

# The millennium development goals



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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed upon at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. More heads of states (189 nations) and governments came together than ever before, a benchmark in itself. They pledged to work together & to make a better world for all by 2015. Unanimously signing & adopting a package, aimed at eradicating social injustices & inequalities; extreme poverty, getting all kids to school, including girls; gender equality, fighting maternal mortality and child mortality, reversing the AIDS pandemic & ensuring sustainable development in an environmental sense. These committing nations agreed upon a new global partnership to ensure these goals were met and set out a series of time bound targets, with a deadline to be met by 2015. The MDGs are the most ambitious and most broadly supported development goals ever to be established.

The Millennium Development Goals are a set of eight goals, which pledge to liberate men, women and children from the dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty and make the right to development a reality for everyone. Listed below are the eight goals:

- 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

The eight MDGs break down into 21 quantifiable targets that are measured by 60 indicators. The MDGs are more than just goals, ' they are seen to provide an overarching framework for the development efforts, and benchmarks against which to judge success' (Health and the millennium development goals By World Health Organization). They set out a clear & precise agenda as to what is required to help realise the goals. Each goal has been designed so that it is easy to understand, easy to implement and easy to measure in order to help improve the lives of the impoverished people of the world. ' The fact that MDGs are concrete, time bound and deliberately designed to be measurable (which lends to a sense of accountability) makes the MDGs feel more tangible... people everywhere can immediately relate to them; they speak to the immediate concerns and basic needs of everyone globally.' Measurability is seen as an integral characteristic of the MDGs, it is through this that the United Nations is able to assess how close it is to achieving one of the most ambitious agreement accords in its history. Furthermore, this also leads to governments being held accountable for any irregularities that may arise or for failure to implement successfully the eight MDGs within their nation states. The MDGs ' reflect an unprecedented commitment by the world's leaders to tackle the most basic forms of injustice and inequality in our world; poverty, illiteracy and ill health.' (Health and the millennium development goals By World Health Organization).

The importance of the MDGs cannot be overstated. Firstly, as set out in the Millennium Summit the aim of the MDGs is to liberate the billion plus people who currently live in extreme poverty. A common proverb the world over is the rich get richer whilst the poor get poorer. However, with the MDGs it

seems that the stigmatisation on the richer nations is slowly being rendered obsolete. Secondly, reducing the number of people in poverty matters for security and stability. ' Research shows, for example, that a negative shock on income growth increases the probability of a civil war substantially (United Nations Millennium Development Project 2005)' (Financial sector development and the Millennium Development Goals By Stijn Claessens, Erik Feijen). A prime example is that of the ever worsening situation in Sudan's Darfur region, where the scarcity of sanitised water has seen some of the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st Century, with more than 200, 000 Darfuris dead and 2 million having fled their homes. Thirdly, economic wealth for the poor creates new worldwide growth opportunities, by opening new consumer markets and commercial activity; ' the 4 to 5 billion underserved people are estimated to represent economic opportunity of \$13 trillion (Financial sector development and the Millennium Development Goals By Claessens. S, Feijen. E). Arguably the biggest stumbling block for poorer nations being unable to attain the seventh MDG of ensuring environmental sustainability, is entirely down to the developed nations insistency on tariffs, quotas & subsidies. All of which have made it extremely difficult for developing nations to earn a living on their produce.

The message the MDGs are trying embed in our minds is, that the issues being faced around the world are not the sole responsibility of the heads of states of the developing nations or developed nations, but it is a collective responsibility that the people of this world must share and be held accountable for. The biggest problem is that heads of state and ministers often go to meetings, sign something incredible, and then they take the

plane back from the UN to return to business as usual. It takes all of us to achieve these goals, this is excruciatingly important because we have to make our governments accountable for the promises they have made. Government after government and country after country after country. The UN is able to provide a platform but it does not have any instrument to force compliance. So it falls upon us, in civil societies who are the most important campaigners. We put the politicians and leaders in power to give us a voice and so we must in turn use our voices to make the governments enforce the MDGs and implement a plan for achieving them by the target date of 2015.

Successful implementation of the MDGs with the right guidance can lead to some concrete results. If we take a look at some midway progression figures; taken from the European Commission on Development File, then we can clearly see the impact the MDGs have made in the lives of millions of people.

‘ Some Impressive Progress...

- 120 million people out of poverty between 2000 and 2005, or 2. 4 per cent annual drop
- 2 million lives saved through reduced child mortality
- 30 million additional 6 12 children going to school
- 30 million additional families having access to drinking water
- Boys and girls in equal numbers in primary school’

However, the progress being made is vastly uneven and still too slow in some areas of the world. The reason for the decrease in global poverty is for the most part due to rapid growth in giant Asian countries such as China, India & Indonesia. Yet on the other hand, achieving goals such as reducing

child mortality rates and access to sanitised water seem way further off track. Furthermore, there seems to be strong inconsistencies across regions and countries in implementing the MDGs, with countless developing countries projected not to meet most of them.

' While ambitious the MDGs are considered achievable. The Millennium Project has argued that for the first time in history the world is rich enough to eradicate extreme poverty. The Millennium Project calculated that achieving the MDGs requires funds equal to 0.5 percent of Gross National Product (GNP) of developed countries' (Financial sector development and the Millennium Development Goals By Stijn Claessens, Erik Feijen). This highlights an important fact, that if implemented and rigorously followed through, the developed countries have enough resources to help eradicate extreme poverty. The rich countries have never been richer. But the efforts that they are doing in terms of giving aid to poor countries is, in terms of percentages of national wealth, less than it was ten, twenty or thirty years ago.

It is not just financial assistance that needs to be rectified; too many poor countries in Africa are paying far more back to the rich countries for old debts, than they can afford to pay for the primary health and education of their people. Debt relief must be provided to ensure that developing countries are not forgoing the money for development to help them make their repayments. Furthermore, the trade barriers make it impossible for farmers in developing countries to make a living. In Europe farmers are subsidised to the extent that they produce more than they can ever swallow and then they dump the excess on the markets in poor African countries. In

the US the problem is all too similar, where cotton subsidies have led to the collapse of world prices for cotton. West African countries that produce cotton are unable to sell their stuff produce anymore. If and when these trade issues are rectified, then only can the developing countries seriously think of progressing their development through the MDGs.

## Conclusion

The MDGs came about through the mutual agreement of the world's leaders from developed nations to developing nations, each having their own role to play in aiming to help improve the lives of billions of impoverished people. They agreed upon eight goals, covering poverty, hunger, health, child mortality, women's rights, the environment and a global partnership on development. It is the primary responsibility of the poorer countries to achieve the first seven goals. They must do more to integrate the MDGs into their policies, plans and budgets and translate them into services for the poor. There is a need for more transparency and accountability so the progress being made, or lack of, is clear for all to see & so allows for the people to hold their governments accountable for the promises they made. The MDGs are mutually binding, so the poor countries cannot achieve their first seven goals unless rich countries fulfil their responsibilities set out in goal eight; Develop a Global Partnership for Development. The developed countries need to give more and to make sure what they are giving is used more effectively. They also need to offer more debt relief and increase trade opportunities for poor countries by reducing tariffs and subsidies to agriculture which deny farmers from poor countries their best chance of earning a decent living.

The importance of the Millennium Development Goals, is to implement a clear framework from which the world is able to reduce the social injustices and inequalities. It is to get the minds and mouths of the ordinary person working so they continue to strive to achieve the goals, way beyond the expectations of politicians. Their attainment, which is possible, lies in the hands of every single individual.