

Change the World in 8 Steps

Background: The Millennium Development Goals

What are the Millennium Development Goals?

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are international targets for reducing global poverty. They aim to lift around 500 million people out of poverty by the year 2015. If this happens, fewer women will die in childbirth, fewer people will die from treatable diseases, many more boys and girls will go to school and the lives of millions of people will improve dramatically.

How did they come about?

In the year 2000, the member states of the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration. This document contains the MDGs, a set of realistic and achievable targets. By signing up to these goals, governments of the world have committed themselves to working collaboratively towards a better future for us all.

What is happening now?

Progress on the goals will be measured each year, in order to help achieve them all by 2015. For the first seven goals, the onus is on the governments of developing countries to ensure that targets are met or bettered. It is the eighth goal, however, to 'build a global partnership for development' that will create the conditions necessary for achieving the other seven. With this goal, the responsibility falls on the richer countries and the wider 'global community' to reduce debt, to give more and better aid and to make trade fairer, among other measures. However, at the current rate of progress, many of the targets will be missed and it is therefore vital that pressure is stepped up on the world community to increase efforts to achieve them.

Progress towards the goals is now threatened by sluggish — or even negative — economic growth, diminished resources, fewer trade opportunities for the developing countries, and possible reductions in aid flows from donor nations. At the same time, the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly apparent, with a potentially devastating impact on countries rich and poor. Today, more than ever, the commitment to building the global partnership embodied in the Millennium Declaration must guide our collective actions.

In June 2010 members of the G8 will meet in Canada and will discuss progress on the Millennium Development Goals. The UN have also planned a special MDG Summit in September 2010. In the 2009 Millennium Development Goals Report released earlier, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon noted: "We have made important progress in this effort, and have many successes on which to build. But we have been moving too slowly to meet our goals". The 2010 high-level meeting, he hopes, will not only result in a renewal of existing commitments but also can decisively galvanize coordinated action among all stakeholders and elicit the funding needed to ensure the achievement of the Goals by 2015.

Climate Change is a significant factor when it comes to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Poorer countries will not be able to eradicate hunger and poverty if they continue to be adversely affected by droughts or floods. Government funds for education could be diverted for disaster relief. Girls will miss out on education if they have to walk for miles to find water or food for their families. It would be difficult to improve child health and maternal health if the whole area is being adversely affected by climate change. Floods and drought lead to the spread of diseases such as malaria. Poorer people often suffer the most from the effects of climate change yet it is richer countries that produce the most carbon per person that is one of the chief causes. Until all countries commit to reducing carbon emissions and richer countries put forward the money to help poorer countries adapt to the effects of climate change, the Millennium Development Goals will be very difficult to achieve.

Equally important is ensuring that the interests of the developing countries, and especially the poorest ones, remain central in negotiations on trade. We must also 'seal the deal' on a new climate change regime in Copenhagen in December. The timing is ripe for making the structural changes that are needed to move more decisively towards more equitable development and sustainability and to address the climate crisis.

Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General, United Nations, MDG Report introduction 2009

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**Oxfam Youth & Schools Team
Oxfam House
John Smith Drive
Oxford OX4 2JY**

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