

## Are UN Goals Achievable?

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## What are the Millennium Development Goals?

The Millennium Development Goals are, in one sense, a restatement of the objectives of the earlier United Nations Development Decades.

Each of the Decades sought to mobilize global co-operation in the struggle against hunger, preventable diseases, lack of educational opportunities, unjust land distribution, polluted water, poor - or non-existent - sanitation and all the other hallmarks of the poverty which held a majority of the world's population in its grip.

Despite the major inroads made by many governments, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other actors in this struggle, nevertheless, by the end of the 20th century, billions of people were still living their lives blighted by poverty. Thus it was that, in preparing for the Millennium Summit meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, an African with plenty of first hand experience of those levels of poverty, prepared a report and the Secretariat drafted a Millennium Declaration which focussed on many issues but which ensured that the drive against poverty and all the injustices which are its inevitable bedfellows came centre stage.

The UN Millennium Declaration confirmed the centrality of early poverty reduction and its final elimination from the face of the world for the programmes of the United Nations.

It was a bold move to build a target date into the process of implementing the Millennium Development Goals. The year 2015 was fixed for most of them and this was a major challenge to the member states to get on with their fulfilment.

## Which specific targets have been set?

There are eight major headings for the Goals, which are

eradicating extreme poverty and hunger;  
achieving universal primary education;  
promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women;  
reducing child mortality;  
improving maternal health;  
combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;  
ensuring environmental sustainability;  
developing a global partnership for development.

Let us now look briefly at some of the major targets within those headings.

(a) eradicating extreme hunger and poverty

In relation to eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, the aims are to reduce by half the number of people living on less than \$1/day and to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. It is, of course, appalling that anyone should be living on less than \$400 per annum but that is the fate of 20% or so of our fellow human beings - and it is estimated that perhaps twice that number are eking out an existence on less than \$2/day.

What superb breeding grounds for anger at the sheer injustice of it all those impoverished communities must be! And, as we have seen in recent years, that anger can spill over into violence and, ultimately, terrorism. The massive frustration of people like the Palestinians, who have not even secured a sovereign national homeland for themselves, despite the hyperbole of UN resolutions on the issue, can very understandably boil over; and now we have the horrific spectacle of young suicide bombers not only killing themselves but slaughtering innocent bystanders, including children, in the most grotesque of angry hatred. So, although not mentioned explicitly in the Goals, the exercising of the right to self-determination and the implementation of good governance for the equitable sharing of national resources are an essential part of genuine poverty reduction and the advancement of social justice in which every citizen becomes a stakeholder within their community and wider society.

At a recent seminar in Bruxelles, we were addressed by the representative of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization who, recalling the key place allocated to hunger issues in those earlier International Development Decades, was delighted that the European Union, now one of the world's principal multilateral donors, was starting to revisit the issue of rural poverty, in which hunger and malnutrition still remain key actors. This is not to deny that there are also major urban problems to be tackled, but to see that rural poverty, often more hidden than urban, still affects the majority of people in many developing countries and that, unless addressed on a sustained basis, will simply continue to add to the urban drift and the wasted lives in the appalling slums now so evident in the majority of major cities.

I recall that, perhaps 25 years ago, there was a major report on rural food production and consumption in India. It showed that, in broad terms, farmers and their families only ate about 1/3 of the food which they had harvested, while 2/3 were devoured by weevils and rats. A tremendous effort was made to develop appropriate storage silos which were proofed against these unwelcome visitors with a considerable impact following on levels of sound nutrition.

(b) achieving universal primary education

There can surely be no better start for young children who have been weaned from their mother's breast milk into the life of their home and community than to become literate and numerate. We all hated school - or, at least, said that we did, since it was never the done thing in my country ever to admit that school could ever be fun! - but just think how many of us would be here at this conference today if we had never had the opportunity to learn how to read, write and do our arithmetic - the classical three Rs of education all over the world. We lucky ones were able to pass on to secondary and higher education.

But there are countless children in the world today who still have no opportunity to go to school at all. That is a scandal and it is absolutely right for universal primary education to be a major Millennium Development Goal.

In my view, we should not - at least in the longer term - concentrate solely or too strongly on primary education. Research undertaken in many different parts of the world shows that children who have been stimulated by pre-school kindergarten experiences shine earlier and more fully at primary school than do those children who have been denied this opportunity. And, if we are to see our children of today play a role in a more just world than the one which we currently inhabit, we need to offer secondary and higher education to as many of them as wish to seize this opportunity.

But, of course, as Uganda has discovered with its major emphasis on investing money saved from its debt relief arrangements into education, there must be a corresponding increase in the number of teachers being trained, the provision of adequate supplies of books and other teaching needs and satisfactory buildings at every school, especially in the more extreme climate areas of the world.

I believe that this Goal is as important as any; and some would say the most important of them all. If this generation of young people can be encouraged to become more self-confident - and I am convinced that literacy and numeracy give just that level of confidence which illiterate and innumerate people never experience - then they will be better equipped to tackle the challenges posed by the other Millennium Development Goals.

To succeed in its objectives, the provision of universal primary education must ensure that girls have equal access to it as boys. Given the massive disadvantage which girls in many parts of the world suffer against boys - and not only in relation to education! - it is essential that they be treated on equal terms from now on.

One reason why access to education should not be restricted to the primary level is the urgent need for adult women, denied the opportunity in childhood, to gain access to literacy, numeracy and the other aspects of education.

(c) promoting gender equality and empowering women

This goal calls for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. Clearly the initial target for 2005 is not going to be met universally, but it should not be allowed to fall and, perhaps, a revised date of, say, 2008 or 2009 should be agreed by the General Assembly.

But the empowering of women needs much more than just education. In the whole range of policy formulation and decision-making at all levels, women must become fully equal partners with men. In domestic life, there needs to be an equality of responsibilities - not least in the area of childcare - with men carrying out their full role. Sexual or other harassment in all places, including work, needs to be exposed and effectively acted against. The exploitation of women's bodies in advertising and other areas must be ended.

Indeed, women must be encouraged to become fully involved in all areas of human experience.

(d) reducing child mortality

It is a key objective of women's development that antenatal care should be universally available and that the delivery of children in childbirth should be carried out in hygienic ways with competent midwifery available, especially when problems arise. Postnatal care, proper maternal and child health care programmes, nutrition education (which should also involve the fathers) and the easy availability of the key ingredients for a sound diet should all be widely promoted and achieved.

This Development Goal seeks to reduce by 2/3 the mortality rate of under-five year old children. Very special emphasis should, in my view, be placed on children's care and needs in the first year of life, when they have the advantage of their mothers' breast milk, with women everywhere being strongly encouraged to breastfeed their infants - quite the best nourishment that they will ever enjoy! HIV/AIDS women will need to seek advice on breastfeeding but there are those who believe that even they should nourish their infants thus or should try to seek the help of non-infected wet nurses.

The fifth Development Goal could easily be incorporated into the fourth, since it looks at issues of improving maternal health by reducing by 3/4 the maternity mortality ratio. Although the requirements for effective action are different, it seems to me that improving maternal health is a vital part of what I have outlined above. Although it is perfectly reasonable to show it as a separate Goal, nevertheless it should not be allowed to become marginalized for any reason but should be seen as an integral part of the total 'package'.

(e) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

The 'celebrity' status of HIV/AIDS is such that there is a real danger that other major health issues will be relegated to a lower status. While the global pandemic which HIV/AIDS is rapidly becoming must, indeed, be seen as a major priority - and there is much rhetoric in this area but still a lack of universal commitment actually to help its victims at a practical level, despite the sterling efforts of the UN Secretary-General, UNAIDS, medical experts, non-governmental organizations and others - nevertheless there are other medical challenges which cannot be ignored if the better health and wellbeing of millions of sufferers are going to be secured.

Among these are malaria and tuberculosis. Measles, too, is another challenge, partly in developed countries where a certain level of controversy persists in relation to the triple MMR vaccine. The efforts to eradicate diseases - and, not least, measles and polio through massive international co-operation (including bodies like Rotary International) - are very heart warming; and we know that we have the basic knowledge, skills and technology to achieve these ends, but somehow lack the political will to deliver the killer blow finally to eradicate preventable diseases.

The Millennium Development Goal sets out to 'halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS - and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases'. One is forced to question whether this is an adequate objective. Millions of lives, particularly in the poorest parts of the world, are blighted by poor health in ways in which better off societies are not. Many of these diseases are preventable and WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank and others are promoting effective - and, often, relatively inexpensive - prevention programmes. The recent announcement by Bill Gates that he will help in this area is a wonderful commitment; but Governments need to do more and the HIPC debt relief process ought to be extended so that more countries can benefit from debt relief and plough the savings achieved into the health sector - among others - so as to enhance permanently the overall level of good health of their population.

(f) ensuring environmental sustainability

The concept of environmental sustainability is, in global and UN terms, still relatively young. Prior to the Stockholm Conference of 1972, environmental protection had never been a key area of UN concern. Since then, through a whole range of actions, including the Brundtland Report, 'Our Common Future' (1987), the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and its follow-up meetings in New York (1997) and Johannesburg (2002) and many specific negotiations at the global, regional and national levels (e.g. the Montreal Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and other such instruments) an enormous amount has been achieved in this area. In addition, key agreements such as the Law of the Sea Convention and the work of Specialized Agencies like the International Maritime Organization seek to ensure that maritime as well as earth-bound protection is furthered.

The concept of truly sustainable development has also become widely accepted - in principle, if not always in practice! The Millennium Development Goal dealing with this whole area of environmental (and development) sustainability is calling for:

the integration of the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes;

the reversal of the loss of environmental resources;

the reduction by half of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water;

the achieving of significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020.

Pushed, not least, by a burgeoning peoples' awareness of the vital and urgent necessity to protect Mother Earth from the ravages of blindly unthinking short-term self interest, whether at the national, community, family or personal level, more and more Governments are now starting to respond on a continuing basis to the tenets for sustainable development and environmental protection within their national development plans. While there is still a very long way to go to achieve this goal universally, especially when one or more of the most influential powers (for good or ill) fail to live up

to their responsibilities, nevertheless much progress has been made and the role of civil society as the point of pressure for more to be done is absolutely vital.

It being the UN International Year of Freshwater this year (2003), it is worth spending a few moments looking at freshwater issues.

The first thing to say is that freshwater cannot be looked at in isolation from its key partners - safe sanitation and hygiene. They are a veritably indivisible trinity, as has been fully recognized once again in the UN's WASH campaign, which promotes simultaneous progress on all three aspects as vital.

The environmental, health and social criteria for seeing the WASH approach as of the highest importance are, I believe, vividly summed up in a few statistics:

freshwater comprises only 2.5% of the planet's water coverage;  
one billion of the world's population do not have access to clean water;  
2.4 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities;  
water related diseases kill more than 5 million people worldwide each year;  
1 in 6 children die before the age of five due to causes related to poor sanitation and water supply;  
in many developing countries, women and children have to travel 10-15 km (6-10 miles) on average each day, usually on foot, to collect water;  
70% of our freshwater supply is used in the agricultural sector;  
60% of the freshwater used in agriculture is wasted due to bad practices;  
70% of untreated industrial waste is dumped in usable water supplies in developing countries;  
in developing countries, as an overall average, only 2% of government spending go towards low cost water and sanitation.

Such stark facts show how very important this International Year and the relevant Millennium Development Goal are for us all.

The issue of urban drift is both urgent and massively complex. The UN Agency HABITAT has just published a report which spells out the likely trends in terms of human slum dwellers in the world's major conurbations over the next few decades. The situation could very easily get largely out of control as millions of people continue to drift to cities in search of the 'better life'. Family and other cohesion could be severely disrupted as families become divided between rural and urban dwellers.

There is a major school of thought that argues - and I have much sympathy with it - that we need to return to a much greater emphasis on rural development, so as to make it attractive (or, at worst, less unattractive) for people to live sustainable lives in the countryside. This will require a very considerable investment of funds and expertise in national development plans by the Governments concerned and by all who support them in the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes and non-governmental organizations.

The political, social and environmental consequences of unsustainable cities with massive slums - look at Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya (reputed to be the largest slum in the world, with several million inhabitants) - could have unimaginable consequences of which we need to become more fully aware NOW, while there is still time to prevent the worst of these consequences from being realized. Poorly administered slums with inadequate facilities fly in the face of so many of the Millennium Development Goals being universally achievable.

(g) developing a global partnership for development

This Goal has a massive agenda attached to it. If it is all to be achieved by 2015, it will require major changes of policy, not least by the industrialized countries.

Its purposes include:

developing further an open trading and financial system which is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory, including a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction nationally and internationally;

addressing the least developed countries' special needs, including tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction;

addressing the special needs of landlocked and small island developing countries;

dealing comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term;

in co-operation with the developing countries, developing decent and productive work for youth;

in co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, providing access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries;

in co-operation with the private sector, making available the benefits of new technologies and, especially, information and communications technologies.

In meeting the terms of this Goal, the world would have tackled seriously some of the major sores still so badly distorting the struggle for economic, social, environmental and political equity.

I do not have the expertise to look in detail at the whole trade issue, but I am one of those who sees the current arrangements as highly skewed in favour of the industrialized countries, even if - on paper, at least - the constitution and rules-based approach of the World Trade Organization are largely expressing the model which we should all be seeking to implement. It is in their mis-implementation that things start to go wrong, as the recent scandalous behaviour in the cotton production sector showed all too clearly, with countries like Mali unable to resist the massive subsidies given by their Government to American cotton farmers. Bananas and other commodities also require a much more equitable arrangement than appears to be the case at the moment. Many people find other arrangements - such as TRIPS - deeply flawed and in need of re-negotiation. If developing countries in general are ever going to be able to develop strategies which

effectively address their poverty reduction needs, they must be enabled to become much more genuine partners in the global marketplace than they are currently.

Some of the earlier attempts to negotiate more equitable arrangements through the regular conferences of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the European Union's Lomé Conventions, with their STABEX and other agreements with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, were pointers in the right direction. The lessons learned need somehow to be taken more seriously in this era in which free trade is the god.

International financial arrangements are another very complex area. How to get an equitable international financial arrangement with currency stability for poor countries as a priority continues to defy us. One contribution might be through the levying of some form of tax - like that espoused by Professor Tobin - on international currency speculation which would be used for development and stabilization programmes for the poor. Many decision-makers appear to support such a tax in principle and then to oppose it in practice!

The very poorest countries will need special support in these areas, linked to effective debt relief and, where appropriate, to sustainable debt arrangements. Uganda is an example where real progress is being made within the HIPC debt relief programme, with the savings made by the Government through debt forgiveness being ploughed into such areas as primary education. I understand that, of all young children, Uganda now has a higher proportion in primary schools than any other country in Africa.

The need for more generous official development assistance (ODA) is still a key issue. With one or two notable exceptions, no donor country has yet achieved the target, agreed at the United Nations more than 30 years ago, of allocating 0.7% of Gross National Product to their ODA. In the United Kingdom, we had achieved 0.5% by 1979, but that figure was almost halved during the following 18 years. Our current [UK] Government will have raised it to 0.4% by 2005-6 but this is still woefully inadequate. This is a key area for continuing advocacy. If the Millennium Development Goals really are going to be achieved by the year 2015, it is essential that adequate resources are allocated to them NOW so that the necessary human capacity and other requirements start to be met immediately. If this does not happen, I fear lest we shall continue to slip further and further behind in moving towards the targets which have been set and there will then be some form of agreement cobbled together to delay the target date to 2020 or whenever - with the very poor once again losing out.

The special needs of landlocked and small island countries need to be seriously addressed. Adequate access to ports and the international market place for the former have long been on the agenda. I recall many years ago how the coffee harvest in landlocked Burundi in Central Africa was harvested but its export to the international coffee trading market in New York was badly delayed by flooding in neighbouring Tanzania which had destroyed a section of the railway line along which the coffee had to pass for some 1,500 kilometres from Kigoma, the port on Lake Tanganyika to which the

coffee had been shipped from Burundi, to the port of Dar-es-Salaam and thence by boat to New York. When the shipments reached their final destination, their unloading was further delayed as a result of a dockworkers' strike. When the coffee eventually went under the auctioneer's hammer, supplies from Brazil and elsewhere had started to arrive and Burundi's advantage - of being one of the earliest coffee harvests each year - was lost, the price received fell and Burundi was left to cope with the consequences.

Small island states also have very special needs. A number rely for their export earnings on a monocultural basis, others with few extra options. Commodity price stability is essential if they are to be enabled to plan effectively in the longer term. Alternatives can be promoted - including tourism, with all the benefits and pitfalls which it brings in its wake - but I vividly recall a conversation which I had a few years ago with a former Deputy Prime Minister of Jamaica, at the time when the Caribbean banana industry was under major threat as a result of action being taken by the US Government on behalf of the giant banana production company Chiquita. 'Not all of us', he said to me, 'can become hoteliers'. There are very worrying developments in a number of small island states as the international drug smugglers, money-laundering rings and other mafia groups move in and develop their bases in them. The relatively easy migration of workers to other countries of forty years ago has been seriously curtailed by the recipient countries, with an increasing decline in remittances to family members still at home of hard currency support. Again, I recall a conversation with the Bangladeshi High Commissioner in London when he gave me the percentage of foreign currency earnings accruing to the Bangladeshi national economy each year from remittances by family members living abroad. It was a phenomenal sum, without which the national economy would have suffered terribly. What is good for Bangladesh - not a small island state - is replicated in the Caribbean, the Pacific and elsewhere.

Issues of global warming, climate change and sea level rises are key for a number of the lowest lying small island states. I recall again an environmental conference in London at which the Prime Minister of a small island community in the Pacific spoke of the threat posed by rising sea levels. If I recall correctly, his island had a highest point of something like 10 metres above sea level. He posed the question - which none of us could answer - as to what he should advise his people to do: stay and develop the national economy or seek New Zealand residence permits as quickly as possible? He pointed out that his nation had absolutely no influence on the issues which were threatening a terminal catastrophe for it, either in their creation or their solution; but the rest of the world hardly seemed to bat an eyelid over what he and his people should do.

That is, quite simply, a gross abuse of the right of that nation to a sustainable future.

Purposeful youth employment has to be a central issue for us all. While in almost all the industrialized countries the current child-bearing generation is not having enough babies to enable us to sustain our living standards, so that a major influx of overseas workers will be needed over the coming decades unless our demographic trends alter, in so many developing countries it is the young generation which, for a variety of reasons, is burgeoning. A number of countries are now seeing a population of which one-half is

below the age of 18. Without mass migration, many of them will not be able to find purposeful employment at home. They will, it is feared, become increasingly involved in serious crimes - drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, such as illegal immigrants and recruits for the sex trade (often lured abroad illegally under false pretences), illegal arms dealing and the like. Almost all of us are, in one way or another, witnessing such trends in our own societies. Globalization and the information and other technology revolution are also almost certainly exacerbating the employment prospects of poor children from the most disadvantaged communities ever becoming genuine stakeholders in either their local or their national economy.

In planning for the future, the countries in the OECD need to seek genuine partnerships with developing countries in an effort to co-operate on a major and ongoing basis to address the issues of purposeful employment for young people - and for women, so that they can become equal partners in their lives with their menfolk.

Finally, the development of a genuine global partnership must address once more the issue of pharmaceutical companies providing access to affordable essential drugs to developing countries and the challenges, largely the property of the private sector, linked to the benefits of new technologies, not least in the information and communications areas.

There is still much controversy surrounding the issue of affordable drugs in developing countries. While the private conglomerates which invest very considerable sums of time, expertise and funds in researching new drugs understandably need to recuperate some of those costs when their products are marketed, nevertheless there is a crying need for the liberalization of price structures and the local production of generics in poor regions of the world. That there should be some protective regime to prevent undue price cuts in rich countries seems a perfectly reasonable demand, partly because Governments could subsidize expensive medicaments for their poorer citizens. A soundly based and just settlement needs to be found very urgently.

On information and related technology, about a year ago, I read a summary of an UN report which estimated that there are more telephones in South Africa than in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa combined and that some two-thirds of the world's population have neither made nor received a telephone call in their lives. While we - the élite in this sector - increasingly rely on web pages, emails, mobile telephones and the like to communicate instantly, we are seeing a gap developing between the communications Haves and Have-nots, as a result of which their capacity to develop equal partnerships with us will become ever more difficult. Kofi Annan frequently stresses the need to close this gap if ever globalization is going to be equitably developed for all of us rather than for the lucky few. We do not seem to be getting very far very fast!

## Conclusion

I have tried in this paper to outline what I see as some of the major issues covered by the Millennium Development Goals. Their successful conclusion by the year 2015 would bring unimaginable benefits to countless millions of our most disadvantaged fellow

human beings. Given the history of the Caribbean, with the horrendous cruelty and savage injustice of the slave era, given the imperial interests which skewed the economies of so many island and other communities towards serving the needs, on grossly unequal and unjust terms, of the rich colonial masters and given the lack of compensation which those former imperial powers and their allies in North America and elsewhere have seriously accorded to those who suffered from their erstwhile greed, the Millennium Development Goals could prove to be the turning point in the true globalization of the world economy towards a genuinely more equitable and just totality.

There is no doubt in my mind that the major initiative must come from the donor countries, the great majority of which show a meanness in their Official Development Assistance allocations which they do not so readily display in such areas as military expenditure. My own Government has allocated to the war in Iraq (and, despite the hyperbole spoken to show that it has been won, there is still a war raging there) almost the equivalent sum that, this year, has been allocated to British ODA. And yet, if we want a safer Iraq - and a safer world - for our children and for their children in the future, it is through tackling the root causes of poverty, environmental degradation and injustice, through seeking to ensure the universal application of agreed human rights standards and through creating levels of stability which enable genuine military disarmament to become a reality, that we shall achieve our objectives.

The United Nations was, as Dag Hammarskjold once said, created not so much to get us to heaven as to save us from hell. The hell of grinding poverty and injustice is tragically and cruelly real for perhaps half or more of today's global population - eking out a living on less than either a dollar or two dollars a day. The Millennium Development Goals are the most comprehensive package of targeted measures to end this shameful disgrace.

We in UNAs, all over the world, have a key role to play in promoting them, in educating our children about them, in encouraging our Governments to implement them and in seeking to ensure that the injustices of the past are never allowed to be re-enacted in the future.

That is our calling; and we must not turn a deaf ear to it.