

Challenge of the millennium development goals



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Introduction

This essay addresses four main research questions, namely: what are the challenges of the Millennium Development Goal Two as an education development concept; how has the concept of the Millennium Development Goal Two improved the existing education system; what strategies are being used to achieve the Millennium Development Goal Two and how effective are these strategies in achieving the objective; and is 2015 a realistic objective for achieving the Millennium Development Goal Two, in terms of what means are being used to determine the achievement of the goal and how reliable/effective these tools are.

Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and to empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. Each goal is composed of a series of targets that have associated indicators for monitoring progress. The Millennium Development Goal Two, for example, aims to achieve universal primary education, with the main target being to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls like, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, with three main indicators for monitoring progress, namely the net enrolment ratio in primary education; the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach the last grade of primary school; and the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds, both women and men. Some of the aims of the Millennium

Development Goal Two overlap with those of Millennium Development Goal Three, which aims to promote gender equality, aiming to eliminate gender disparity in primary (and secondary) education in terms of the ratios of girls to boys in primary (and later) education.

In Africa, the Millennium Development Goals are overseen by the MDG Africa Steering Group, which brings together the leaders of development organisations working in Africa, the UN Secretary General and the heads of various organisations, such as the IMF, the Islamic Development Bank Group and the World Bank Group, in to order to identify the steps that are needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in Africa (MDG Africa Steering Group, 2009). The objectives of the MDG Africa Steering Group are to strengthen international mechanisms for implementation of development plans in health, education, agriculture, food security and infrastructure, to improve aid predictability and efficacy and to enhance coordination of aid at the level of individual countries (MDG Africa Steering Group, 2009).

The Millennium Development Goals were developed as a fundamental part of the Millennium Declaration, which was signed by 189 countries in September 2000 (UN, 2000), supported by further countries at the 2005 World Summit via Resolution A/RES/60/1 of the UN General Assembly (UN, 2005). The Millennium Development Goals were conceptualised as a set of inter-related goals and targets that represent a way to encourage a viable partnership between developed and developing countries, in order to develop an environment – both global and national – that is conducive to development and to the elimination of the causes, and consequences, of poverty (UNDP, 2009). As of the date of signing of the Millennium Declaration, many

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hundreds of millions of people in the developing world lived below the poverty line, with a large proportion of these people failing to receive enough food to be able to survive. The Millennium Development Goals were, thus, developed as a concerted effort to identify where improvements were necessary and how these improvements could be made, via a series of targets and indicators, which would allow progress to be measured over the various goals. The Millennium Declaration focused on several main areas of improvement, including the achievement of peace and security, poverty eradication, protecting the environment, ensuring human rights are upheld and protecting the most vulnerable members of the worldwide community, with this framework providing the conceptual basis of the Declaration and providing the holistic framework for the development of the specific goals, targets and indicators for monitoring progress.

The Millennium Development Goal Two was introduced because primary school enrolment, and the completion of primary level education was extremely low at the time of signing the Millennium Declaration, something that was the cause of great anxiety for Governments in the developed world as education is thought to be a fundamental part of development, a tool that allows communities, and societies, to move out of their situation and to develop. The Millennium Development Goal Two is thus relevant because it aims to specifically ensure that each and every child, regardless of economic situation and gender, receive the opportunity to enrol in primary schooling and to complete a full primary level education, irrespective of gender and/or economic situation.

The Millennium Development Goal Two is considered an important education development concept because, as discussed by the UN (2008), in 1999 there were 96 million children, worldwide, who were not in school, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many families simply cannot afford either the school enrolment fees; that many children are required to work, in order to achieve a better family-level income; that many children are needed at home, in order to care for siblings whilst their parents are out at work (as childcare is virtually non-existent in many developing countries, and, where it is available, is prohibitively expensive); and/or that, often, schools are very far away from the child's home, with transport costs being prohibitively high (UN, 2008). For many families in the developing world, therefore, children's education is simply not a priority, with this leading to vicious circles in the development process, as communities, and societies cannot move out of poverty without education, especially in this world where ICT is becoming so important, on a global level, and many economies are service-based. It is thus important, given the lack of favourable circumstances for education to occur, and given the fundamental role of education in development, that education is encouraged in developing countries.

The strategies that are being used to achieve the Millennium Development Goal Two include providing coordinated aid that is specifically dedicated to achieving the Millennium Development Goal Two. This aid is, as will be discussed later in the essay, facilitated through advocacy talks between bodies such as Education For All and organisations that provide aid, such as the World Bank. The role that organisations such as Education For All plays in advocacy for the aims of the Millennium Development Goal Two is

fundamentally important in terms of maintaining the Millennium Development Goal Two target (and other Millennium Development Goal targets) at the forefront of the debate about development in Africa. In addition, more practical, on the ground, strategies have been employed by national Governments, in conjunction and in collaboration with international organisations, such as abolishing direct and indirect school fees and providing alternative delivery modes for schooling (such as mobile schools in rural African areas, for example) (UN, 2008), all of which have had the effect of increasing primary school enrolments.

In terms of ensuring completion of primary level education, as will be discussed later in the essay, this is still a rather complex issue, as many children drop out of primary school, for various reasons (such as economic need or ill health of the child, their teacher or their family members), which requires attention from the other Millennium Development Goals, in terms of lessening the impact of HIV/AIDS on primary school children, and teachers, in certain areas of Africa, for example. Incentives to complete primary education have been implemented in many regions covered by the Millennium Development Goals and their impact has been largely positive. Increasing the number of teachers, to improve the quality of primary education, has been implemented by many Governments, although, as will be seen later in the essay, there is still a long way to go in this respect, with many African primary schools, for example, having unacceptably high teacher-pupil ratios. It is clear, therefore, that there are many strategies being implemented, via the use of either Government-directed resources, or external aid, in order to encourage the meeting of the Millennium

Development Goal Two target by 2015. Each particular setting requires a particular set of strategies, depending on the local development and local demographics.

The tools being used to assess the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal Two are as laid out in the indicators for Millennium Development Goal Two, namely the net enrolment ratio in primary education; the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach the last grade of primary school; and the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds, both women and men. Each of these tools can be seen as a set of individual targets to be met: as will be seen later in the essay, when the EFA Global Monitoring Reports are discussed, for example, statistics for measures such as the net enrolment ratio in primary education, the proportion of children completing their secondary education and the literacy rate of youth are readily available, and can be used as measures of how much impact the Millennium Development Goal Two has had on developing countries, in terms of primary education.

In terms of what the challenges of the Millennium Development Goal Two as an education development concept are, education cannot be viewed in isolation, as enrolment in, and participation in, education are affected by many factors, many of which are themselves, in turn, affected by other aspects of development. It is known, for example, that many children in sub-Saharan Africa are unable to attend school, or to complete their education, because either they, their teachers, or their families, are affected by poor health, either as a result of malaria, HIV/AIDS or other diseases that are development issues in themselves. In addition, in areas of extreme poverty, <https://assignbuster.com/challenge-of-the-millennium-development-goals/>

even with economic stimuli from Governments or via outside aid, families continue to find it difficult to send their children to school, and to maintain their commitment to keep their children in school to complete their education. The Millennium Development Goal Two thus faces challenges in terms of being only one strand of the very complex problem that is development.

Education for All is overseen by UNESCO, which coordinates the global drive to achieve education for all, working with various partners to make education a top priority on national, regional and international levels (EFA, 2009a). Education for All highlights educational challenges and aims to promote better coordination between key stakeholders in terms of strengthening the political commitment towards Education for All and ensuring better foundations for lifelong education for all, namely: the provision of strong educational foundation in early childhood; the provision of universal primary education; seeking to ensure gender equality; the provision of life skills, literacy and quality learning at all life stages, through both formal and informal approaches (EFA, 2009a). Education for All is particularly focused on those areas that are furthest away from reaching their EFA goals, focusing on improving policies for teachers, more investment in literacy an early childhood education and mobilising resources more effectively in terms of achieving education for all (EFA, 2009a).

Education for All is thus clearly linked to the Millennium Development Goal Two in terms of its emphasis on early childhood education and its focus on delivering resources to ensure that early childhood education becomes universal, especially in those areas that are lagging behind in terms of the <https://assignbuster.com/challenge-of-the-millennium-development-goals/>

provision of early childhood education. Education For All works with various international partners to work towards its goals, including UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank (EFA, 2009b). Education For All works in the form of various partnership mechanisms, including inter-agency working, donor partnerships, thematic partnerships (to support the Millennium Development Goal Two, for example), international drives and public-private partnerships (EFA, 2009b).

Education For All promotes the Millennium Development Goal Two as part of its belief that education is a fundamental right and that it is necessary to improve the quality of education in order to fulfil the aims of the Millennium Development Goal Two (EFA, 2009c). Education For All, coordinated by UNESCO via EFA Coordination Teams, has several coordination priorities in terms of ensuring education for all, and backing the Millennium Development Goal Two target, namely: promoting partnership in order to enable stakeholders to develop strategies for meeting challenges posed to education and to assess progress in meeting these challenges; mobilising resources, as domestic and national resources are insufficient to address the EFA goals, it is necessary for the EFA to advocate the EFA goals to G8 countries, and international organisations, in order to attract external financial help; ensuring effective use of aid, in terms of coordinating aid delivery and usage; communication and advocacy, in terms of ensuring strong visibility for the EFA agenda (and related Millennium Development Goal Two targets) in order to sustain momentum and support; capacity building, in terms of developing the capacity to plan and manage the goals at the national level; and, finally, monitoring progress, which is undertaken

through the publication of the annual EFA Global Monitoring Reports, independent reports that track the progress of the EFA goals and trends in international aid with regards to education goals (EFA, 2009c).

Two of these Education for All annual reports will be discussed now, as they have particular relevance to the aims of the Millennium Development Goal Two: the 2007 and 2008 reports. The 2007 report highlights how the EFA goals focus on providing learning opportunities at every stage of life, from infancy to adulthood, highlighting how, with only a few years until 2015, which is the target year for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it is important to actively remember, and to work towards, the holistic perspective on education (EFA, 2007). As the EFA (2007) Global Monitoring Report makes clear, many countries furthest away from the EFA goals and the MDG targets are making great progress, particularly with regards to early childhood education, but there are many major challenges that remain. In terms of the six EFA goals, for example, it is clear that pre-primary education is growing in provision, but that this is still scarce, particularly for females; that enrolment to primary education is growing (from 83% worldwide in 1999 to 86% in 2004, but that, of new entrants to primary school, many drop out after enrolment and do not complete their primary education and that the quality of primary education is questioned in many areas, particularly in Africa; that participation in secondary education, in terms of enrolment, is increasing worldwide, but that completion rates are not increasing; that enrolments to tertiary education is still increasing but that access is still limited; that the quality of education is often put at stake

when expansion of education is undergone, something that goes against the goals of the EFA and the targets of the MDGs (EFA, 2007).

The picture painted by the EFA (2007) Global Monitoring Report is therefore relatively bleak, showing that a great deal more work needs to be undertaken in order to meet the Education for All goals, and to meet the relevant Millennium Development Goals, especially in view of the fact that there are only a few years remaining before the 2015 deadline for the targets to be met. As concluded in the EFA (2007) Global Monitoring Report, the education agenda needs to focus on acting with urgency, in terms of assuring timely interventions when needed; emphasising equity and inclusion in education, so as to ensure that females are not left behind in the educational process; increasing public spending and focusing this spending better, in terms of dedicating spending to the specific support of attaining the MDG Two target; augmenting international aid and allocating this in areas of most need, i. e., to the specific support of attaining the MDG Two target in those areas that are unlikely, at the present time, to meet the MDG Two target by 2015; moving early childhood care and education up the domestic and international agendas and stressing a holistic approach, through continuing advocacy for the MDGs, for example; increasing public finance for early childhood care and education, and targeting this finance better; upgrading the early childhood care and education workforce in terms of qualifications, training and working conditions, through human capital development; and improving the monitoring of the early childhood care and education in order to ensure that quality of education is not compromised as a result of the drive for increasing enrolments to primary education (EFA,

2007). As is made clear in the conclusions to the EFA (2007) Global Monitoring Report, a more comprehensive approach to meeting the EFA goals and MDG targets, with regards to education, is needed if the 2015 deadline is to be met by a significant proportion of the countries covered by the Millennium Declaration (EFA, 2007).

The 2008 Education for All report entitled 'Education for all by 2015 - will we make it?' looks at the status of the EFA goals and the MDG targets, highlighting the major developments that have occurred since 2000 (such as increases in primary school enrolments, greater gender parity in school enrolments, at all ages (although gender parity targets are regularly missed) and reductions, or abolitions, in primary school fees). The EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report then goes, one by one, through the EFA goals, looking at where the world stands in terms of these goals, showing how 51 countries have achieved four of the most quantifiable EFA goals, how 53 are in an intermediate position and how 25 are very far from achieving the EFA goals, with regards to education, such as universal primary education, adult literacy, gender equality in education and quality of education (EFA, 2008). As the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report highlights, there are various barriers to the achievement of the EFA goals and the MDG Two targets, namely that population growth and urbanisation affect the potential for schooling; that health can affect schooling, with HIV/AIDS, in particular, having a major negative effect on education in many African countries; that economic growth and rising inequalities are affecting education, in terms of the percentages of people living in extreme poverty not being changed and this having knock-on effects on the capacity of families to educate children;

and that conflict and fragile states are still major negative factors in terms of achieving the EFA goals and MDG Two targets (EFA, 2008). As pointed out in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, total aid to Africa has, also, not increased since 2004, despite the great need for extra aid, in terms of meeting the Millennium Development Goals in many African countries.

As discussed in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, with regards to the Millennium Development Goal Two, great strides are being made towards universal primary education, worldwide, partly because tuition fees have been abolished in many countries, with sub-Saharan African countries registering increases of 40% in primary school enrolments (EFA, 2008). As pointed out in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, however, in order to meet the Millennium Development Goal Two (i. e., for all children to have access to, and to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality), all children of relevant age should be enrolled in school by 2009, yet, many countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, will not meet this target. The conclusions from the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report are thus bleak with regards to the meeting of the Millennium Development Goal Two by 2015, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Suggestions are made, in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, as to how universal primary school access by 2015 could be made a more realistic goal, including: the encouragement of expanding equitable access; placing new constitutional obligations on families, redressing sub-national disparities in access to primary school; abolishing school charges; creating targeted campaigns to encourage, and thus increase, participation; reducing ethnic discrimination in schools; reducing the burden of child labour and the

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negative effects this has on access to education; encouraging the development of skilled and motivated teachers; deploying such teachers to underserved areas; improving assessment of teachers and pupils (to ensure the quality of the education); and focusing on restoring education in difficult circumstances (EFA, 2008). As argued in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, in addition, many Governments are simply not spending enough on primary education, and should be encouraged to allocate more resources to primary education, with resources being best focused on primary education in those low-income countries that do not have enough resources to build a fully comprehensive, lifelong, education system (EFA, 2008). It is also recognised that aid that is provided for primary education needs to be delivered more effectively, in view of the fact that 58 of the 86 countries covered under the Millennium Development Goal Two will not meet the MDG Two target by 2015 (EFA, 2008).

As pointed out in the EFA (2008) Global Monitoring Report, the development of a stronger base of good, motivated, teachers, is fundamental to meeting the Millennium Development Goal Two targets. This links in to the idea of human capital development, where human capital development is generally understood as the recruitment, support of, and investment in people, through education, training and/or organisational development. Human capital development links to the Millennium Development Goal Two because, as has been suggested by the EFA and in the two Global Monitoring Reports discussed, it is considered necessary to recruit more teachers in order to meet the Millennium Development Goal Two, with the EFA (2008) suggesting that 18 million new primary teachers will be needed in order to meet the

target of universal primary education by 2015, as current levels of staff recruitment cannot keep up with the primary enrolment increases (EFA, 2008).

As discussed in the EFA (2008) report, teacher-pupil ratios reach up to 155: 1 in Ghana, severely affecting the quality of primary education delivered, with average levels in Africa being 40: 1, much higher than the recommended 22: 1. Increasing the number of teachers, and decreasing teacher-pupil ratios to acceptable levels in terms of the provision of quality primary education, will require a comprehensive program of human capital development, through attracting new recruits to the teaching profession and providing adequate teacher training and ongoing professional development (EFA, 2008). As argued in the EFA (2008) report, quality education stems from the presence of well trained, and highly motivated, teachers, the presence of adequate learning materials, instructional time and adequate school facilities; without these basic ingredients, even if recruitment increases, reaching the Millennium Development Goal Two target, the quality of primary education needs to be insured, through adequate human capital development in teaching staff, in order for universal primary education to actually mean something in terms of the quality of the education received. Human capital development, of teachers, for example, is thus fundamental in terms of meeting the Millennium Development Goal Two target, especially in the 58 of the 86 countries covered under the Millennium Development Goal Two that are not expected to be able to meet the MDG Two target by 2015 (EFA, 2008).

Conclusion

In terms of how the concept of the Millennium Development Goal Two has improved the existing education system, as has been seen, since the introduction of the Millennium Development Goal Two, many more children are being enrolled in primary school, in more gender-equitable ratios, with many more teachers being trained, via human capital development schemes, and many more resources being devoted to education, in order to support the Millennium Development Goal Two target. The Millennium Development Goal Two has, therefore, been a source of positive change in many countries, and communities, although, as has been seen the range, and overall success, of the Millennium Development Goal Two have been limited by development issues.

In view of the evidence presented, as to whether 2015 is a realistic objective for achieving the Millennium Development Goal Two, in terms of what means are being used to determine the achievement of the goal and how reliable/effective these tools are, the EFA Global Monitoring Reports make it clear that the Millennium Development Goal Two target will not be met in a large proportion of countries targeted as part of the Millennium Declaration. 2015 is, thus, not a reasonable target for many countries in terms of the Millennium Development Goal Two target. The means used to achieve the target do work, as has been discussed, but conflicts with other development issues (such as the economic climate of a community and the health of that community) interfere with the reaching of the target, meaning that the reliability and efficacy of these means are called in to question, not because of their inherent reliability and efficacy per se but by virtue of the fact that

there are so many problems that appear concurrently in the developing world that these often conflict with the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal Two target, reducing the capacity of the stakeholders to meet the target, however well planned, or executed, the means used are.

In conclusion, the Millennium Development Goal Two target cannot be viewed, or assessed, in isolation from the other Millennium Development Goals, as all aspects of development impact on each other, affecting the capacity of communities for overall development.