Nigeria is making real progress. Whilst no Goal is certain to be achieved, there is good news on each. If the supportive environment continues to improve, as it has over the last ten years, the nation has a real chance of achieving the MDGs.

For every MDG there is a positive story to be told. Although there are extreme variations from state to state, indicators for primary school enrolment, the proportion of underweight children, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and debt sustainability show impressive improvements. Progress on improving access to safe water, primary completion rates, empowering women and ensuring births are attended by skilled health workers has been much slower.

Nigeria fully integrates the MDGs into national development strategies and leads Africa in introducing innovative initiatives to reduce poverty and improve public services. Pioneering schemes include the virtual poverty fund that tags and tracks funds allocated to poverty reduction from debt relief, compulsory free basic education, conditional cash transfers to the vulnerable for social protection, and federal grants to support investment by state and local governments.

But more is required. More in terms of innovative governance reforms, more financing, and more coordination.

**Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

Recent economic growth, particularly in agriculture, has markedly reduced the proportion of underweight children, from 35.7 per cent in 1990 to 23.1 per cent in 2008.

However, growth has not generated enough jobs and the effect on poverty is not yet clear (the most recent data is from 2004). Growth needs to be more equitable and broad-based.

**Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education**

In a major step forward, nearly nine out of ten children, 88.8 per cent, are now enrolled in school. Nevertheless, regional differences are stark. Primary completion rates in states range from 2 per cent to 99 per cent.

Low completion rates reflect poor learning environments and point to the urgent need to raise teaching standards. The rapid improvement in youth literacy, from 64.1 per cent to 80 per cent between 2000 and 2008, appears to have reached a plateau.

**Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women**

A gradual improvement in the proportion of girls enrolled in primary school, though noteworthy, is not yet enough to meet the target. There are signs of backsliding in tertiary education.

Although few women currently hold political office, the new policy framework is encouraging.

Regional variations in the determinants of gender inequality mean that state and local government efforts will be critical to the achievement of this goal.

**Goal 4 Reduce child mortality**

Progress in reducing child mortality has been rapid. With sustained effort and progress in other sectors, such as water and sanitation, there is a strong possibility of achieving Goal 4 by 2015.
Under-five mortality has fallen by nearly a fifth in five years, from 201 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003, to 157 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008.

In the same period, the infant mortality rate fell even faster, from 100 to 75 deaths per 1,000 live births.

**Goal 5 Improve maternal health**

Recent progress towards this Goal is promising. If maintained at the same rate, Nigeria will reach the target by 2015 and turn progress on this Goal into a success story.

Maternal mortality fell by 32 per cent, from 800 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003 (at the time one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world) to 545 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2008.

An innovative Midwives Service Scheme aims to raise the proportion of births attended by skilled health workers. This will further accelerate progress.

**Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

Nigeria has had striking success in almost eradicating polio, reducing the number of cases by 98 per cent between 2009 and 2010.

Another marked success was the fall in the prevalence of HIV from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2008. Awareness and use of contraceptives also improved and access to treatment for HIV/AIDS rapidly doubled from 16.7 per cent in 2007 to 34.4 per cent in 2008.

Nationwide distribution of 72 million long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets, although only in its initial stages, protected twice as many children (10.9%) in 2009, compared to 2008 (5.5%).

**Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability**

Nigerian natural resources are some of its most valuable assets but are still seriously threatened. For example, between 2000 and 2010 the area of forest shrank by a third, from 14.4 per cent to 9.9 per cent of the land area.

Safe water and sanitation became less accessible between 2003 and 2005, but the situation has since improved due to more effective investments. The proportion of the population accessing safe water is now 58.9 per cent and the proportion accessing improved sanitation, 51.6 per cent.

**Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development**

Debt relief negotiated by Nigeria in 2005 greatly improved the macroeconomic environment. Debt servicing fell from 15.2 per cent of exports in 2005 to 0.5 per cent in 2008. Development assistance too has grown, although it is still low on a per capita basis.

Trade agreements unfortunately are still not equitable and constrain exports and economic growth.

The rapid spread of technology has yet to bridge the digital divide: 41.6 per cent of the population own a mobile phone and only 15.8 per cent access the internet.