

ODUMUNC 2010
Issue Brief for the
Special Political and General Assembly Plenary



Re-evaluation of the UN Millennium Development Goals

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Introduction:

The new century brings new challenges to the global community. These challenges cannot be ignored because they have dramatic affects on peoples' common destiny as at the present day we find ourselves interconnected as never before. The United Nations can help meet those challenges because the UN can be reshaped to make a real measurable improvement in peoples' lives in the new century.

For this purpose, in March 2000 the 192 UN member states and more than 20 international organizations agreed to achieve eight international development goals by the year 2015. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration that was adopted by 189 nations-and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The MDGs respond to the world's main development challenges and include the following vitally important targets:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development



These goals are also basic human rights — the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security as pledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Millennium Declaration.

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Why are MDGs important?

Do you know that:

- about 900 million people are estimated to live in slum-like conditions characterized by insecure, inadequate housing, and a lack of access to water or sanitation;
- nearly one billion people still do not have access to safe drinking water;
- by the end of 2001, an estimated 13 million children under 15 had lost one or both parents to AIDS in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean?

World is the global village where the problem occurred in one part has devastating consequences in the other part. By overcoming these and many more problems, we will move forward to sustainable society and give a chance to our descendents to inherit a better world, where more than 500 million people will be lifted out of extreme poverty; more than 300 million will no longer suffer from hunger; more than 2 million mothers and 30 million children will be saved, rather than die before reaching their fifth birthday; hundreds of millions more women and girls will go to school, and access economic and political opportunity. All this will provide the opportunities to end the burden of grinding poverty and contribute to economic growth and renewal on global level.

Re-evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals

In the background note provided by Secretary-General at the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals, Mr. Ban Ki-moon indicated that at midpoint towards 2015, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals have been uneven, and the UN faces a development emergency. The point is that whereas many developing countries are on their way to achieve some of the goals, their actions were not very effective. Today, no African country is expected to achieve every goal. Even in middle income countries which are more or less progressive in achieving the MDGs, poverty levels remain extreme. The situation is further aggravated by the economic crisis and possible climate change problems. Such circumstances require immediate response from governments, the international community and the private sector.

The High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals took place on 25 September 2008, where world leaders gathered to discuss and translate new and existing commitments to ensure

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that all countries would effectively achieve the MDGs in a decisive and timely manner. The ongoing re-evaluation of the MDGs includes refocusing attention to critical areas within each goal, which are presented in the five sections below.

I. Poverty and Hunger

Eradicating extreme poverty continues as one of the main challenges to the success of the MDGs. Poverty leads to hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter as well as health problems, gender inequality and environmental unsustainability. There has been real progress towards achieving some of the goals; however, in some countries including many in sub-Saharan Africa, progress is slow and uneven.

Moreover, with the increase in food prices, about 1 billion people go hungry, while at least another estimated 2 billion are undernourished. The food price spikes are believed to have pushed over 100 million more people into extreme poverty.

Currently, about 143 million children under 5 years of age in the developing countries suffer from malnutrition, which exacerbates the impact of disease and reduces their health and education potential.

II. Education and Health

In 2006, primary school enrollment in developing countries reached 88 per cent (up from 83% in 2000); however, the situation hasn't improved in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, the quality of education also remains poor in many contexts as well as gender inequality.

Worldwide, under-five mortality declined from 93 to 72 deaths per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2006. Nevertheless, in 62 countries under-five mortality is not declining fast enough. In addition, over 500,000 women die annually, mainly in low income countries, because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Moreover, an estimated 33 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS in 2007. Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia see the greatest concentrations of the disease. In addition, malaria and tuberculosis kill millions of people annually.

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Despite the success of MDGs, about 1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water, and 2.5 billion lack access to basic sanitation services.

III. Environmental sustainability

Environmental degradation can undermine efforts aimed at sustainable development as the poor, rural populations depend greatly on natural resources to sustain themselves. Realizing the important relationship between a healthy environment and access to natural resources has with reducing poverty and spurring development, the sector remains largely underfinanced in many countries.

Close international cooperation is central to effectively address climate change and create and implement measures to mitigate and adapt to possible climate-related problems, as well as to ensure access by all countries to the financial and technological resources that encourage sustainable environmental practices.

IV. Gender Equality and the Empowerment of women

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women are effective ways to reduce poverty, hunger and disease. Progress has been made towards the elimination of gender inequalities in political participation and education; however, millions of girls are still not in school. Of the 113 countries which need to meet the gender parity school enrolment target, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015.

V. Global Partnership for development

In the global partnership for development, developing countries take primary responsibility for their development and for mobilizing domestic resources and ensuring good governance. Developed countries in their turn agree to provide effective assistance.

Nevertheless, in the area of trade, only slow progress has been made towards achieving eighth Millennium Development Goal. Despite some progress being made in terms of debt relief for the poorest countries, the objective of dealing with the debt problems of developing countries has not been fully achieved.

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Efforts to step up Official Development Assistance (ODA) have been set back. Total net aid flows from members of the Development Assistance Committee fell to \$103.7 billion in 2007, representing 0.28% of the combined national income of the developed countries. In addition, ODA should be accompanied by improvements in ODA quality and predictability.

Problems of MDG implementation

At the halfway point to the year 2015, the United Nations faced the problem of ineffectiveness in meeting broad and vaguely specified norms of MDG goals in some countries. There are several reasons why some MDG goals are even considered to be impossible to attain by the deadline.

The first reason is that MDGs are attainable only if and when countries of the world work towards them in cooperation with each other and inside the country. Today, the sad reality is that considerable gaps exist between performances of different countries and regions in applying and instituting the reforms to complete all the MDGs. These gaps are caused by lack of economic growth, inequality in the distribution of income (for example, the economic growth of African countries must increase 7% annually to catch up with the progress of others in meeting the MDGs by 2015). Another problem that prevents meeting the MDGs is political mismanagement and inefficient policy making, including low government spending, as well as numerous policy and institutional weaknesses.

Here a question arises – are the goals really achievable? The MDGs are laudable and undoubtedly well-intentioned. But that does not mean they are realistic for all countries. Countries with deep structural problems and lack of political will to make the changes, will hardly achieve any goals even if financing increases considerably. Despite the popular belief, resources are not the sole – and perhaps not even the most important – constraint to meeting the MDGs. No amount of aid will make Africa economically grow 7% annually. The experience over the past seven years tells us that only where political will and responsible donor support exists can there be positive results.

However, lack of political will is a problem not only for countries who find it almost impossible to achieve the MDGs, but also for many developed nations. The national interests of major states often differ considerably, and their respective political goals affect how they approach and handle the MDGs and providing assistance to others.

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The United States, backed by British Premier Minister Gordon Brown and Japanese Premier Taro Aso, thinks other governments should be spending more on economic stimulus programs, which must be worth at least 2 percent of the gross domestic products. It set the cross interests of the G-20 members on collision course. European Union countries, in particular Germany and France focus on more regulation rather than on more stimulus spending and remain unwilling to spend more before they know whether and how their existing stimulus package is working.

China sided with European countries on the call for reform of international financial system. However, President Hu Jintao gave his tacit support to the United States, because this could increase foreign trade and thus profit. But it does not suit Germany and France as they are exporters of capital goods. In such a manner, countries have to work hard to reach some consensus first among them to move forward.

Conclusion

Due to economic crisis, diminished resources, and few trade opportunities for the developing countries, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is uncertain. This is the main reason why commitment to building a strong UN and global partnerships embodied in the Millennium Declaration is vitally important. In such circumstances the willingness of governments to work together and with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and multilateral agencies, is crucial to meet the Millennium Goals.

There has been real progress made towards achieving some of the goals, even in regions where the challenges are greatest. A number of recent successes across the developing world — including improved macroeconomic indicators, expansion of AIDS treatment and increased agricultural productivity, school enrollment and access to water and sanitation demonstrate that rapid progress is possible. However, in order to achieve all the goals, the UN must become more active – perform quickly and coherently with the effective exploitation of new technologies.

The Secretary-General's recommendations:

- The UN has to identify its core strengths in its ability to stimulate global concern and action to improve the level of life. The Security Council needs to be reformed so it can both work effectively and be legitimate. It is vital to expand the UN's relationship with NGOs, as well as with the private sector and foundations.

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- The UN has to create an effective network out of formal institutions with informal policy networks including international institutions, civil society and private sector organizations, to meet common goals.
- To make the UN more efficient and to improve its interaction with the rest of the world, new information technology is needed. But first it is vital to solve the problem of change-resistant culture.
- The UN needs structural reform to become truly effective, as well as clearer consensus on priorities among member states and more discussion and focus in the General Assembly on decision-making processes such as results-based budgeting.

Relevant to the issue of the MDGs and the prospects for their full realization, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made this remark at the High-level Event on September 25, 2007:

"Looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, there is no question that we can achieve the overarching goal: we can put an end to poverty. In almost all instances, experience has demonstrated the validity of earlier agreements on the way forward; in other words, we know what to do. But it requires an unswerving, collective, long-term effort."

Recommended Resources

High-level event on the Millennium Development Goals 25 September 2008, Committing to action: achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Background note by the Secretary-General, 25 July 2008.

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/pdf/committing.pdf>

Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/overviewEng1-23LowRes.pdf>

Millennium Summit, 6-8 September 2000.

<http://www.un.org/millennium/>

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Secretary-General's concluding remarks to the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals (as prepared for delivery), 25 September 2008.

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/sgstatement.shtml>

United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

<http://www.un.org/ga/63/resolutions.shtml>

United Nations Millennium Declaration A/Res/55/2, 18 September 2000.

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>

We the Peoples: the Role of the United Nations, 12th century, Kofi A. Anan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, March 2000.

<http://www.un.org/millennium/sg/report/full.htm>