MVP has something for everyone.

Theoretical eclecticism is not to be criticized in and of itself. However, a productive eclecticism must carefully consider the different theories being amalgamated, and the ways in which the resulting theoretical product maintains or loses coherence through this amalgamation. MVP-related publications show no evidence of such consideration, which is unsurprising, given the absence of overt theoretical discussion in this literature. What results from this absence is an inability to identify the ways in which the various aspects of development theory pulled together through the MVP are often incompatible. For example, as Cabral *et al.* (2006) have observed, 'big push' theories of development that see a coordinated injection of capital across all sectors of an economy as a productive means of driving economic 'take off' and development (for example, Rostow 1959) run contrary to the claims of modernization theorists like Lewis (1954), who saw unbalanced growth in

different sectors of the economy as a key to stimulating the overall economy. Therefore, similar-sounding concerns, such as for the need to alter governance to foster development, may come from approaches that rely on means of economic development that are in opposition to one another. As a result, the MVP tactic of appropriating ideas from previous theories to build a new approach to development, thereby giving everyone something to grab on to, results in an approach that lacks internal coherence, and that cannot reflect upon or address the problems encountered by the theories from which these ideas were taken.

Theoretical eclecticism is not the only attraction of the MVP. Most policy makers do not spend their time picking apart the theoretical antecedents of new theories. However, policy makers are sure to recognize how the MVP fits into existing ways of thinking about development and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. Perhaps the most visible policy mechanism for addressing poverty in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Like the MVP, PRSPs tend to deal with development issues sectorally, without addressing either the tradeoffs or the synergies between different sectors – this is particularly true in the context of sustainable development planning. PRSPs also tend to conceive of solutions to sectoral problems without reference to local conditions. For example, lagging agricultural production is often addressed through the introduction of more inputs, which on its surface might seem like the 'common sense' application of 'tested and true methods'. Such a set of solutions and rhetoric is nearly identical to that seen in the MVP. Finally, PRSPs, like the MVP, do not consider the social context and processes through which problems are identified and solutions shaped at the national or local level. Yet, national politics may influence the identification of a particular harvest as 'insufficient' or 'sufficient', a label that shapes how people view that harvest and the needs of those who are dependent on it for their

livelihoods. In short, the MVP and the PSRPs are mutually reinforcing – there is no challenge to the development status quo in the MVP, except perhaps in the form of a call for more money to fund the ‘big push’ (Cabral *et al.* 2006) needed to ‘kick-start’ development in these villages.

V Recovering the MVP: a critical grassroots approach

The theoretical eclecticism of the MVP, and its convergence with mainstream, if controversial, development tools like PSRPs, masks some of the important unresolved issues that will ultimately determine its success or failure. Simply put, the MVP’s issues with addressing the diversity of people and problems at the village scale, and accounting for the influence of existing project frameworks on the identification of problems and solutions in project villages, are symptomatic of a general dearth of critical thought in the conceptualization of the project. As a result, the project over-valorizes and over-generalizes those living in the project villages, and fails to consider the impact of its pre-existing frameworks on the outcomes of efforts to identify problems and solutions in the villages. Resolving these issues does not require a complete rethinking of the MVP, or the abandonment of the project. To address these problems, I suggest that village-level development research exemplified by the MVP adopt what I call a critical grassroots approach to development. I argue that such an approach, outlined below, resolves these two issues directly, and indirectly provides a means of addressing the interlinked character of problems and solutions, and the long-term financial sustainability of the project.

A critical grassroots approach to village development considers the villager-led identification of problems and their solutions central to the success of the development project. However, unlike the MVP in its current incarnation, a critical grassroots approach does not begin from an acceptance of these solutions

as valuable and in need of augmentation, nor does it arrive at a particular village equipped with proven interventions. Instead, this approach interrogates who gains and loses from the existing definitions of and solutions to problems, who identifies these problems and solutions, and how these solutions become legitimate in a particular village when their benefits are not evenly distributed across the community.

The need to ask who gains and loses under existing solutions is widely held in development literature, especially the gender and development literature cited above. Identifying winners and losers prevents us from uncritically valorizing local definitions of either problems or their solutions, as we are forced to consider how those definitions and solutions work better for some members of the community than they do for others. Further, if we extend these considerations of who defines and who benefits beyond the villagers to include those designing and implementing the project, we have the opportunity to evaluate the political contexts of these projects, and how a project might either ‘win’ (by obtaining new funding that perpetuates the project, for example) even as it fails to address the needs of those in the village, or ‘lose’ (by alienating its financial supporters) by meeting the needs of villagers but ignoring the mandates of the funding sources. Thus, an attention to winners and losers not only focuses attention on inequality at the village level, but also serves to inject a critical moment into project design that might allow village-level project designers to think about the ways their frameworks and questions shape the outcomes of efforts to identify problems and solutions in project villages.

This first step illustrated above describes the inequality that results from particular definitions and strategies, and the material outcomes of that inequality. To present a hypothetical example, in a village negotiating changes in the local environment brought

on by regional climate change, we might find that households divide agricultural production roles by gender, where men raise crops for market sale, while women farm for household subsistence (a very common division of roles in sub-Saharan Africa). Thus, in times of plenty men can sell their crops for cash income, since the household relies on women's production for food. In times of shortage, the household can eat whatever production the woman can provide while selling the man's crops at a premium, and using that income to augment their subsistence food supply. A rapid assessment of this strategy would likely find that, on an annual basis, this division of livelihoods roles results in a household that can survive difficult years, and can improve its security and material standing in plentiful years. A careful exploration of this household strategy that looks for winners and losers within the household (for arguments against treating the household as an a priori unitary unit, see Akinyele 1997; Ali and Pitkin 1991; Aryeetey 2004; Barrett *et al.* 2001; Carr 2005; Chant 2005; Doss 1996; Egyir 1998; Ellis 1998; Fapohunda 1988; García 2001; Geisler 1993; Guyer 1986; Haddad and Kanbur 1990; Haddad *et al.* 1997; Haller 2000; Kanbur and Haddad 1994; Luckert *et al.* 2000; Maxwell and Frankenberger 1992; Phillips and Taylor 1998; Thomas 1990; Udry 1996), however, would tell a different story. Such an analysis might reveal that women's income, and therefore household bargaining power, is negatively impacted by their role in this household strategy to manage climate variability (as their production does not generate much surplus value in plentiful years, and drops dramatically in difficult years), while men's household bargaining power is much stronger, even in difficult years. In plentiful years, men earn most of the household's cash income. In a lean year, the shortages in agricultural production created by climate variability tend to push market prices for crops higher, allowing men to recoup some of the

income they would otherwise have lost through decreased farm output. Such inequality in household bargaining not only works against gender equity (one of the MDGs), but has also been demonstrated in some contexts to be linked to material issues such as negative child health outcomes (for example, Haddad and Hoddinott 1994; Kennedy and Peters 1992).

The description above allows us to see how a strategy that provides a solution for a particular local problem (the impact of climate variability on livelihoods) results in unequal incomes and household bargaining positions within the household, and may have negative repercussions in other areas, such as health. However, this description does not tell us how definitions, solutions, inequality and outcomes become linked in a systematic way, and therefore we cannot use this descriptive evaluation to explore the potential impact of new interventions and avoid the reproduction of such inequality and its associated negative outcomes.

A critical grassroots approach to development adds value to this first step by considering how the definitions and solutions that come to the fore in village development projects are validated and reproduced by both project staff and villagers alike, even as the benefits and drawbacks of these definitions and solutions are distributed unevenly across the population. To return to our hypothetical example, it is not enough to describe the gendered outcomes of this livelihoods strategy. Instead, we must ask why women's production is constrained to subsistence production as part of the solution for the impact of climate variability on livelihoods. To do this, we must find out if women choose this subsistence role for themselves, or have this role defined for them by men. If women choose this role, we must explore why they would take on a role that potentially increases the uncertainty of their personal livelihoods, and therefore reduces their household bargaining power. If, on the

other hand, men define women's roles within this livelihoods strategy, we must understand how they come to have the ability to do so (for example, through the control of household land tenure), and whether or not women accept this role and/or men's rights to define their role. In both cases, since men come out the winners under this strategy, we would have to interrogate how the intersection of historical gender roles with increasing climatic variability produces new gender roles in a manner that legitimizes and rationalizes this livelihoods strategy and its outcomes.

Understanding current processes of identifying problems and solutions, and the legitimization of both these identifications and their unequal material outcomes, allows us to develop critical understandings of local capacity, which enable the evaluation of the variable impacts of particular interventions across a particular village population to assess their efficacy *before* they are implemented. For instance, in the case of the hypothetical example above, we might consider the MVP intervention of augmenting local agricultural knowledge with 'technical expertise and required inputs to diversify parts of farmland to higher value products after food security is achieved' (Millennium Promise Website n.d.) to improve local livelihoods and standards of living. An understanding not only of men as those who already focus on high-value crops, but also of how this gender role is seen as legitimate even as it excludes women from an important source of income in the current context, would allow us to make a preliminary evaluation of the likelihood such an intervention has of reaching women's production and thereby improving gender equity (MDG 3) and health outcomes (MDGs 4, 5 and 6), or whether the intervention simply contributes to and enhances existing inequalities between men and women, and their negative consequences for human well-being.

VI Interventions and financial sustainability under a critical grassroots approach

A critical grassroots approach, while injecting a needed critical perspective into the MVP, would also serve to address the failure of the project to capture the ways in which local definitions of problems and solutions inextricably link different sectoral issues and reduce even further the costs associated with the project, making its financial stability more likely. First, the critical grassroots focus on the local definition and legitimization of problems and solutions, and allows us to see how sectoral issues come together to form 'problems' (and the means of addressing them) for different groups. In the example above, issues of water, markets and gender are all linked in both the definition of the challenge to be addressed by existing livelihoods strategies, and in the strategies that 'solve' this problem. Addressing any one of these issues with a sectoral intervention cannot resolve the material needs of the villagers in a socially just manner.

Second, the critical grassroots approach outlined above addresses issues of project cost in two ways. At one level, a critical grassroots research project is relatively inexpensive to conduct. A single researcher with a strong background in anthropology, geography or sociology can obtain the core data on social relations over a period of several months of intensive fieldwork. Beginning with this social research ensures that later efforts to obtain biophysical and economic data are focused on relevant local problems, minimizing expenditures on issues peripheral to the problems of a particular place. At another level, the solutions that are currently in place in villages are already constrained by existing resources, so building on (as opposed to completely transforming) those solutions deemed critically appropriate will not require large infusions of capital. Indeed, some solutions may require no additional capital at all.

Thus, by using a critical grassroots approach to inject critical thought into MVP efforts to identify existing solutions to locally defined problems, we might create projects that enhance local livelihoods without subjecting villagers to a dependency on often capricious foreign aid flows that strips the poor of their dignity.

VII Conclusion

The MVP must resolve a number of issues if it is to proceed with confidence in its project design. This article has identified the issues most central to the long-term success or failure of the MVP, and suggested a means of resolving many of these issues through a critical grassroots approach to village development. This approach does not require a complete reworking of the MVP, much less an abandonment of the project. Instead, it suggests a new layer of questioning which, if included in existing MVP efforts, might enhance the likelihood of success across the various village projects under the MVP umbrella. In short, by adopting a critical grassroots approach to village development, we might recover the useful ideas within the MVP and create a realistic, sustainable development path in Africa.

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Note

1. It should be noted that Easterly (2005) presents evidence that supports the idea that existing forms of governance in some countries may indeed be a central cause of the growing gap between richer and poorer countries. This evidence does not, however, absolve the MVP from a responsibility to critically consider the ways in which existing forms of governance function in (as well as hold back) a given society.

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