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### *Narratives of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa and performance disparity: Institutional incentives and local political behaviour*

Over the past decade, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have dominated the centre-stage of the development discourse at national and international platforms and influenced national policy debates and planning in many parts of the global South. As the life-span of this global blue-print for development expires in 2015, empirical evidence shows that though substantial progress has been made in all regions, what has been grossly missed has been the disparity and the variability of progress made across goals, countries and importantly regions. While some regions are deemed closer to meeting their targets, the Sub-Saharan African region is widely seen as experiencing deficits in many of the goals despite the region's overall positive performance. Though assumptions surrounding Africa's deficit performance in the MDGs have been quite varied, popular narratives explaining this seeming outcome have largely singled out the role of initial conditions of the Sub-Saharan African region as being the region with the most difficult starting point. While this assertion may to some extent explain the African region's deficit performance in the MDGs, as compared to other regions of the global South, it nonetheless fail to fully account for similar existing disparities situated within country performances in the sub-region itself, especially when one takes into account that some of the countries (e.g. Rwanda) with the most challenging initial conditions on the continent are the ones being cited among the region's high performers in many of the MDGs. This study therefore seeks to fill this literature gap by exploring the role local dynamics (political, institutional, structural incentives) play in driving these incongruous outcomes. Critical questions relating to - why have some countries been more successful in the attainment of their goals and other not? What incentive structures drive success and failure? - will be key in this process. A comparative research design using country cases of Ghana and Rwanda will be adopted in investigating the main questions. Both qualitative and quantitative data sources will be used.