



# More than a Numbers Game?

*Ensuring that the  
Millennium Development Goals  
address Structural Injustice*

April 2005

**TROCAIRE**

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# Acronyms

BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action (on women's rights)
Caritas	Caritas Internationalis, an international confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organisations
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CI	Caritas Internationalis
CIDSE	International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity
DAC	Development Aid Committee of the OECD
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FfD	International Conference on Financing for Development, under the auspices of the UN
ICESR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFIs	International Financial Institutions (World Bank and IMF)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDC	Least Developed Countries
GNI	Gross National Income * <i>The UN goal is for rich countries to donate 0.7% of GNI in aid</i>
HIPC	Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries initiative
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NAMA	Non-Agricultural Market Access, a much-prized aim of developing countries in negotiations at the World Trade Organization
NGDOs	Non-Governmental Development Organisations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Related Strategy Paper
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Executive Summary

*In 2000, the member states of the United Nations signed the Millennium Declaration. In it, they committed themselves, among other things, to meeting certain development targets subsequently referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).*

Over the past four years, civil society organisations and governments alike have begun to re-evaluate their activities in the light of these global goals, and to realign policies in order to maximise the chances of meeting the MDGs. 2005 is a critical milestone. It offers a chance to assess the extent to which the ambitions set out in the Millennium Declaration have been achieved – and set out actions needed to achieve them.

The adoption of these goals by governments has been cautiously welcomed by civil society, which recognises this as a step towards a concrete, time-bound commitment to the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights and development goals, as set out in the UN Conventions and summits of the 1990s.

The MDGs represent an attempt to articulate at the highest political level and in a comprehensive fashion the priority areas of social, economic and environmental development that need to be pursued in order to reduce poverty and enable sustainable development. The multi-dimensional nature of the goals makes them an important step beyond the use of economic growth as an indirect measure of poverty reduction. The goals are not perfect, nor are they ambitious enough, but their achievement would mark a major step towards a more just world.

Particularly important is MDG 8, which recognises that the achievement of the other goals depends on a new global partnership, based on collective responsibility. This goal sets out some of the steps that the better off countries of the world need to take in order to create an enabling environment for development. These include: more and better aid, the cancellation of unsustainable debts, reform of the global trading system, and enabling poor countries to have a greater say in international institutions.

Above all, the MDGs provide a global framework that can be used to increase the accountability of governments in meeting commitments they have agreed at international forums. The fact that the goals were signed by Heads of State at the UN, and are attached to a timeline, provides an important link between global policy and national level decision-making: it enables citizens to scrutinise national decisions in the light of globally agreed targets.

However, acknowledgement of the positive nature of the goals is not the same as endorsing the processes and policy measures currently being pursued in their name. The adoption of the goals also brings some serious risks. The MDGs have been rapidly elevated to the status of 'ultimate solution' in international development policy-making. While such a focus on poverty eradication and development is welcome, there is a risk that other agendas not explicitly stipulated in the MDGs – especially human rights norms and standards – will be sidelined in the drive towards achieving the MDGs speedily and efficiently.

The MDG initiative, therefore, brings risks as well as opportunities. The field research for this report identified a number of interlinking risks associated with the current drive to reaching the MDGs:

- Given the holistic nature of the goals, and their crosscutting dimensions, they

encapsulate the breadth of development cooperation efforts that have been in existence for many years. Everybody can attribute elements of existing work to one or other of the MDGs. This has given rise to an elaborate 'window dressing' exercise over the past four years, with little substantive policy change. In this respect, it is possible that the only thing that the MDGs will change is the discourse of poverty and development (making it even more technical) and not the substance of policies. The main winners in that scenario would then be the army of development professionals dedicated to report-writing and intensive monitoring exercises; the poor would only benefit indirectly.

- The targets-oriented approach pays little regard to process issues. The MDGs make no distinction between best practice and bad practice: within the terms of the goals, there is no distinction made between a totalitarian regime that 'halves poverty' on the basis of an ethnic divide and a state that enables poor people to participate actively in budget processes. Likewise, controversial policies, such as the privatisation of basic services, could be adopted in the name of the MDGs without regard for the long-term impact on the equitable distribution of national assets.
- The MDGs tend to entrench a top-down approach to development that ignores local knowledge, participation and solutions in the name of a global agenda and global targets.
- The MDGs tend to foster a 'charity' approach to development, focused on the volume of financial aid, while sidelining necessary reforms to the national and international financial, commercial and political systems. Through setting targets on the basis of quantifiable indicators, they promote a definition of poverty exclusively as a 'lack' of material things, which can be

solved through 'paying' for those things.

In this respect, the MDGs, as currently pursued, run the risk of distracting attention from the causes of inequalities and injustice at national and international levels. The MDGs underscore the need to provide basic social services to the poor. However, this challenge cannot and should not be dissociated from the underlying contradictions within the processes of globalisation. It is plausible that the processes of privatisation and liberalisation that have undermined poverty reduction in many poor countries in the past decade could actually be accelerated in pursuit of the MDGs. Increased aid to achieve the MDGs without pro-poor reform could also bring increasingly centralised conditionality and dependence on the macro-economic policy prescriptions of the international financial institutions (IFIs): the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Many developing countries could find themselves locked in a paradoxical situation: forced to fulfil IMF conditions in order for MDG aid to be disbursed in the knowledge that those conditions limit the quantity of aid inflows allowed and undermine the poverty reducing impact of government expenditure, further increasing dependency on aid. Failure to accept these conditions, moreover, will be interpreted internationally as a failure to work towards the MDGs.

In order to avoid this scenario, three steps are essential in 2005:

Firstly, the MDGs must be set within the wider framework of values and principles encapsulated in UN conventions on economic, social and cultural rights. CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, as networks of agencies rooted in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, underscore the need for values such as participation, subsidiarity and ownership to be at the core of human

development initiatives, rather than being regarded as adjuncts. It is only through putting greater emphasis on the *quality of processes* - and not just the quantity of outcomes - that poverty reduction can be adequately assessed. At present, such a vision is largely missing from the MDGs. On the ground, the MDGs must not become a new conditionality that binds governments to international goals and targets, regardless of their own national priorities. People must be allowed to exercise their right to participate so that solutions are fostered from the bottom up, leaving space for national and local responses.

Secondly, the MDGs must be set squarely within the context of macroeconomic policy-making and the power imbalances underpinning such policy formulation. Goal 8 addresses these issues to some extent, but is extremely weak in its breadth and scope. It does not go far enough to address imbalances in international structures and, unlike the other goals, has no timeline for implementation. It fails to acknowledge that this goal is, to a great extent, an enabler for all the others. The focus of discussions around the achievement of the MDGs must, therefore, shift from one of 'window dressing' and social service provision to substantive reforms of global financial and commercial institutions, taking Goal 8 as the starting point.

Finally, more and better finance is essential. Donor government must honour their funding commitments, and set out how and when they will be met.

## Key Recommendations

### 1. There should be a Stronger Focus on Processes and Quality within the Global Consensus on the MDGs

To this effect, the international community and national governments must work to ensure that the principles enshrined in the Millennium Declaration are reflected in the implementation of the goals it sets out. In our view, this means:

- Much greater emphasis should be placed on quality and process issues, through deepening the link between the MDGs and the values underpinning human development, especially the human rights framework. This emphasis must be reflected in future documents relating to the MDGs, starting with the outcome of the Millennium +5 Summit in September 2005;
- All levels of poverty analysis and strategy development around poverty reduction should incorporate a multi-dimensional, rights-based approach;
- The creation of nationally owned development strategies should be encouraged and supported, using the MDGs as indicative areas of concern and localising the goals to suit national priorities. In particular, stronger emphasis is needed on non-MDG sectors, such as productive sectors;
- The participation of local actors, including communities, civil society organisations and national parliaments, should be enabled and encouraged in setting out plans and priorities.

### 2. Greater Participation of Poor People and Countries should be Facilitated within the Structures of Global Economic Governance

Substantive reform of macro-economic policy frameworks advocated by the

World Bank, IMF and WTO, as well as the donor countries, is essential. International discussions around the MDGs must first accept sovereign countries' control over economic, social and political decision-making as the context in which development takes place. World Bank and IMF policies need to be reformed to take into account local political realities, in particular the needs of the poor.

In our view, the following reforms are essential in order to address underlying structural injustices within global economic governance:

- The composition of the boards of the World Bank and IMF should be altered, voting power rebalanced, formal voting put in place, and the leaders of the organisations selected through open and transparent merit-based processes;
- Transparency should be enhanced by making the transcripts, minutes and important documents of board meetings available to the public, and by establishing sub-boards that would monitor decisions made by the staff of the World Bank and IMF;
- Real democratic control over World Bank and IMF activities should be enhanced through parliamentary oversight. Their orientations and policies should be debated in the parliaments of each member state, as currently happens in some countries;
- The architecture of developing countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) should be revised, bringing all actors (including the World Bank and IMF) inside a domestic, partnership-based, decision-making forum.<sup>1</sup>
- The IFIs should work with key stakeholders to develop the capacity to produce ranges of policy options, including undertaking examinations of

the economic, social and political trade-offs associated with different policy paths.

- The IFIs should be held accountable in international law, in particular human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As a first step, the Draft Guidelines prepared by the UN's Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights on 'A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies' (2002)<sup>2</sup> should be further elaborated and approved.

### **3. The Global Trade Agenda should be brought into line with a Rights-Based Approach to Human Development**

In addition to the above reforms of the IFIs, meeting the MDGs means ensuring that international trade rules are aligned to poverty reduction goals. This means favouring the fair functioning of markets, including the right to protect local markets from dumped imports and ensuring a decent income for small farmers. It would also require greater market access for all LDC products in all developed countries, as well as an end to export subsidies in high-income countries. The institutional processes of the WTO are not adequately equipped to ensure such outcomes. This report argues that substantive reforms are needed to ensure that the global trading system is consistent with the goals set for poverty reduction.

- The WTO should be reformed to ensure democratic, transparent and accountable decision-making.
- A regularised, clear and transparent system should be established - something akin to the consultative status enjoyed in relationship with ECOSOC at the UN - in order to ensure the participation of civil society.
- Trade and investment agreements must recognise, and be made compatible with, the legal priority of

<sup>1</sup> CIDSE-Caritas Internationalis (2004) *PRSP as Theatre: Backstage Policy-making and the Future of the PRSP Approach*, Background Paper, <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200409271723027101.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (2002) *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/povertyfinal.html#guid18>

human rights, gender equality, labour and environmental accords.

- A relationship agreement should be established to formally bring the WTO into the UN family. This agreement should also enable the UN to ensure that the WTO rules negotiation process fully respects the jurisdiction of other agencies, funds and bodies.

#### **4. The Provision of Additional Finance to Achieve the MDGs, and Reform of the International Aid System to Ensure the Aid is Well Spent, require that:**

- By September 2005, all OECD donors should agree on a timetable for reaching the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNI to ODA.
- OECD donors should end the practice of taking an automatic signal for aid disbursements on the basis of IMF recipient countries having a current programme agreement with the IMF.
- All aid should be untied, and directed towards areas identified as national priorities for poverty eradication by host governments.
- The DAC guidelines on aid effectiveness should be put into practice, and systems of donor accountability established at the host government and global level.
- On top of the 0.7% UN target for ODA, additional resources should be made available through innovative means such as an international tax.
- There should be 100% debt cancellation for those countries whose debts are unpayable on the basis of human development needs, paid for by sales of IMF gold and increases in bilateral contributions to debt relief.

The MDGs have created a political space to discuss global poverty at a time when other agendas, such as security, are dominating international forums: the

goals have become the entry ticket to global debates.

The key challenge for civil society is to grasp this opportunity and use this space to focus attention squarely on the underlying causes of poverty and injustice. In the words of Nelson Mandela: *"Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom. Of course the task will not be easy. But not to do this would be a crime against humanity, against which I ask all humanity now to rise up."*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> NELSON MANDELA, Trafalgar Square, 4.2.05  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4232603.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4232603.stm)

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# 1. The Promises of the Millennium Declaration

*"All this has been promised but not delivered. That failure is measured in the rolls of the dead – and on it are written millions of new names each year."*<sup>4</sup>

The Millennium Declaration, signed by world leaders on 8 September 2000, is a remarkable achievement. Despite numerous criticisms launched against the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the past few years, the fact remains that, at a given point in history, the leaders of the world came together and decided to set themselves clear targets on a range of human development indicators. They set out their vision of the kind of world that they would like to see in the next millennium.

The Millennium Declaration is a global political consensus the like of which has never been seen in humanity's history. The choice to sign the Millennium Declaration was not an accident of history; the targets contained within it were not made by chance, but through political negotiation in which each side had to give and take. They were thrashed out in the course of political discussions over several months, in which each word, each comma, was studied and agreed. The result is a consensus on a list of goals that embrace elements that are regarded as central to human development.

Why world leaders decided to sign this document, however, is in some ways a mystery. Cynics could say that the Declaration was signed with no intention

of meeting the goals: like other UN documents, it was the result of 'a talking shop' and represented no more than a photo opportunity. Another likely explanation has to do with the optimism of the year 2000 and the sense of living through an epoch change of momentous proportions. Somehow leaders rose to the occasion and made a 'once and for all' declaration.

Perhaps the leaders thought that this declaration, like all previous UN declarations, could be shelved and never returned to? Yet the context of the Millennium Summit should have prevented such a shortsighted political strategy, if that was their intention. The emergence of the global justice or 'anti-globalisation' movement in the late 1990s meant that global civil society, in all its various forms, was waking up to the commitments set by leaders in various forums. Civil society was sure to call to account leaders on the promises they made in the Millennium Declaration – especially since they were designed in such a way that they were measurable.

## A Political Statement of Values and Principles

In terms of values, the Millennium Declaration makes a number of important points. It starts off by stating that all nations have "a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level." (2) It then outlines some of the key challenges facing the developing world in the process of globalisation, so as to ensure that it "becomes a positive force for all the world's people. For while globalisation offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed." (5) Key values in making this happen include "effective participation" of the developing countries in policies and measures at a global level, as well as respect for fundamental values: freedom,

<sup>4</sup> ANNAN, K (2005) *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. Report of the Secretary General A/59/2005

equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility.

Moreover, the leaders committed themselves to regulating the international system better so as to ensure greater participation and equity. "We are committed to an open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system", they said. (13) They

set out clear benchmarks around the achievement of human rights, democracy and good governance, stating that they would, among other things: "promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law" (24); "strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights, including minority rights" (25); "work collectively for more

**Figure 1: Commitments in the Millennium Declaration: the MDGs**

**1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

- Reduce by half the proportion of people in extreme poverty and hunger
- Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

**2. Achieve universal primary education**

- Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

**3. Promote gender equality and empower women**

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

**4. Reduce child mortality**

- Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

**5. Improve maternal health**

- Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

**6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids
- Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

**7. Ensure environmental sustainability**

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020

**8. Develop a global partnership for development**

- Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – nationally and internationally
- Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction
- Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states
- Deal comprehensively with developing countries debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term
- In cooperation with developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communications technologies.

inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries" (25).

In other words, the Millennium Declaration reaffirms and strengthens the human rights framework at the heart of the UN Charter.

## Concrete Goals and Targets

Such lofty values and principles underscored the various documents and conventions signed in the previous decades in the context of the UN. In many ways, they represented nothing particularly new, except that they were restated in such a high-level forum. What was new, however, was the decision to include concrete promises within the declaration itself. The Millennium Declaration selects a number of promises made in UN conferences, translating them into the Millennium Development Goals summarised in Table 1.

The first seven of these goals represent different dimensions of human development that correspond very closely

to the findings of research over the past several decades. The first indicator is a measure of income poverty, measured by the standard poverty measure of GNP per capita. But this measure, which has been severely critiqued in recent years, is supplemented by other indicators of poverty that relate directly to access to other dimensions of basic needs, including health, education, food, housing, sanitation and water. Goals are set against specific indicators related to each of these sectors, ensuring that the multi-dimensional nature of poverty is addressed by the MDGs – and not just as an indirect consequence of economic growth.

## Key Positive Elements

Before coming on to the difficulties and problems currently associated with the MDGs (the focus of this report), due credit must be given to their many positive dimensions. From the positive point of view, they cover the relevant dimensions of poverty, not just income poverty. The body of academic research underscores the fact that poverty is 'multi-dimensional'. These goals reflect a broad terrain of basic human well being, representing the many dimensions of poverty as part of an integrated whole.<sup>5</sup> The visible signs of poverty can be calculated in terms of access to basic needs such as food, sanitation, water, healthcare and education. The goals underscore the fact that tailored interventions in many sectors are essential if human development is to be achieved, as can be seen from the table below. This analysis also points to a number of key gaps in the MDG framework, such as participation, which will be discussed further ahead.

A further strength of the MDG framework is its implicit links to the human rights framework - although, as we will argue later, such links are not strong enough.<sup>6</sup> The MDGs are linked to the human rights framework both in terms of substance and, to a lesser extent,

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*"In the MDGs we have defined the totality of basic human dignity; we've narrowed it down to specifics that in themselves and in combination define a dignified life, an acceptable human condition. They [the goals] are few in number, manageable and achievable; if you pursue these, you can significantly change the human condition. The specificity of targets and indicators allow for national level ambitions, but also the evolution of a framework for monitoring and evaluating targets."*

**Odhiambo Ojijo, UNDP Kenya**

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<sup>5</sup> PRONK, J (2003) *Collateral Damage or Calculated Default?* The Millennium Development Goals and the Policies of Globalisation Inaugural Address, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague p.2

<sup>6</sup> *Human Rights Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals Conference Report* (2003) <http://www.nyuhr.org/images/NYUHRGJMDGREPORT2003.pdf>.

**Table 1. The MDGs and the Human Development Paradigm**

Human Development						
Directly enhancing human/capabilities dimensions				Contextual dimensions		
Long and healthy life	Knowledge	Decent standard of living	Participation	Environmental sustainability	Human Security	Gender Equality
MDGs 4,5 and 6	MDG 2	Partly by MDG 1		Partly by MDG 7		Partly by MDG3
Child mortality Maternal Health HIV/AIDS	Universal Primary Education	Extreme income poverty Hunger		Environmental sustainability		Gender equality in primary education

Source: Jahan, S 2002

*“The MDGs represent the closest to a global consensus we have. They have the strength of being simple, understandable, identifiable. Targets and indicators can be localised as well, to make them consistent with local targets and goals. They are time-bound. They cut across sectors. They are not controversial, and are easy to build consensus around - unlike some previous development goals.”*

**UNDP, Zambia**

process. The MDGs link directly to Articles 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), which state that ‘everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and the well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services’ (Art 25) and ‘everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.’ Furthermore, Article 28 of the UNHR calls for an international order supportive of the implementation of Human Rights, reflected in MDG 8. The MDGs also link to human rights indirectly through the

paradigm of human development. The MDGs do not cover all the dimensions of human development – in particular, the right to participate and human security are absent – but these do form part of the Millennium Declaration, from which the MDGs are taken.

Several other positive dimensions of the MDGs have been identified in the growing literature on the subject, as well as by the interviewees for this research report. These include:

- The MDGs are global and national. The process through which they were elaborated – Heads of State together – means that they have an impact both at the national level and the global level. There is no higher source of authority than Heads of States agreeing at a global forum.
- They are concrete output targets: they are not process driven. The goals offer clear, agreed and quantifiable targets to galvanise efforts in the rich and poor countries and to hold their leaders to account.<sup>7</sup> This means that they can be objectively verified but, as we will see, it also leaves the question of process wide open.
- Poverty reduction is not regarded as an indirect result of economic growth.
- They are measurable and accountable. Governments have made these promises and can be held to account

<sup>7</sup> OXFAM GB (2004) *Paying the Price: Why Rich Countries Must Now Invest in a War on Poverty*, Oxford.  
[http://www.oxfam.org/eng/pdfs/pp041206\\_MDG.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/eng/pdfs/pp041206_MDG.pdf)

on them. There is no hiding from the MDGs.

- Although not ambitious enough, they are achievable. As goals set by world leaders, they represent shared ambitions that can be achieved if there is political will to do so. There are no ecological, physical, technical or other autonomous reasons that make their achievement impossible within a reasonable timeframe.

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*“The MDGs have helped government planners in providing clear targets, helping them work out very clear resource needs; have helped conscious pursuit of targets that are very clear on a sustained basis over a [long] period of time.”*

**George Anyango,  
MDG Focal Point,  
Ministry of Planning,  
Government of Kenya**

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**Table 2. Civil society views on the positive dimensions of the MDGs**

**Zambia**

- “Very good for advocacy purposes, excellent targets”
- “A lot of interest in the MDGs; human centred and easy for people to identify with”
- “They are relevant because they are trying to address issues of poverty.”
- “It’s not business as usual.”
- “Formulation involved countries finding common ground in trying to look at critical dimensions of poverty and human development;”
- “Regard the MDGs as a set of objectives Zambia might want to attain, using PRSP stages as signposts to gauge where it needs to be at intermediate stages... Most of the goals, targets and indicators are relevant for Zambia... goals 1-7 are very important, Goal 8 is very [too] broad”

**Kenya**

- “They touch on many real development concerns: eradication of poverty and hunger, education, health, HIV-AIDS;”
- “There is a time-frame and there are targets. It’s a little bit more crisp, it doesn’t cover everything. You have the globe then the nations and within the nations you ask how do we approach this?”
- “Very good but we have to find ways of working with people and telling them this is where we are, this is where you are, so how do we move forward?”
- “MDGs really are good ideologically, those are the issues we are confronting, they’ve been taken and put down very clearly”
- “They are few in number, manageable and achievable; if you pursue these, you can significantly change the human condition”
- “The MDGs have changed debates in the South. PRSPs and even Economic Recovery Strategy do have cognisance of the Goals, they do realise that this is what everyone is going on about when they say poverty reduction. It does help crystallise that”
- “MDGs have helped government planners (in Kenya) in providing clear targets, helping them work out very clear resource needs; have helped conscious pursuit of targets that are very clear on a sustained basis over a [long] period of time.”

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Source: Field interviews, Zambia and Kenya, November 2004

## The MDGs and other UN Commitments

Many NGOs and civil society leaders have been slow to recognise the validity of the MDGs, despite their strengths. Part of this is due to the way in which the goals were negotiated and approved in the run up to the Millennium Summit. Throughout the 1990s, civil society organisations played a key role in the negotiation of the UN's Platforms for Action, which arose from the Earth Summit, Copenhagen Social Summit and Beijing Summit, among others. Each platform contains a large number of specific recommendations on key policy areas relating to health, population, education, and poverty eradication. The vast majority of these commitments remain unfulfilled and no effective monitoring processes are in place to ascertain whether they will ever be fulfilled. In the Millennium Declaration, the commitments within these declarations were effectively 'downsized' to one overarching commitment summarised in the eight goals above. No reference is made within the Millennium Declaration to the commitments made in the previous decade.

Furthermore, the process through which this was done did not involve civil society or, largely, southern governments. It was driven by donor governments, building as it did on the OECD's compact: *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the contribution of development cooperation*. This report stated that it was necessary to 'select, taking into account the many targets discussed and agreed at international forums, a limited number of indicators of success by which our efforts can be judged.'<sup>8</sup> The Goals agreed in that report became the basis for another report in 2000 in preparation for the Millennium Summit *A Better World for All*, endorsed by Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN.

The reaction from civil society was scathing: "NGOs were outraged, drawing attention to the need for targets and objectives to be agreed in an inclusive process of negotiations, with transparent procedures. They noted that the OECD was comprised exclusively of rich countries... who can hardly be said to have the interests of the poor nations at the centre of its concerns."<sup>9</sup> Recognising this difficult past, we argue, does not invalidate the goals themselves. The goals should be judged principally on their merits, regardless of how they were arrived at. Nor should this past prevent NGOs and others in civil society from using the MDGs as tools to achieve their goals, wherever possible.

As political goals, the MDGs should not be shunned because, in themselves, they represent the clearest indication yet of a global consensus on the need for poverty reduction. The fact that they are now emerging within the public arena represents a key opportunity to utilise them to harness the political space to address the root causes of poverty.

<sup>8</sup> DAC/OECD (1996) *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation*; [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

<sup>9</sup> VAN REISEN, M, (2004) *The Millennium Development Goals: A Reality Check on their Past, Present and Future*; Paper prepared for Social Watch

## 2. Where are We Now?

*Progress on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, and in particular the MDGs, has been painfully slow. As explained above, many of the MDGs were originally set in the mid-1990s and take 1990 as their baseline, making it possible to assess progress over 15 years. Several authoritative reports have provided extensive detail on the levels of progress at different levels and in different sectors. Suffice here to summarise some of the most salient points from these reports.<sup>10</sup>*

From a global perspective, progress over 130 developing countries, across the broad sectors of human development, is very difficult to summarise. The Millennium Project, headed up by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, has identified the following regional trends in relation to the achievement of the MDGs:

- Even in the fastest growing economies of East Asia, progress is lagging in several dimensions of poverty reduction: health, gender equality, basic infrastructure and environmental sustainability
- In West Asia, poverty levels are increasing, with progress towards gender equality slow, and with threats of resurgent malaria, as well as

HIV/AIDS; In South Asia, gender disparities are severe and persistent, educational levels remain too low, and health outcomes, especially maternal mortality, remain impediments to meeting the MDGs. Moreover, the long-term impacts of the tsunami disaster in late 2004 have yet to be assessed.

- In Latin America, the extent of extreme poverty is much lower than in Asia, but progress in reducing extreme poverty has been much more limited and environmental challenges remain serious.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, most countries are off track to achieve most of the MDGs. The region is stuck in a profound poverty trap that constitutes the epicentre of the world's development crisis.<sup>11</sup>

The 1990s saw many success stories: education improved in Guinea and Malawi; HIV/AIDS levels were reduced in Senegal, Thailand and Uganda; child mortality dropped in Bangladesh and the Gambia; nutrition improved in Indonesia, Mexico and Tunisia; and income-poverty was dramatically reduced in China.

But for each region of the world, and for each area improved, there have also been setbacks: under-5 mortality rates increased in Cambodia, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia, reversing decades of steady decline; primary school enrolment dropped in Cameroon, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tanzania; malnutrition increased in Burkina Faso and Yemen. At the same time, the HIV prevalence in many countries doubled, trebled or even quadrupled, severely affecting the development prospects not only of individuals but of an entire generation.<sup>12</sup>

### Income Poverty

In terms of extreme income poverty, estimates from the World Bank suggest that the average proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day dropped from 32% in 1990 to 25% in 1999. Despite

<sup>10</sup> CDF SECRETARIAT/WORLD BANK (2003) *Getting Serious about Meeting the MDGs: A Comprehensive Development Framework Progress Report*; <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CDFINTRANET/Resources/MDGReport.pdf> UNDP (2003) *The Millennium Development Goals: A Compact among Nations to End Human Poverty*, Human Development Report 2003 <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/>

<sup>11</sup> SACHS, J et al. (2005) *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, Earthscan, London <http://unmp.forumone.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> VANDEMOORTELE, J. (2002) *Are the MDGs feasible?* UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, New York. <http://www.undp.org/mdg/areMDGsfeasible.pdf>.

progress in China and India, 18% of the world's population are still estimated to be surviving on less than \$1 a day. Taken at face value, the downward trend would suggest that, by 2015, the first MDG of 'halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty' could be met on the global scale. The reality is more complex, however. Almost all of the progress has been made in Asia, and especially in China.<sup>13</sup> Other countries have had much more patchy progress, and nearly all of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa have seen reversals in income poverty. This extremely uneven situation, characterised by unreliable data and regional aggregates, makes such estimates so rough as to be virtually meaningless. Income-poverty statistics are only meaningful if based on country-specific projections.

## Primary Education

The target for the MDG on education was originally due to be achieved by 2000. Throughout the 1990s, however, progress in achieving it was very slow, increasing on average by 5% during the decade. The average increase in enrolment in the 1970s and 1980s was 10% per decade. This meant that, in 2000, an estimated 120 million school-aged children were not enrolled: almost the exact number as a decade earlier. At current rates, the goal will not be reached until 2030.

Failure to meet the education goal is particularly worrying as it limits the chances of meeting and sustaining the gains from all the other MDGs. Basic education has a knock-on effect in terms of enhancing the potential to meet all the other goals. In particular, girls' education is critical to achieving the MDGs. Evidence shows that babies born to mothers

without a formal education are twice as likely to suffer from malnutrition or die before the age of 5 than babies born to girls who completed primary school.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, health investments are more effective and efficient where people are better educated.

The original target for achieving gender equality in education was 2005. This gap in primary school education is narrowing, but not as quickly as it ought to be. The ratio of girls/boys in primary education increased from 83:100 in 1990 to 88:100 in 2000. At the current rates, this goal will not be met until 2025. This remains a critical issue in certain regions of the world, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

## Child Mortality

In 2000, more than 10 million children under the age of 5 died, mostly due to preventable diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, measles, malaria, HIV/AIDS and malnutrition. The rates of child mortality have been decreasing, from 103 to 91 deaths per live births between 1990 and 2000. However, this rate of progress is less than half of what was achieved in the previous three decades. A major cause of this was the increasing rates of mother to child transmission of HIV, which has contributed to an unprecedented increase in child mortality in the 1990s. In Zimbabwe, for example, HIV/AIDS is responsible for over 70% of deaths among children under the age of 5.

If this trend continues at the present rate until 2015, the rate of child mortality will be reduced by a quarter – not the two-thirds promised in by the MDGs. Meeting the global target would require that the rate of reduction increases more than five-fold between now and 2015. Given that almost half of under-5 mortality takes place in sub-Saharan Africa, an urgent and rapid improvement in the mortality rates in that region would have to take place in order to achieve this target.

<sup>13</sup> The scale of the reported decrease in poverty in China in recent years is widely contested. NGOs and academics have questioned the reliability of statistics and the methodology used to calculate the decline in poverty. See, for example, the article by RAGHAVAN, C (2000) *Juggling Data to Claim Poverty Decline Third World Network*, <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/juggling.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF (2003) *Girls' Education: Making Investments Count*, UNICEF, New York. <http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Investmentgirlsirlsed.pdf>. See also AIKMAN, S and E UNTERHANDLER (2004) *Beyond Access*, Oxfam, Oxford.

Another major cause of under-5 deaths is malnutrition. In 1990, the target was set to halve malnutrition by 2000 from 32% to 16%. Data shows that between 1990 and 2000, there was only a 4% drop in the rates of malnutrition, from 32% to 28%. Given this shocking lack of progress, the goalposts were pushed to 2015 but current projections indicate that the target will still not be met by then. A three-fold increase in the rate of progress would be needed to ensure that the moderate target of halving the levels of malnutrition is met.

## Maternal Mortality

Each year around half a million women die in pregnancy and childbirth. These figures are notoriously difficult to monitor, but there is consensus that the presence of qualified health professionals at birth is closely linked to maternal mortality. In 1990, the target of reducing maternal mortality by half was set for 2000. In 2000, the goalposts were changed to reducing the maternal mortality rate by 75% by 2015. So far, progress has been slow. The current rate of improvement would have to increase three-fold to meet the new MDG target of 2015.

Progress differs widely across regions in relation to maternal mortality. Little or no change was seen in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, whereas North Africa, East and South Asia observed considerable progress. Latin America and the Caribbean also saw moderate progress.

## HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains the single biggest threat to human development and it is still growing in a number of countries. It is now the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa and it is in the top four leading killers worldwide. The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS is now the single biggest threat to the

achievement of all the MDGs. None of the other MDGs is achievable and sustainable without addressing HIV/AIDS and its effects directly.

Almost 70% of all those with HIV are living in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over 28 million Africans now live with HIV, and AIDS killed 2.3 million African people in 2001. Life expectancy in the 35 worst affected countries in Africa is estimated at 48.3 years, 6.5 years less than it would have been in the absence of AIDS. Nearly 90% of children born with HIV or infected through breast-feeding are living in sub-Saharan Africa. The countries of Southern Africa are most severely affected: between 20% and 25% of adults in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland have HIV. In East and Central Africa, some 10% to 15% of adults are estimated have HIV infection.

The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS has led to a 'poverty trap' in many African countries, undermining years of development efforts. It is recognised that poverty and malnutrition leads to increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, but the reverse is also true: HIV aggravates poverty. It does so by thrusting households back on ever more limited resources, as it removes ailing wage earners and their (usually female) carers from employment, reduces families' ability to engage in small-holding or agricultural work, and means that whatever meagre savings or capital (eg, livestock) families have are put into medicines, health care and funerals or families are forced into high-interest borrowing to meet such expenses. HIV also aggravates poverty through the reduction of employment opportunities, as industries experience a downturn, there is a decline in economic growth due to the loss of skilled labour and, increasingly, the resources that do exist are used for consumption rather than investment.<sup>15</sup>

Education has an important role to play in the reversal of the pandemic, but many countries now find themselves in a 'Catch

<sup>15</sup> KELLY, M, J (2000) *Planning for Education in the Context of HIV/AIDS*; Fundamentals of Educational Planning Series, International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris.

22' situation: HIV/AIDS is now undermining the education system. In 1998, Zambia, for example, lost 1,300 teachers to HIV/AIDS. For every death, a lot more are absent due to illness or caring for relatives who are sick. In several countries, the deaths from HIV/AIDS are outstripping the numbers of new recruits. HIV/AIDS also reduces the demand for education due to a family's inability to pay for schooling. Globally, no progress has been made towards the MDG target of reducing HIV prevalence among young people.

## Access to Safe Water

The goal for universal access to safe water, like many of the other MDGs, was originally set for 2000. By then, however, over 1.1 billion people still lacked access to safe water. The trend of access to water in developing countries had increased throughout the 1990s (from 70% in 1990 to 78% in 2000) but not at the pace expected. In light of this, the MDG for 2015 was less ambitious, seeking to reduce the 'proportion of people without safe water by half'. According to Vandermoortele, this is nearly five times less ambitious than the initial aim. Given this dramatic scaling down, the world is now on target to meeting this new target by 2015.

Such global statistics, although useful in some ways – in terms of giving an overview of where progress has been made – can be misleading. The global picture disguises the huge inequalities that exist at an international and local level. Levels of poverty vary dramatically both in terms of the nature of the poverty and the depth of poverty experienced. Aggregate statistics fail to take account of inequalities that exist within countries and the needs of particularly disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, the elderly and the disabled. At the regional level, sub-Saharan Africa stands out in lagging behind on nearly all of the targets and indicators set.

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*"We are all supposed to reach MDGs by 2015 but there are very different national scenarios and problems, requiring different priorities. Neither national nor international policy environments support the achievement of the MDGs; it may be one of those documents none of us use at the end of the day because I'm sure most of the African countries won't reach those benchmarks by 2015. Then they'll come up with another framework. We will forget about the MDGs by 2010."*

**Women for Change, Zambia**

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## The Global Partnership for Development

Each MDG has a national and international dimension. An integral part of the Millennium Declaration regards changes to the policies of the rich donor countries and reforms of international institutions in order to meet the MDGs. These policies, as mentioned already in Chapter one, constitute the enabling international environment in which the other goals can be realised; they are integral to the realisation of each of the other goals. Goal 8, however, is qualitatively different to the other goals because it involves the quality itself of that partnership between a wide range of international and national actors.

The Financing for Development Conference in 2002, and its follow-up process, has provided the overarching framework for the implementation of concrete mechanisms for financing the MDGs. The conference focused not only on the levels of ODA necessary to achieve the goals, but also the systemic issues that underpin structural imbalances. A core element of this was addressing the coherence of IFI

## Figure 2. Key elements of Millennium Development Goal 8

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system. Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, both nationally and internationally

Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries. Includes: tariff and quota-free access for least developed countries' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

and WTO activities with UN policies and normative standards. The conference was the result of an agreement whereby, for the first time in the history of UN processes, the IFIs and the WTO were active players. Its call for coherence attests to the recognised and continuing need for such an approach, in face of the challenges of managing an increasingly globalised economy. With its emphasis on the achievement of coherence and consistency among trade, financial and monetary policies to support development, the conference sought to re-frame the debate on coherence in a way that would contemplate the necessary role of the UN as the guardian of fundamental human and social standards and values.

So what has been achieved so far? In terms of creating a "rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system", including a commitment to good governance, development and poverty

reduction, very little has been achieved since the signing of the Millennium Declaration in 2000. As a recent IDS report stated: "more than five decades after international development began to emerge as a field in its own right, the international development financing 'system' is really not much of a *system*. It is rather a collection of disjointed entities that lack coherence, often work at cross purposes and are not up to the task of mobilising finance in the amounts and ways required to assist a growing diversity of developing countries in their efforts to reduce poverty and improve living standards."<sup>16</sup> They cite the continued proliferation of development agencies, programmes, funds and organisations as a major impediment to the achievement of development objectives.

One positive outcome of the MDGs is that such systemic issues, clustered around the "coherence debate" are now firmly on the table. A small number of donor countries have begun to address their approach to development in a holistic manner.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the emergence of debates around harmonisation and efficiency address issues of collaboration, complementarity and coherence between the different actors in the development sphere.<sup>18</sup>

From the UN perspective, the outcome of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's High-Level Panel on Threats and Challenges recognised the lack of implementation of the development goals as a major issue to be addressed.<sup>19</sup> While little has been

<sup>16</sup> SAGASTI, F et al (2004) *The Future of Development Financing: Challenges and Strategic Choices*, IDS, Sussex <http://www.new-rules.org/docs/ffdconsultdocs/segasti-bezanson-prada04.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Sweden was the first country to introduce a national policy on coherence for development. See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/55/17/33797161.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> See ROGERSON, A (2005) *What if aid harmonisation and alignment occurred exactly as intended? A reality check on the Paris Forum on Aid Effectiveness*. ODI, Draft Paper prepared for the OECD Forum on Aid Effectiveness <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/6/34373277.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> The final report of the panel concludes: "Development has to be the first line of defense for a collective security system that takes prevention seriously. Combating poverty will not only save millions of lives but also strengthen States' capacity to combat terrorism, organized crime and proliferation. Development makes everyone more secure. There is an agreed inter-national framework for how to achieve these goals, set out in the Millennium Declaration and the Monterrey Consensus, but implementation lags." UN (2004) *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* <http://www.un.org/secureworld/brochure.pdf> p.2.

achieved in practice, there is at least now a growing consensus around the need for transformation – or, at least, reform – of the international system. 2005 constitutes a key opportunity for bringing about many of the reforms cited in the various reports and commissions.

### *Trade reform*

In terms of reform to the trade system, very little has been achieved in the five years since the Millennium Declaration was signed. A new round of trade negotiations was started in Doha in November 2001. The framework for negotiations is set by the Doha Declaration, which commits WTO members: “to establish a fair and market-oriented trading system through a programme of fundamental reform, encompassing strengthened rules and specific commitments on support and protection in order to correct and prevent restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets”.<sup>20</sup>

This Declaration outlined three pillars needed to achieve a fair, market-oriented system in agricultural trade: substantial improvements in market access, reductions of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies, and substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic supports. Ensuring that special and differential treatment for developing countries was an integral part of all negotiations would complement these measures and support development objectives, including food security and rural development goals.

Whilst some measures have been taken since 2001, much remains to be done. The reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy proposed by the EU fall very far short of the reforms proposed in the Doha Declaration.<sup>21</sup> Little has been achieved in terms of reaching an

agreement on a time-bound elimination of EU/US export subsidies/credits and the commitment to phasing out all other trade distorting subsidies. Likewise, serious difficulties remain in relation to ensuring real quota- and duty-free market access, unhindered by inflexible ‘rules of origin’ and other restrictions for LDC agricultural exports.

WTO negotiations gathered pace in early 2005, with regular meetings of all committees and higher-level meetings at mini-ministerial level increasing in regularity. The ambition is to achieve a ‘first approximation’ of negotiations by August, some four months before the Sixth Ministerial.

Currently, the most comprehensive parts of the 2004 ‘July Framework’, dealing with Agriculture and Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA), in particular with respect to tariff formulas and market access, are the subject of major differences. Despite this, members report a feeling that the negotiations are moving towards a new phase whereby agreement on the modalities may be in outline form by the autumn.

LDCs and other developing countries see that unconditional agricultural liberalisation by developed countries is not on the cards. The trade-off for any agricultural concessions remains major concessions in NAMA, which have the potential to destroy local emerging industries. The potential to present LDC and developing country interests in the negotiations is compromised in a process dominated and led by the major developed countries, and which takes place at small, closed mini-ministerial type meetings.

### *Official Development Assistance (ODA)*

Finance is essential to reaching the MDGs. The commitment of rich countries to the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) to ODA is reaffirmed in Goal 8. The MDGs have given new emphasis to

<sup>20</sup> Doha Ministerial Declaration, Adopted on 20 November 2001 [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/min01\\_e/mindecl\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/mindecl_e.htm).

<sup>21</sup> For analysis of the impact of CAP reforms, see RICE, T (2003) *CAP Reform Agreement and Implications for Developing Countries*, Action Aid <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/wps/content/documents/cap.pdf>. See also KWA, A (2003) *EU's CAP TWN Africa*, [http://twnafrica.org/event\\_detail.asp?twnid=391](http://twnafrica.org/event_detail.asp?twnid=391)

the need for higher and additional volumes of aid, and some modest increases have resulted from the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference in 2002.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a number of countries have set out timetables for reaching the 0.7% target.<sup>23</sup> While such timeframes are welcome, there is no binding obligation to stick to them (as will be discussed later) and, already, some countries, including Ireland, have gone back on their promises. One of the key recommendations from the Millennium Project report is that “each donor should reach 0.7% no later than 2015.”<sup>24</sup>

Additional finance is essential for meeting the MDGs. In addition to the 0.7% target, more stable, and predictable finance is also essential for meeting the MDGs. We will return to this point later on. A number of studies have estimated that sub-Saharan Africa alone will need more than \$40bn of external assistance a year in order to meet the MDGs. This is more than double the \$18bn it received in 2002. CIDSE’s estimate is consistent with the African Development Bank’s estimate of \$38bn in the Global Poverty Report 2002 and the preliminary, lower end, value of the Millennium Project’s draft Global Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals (\$41bn to \$72bn).

<sup>22</sup> See Trócaire: Global ODA Levels <http://www.trocaire.org/policyandadvocacy/oda/globalodalevels.htm>. Also, HILDITCH, L, G HURLEY and J LEADBEATER (2005) *Heroes and Villains: Which Countries are Living up to their Promises on Aid, Trade and Debt?* Joint Paper – Action Aid, Eurodad and Oxfam.

<sup>23</sup> Within the EU 15, Denmark, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden have already reached the 0.7% target. Belgium (2010), Finland (2010), France (2012), Spain (2012) and UK (2013) have set timetables for reaching the target. Other EU countries Italy, Austria, Portugal, Greece, and Germany have no target date set. Ireland had set the date of 2007 but has reneged on that promise and has yet to set a new date.

<sup>24</sup> SACHS, J et al (2005) p.xvi.

<sup>25</sup> The World Bank and IMF estimate that by Completion Point eight to ten of the HIPC countries most affected by the slump in commodity prices will have debt-to-export ratios higher than the 150 per cent target set by the HIPC Initiative. More than half of HIPCs are spending about 15 per cent of their government revenue on debt servicing. NORTHOVER, H, F LEIMOINE, et al (2002) *A Joint Submission to the World Bank and IMF Review of HIPC and Debt Sustainability*, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Eurodad – [www.cafod.org.uk/policy](http://www.cafod.org.uk/policy).

<sup>26</sup> The point when creditors commit to reduce debt to “sustainable” levels.

## Debt

On debt, too, the donor countries have collectively broken their promise to the developing world to find a definitive solution to the debt crisis. At the G7 Cologne Summit in 1999, the heads of government of seven of the richest countries in the world promised US\$100bn of debt relief. To date, only US\$31bn has been delivered. The World Bank and IMF promised in their follow-up meetings to provide sufficient debt relief to remove the burden of unsustainable debts from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). But any judgment of the financial benefit of the enhanced HIPC Initiative must start by analysing its impact on the HIPCs and here, the results can best be described as modest.<sup>25</sup>

The central technical flaw of the HIPC initiative is that it uses an inappropriate analytical criterion (the debt-to-exports ratio) to judge the sustainability of a country’s debts. CIDSE has proposed that analyses of debt sustainability for developing countries must take account of a wider set of human development indicators. The capacity to earn foreign exchange through exports is an important element in any analysis of the sustainability of debts denominated in foreign currencies. But for developing countries challenged by widespread and deep levels of poverty, a crucial part of the analytical framework must be the tax revenue actually available to governments and the trade-off between maintaining their debt-servicing obligations and financing poverty reduction.

That said, it is true that the HIPC Initiative has produced pro-poor development finance. Indeed, because the initiative has shown that debt reduction has clear development benefits, CIDSE (like developing countries themselves) is calling for new debt sustainability criteria that will put development first.

In HIPCs that have reached Decision Point<sup>26</sup>, social spending has increased by

between 20% and 50%. Mozambique has introduced a free immunisation programme for children. User fees for primary education have been abolished in Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania, and in rural areas of Benin. Mali, Mozambique and Senegal are due to increase spending on HIV/AIDS prevention. The requirement to consult with civil society to design Poverty Reduction Strategies, moreover, has helped to increase the potential for poor people to influence national resource allocation processes.<sup>27</sup> Uganda and Mozambique, among the early beneficiaries of debt relief and enhanced aid flows, have consistently sustained annual growth rates more than 5 per cent. Two IMF working papers suggest that debt relief has a positive effect on growth rates, whereas conventional forms of aid do not produce the same dynamic.<sup>28</sup>

breakthroughs on any of the key areas of trade, aid and debt. Failure to address these underlying issues is now seriously undermining efforts to reach the MDGs by 2015.

## Conclusion

Overall our assessment is that very little, if any, progress has been made on achieving the MDGs since 2000, particularly within the poorest countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. Although patchy progress has been made in some regions of the world, certain regions are now falling further behind, with devastating consequences both in terms of human loss and regional instability. This is a view reflected in the UNDP *Human Development Report* in 2003, which focused on progress to date. "Unless there is a radical improvement, too many countries will miss the targets – with disastrous consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable of their citizens", it stated.<sup>29</sup> Rich countries, despite rhetorical claims, have consistently failed to meet their obligations under Goal 8. Since 2000, there have been no major

<sup>27</sup> See 25

<sup>28</sup> CLEMENTS, B, R BHATTACHARYA and T QUOC NGUYEN (2003) *External Debt, Public Investment, and Growth in Low-Income Countries*, IMF Working paper, <http://ideas.repec.org/p/imf/imfwpa/03249.html>; PATTILLO, C, H POIRSON and L RICCI, (2001) *External Debt and Growth IMF working paper*, [http://www.wider.unu.edu/conference/conference-2001-2/parallel%20papers/2\\_1\\_pattillo.pdf](http://www.wider.unu.edu/conference/conference-2001-2/parallel%20papers/2_1_pattillo.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> UNDP (2003) *The Millennium Development Goals: A Compact among Nations to End Human Poverty*, Human Development Report 2003 <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/> p.13.

### 3. Shortcomings of the Current MDG Approach

*The MDGs, as outlined above, open space at the highest level to put key issues of poverty and inequality onto the global agenda, providing a welcome opportunity for public debate. They put questions of access of the poor to basic public services centre stage, underscoring the need for higher and additional finances to fill the resource gap that exists. Such a shift in emphasis is particularly important given the current emphasis on global security issues and militarisation. Nevertheless, the way that the MDGs are being used in policy-making at present raises some cause for concern and it must be made clear that acknowledgement of the positive nature of the goals is not the same as endorsing the processes and policy measures currently being pursued in the 'name of the goals'. For while the MDGs are strong on quantitative outcomes, most of which CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis would embrace (or wish to see exceeded), there is a major gap in relation to the processes appropriate to reaching those outcomes.<sup>30</sup>*

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*"I've concerns that MDGs would be treated as some sort of hoops that people have to get through. People use the language of the MDGs: I'm not too sure of energy that is around it, not too sure about levels of commitment to it."*

Donor official, Zambia

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The processes through which the MDGs are reached will, to a great extent, determine the quality of the outcomes themselves. Six sets of problems associated with the MDGs were identified in the field research for this report:

1. Window dressing of existing policies, leading to scepticism about the integrity of the MDGs as a vehicle for real policy change;
2. A persistent top-down approach, leading to lack of ownership and participation of local actors;
3. Lack of attention to the intangible dimensions of poverty;
4. Over-emphasis on external finance volumes rather than reform that would lead to greater participation and ownership;
5. Distracting attention from productive sectors and their role in development, particularly rural development;
6. Distracting attention from the macro-economic constraints underpinning the ability of developing countries to access finance.

Some of these problems, we argue, help explain the distinct lack of progress that has been made in delivering substantial change and concrete results.

#### 'Window Dressing' Leads to Scepticism

The first such risk is that the MDGs can give an impression of change dressed up in a new discursive language – but little

<sup>30</sup> In 2003, an IIED report on the role of local processes in the MDGs concluded that: "the MDGs are very clear in what they want to achieve, but not clear about the means through which they will be achieved. In a sense, they are a critique of development institutions and development theory, because they are pointing to desired outcomes that more than forty years of international aid have failed to achieve. But they give little idea of how international development assistance should change, except that more international aid needs to be spent on interventions to support these goals." International Institute for Environment and Development (2003) *The MDGs and Local Processes, Hitting the Target or Missing the Point?* <http://www.iied.org/docs/mdg/MDG-booklet.pdf>

change in substance. Given the holistic aim of the goals and their crosscutting dimensions, they encapsulate the breadth of development co-operation efforts that have been in existence for many years. Everything and everybody can attribute elements of their existing work to one or other of the MDGs. This has given rise to an elaborate 'window dressing' exercise over the past four years. Countless studies, commissions, reports, workshops and think-ins have been held or are in progress to examine the contribution different institutions are making towards the goals. Much of this work entails re-packaging existing work to fit within the framework of the MDGs.

Associated with this is the way in which the MDGs are leading to new reporting requirements and procedures, which are not usually accompanied by new resources or changes in policies. Within civil society, as with government ministries, there is frustration with ever-changing acronyms and approaches that, in the end, change little on the ground. Rather than enthusiasm for the goals, the most marked reaction to the MDGs is a profound sense of resignation.

In this respect, it is possible that the only thing that changes is the discourse of poverty and development - not the substance of policies and action. The main winners are the army of development professionals dedicated to report writing and intensive monitoring exercises.<sup>30</sup> The net effect of this is to further depoliticise the development agenda, shifting it even more from a question of politics to one of technical support and expertise.

## Persistent Top-Down Approach

Associated with this first risk is the question of participation and the top-down nature of the MDGs. Received wisdom in recent

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*"The negative reactions from civil society to the MDGs are understandable. We've had the PRSPs, now we have the MDGs - what's going to come next? For us it is alphabet soup..."*

Fr Pete Henriot, JCTR, Zambia

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years underlines the need for development strategies to reflect the priorities and needs of the poor. Ownership, participation and partnership have become core principles both in the theoretical approaches to poverty reduction in the past decade and in practice.<sup>31</sup> From a practical viewpoint, participatory approaches and frameworks fulfil a number of key objectives:

- Participation **clarifies project goals**, essentially the promotion of the social and economic development of local communities.
- Participation **reduces project cost**, by identifying site-specific data crucial for determining the most effective size, form and means of execution for projects.
- Participation **prevents or reduces management conflicts** that may be caused between development workers and local people, by negotiating and sharing the development process.

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*"I'm a massive fan of the MDGs but when you try and shortcut the system and give them a role that they weren't ever expected to have in policy, in budgeting...when you start doing that you undermine equity decisions, you undermine local ownership, you undermine all sorts of processes that really are much, much more complicated..."*

DfID, Kenya

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<sup>31</sup> For an alternative perspective on the MDGs see TANDON, Y (2004) *Are the MDGs WMDs\*? (Weapons of Mass Distraction/Diversion)* Unpublished Paper.

<sup>32</sup> The literature on participatory frameworks is vast. A good database covering the main rationale behind participation can be found at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/Gallery/katsumot/shuzo.html#why>

- Participation **promotes technology transfer** to people in need, which is often necessary for projects to have lasting impact.
- Participation **encourages a culture of self-help** and a commitment by people to the development of their own communities. This is one of the most significant goals of participatory projects.

For CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, participation is central to building a more just and equitable world. This vision is encapsulated in the approach of Catholic Social Teaching, which emphasises that human rights can only be fully realised through recognising mutual responsibilities. Underpinning these rights, and sustaining them, must be a shared value system that reflects certain basic principles of equality, justice, truth, honesty, fairness, non-violence, tolerance, participation and solidarity. Without these values, which affirm the centrality of the human person, the idea of human rights becomes meaningless.<sup>33</sup>

Such principles are not additional to human development, but part and parcel of what constitutes human development. The participation of civil society at different levels of interaction – from PRSPs to UN conferences – has become a key feature of the development debate in recent years. At every level, and to varying degrees of success, efforts have been made to translate the *right to participate* into reality, acknowledging that true development is only possible if this right is exercised. The UN also accepts that full participation and ownership are key to turning the MDGs into a reality.

As outlined above, the process that led to the Millennium Development Goals excluded key players, including southern

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*“The trouble with any framework that comes from a group ‘up here’ [at the macro, UN level] is that it can be nice words and nice phrases, and beautiful human development reports written around it... not quite hitting the heart with what people are concerned with in any one particular place... Even when the goals were presented here they were presented largely to an audience of policy makers and NGOs etc.”*

**Prof Dorothy McCormick,  
ODI University of Kenya**

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governments and civil society groups. From their inception, therefore, the participatory nature of these goals has been questionable. In 2003, an IIED report on the MDGs and local processes found that the goals are too determined by ‘external’ experts and that those suffering from deprivation have not determined the priorities and have had no role in the definitions of ‘what is poverty’ and of what is needed to reduce it.<sup>34</sup>

The same report said the MDGs were too focused on the role of international agencies and national governments, neglecting the investments and ingenuity that low-income groups and their organisations can bring to poverty reduction, and the extent to which poverty reduction requires local processes that are more responsive and accountable to low-income groups.

This view was reflected strongly by the civil society representatives in the survey carried out for this report.

In the two countries surveyed for this report, there was general consensus that the governments of Kenya and Zambia viewed the MDGs as something ‘cooked up’ by the outside world to which they

<sup>33</sup> The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, published in 1965, first highlighted the value of participation as a key to authentic human development: “It is in full accord with human nature that juridical political structures should, with ever better success and without any discrimination, afford all their citizens the chance to participate freely and actively in establishing the constitutional bases of a political community, governing the state, determining the scope and purpose of various institutions, and choosing leaders...” (No.75) This view has subsequently been strengthened within the Church’s teaching.

<sup>34</sup> See 30

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*“All we heard a year or two after the MDGs came into place that there’s this thing, therefore we have to reduce poverty by half by 2015. Very few people actually knew there was even going to be such a conference to come up with the MDGs. The poor, if you went to the villages today to ask them a simple question about the MDGs, very few will know there is such a thing. This issue of things decided elsewhere is a major problem.”*

### Zambia Land Alliance

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must respond – or at least give the appearance of doing so. It is mostly international agencies that have pushed the MDGs strongly, and have (rapidly) made them a central focus of their policies, almost to the exclusion of other fundamental aspects of sustainable development. They represent ‘hoops’ that have to be jumped through in order to gain access to finance, rather than incentives for substantive policy change.

Jolly identifies this as a problem not only in relation to the MDGs, but as a risk inherent to setting goals on the international stage. He argues that such goals tend to cement top-down planning and implementation processes at the cost of bottom-up participation, in which the community or other local groups set their own priorities for development.

Global goal setting, according to Jolly, can also lead to a bias in the selection of development goals in favour of those that are internationally favoured by experts or donors, as opposed to those that make the most sense in the national context of individual countries.<sup>35</sup> In this way, the critical issues that matter most to

those countries in need can be masked. Given the power imbalances in the international aid system, such risks within the MDG framework need to be kept at the forefront of policy making and implementation.

The success or failure of the UN’s ambitious drive to have the MDGs incorporated into all developing countries’ poverty reduction plans will greatly depend on the participation of southern governments, civil society organisations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in the formulation of the MDGs - and their sense of ownership over them.

Partnership without full participation and ownership is an anathema. Yet it is apparent that the poorest people, in whose name the objective of poverty eradication is pursued, have never heard of the MDGs. Until they do, they cannot hold anyone accountable for achieving them. While they remain ignorant of them, they are not empowered by them. The solution is not to tell them about the global targets, which are barely relevant to them. It is to involve them in bringing these targets closer to home, to a level where they become tangible and relevant, and can make a difference to their daily lives.<sup>36</sup>

## The Intangible Dimensions of Poverty

A further concern with the MDGs is their lack of direct reference to the intangible dimensions of poverty. It is widely accepted that basic needs extend beyond material goods to include other intangibles, such as the need to be valued or treated with dignity, or to be free to participate politically, culturally, and economically in one’s society. Other important psychological dimensions of poverty are powerlessness, voicelessness, dependency and humiliation.

The different aspects of poverty outlined in Table 3 are based on the views and

<sup>35</sup>JOLLY, R. (2004) *Global Development Goals: the United Nations experience*, Journal of Human Development, 5/1.

<sup>36</sup>McGEE, R. et al (1998) *Distant Targets? Making the 21st century development strategy work*, Christian Aid, London <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/indepth/9810dist/distant1.htm> p.19.

**Table 3. Different Dimensions of Poverty**

- Poorer groups' voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and bureaucratic structures, leading to little or no possibility of receiving entitlements to goods and services; of organising, making demands and getting a fair response; and of receiving support for developing their own initiatives. Also, no means of ensuring accountability from aid agencies, NGOs, public agencies and private utilities, and of being able to participate in the definition and implementation of their poverty reduction programmes.
- Inadequate and often unstable income (and thus, inadequate consumption of necessities including food and often safe and sufficient water); often problems of indebtedness, with debt repayments significantly reducing the income available for necessities.
- Inadequate, unstable or risky asset base (both non-material, including educational attainment, and material, including savings and stores) for individuals, households or communities
- Poor quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing.
- Inadequate provision of "public" infrastructure (piped water, sanitation, drainage, roads, footpaths, etc.), which increases the health burden and often the work burden.
- Inadequate provision of basic services such as day care/schools/vocational training, health care, emergency services, public transport, communications and law enforcement.
- Limited or no safety net to ensure basic consumption can be maintained when income falls or crops fail; also to ensure access to housing, health care and other necessities when these can no longer be paid for.
- Inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law, including laws, regulations and procedures regarding civil and political rights; occupational health and safety; pollution control; environmental health; protection from violence and other crimes; and protection from discrimination and exploitation.

Source: IIED 2003: 27

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*"These are things that were done at the topmost level – without involving citizens... that's why it took a long time for that information to trickle down to the grassroots and, in the process, we've lost time to put pressure on so that they could deliver."*

**Civil Society for Poverty Reduction,  
Zambia**

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experiences of those experiencing poverty. They underscore the fact that poverty reduction is about empowering people to acquire the tools they need to meet their needs, to participate in political processes and to demand

accountability from state and non-state institutions.

The MDGs, as a set of targets, do not deal directly with many intangible dimensions of poverty, such as the inclusion of minority groups. The experience of the Dalits and other minority communities (Figure 3) highlight the complexities that arise in applying a development approach without taking into account local realities.

The MDGs do not deal directly with many intangible dimensions of poverty. While they seek to relieve the suffering caused by addressing the lack of access to basic services, there is a risk that the underlying drive towards speed and efficiency could sidestep the prerequisite of participation and its role in empowering citizens. Had a more holistic definition of poverty been used, such as that laid out in the UN

### Figure 3. The MDGs and Minority Groups: the Case of the Dalits and Tribals in India

Minority groups such as Dalits in India and ethnic minorities count for more than one billion of the world's population. Dalits alone represent over 300 million people. They form the poorest of the poor, for whom the MDGs have been designed. Why then have the MDGs become impossible dreams for them? This is partly due to the lack of a human rights approach in the MDGs. But even with a human rights approach, if we consider Dalits just as 'individuals' in a 'country' process, they will continue to comprise the bulk of the poor by 2015 because the very system in the country where they belong denies their right to be treated as equal, and therefore to participate in the process.

A Social Watch Study in Tamil Nadu on Dalits: The Lost Dimension in the MDGs in November 2004 stated that "after more than 50 years of planning, the socio-economic status of Dalits has significantly lagged behind that of others" in India. The MDGs will be another development failure if they continue to ignore this marginalisation and exclusion. Just including human rights approaches in the MDGs would not challenge this reality because national and international human rights mechanisms and treaties have also failed to deliver them equal citizenship 50 years after the Universal Declaration.

This stark reality was once again manifested in relief and rehabilitation programmes after the tsunami disaster of December 2004, with many Dalit and tribal disaster victims thrown out of camps and denied their due share of resources.

The MDG process requires very specifically designed goals, targeted policy frameworks and adequate mechanisms, with indicators and separate budget allocations, if it is to guarantee the participation of the world's poorest and most marginalised peoples, who continue to be the main victims of exclusion, including in the recent MDG studies and debates.

*Human Development Report 1997, issues of participation and empowerment would be at the centre of the MDGs.<sup>37</sup>*

Such a view is compounded by the inherent risk that targets can play in public policy making and implementation. While targets are useful for rallying support, as can be seen by the way the MDGs have led to greater focus on ODA levels, process issues are often ignored within that framework as a natural consequence of the agreement on outcomes. As concrete policy tools, targets and goals tend to foster a simplistic view of how systems work. The result is a linear, technocratic, apolitical understanding of what constitutes change. In that scenario, important process issues, which are notoriously difficult to measure - such as equity,

*"When you try and shortcut the system and give them (MDGs) a role that they weren't ever expected to have in policy, in budgeting.... when you start doing that you undermine equity decisions, you undermine local ownership, you undermine all sorts of processes that really are much more complicated than that."*

DFID Kenya

consensus building, and partnership – can be systematically overlooked.<sup>38</sup>

Maxwell points to the experience of target setting in the UK as an example of how complex processes can be oversimplified and priorities can be skewed as a result of targets. This research shows that the use of targets can "encourage a reductionist approach to complex

<sup>37</sup> Poverty is defined as "the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development – to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others." UNDP, (1997) *Human Development Report: Human Development to Eradicate Poverty* [www.hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1997/en/](http://www.hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1997/en/)

<sup>38</sup> MAXWELL, S (2003) Heaven or Hubris? *Reflections on the New 'New Poverty Agenda' Development Policy Review* 21/1 pp.5-25 [http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/images/Journal\\_Samples/DPRO/950-6764~21~1~196/196.pdf](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/images/Journal_Samples/DPRO/950-6764~21~1~196/196.pdf).

#### **Figure 4. The Downside of Goal 1: Measuring Poverty using the 'Dollar a Day' Poverty Line**

Monitoring progress towards MDG 1 with the 'dollar a day' poverty line has grave limitations, especially in nations where the governance structure is particularly weak, ineffective or anti-poor. Any income-based poverty line should reflect the real monetary cost for individuals or households of meeting their needs. In most nations, however, the income-based poverty lines used by government do not do this, because they take insufficient account of the real cost of non-food essentials, or do not include the cost of some non-food essentials in their calculations. Most do not allow for differences within national territories in the prices of essential goods and services. The use of a single income-based poverty line greatly understates who is poor in the higher-cost locations.

Furthermore, if poverty is seen as a lack of opportunity to acquire lasting control of resources, in order to strengthen one's capacity to acquire the basic necessities of life, combating it will require more than money, more than an income. It requires assets or entitlements, the value of which cannot be easily estimated in money terms. In other words, it requires rights that ensure access to all these things - rights that certainly cannot be acquired for a dollar a day.

Another flaw of the dollar a day yardstick to measure poverty levels is that it takes no account of people who did not even reach this level because they died, due to poverty, shortly after birth or at least far below the average life expectancy enjoyed by others. Their numbers do not even reach the income statistics. At present, annual poverty-related deaths run into dozens of millions. Such a figure would add substantially to an annual stock figure of poor people at any particular moment in time.

A critical question posed by Pronk with regard to the dollar a day yardstick is what kind of life can a person live on a dollar a day anywhere in Africa, Asia, in the cities of Latin America, or even in China? He wonders if that question has not been raised because of the fear that a more ambitious goal, affecting more poor people, could never be attained without far-reaching changes in the distribution of world income and entitlements, while the dollar level would only require better governance in the poor countries themselves and a slight increase in development aid. The blame for not meeting a dollar a day target level could easily be apportioned to the poor countries themselves, while failing to reach a more civilised goal could be attributable to the richer countries and their reluctance to share with the poor.

problems, privilege quantitative indicators at the expense of qualitative ones, distort resource allocation, undermine professional motivation, and responsibility."<sup>39</sup> The fact that the MDGs and accompanying targets are greatly concerned with measurable outcomes may result in too much support for top-down, targeted interventions to deliver on the chosen targets, and a neglect of development aspects where impacts are not easily measured, such as more accountable local governance, protection of poorer or minority groups' civil and

political rights, and enhanced possibilities for community-designed and managed initiatives.<sup>40</sup> A further concern, highlighted by Jolly, is that targets produce a perverse incentive to falsify statistics rather than admit to failures or the non-availability of relevant data.

Is this a real issue for the MDGs? According to many of the respondents involved in this report, this is a risk for the MDGs – but one that can be addressed. The risk lies not in the value of the outcomes of the MDGs, but in who owns those outcomes and the capacity of the global plan to by-pass local processes. Several interviewees quoted the Millennium Project initiative as one example of where the targets had overstepped the boundary between global planning and local processes. Local

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.12

<sup>40</sup> Chapman, moreover, argues that public service organisations are complex, adaptive systems, which can be expected to respond poorly to centralised targets. Targets will (1) maximise the likelihood of adverse unintended consequences, (2) increase administrative overheads, (3) make institutions more fragile, (4) demotivate staff throughout the system, and (5) cause disillusion among clients. He concludes that the 'current approach to policy making and implementation can be expected to fail'. CHAPMAN, J (2002) *Systems Failure: Why Governments Must Learn to Think Differently*, Demos, London

### Figure 5. Does Millennium Development Goal 3 Empower Women?

MDG3 has many problems, in particular, its totally inadequate Target 4 of “eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education” and its accompanying indicators. While the indicators on education and literacy represent major achievements for women everywhere, experience in the Caribbean shows how inadequate they are as indications of empowerment, where they have certainly not translated into higher access to employment, incomes, decision-making positions in the public domain or political office.

Women in Caribbean countries have already achieved the target, yet can hardly speak of equality, equity or empowerment in a situation where poverty persists, violence against women continues unabated and the second highest spread of HIV/AIDS after sub-Saharan Africa prevails, with its incidence especially worrying among women. Moreover, despite efforts to change this, there is still a great deal of sex-role stereotyping in the school curriculum that limits the options of girls. Indeed, education (or certain forms of education) may perpetuate gender stereotypes and, in that sense, even serve to reinforce the existing socio-cultural gender construct.

It depends on the circumstances in which women candidates take part in elections as to whether the number of women in parliaments is a useful indicator of women’s empowerment. In CARICOM, with few exceptions, the small number of women who run for and win seats owe their preferment to the men who make decisions within political parties: women who challenge male privilege are not likely to be among these. Once in office women (and men) tend to cede their own power to that of their government, and are unlikely to have the freedom to demonstrate empowerment and agency, especially in relation to gender issues.

NGOs, civil society and community groups are regarded principally as implementers of the MDGs rather than full participants in setting the priorities for development.

These potential drawbacks can best be illustrated in relation to the specific targets set for the various MDGs. A number of criticisms have been levied in relation to the 18 MDG targets that accompany the MDGs. Black and White (2003) criticise them for defining the expected outcomes of development rather than inputs in the form of resources and processes.<sup>41</sup> Maxwell also highlights the risks they pose: they can encourage a reductionist approach to complex problems, such as the ‘dollar a day’ target for poverty reduction in the box below. These tend to privilege quantitative indicators at the expense of qualitative indicators, distort resource

allocation, and undermine professional motivation and responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

These issues are further highlighted in relation to other goals, such as goal 3 on gender equality (see Figure 5). One obvious problem relating to the gender dimension of the goals is that none of the other indicators are gender-sensitive. UNIFEM has proposed additional indicators, including women’s wages and economic equality, but they are still inadequate. Truly gender-sensitive measures of progress would have to include indicators such as access to and control of land, equality before the law, incidence of domestic violence and rape, and access to health services.

### Over-Emphasis on Volume of Finance

Additional finance, in particular increases in ODA, is generally acknowledged as essential to achieving the MDGs.<sup>43</sup> CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis strongly share this view. One of the strengths of the goals is the way in which they are able to focus

<sup>41</sup> BLACK, R and H WHITE, eds. (2003) *Targeting Development: Critical Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals*, Routledge, London, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> See 37, p.30

<sup>43</sup> VANDERMOORTELE, J and ROY, R (2004) *Making Sense of MDG Costing*, Poverty Group Paper UNDP <http://www.undp.org/poverty/docs/making-sense-of-mdg-costing.pdf>. ATKINSON, A B (2004) *New Sources of Development Finance: Funding the Millennium Development Goals Policy Briefing B*, No.10, UNU-WIDER.

attention on the provision of essential services to the poor and to demonstrate the gap that exists between existing sources of funding and what is needed to meet the goals.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, they can act as a powerful lever for international resources to address poverty and hunger.

This growing emphasis on the volume of finance, however, needs to be accompanied by an equally strong focus on quality issues – and reforming the international aid system. Merely increasing finance is not the solution to achieving the MDGs: the economic and political imbalances within the aid system means that the provision of any additional funds needs to be accompanied by reforms to the system to achieve the maximum benefit.

This emphasis on the need to increase the volume of development finance must be seen within the wider context of reforms to the aid system needed to achieve the goals. If the donor community is serious in its intent to achieve the MDGs, the challenge is not only to increase aid, but also to ensure that the financing instruments are sufficiently predictable and flexible to respond to the needs of low-income countries. At present, donor flows are highly unpredictable. They are four times more volatile than income from domestic revenue.<sup>45</sup> The current volatility and unpredictability of aid flows is a serious impediment to planning to meet the MDGs. Only 70% of pledges are currently delivered. A more stable and predictable way to finance recurrent social spending and capital outlays is essential.

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*“The investment requirement is just beyond what this country can afford.... That’s why we’re saying: Lets know all what we require, what can be gotten domestically, lets know what the gap is. And this gap is so strong that it is for the development community to provide in the spirit of world aid and, of course, the Monterrey conferences.”*

UNDP Kenya

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## Distracting Attention from Productive Sectors

A further concern with the current MDG approach is its potential to distract attention from the need to invest in the productive sectors of developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Almost without exception, the lowest average yields for crops and livestock are found in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>46</sup> African agricultural production actually declined by 5 per cent between 1980 and 2001.<sup>47</sup>

If African countries are to have any chance of meeting and sustaining the MDGs, they need substantial investment in their productive sectors. Spending on Africa’s productive sectors, such as agriculture, has fallen in relative terms over the past 20 years. Noting donors’ increasing preference for allocating aid to social sectors such as health and

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*“Simply allocating more resources, even on education and health, will not reduce poverty; it is a matter of how that money is utilised”*

**Prof Venkatesh Seshamani,  
University of Lusaka, Zambia**

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<sup>44</sup> Oxfam, 2005 p.

<sup>45</sup> BULIR, A and A. JAVIER HAMANN (2003) *Aid Volatility: An Empirical Assessment*, IMF Staff Papers, Vol 50 No. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> UK Parliament International Development Select Committee (2004) International Development Committee: DFID’s Agriculture Policy, Seventh Report House of Commons, London.

education – ‘traditional MDG sectors’ – equal and increasing investments in production and economic sectors are crucial for Africa to build its productive base and enhance its economic prospects.

As the head of the UN’s Economic Commission for Africa, KY Amoako, said in 2003: “This preoccupation with the lifting of social services may have led us to neglect the centrality of strengthening the fundamentals... There has been a sharp reduction in the share of aid going to productive sectors. [Aid and debt relief] may have enshrined a set of policy priorities, which does not fully reflect Africa’s most urgent needs. There is clearly a necessity to direct HIPC savings beyond the social sectors.”<sup>48</sup>

In Africa more than 70 per cent of the poorest people live in rural areas and work in agriculture. There is an intimate relationship between poverty and agriculture. Studies have repeatedly shown that agriculture is key to poverty reduction efforts in Africa and must therefore play a central role in achieving the MDGs. Of the 1.2 billion people worldwide living on less than a dollar a day, 900 million live in rural areas.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, given the lack of alternatives,

agriculture is the only route to sustained poverty reduction in Africa.

Agricultural growth has a more powerful impact on poverty reduction than any other economic sector.<sup>50</sup> Agricultural growth favours the sector where poor people work, uses the land and labour that they possess, produces crops that they consume and favours the rural areas where they live. It generates employment, creates income, and increases the ability of poor people to secure and create further assets. A 1 per cent increase in agricultural productivity has been found to reduce the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day by between 0.6 and 1.2 per cent.<sup>51</sup>

In the past two decades, moreover, African countries have been under constant pressure to lower their agricultural tariff barriers. This is evident in the conditions attached by the World Bank and IMF to the approval of new loans and debt reduction. Liberalisation has often occurred at a breathtaking pace and depth, and has seemingly been promoted more by economic dogma than a considered analysis of its probable impact on poor people. Both Mozambique and Zambia now have more open economies than the UK and Germany, for example.<sup>52</sup>

The liberalisation process has led to surges in imports of cheap, usually subsidised, products to developing countries that have undercut small farmers’ ability to sell to local markets. This sets off what the FAO describes as “a progressive pauperisation of small-scale farmers, who cannot possibly compete with modern capitalised farms in an increasingly open world economy.”<sup>53</sup> Sixteen country case studies carried out by the FAO, looking at the impact of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, found that food imports surged after liberalisation. “Tariffs were often the primary, if not the only, trade instrument open to these countries for stabilising domestic markets and safeguarding farmers’ interests”, the FAO noted.<sup>54</sup> As

<sup>48</sup> AMOAKO, K Y (2003) Speaking at Expert Group meeting on Africa’s Debt, UNECA November.

<sup>49</sup> IFAD (2003) *Achieving the MDGs by Enabling the Rural Poor to Overcome their Poverty*, Rome.

<sup>50</sup> HANMER, L and D BOOTH (2001) *Pro poor growth: why do we need it, what does it mean and what does it imply for policy?* ODI, London; See also LIPTON, M. and M. RAVALLION (1995) *Poverty and Policy*; RAVALLION, M. and G. DATT (2000), *When is Growth Pro-Poor?* Mimeograph, World Bank.

<sup>51</sup> EASTWOOD, R and M LIPTON (2001) *Pro poor growth and pro growth poverty reduction: what do they mean? What does the evidence mean? What can policymakers do?* Asia and Pacific Forum on Poverty: Reforming Policies and Institutions for Poverty Reduction [http://www.adb.org/Poverty/Forum/frame\\_lipton.htm](http://www.adb.org/Poverty/Forum/frame_lipton.htm). The World Bank found that a 1 per cent increase in agricultural GDP per capita led to a 1.6 percent gain in the income of the poorest fifth of the countries analysed. See TIMMER, C.P. (1997) *How well do the poor connect to the growth process?* Harvard Institute for International Development, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>52</sup> IMF’s Trade Restrictiveness Index (1999) available from the IMF’s *International Financial Statistics* CD Rom.

<sup>53</sup> FAO (2000) *The State of Food and Agriculture 2000*, FAO, Rome [http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/docrep/x4400e/x4400e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/x4400e/x4400e00.htm).

<sup>54</sup> FAO (2000) *Agriculture, Trade and Food Security Issues and Options in the WTO Negotiations from the Perspective of Developing Countries - Vol. II Country Case Studies*, FAO, Rome [http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/docrep/003/X8731e/X8731e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/003/X8731e/X8731e00.htm).

such, they represent a central source of income generation for southern governments.

With growth rates of between 6 and 8 per cent typically required to achieve the MDGs in Africa,<sup>55</sup> only agriculture can be expected to mobilise the required economic dynamism.<sup>56</sup> Not only can agriculture reduce poverty directly, but it can also stimulate growth in the wider economy. Studies have shown that a \$1 increase in agricultural value added leads to an increase in value of between \$1.50 and \$2.00 in the non-farm economy. Similarly, a 1 per cent increase in agricultural gross output has been shown to raise rural non-farm employment by 1 per cent.<sup>57</sup>

## Distracting Attention from Macro-Economic Constraints

A final risk with the current MDG approach is its ability to distract attention from the underlying macro-economic conditions that constrain the ability of developing countries to take control over their own finances. As discussed above in relation to the international aid regime, the ability of countries to use the aid available to them depends on their ability to meet conditions set out by the IMF and World Bank. The IFIs not only administer a substantial share of all official development assistance, these institutions also exert enormous power by acting as gatekeepers for flows of official

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*“The cabinet is completely distracted by the drive to reach HIPC completion. Other things are going on, but everyone at government level is completely distracted by that; I’m not convinced of a serious focus on the MDGs, per se”*

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**Donor official,  
Zambia**

development assistance. They give their stamp of approval to countries they deem fit for investment, thereby signalling to the rest of the international community, including bilateral donors, other international financial institutions and even the private sector that it is safe to invest.

The credibility of the IFIs’ stamp of approval comes in part from their preferential creditor status, which means that the IFIs are usually the first creditors to be paid, and are paid back in full and on time. Moreover, borrowing countries get the IFIs’ approval only after agreeing to undergo the structural and policy reforms dictated by these two institutions.

In theory, such macro-economic conditions are set in the country’s long-term interests to ensure macro-stability. In practice, however, the policy advice offered by the IMF and World Bank has served to further undermine the potential of countries to reach the MDGs. The role of the IFIs has come into serious question in a number of reports highlighting the manner in which they have stretched their endeavours beyond their original mandates.<sup>58</sup> Donors should take heed of the abundant and authoritative evidence that conditionality regimes imposed by the IMF have failed to produce pro-poor outcomes or deliver the policy reforms desired by donors.<sup>59</sup>

In theory at least, the MDG of halving the proportion of people in poverty, for

<sup>55</sup> AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (2002) *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa: Progress, Prospects and Policy Implications*, AfDB, Abidjan.

<sup>56</sup> AUDINET, J P and S HARALAMBOUS (2005) *Achieving the MDGs: Rural Investment and Enabling Policy*, IFAD, Rome <http://www.ifad.org/events/gc/28/panel/e.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> HAZELL, P and S, HAGGBLADE (1993) ‘Farm-Nonfarm Growth Linkages and the Welfare of the Poor’ in VAN DER GAAG, J and M. LIPTON, (eds.) *Including the Poor: Proceedings of a Symposium Organized by the World Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>58</sup> MELTZER, A (2000) *Report of the International Financial Institutions Advisory Commission*, Washington, D.C.

<sup>59</sup> Amongst the studies reaching this conclusion: IEO (2004) *Evaluation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGFs)* <http://www.imf.org/External/NP/ieo/2004/prspgrgf/eng/index.htm>; IEO (2002) *Evaluation of ‘The Prolonged Use of Fund Resources* <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ieo/2002/pu/>; Independent Group of Experts (1998) *External Evaluation of the ESAF* <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/extev/index.HTM>.

example, could be met by exacerbating the poverty of the other half – thus deepening the poverty of some to lift others out of poverty. It could equally be achieved through addressing the unequal distribution of assets and resources, through land reform or progressive taxation. This ambivalence is echoed in much of the critical literature: “risk exists that targets set by the Millennium Declaration may be met without addressing the structural issues that ultimately will determine the durability of the success.”<sup>60</sup> The emphasis on ODA levels in meeting the MDGs could result in the objective targets being met in part by 2015, but the questions of structural inequality being left largely unanswered. This view is echoed by Martin Khor, who underlines the fact that the mere expansion of funds is not enough and may, in fact, be counter-productive unless the underlying issues of national and international inequality are addressed adequately.<sup>61</sup>

As Roberto Bissio of Social Watch argues: “if international aid was to be duplicated tomorrow, the present macroeconomic system would not allow it to be spent. The World Bank and regional development banks already have more money available than what countries are allowed to absorb by the rules of the IMF.”<sup>62</sup>

One such example occurred in Uganda, which was originally forced to reject a \$52m grant from the global fund for HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB so as to stay within the strict budgetary constraints it had agreed to acquire loans from the IMF. It was only after pressure on the IMF by donor governments that the decision was reversed. The low fiscal deficit and inflation targets of the IMF are directly affecting the capacity of governments to access available aid resources.

The serious implications of such underlying conditions are barely mentioned in the MDGs and are noticeably absent in the recommendations set out in the Secretary General’s Report in preparation for the Millennium+5 Summit. Addressing the role of the IFIs in developing countries raises difficult questions around global economic governance, around participation and around ownership. These questions need to be put centre-stage in the debates surrounding the implementation of the MDGs.

## Conclusion

This section has examined some of the problems with the MDGs as they are currently being pursued internationally and on the ground. As with any overarching framework, there are serious shortcomings with the MDGs. The framework tends to foster simplistic solutions and ‘top-down approaches’ that treat some of the symptoms – but not the causes – of poverty. Some of these can be overcome through greater attention to the wider context in which the goals are being pursued.

At a more fundamental level, however, there is a serious risk that the MDGs could distract attention from underlying causes of structural injustice, at national and global levels. The framework fails to fully appreciate the role of the IFIs in national economic planning within developing countries – and their lack of accountability. There is little chance that the MDGs will be achieved if these basic issues are not addressed.

This view was captured in the civil society report on the MDGs in 2003: “The problem with the MDGs is that they focus attention only on the consequences of poverty and social exclusion and not on their causes. They, therefore, perpetuate a system that tries to put a sticking plaster on the problem rather than trying to address the dynamics creating the problem – which will continue to re-

<sup>60</sup> AHMAD, K (2003) ‘Meeting the Challenge’, *Asian Development Bank Review*, 36 (3), p.11

<sup>61</sup> KHOR, M, (2003) *Developing a Global Partnership for Development: Critical Issues and Proposals for Trade and Finance*, Third World Network <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/mdg.doc>.

<sup>62</sup> BISSIO, R (2003) ‘Civil Society and the MDGs’, *Development Policy Journal*, (3) April 2003, UNDP, New York. [http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg\\_bissio.pdf](http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg_bissio.pdf).

create the problems however much the sticking plasters provide temporary relief. The MDGs allow the international community to ignore the causes of the wounds and who is responsible for wounding.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> FOSTER, J (2003) 'The Millennium Declaration: Mobilising Civil Society Organisations', *Development Policy Journal*, March 2003 [http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg\\_foster.pdf](http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg_foster.pdf) p. 168.

## 4. Ensuring the MDGs Address the Structural Causes of Injustice

*Addressing the concerns about the MDGs highlighted in this report means moving beyond the current emphasis on aid volumes and 'costing studies' to addressing process issues, including structural reforms in the system of global governance. Additional finance is essential – this is not disputed. It is essential that major advances are made in 2005 in addressing finance issues, as outlined in the recent CIDSE position paper Justice Not Charity<sup>64</sup> and underlined here. Reducing poverty and achieving economic justice is about more than aid levels, however. As outlined above, it also means addressing the underlying structural causes of injustice at national and global levels.*

This year offers a key opportunity to achieve breakthroughs on these issues, given the Millennium+5 Summit focus on progress towards the MDGs, but only if they are regarded as an integral component of achieving the goals. Four related concerns require particular attention. In this final section, we outline the key conclusions of the research and make recommendations on how to address the issues raised.

### The MDGs and Human Rights

The relationship between the MDGs and the broader human rights framework has been highlighted as a weaknesses of the MDGs.<sup>65</sup> A common thread in many criticisms lodged against the MDGs, outlined in the previous section, relates specifically to the absence of norms and standards like participation, partnership and empowerment. A human rights approach to the MDGs would ensure that a number of key elements currently lacking in the discourse were safeguarded.

There are also a number of important links between the MDGs and human rights in terms of monitoring. It is through the human rights framework that the duty-bearers can be held accountable, since the principles of transparency and accountability are at the core of the human rights framework.

Moreover, it is the rights framework that can help redirect attention from the outcomes alone, through greater emphasis on processes. This dimension is missing within the current monitoring

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*"The whole thing has to be around rights. You approach them [the Goals] from a rights perspective and not provision. They reason people are poor is because their rights are being denied: that's the bottom line. MDGs are almost distracting from the rights issue... To me, the main things is to start talking about people 's rights to get all these MDGs and, once we have approached it from a rights-based perspective, then we will get there because we will hold governments accountable."*

**Gezahegn Kebede,  
Kenya Country Director, Oxfam GB**

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<sup>64</sup> CIDSE (2005) *Justice not Charity: Policy Recommendations to Donors ahead of the G8 Summit 2005*, CIDSE Position Paper, January 2005, CIDSE, Brussels. <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200501241019543612.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> ALSTON, P (2003) *Human Rights Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals Conference Report*

**Table 4. Core Elements of a Rights-Based Approach to the MDGs**

<i>Universality and inalienability</i>	All people everywhere in the world are entitled to human rights. They cannot be given up or taken away.
<i>Indivisibility</i>	Human rights are indivisible. Whether of a civil, cultural, economic, political or social nature, they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person. Consequently, they all have equal status as rights, and cannot be ranked, a priori, in a hierarchical order.
<i>Inter-dependence and Inter-relatedness</i>	The realisation of one right often depends, wholly or in part, upon the realisation of others. For instance, realisation of the right to health may depend, in certain circumstances, on realisation of the right to education or of the right to information.
<i>Equality and Non-discrimination</i>	All human beings are entitled to their human rights without discrimination of any kind, on the grounds of race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status as explained by the human rights treaty bodies.
<i>Participation and Inclusion</i>	Every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to, and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development in which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realised.
<i>Accountability and Rule of Law</i>	States and other duty-bearers are answerable for the observance of human rights. In this regard, they have to comply with the legal norms and standards enshrined in human rights instruments. Where they fail to do so, aggrieved rights-holders are entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before a competent court or other adjudicator in accordance with the rules and procedures provided by law.

Source: UN<sup>66</sup>

frameworks for the MDGs, which focus entirely on the quantitative outputs rather than quality or process issues, as will be discussed later.<sup>67</sup>

Human rights instruments and mechanisms need to be mobilised to challenge the weak accountability mechanisms in the MDGs and present the case that, not only should states be politically committed to the MDGs, they should also be legally obliged to demonstrate that commitment under various human rights treaties. The ICESR, CEDAW, and the BPFA offer a conceptual framework for understanding the MDGs as human rights obligations.<sup>68</sup> This changes the debate from the language of

will and commitment to the language of duty and obligation.

A summary of the human rights principles that need to be applied to the MDGs is outlined in the table above.

In addition to these conceptual tools, human rights instruments can help to counter some of the weaknesses associated with the MDGs in the areas of monitoring, policy analysis, policy design, participation and accountability. The MDGs would be seen in the light of the legal obligations already voluntarily undertaken by governments that have ratified human rights treaties. A rights-based approach brings norms of non-discrimination and equality to ensure that aggregated approaches do not neglect individuals. Likewise, it gives teeth to vague terms such as 'participation' and 'empowerment', and brings greater specificity in relation to particular civil and political rights.

<sup>66</sup> The Human Rights Based Approach: Towards a Common Understanding Among the UN Agencies, 7 May 2003

<sup>67</sup> JAHAN, S (2002) *Human Development and Millennium Development Goals: Analytical Linkages and Policy Issues*. Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP, Summary: [http://www.inwent.org/ef-texte/human\\_rights/jahan.htm](http://www.inwent.org/ef-texte/human_rights/jahan.htm)

<sup>68</sup> PAINTER, G R (2004) *Gender, the Millennium Development Goals, and Human Rights in the context of the 2005 Review Process*, Gender and Development Network Report [http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg\\_women2004.pdf](http://www.choike.org/documentos/mdg_women2004.pdf).

## Participation at Local and National Levels

The right to participate is inherent within much of international human rights law, including the right to: freedom of expression, freedom of association, education, to receive and impart information, and to self-determination. It is covered under the obligation of 'states parties' to make their human rights treaty obligations widely known, and is underpinned by the principle of non-discrimination.

The right to participate is also referred to in specific human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (article 21 on the right to take part in the government, the will of the people as the basis of the authority of government and the right to vote) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 25 on the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to vote). It is also included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 12; one of its basic principles is respect for the views of the child; article 15 on 'safe spaces' in which these views can be expressed) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (participation of girls is a principle of 'paramount consideration', while article 14 refers to participation of rural women in the public and political life of their communities, and, in particular, in the design and implementation of development planning).

In order to avoid the MDGs becoming another top-down development initiative, the right to participate must be incorporated into the local and pro-poor national planning strategies. This entails ensuring that local communities, civil society and other stakeholders are enabled to participate in setting priorities. It also entails putting in place open accountability mechanisms for civil society participation at national level.

## Participation at the International Level

Local and national participation in MDG processes, however, must be matched by changes in international economic governance structures. Affirming the human rights dimension of the MDGs requires reforms to those economic and political structures that prevent poor communities and countries from full and meaningful participation in their own development. The wave of democratisation that has spread throughout many countries in the last few decades enables more communities and peoples to participate in their governments' economic policy-making processes. However, this opportunity can be rendered meaningless if the policy space enjoyed by those governments is so limited as to prevent any effective policy debate among different options.

While those consulted for this report highlighted a range of structural blockages to such participation (including national level governance issues), almost all stakeholders identified the role of the IFIs as a central problem preventing full ownership of national development programmes and the implementation of anti-poverty goals. They identified three areas as especially problematic: lack of adequate representation and accountability; the model of development the IFIs espouse; and, the disproportionate power of the IFIs in the system of global institutions.

## True Commitment to Partnership

Despite the strong rhetorical commitment that donors give to partnership with recipient governments, the evidence suggests that donors in general do not understand what it means to work in partnership. Donors typically continue to earmark finance for projects and programmes, and impose detailed conditions and institutional controls. This

## Figure 6. Building Meaningful Partnerships to meet the MDGs<sup>69</sup>

Development partnerships work best when they are based on the principle of mutual obligations. The Millennium Declaration implies sets of obligations for donors and recipients based on common goals. At present few, if any, instruments exist to hold donors accountable for fulfilment of their pledges to recipient governments (let alone parliamentarians, civil society organisations or chambers of commerce). Top-down donor policies and conditionalities are fickle and too often shaped by capricious and shifting strategic priorities.

Development partnerships intended to benefit poorer communities must be designed according to the principle of subsidiarity. In the development context, subsidiarity asserts that policies are more successful when they are designed and owned at the level at which they are implemented. Subsidiarity requires that the interests of the impoverished and marginalised are central in the policy design process. The donor-recipient relationship is likely to work better when the dialogue moves beyond the paternalism that characterises too much of donors' interaction with recipient governments. A wider group of informed stakeholders in the country concerned should be included in open, cyclical and participatory planning processes. The aid relationship should be between countries and not only between officials.

The empowerment and inclusion of multiple domestic stakeholders in the policy design process requires transparency and information. At present, negotiations between donor and recipient governments are secretive and exclusive. Decisions with far-reaching consequences for nations are frequently taken without the knowledge of parliamentarians or other genuine representatives of impoverished people. As a first step, bilateral donors must publish and disseminate information on development finance, aid policy and bilateral programmes.<sup>70</sup>

Source: CIDSE web page

undermines the accountability of recipient governments to their own public and civil society agents.

A new relationship is needed between donor and recipient countries in aid, trade and debt. This should be based on giving a greater voice to poorer countries and impoverished communities in the key decisions that affect their lives and economies.

Donors might do well to learn from the understanding of partnership developed by NGOs, as outlined in Figure 6. Some NGOs have learned that the wider participation of impoverished communities and other aid recipients is fundamental to achieving sustainable development.

## Key Recommendations

In order to address these key issues, CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis recommend four sets of recommendations to donor and recipient governments, the IFIs, the WTO and the UN (and its specialised agencies). The first of these relates to the overall focus of the MDGs in international policy making; the second set relates to improvements in participation at the international level; the third relates specifically to trade policy; and the last set relates to issues of finance and the MDGs.

### 1. A Stronger Focus on Processes and Quality within the Global Consensus on the MDGs

The international community and national governments must work harder to ensure that the principles enshrined within the Millennium Declaration are reflected in the implementation of the goals it sets. In

<sup>69</sup> Tools For Developmental Partnership Report on the CIDSE Forum on Partnership – <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200411101509396708.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> For instance, Jubilee Zambia has called for the loan contracting process to be subject to constitutional oversight mechanisms that would include representatives from civil society, the private sector, government and parliament, to safeguard against irresponsible borrowing and lending. See <http://www.jctr.org.zm/jubilee-zambia.htm>.

our view, this means:

- *The link between the MDGs and the human rights framework should be deepened in order to place a much greater emphasis on quality and process issues. This emphasis must be reflected in future documents relating to the MDGs, starting with the outcome of the Millennium +5 Summit in September 2005.*
- *A multi-dimensional, rights-based approach to poverty should be incorporated at all levels of analysis and strategy development.*
- *The creation of nationally owned development strategies should be encouraged, using the MDGs as indicative areas of concern and localising the goals to suit national priorities. In particular, stronger emphasis should be placed on supporting productive sectors, the development of which is needed to sustain progress in achieving the MDGs.*
- *The participation of local actors, including communities, civil society organisations and national parliaments, should be encouraged and supported in setting out plans and priorities.*

## **2. Greater Participation of Poor People and Countries within the Structures of Global Economic Governance**

The International Financing for Development (FfD) Conference in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, called for poor countries to have a larger say on issues of global economic governance. The World Bank and IMF, both of whom endorsed the Monterrey Consensus, were forced to address the governance issue by including it on the agenda of their 2003, 2004 and 2005 spring meetings, and annual meetings in 2004. But recognising a problem is very different from fixing it and, so far, no substantive reform agenda has been undertaken.

Furthermore, the IFIs do not effectively incorporate local input into their decision-making processes, even when they purposefully solicit it. For example, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process is supposed to be a participatory process led by governments, together with their civil societies, in order to devise a country-owned and country-led long-term development plan. The PRS paper that results from the process is supposed to be fully owned by the government, reflecting each country's unique historic, political and economic circumstances. Indeed, in some countries, the PRS has been a very important vehicle for promoting government-civil society dialogue over economic and development policy. However, the IFIs have preserved a role as *de facto* endorsers of PRS programmes.

Even assuming that this situation did not exist, the IFIs' well-known preferences in terms of economic policy, and the formal and informal channels they have to influence the processes, place incentives in the direction of following their prescriptions. As a result, developing countries' PRS papers have not diverged fundamentally from the economic principles of the Washington Consensus, although slight variations in policy approaches seem to be allowed.

Evaluations of the PRS approach in 2004 by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the IMF and the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) of the World Bank revealed that a lot of change is needed. The IEO noted that the process, as it has unfolded, has resulted in too much emphasis on documents and BWI-driven processes. It also made a number of recommendations to allow the IMF to 'adapt' its "way of doing business", including making IMF standards and requirements more country-specific and public, as well as making IMF policy recommendations open to public scrutiny and debate. The recommendations from the IEO and OED reviews of the PRS process, although a

step in the right direction that should be fully implemented, are not enough.

The IFIs have responded to criticism regarding the one-size-fits-all policies of structural adjustment by augmenting their Washington Consensus on macro-economic policy with a number of 'soft' social and institutional policies. However, consideration of institutional factors has not differed from the traditional economic policy in terms of its lack of diversity and respect for local realities, and its prescriptive nature. Social concerns have been taken into account at the margin, as an add-on to economic policy models rather than in order to transform them. For example, the increasing role of the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) in aid allocation and debt sustainability analysis moves in the direction of increased imposition of unilateral criteria for lending.

The IFIs' policy prescriptions run counter to the presumption that, given sufficient information, developing country governments, parliaments and civil society organisations are best placed to know their needs and priorities, and to figure out how best to meet them. Those people most affected by IFI decisions should have a critical influence over the type of restructuring that would guarantee positive development outcomes. Such an approach - which is only feasible if the IFIs revoke their right to design and impose conditionalities unilaterally - would also serve to develop accountability measures at the political level and improve overall governance.

Likewise, the IFIs do not adequately incorporate civil society analyses into their lending and policy decisions, despite constant pressure from civil society representatives. Though they have come to accept information about projects gathered by civil society organisations or their own staff within developing countries, the IFIs' official views come

primarily from internal studies. And although there has been an increase in the number and type of venues for consultation between IFIs and civil society actors, including NGOs and faith-based groups - a positive change that should not be overlooked -, the lack of strategic follow-up has led to a widespread perception that these contributions have had little real impact.

In order to address these key issues, we recommend that:

- *The IFIs should reform their internal governance structures to increase representation of developing countries by altering the composition of their boards and rebalancing voting power, instituting formal voting, and selecting the leaders of the organisations through open and transparent merit-based processes;*
- *The IFIs should increase transparency by making the transcripts, minutes and important documents of board meetings available to the public;*
- *Parliamentary oversight of IMF and World Bank activities should be encouraged at a national level so as to ensure greater democratic accountability;*
- *The role of the IFIs should be restricted to that of a lender through a separation of the creditor and surveillance functions;*
- *A radical revision of the architecture of the PRSPs should be undertaken in order to bring all actors in a given country, including the IMF and World Bank inside a domestic, partnership-based, decision-making forum.<sup>71</sup>*

Furthermore, many of the powers and functions that have slowly been accumulated by the IFIs were once the primary responsibility of the UN and its family of agencies. The IFIs had become involved, by the end of the 1990s, in funding, policy, monitoring and

<sup>71</sup> CIDSE / Caritas Internationalis (2004) *PRSP as Theatre – backstage policy-making and the future of the PRSP approach*, CIDSE /Caritas Internationalis background Paper, September 2004, CIDSE, Brussels; Caritas Internationalis, Vatican City <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200409271723027101.pdf>.

evaluating areas as diverse as structural adjustment policy, poverty reduction, environment, health, education, and civil society development. Yet, they did so without the authorisation of, or debate among, the international organisations that are formally responsible for these areas.

A proposal has been put forward to replace ECOSOC with an Economic and Social Security Council that would have the same standing (with a more democratic manner of functioning) as the Security Council and, thus, present a counterweight to the political power of the IFIs. Another proposal would establish an intergovernmental committee of ECOSOC to provide a focal point for coordination.

This would also significantly strengthen the capacity of the UN to effect this coordination. In addition, the relationship agreements that currently link the IFIs with the UN should be renegotiated to ensure that the UN could ensure that the IFIs respect the jurisdiction of other agencies, funds and bodies. As part of the UN system, the IFIs should be accountable to international law, in particular human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> A first attempt to draft such guidelines has been drawn up by the UNHCR: *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies*. Guideline 18 clearly lays down the responsibility of states as members of the World Bank and the IMF to ensure that the policies of these institutions conform to the states' human rights duties and that in determining the policies of these institutions, the states should be subject to monitoring and accountability procedures at the state level. The guideline provides that international institutions must also be subject to accessible, transparent and effective monitoring and accountability procedures (p. 245). If they fail to do so, others should take steps to establish appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms in relation to the poverty reduction and human rights responsibilities of these institutions. <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/povertyfinal.html#guid18>.

<sup>73</sup> As observed in the 'Sao Paulo Consensus' adopted at the Eleventh Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in June 2004: "...there is a need to enhance the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems and global economic governance. It is important that development should be at the centre of the international economic agenda. Enhanced coherence between national development strategies, on the one hand, and international obligations and commitments, on the other, would contribute to the creation of an enabling economic environment for development." [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdl380\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdl380_en.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Such as the principle of consensus decision-making involving all members, representation of all members on the governing body and consensus requirements for amendments to the governing articles

We therefore recommend that:

- *The IFIs should assume poverty eradication and equitable development as their ultimate objective. They need to consider the impact of their loans and policies (both ex ante and ex post) with respect to the MDGs and, more broadly, international human rights law.*<sup>73</sup>
- *The IFIs should work with governments, civil society actors and specialised bodies, such as the UNDP, to develop the capacity to produce a range of policy options for different situations and circumstances, including undertaking examinations of the economic, social and political trade-offs associated with different policy paths.*

### **3. The Global Trade Agenda should be Aligned with a Rights-Based Approach to Human Development**

In addition to the reforms outlined above, meeting the MDGs means ensuring that international trade rules are aligned to poverty reduction goals. This means favouring the equitable functioning of markets, including the right to protect local markets from dumping price imports and ensuring a decent income for small farmers. It also requires greater market access for all LDC products in all developed countries, as well as an end to export subsidies in high-income countries. The institutional processes of the WTO are not adequately equipped to ensure such outcomes as they stand.

Achieving a fair multilateral trading system requires an open, transparent discussion on governance reforms within the WTO. In this regard, civil society organisations have raised a number of concerns. Although the formal structures of the WTO have a number of positive attributes,<sup>74</sup> the reality often belies the attractive formalities. More than 24

smaller developing countries are unable to maintain representation on an ongoing basis in Geneva. Furthermore, the decision-making processes at the WTO are extremely informal, and agendas are dominated by a “quad” of four powerful nations and by mini-ministerial meetings involving only 24 member countries, all of which leaves many members marginalised.<sup>75</sup>

Another area of concern is the lack of transparency and accountability of the WTO to external stakeholders. Much of the agenda-setting takes place unrecorded in private “Green Room” meetings behind closed doors, rarely with public notice, and on the basis of the host country minister. Moreover, experts on the WTO argue that procedural rules are often broken, are open to manipulation and are difficult for smaller or weaker countries to navigate. Participants and observers add to these factors the application of bilateral pressure from donor and economically powerful countries on developing nations.

The establishment of the WTO in 1995 has intensified the process of moving decision-making on economic, financial and trade matters away from the UN and its standard-setting role on human and trade union rights, and social policy. In this regard, it is important to note, first, that the WTO was created as a new institution with strong enforcement powers to replace the old GATT Secretariat. Thus, it offered a solid counterpart that could interact with the World Bank and the IMF. Second, alongside the agreement establishing the WTO, its member governments issued the *Declaration on the Contribution of the WTO to Achieving Greater Coherence in Global Economic Policy-Making*, which called for greater cooperation and coherence among the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, with no mention of the UN.

The impact of these elements on the UN’s

capacity to exercise its role as the lead institution for achieving coherence cannot be underestimated. Given the WTO’s status as a forum for the negotiation of legally binding rules, the basis for an alternative pole for coherence – beyond the human and social values of the UN Charter – now seems to be in place.

The WTO should, therefore, be reformed to ensure participatory, transparent and accountable decision-making. The credibility of the WTO among member states depends on its ability to ensure participatory, transparent and accountable decision-making. Current forms of exclusive meetings, be they mini-Ministerials or ‘green room’ meetings, undermine many members’ confidence in the institution.

We therefore recommend that:

- *WTO decision-making is improved, such that it is clear who participates and that these participants are nominated on the basis of their representativeness, with agreed constituency mandates, meetings are minuted, and the Committee of the Whole is respected as the decision-making body*
- *Additional procedural improvements should include the approval of agendas and draft texts by the Committee of the Whole, together with member-elected chairs and facilitators. A clear and transparent system should be developed for participation of civil society, perhaps akin to the consultative status enjoyed in relation to ECOSOC at the UN.*
- *The legal priority of accords on human rights, gender equality, labour and the environment must be recognised in trade and investment agreements, which should be tested for compatibility.*
- *Preliminary and near-completion processes should be undertaken, prior to and approaching the end of*

<sup>75</sup> See ADABA, G, A CALIARI et al. (2003) *A Political Agenda for the Reform of Global Governance: A Background Policy Paper* <http://www.coc.org/pdfs/coc/ggpaper.pdf>.

*negotiations, involving an assessment of the potential impact of decisions on human rights, women's rights, labour and the environment. These impact assessments should be made at the multilateral and national levels, and in participatory fashion.*

- *A relationship agreement should be established to formally bring the WTO into the UN family. This agreement should also enable the UN to ensure that the WTO rules negotiation process fully respects the jurisdiction of other agencies, funds and bodies.*

#### **4. Additional Finance should be Provided to Help Achieve the MDGs, and the International Aid System should be Reformed to Ensure the Aid is Well Spent**

While 2005 is a crucial year for decision-making with a view to reform, changes to global governance structures will take time to implement. Meanwhile, immediate increases in development finance are a key element in enabling poor countries to meet the MDGs. Global estimates may differ, but all suggest that more than double the current levels of aid will be required to meet the goals. With 10 years to go to the 2015 MDG deadline, the donor community has failed to identify and agree on where the additional resources will come from. While member states of the European Union set targets to raise EU bilateral aid to at least 0.33% of Gross National Income by 2006, many are far from even reaching this minimum. Proposals for creating additional sources of finance through the introduction of a global taxation measure, such as a Currency Transactions Tax, have been received cautiously. And donors have yet to agree

on what kinds of policies a recipient government must adopt to demonstrate a commitment to "poverty reduction, good governance and economic reform".

Six years ago, the G7 summit in Cologne promised US\$100 billion worth of debt relief for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) in an initiative intended to leave these countries with sustainable debts. So far, less than a third of the promised sum has been delivered and, according to the World Bank, the HIPC Initiative is failing in most debtor countries. At the same time, aid levels need to be increased massively. Flows of ODA to Sub-Saharan African governments must be more than doubled to US\$40 billion a year if countries are to be put back on track in terms of reaching the MDGs.

CIDSE strongly supports the introduction of a global taxation system, in particular the proposed international Currency Transactions Tax, as a means of raising additional finance to meet the MDGs.<sup>76</sup> The advantages of a currency transactions tax are manifold: it has the potential to realise a more equitable distribution of wealth and a more stable financial climate, while at the same time raising revenue that would be dedicated to financing the MDGs. The feasibility of the CTT has been endorsed in the *Landau Report* sponsored by the French government and the World Bank in 2004<sup>77</sup>.

In particular, we recommend:

- *By September 2005, all OECD donors should agree on a legally binding timetable for reaching the UN target that donor countries should contribute 0.7% of GNI to Overseas Development Assistance, or aid.*
- *OECD donors should end the practice of taking an automatic signal for aid disbursements from recipient countries having a current programme agreement with the IMF.*

<sup>76</sup> NORTHOVER, H, M GRIFFITH, and P MARTIN (2005) *Justice not Charity: Policy Recommendations to Donors ahead of the G8 Summit 2005*, a CIDSE Position Paper, CIDSE, Brussels: <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200501241019543612.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> The feasibility of the CTT was endorsed by the World Bank in a preparatory note to the Development Committee at the Annual Meetings in 2004. Also, the Belgian government has laid down the necessary legislation for the CTT to be enforced once agreement for the tax is introduced across member states.

- *All aid should be untied, and directed towards areas prioritised in the MDGs.*
- *The DAC guidelines on aid effectiveness should be put into practice, and systems of donor accountability established at the host government and global level.*
- *On top of the target of 0.7% of GNI in aid for developed countries, additional resources should be available through innovative means such as an international tax.*
- *There should be 100% debt cancellation for those countries whose debts are unpayable on the basis of human development needs. This should be funded by sales of IMF gold and increased bilateral contributions to debt relief.*

greater voice in those international institutions that exercise significant control over their economic well being.

While additional development finance is essential, more than increased ODA is required as the UN and its members meet in September 2005 to take stock of progress on the MDGs. Serious inequities in participation and ownership need to be addressed through far-reaching reforms of the international financial institutions, the WTO and the UN.

## Conclusions

The crosscutting recommendations within this report highlight the complexity of the MDGs and their significance to all aspects of development. 2005 presents multiple opportunities to make steps forward in addressing global poverty. The MDGs are laudable objectives which CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis share, and which represent an important tool for advocating change.

However, the focus on the quantitative outcomes of the MDGs must not lead to automatic assumptions regarding their implementation. Nor must the drive by international experts to find 'the solution' be allowed to bypass local processes that are, by their nature, often slow, laborious and incremental. Local ownership and participation is key to achieving poverty eradication, and must be highlighted more.

Enabling participation and ownership on the ground requires change at the international level. Such ownership is dependent, to a great extent, on the reform of international systems, and on developing countries being given a

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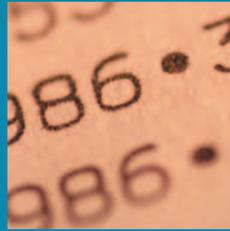
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