



Off track and running out of time

Halfway to 2015: are the Millennium Development Goals achievable?

Every day, nearly 30,000 children die from preventable causes. In 2000 the world stood up and took notice that the gap between developed and developing countries was widening. The UN proposed a solution – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - a framework for achieving real recognisable change. Since their inception, the MDGs have been the most powerful indicators of real improvements in people's lives.

The MDGs have acted as a catalyst to bring about discussions on poverty in numerous key summits and meetings, and to deliver a response for developing countries. The leaders of the world agreed to rally behind the goals and to increase funding in order to achieve them. In 2005, historic meetings took place in Gleneagles which gave a huge boost to the MDGs and committed countries to further, bolder action. However, despite the commitments made in those meetings, the success of the MDGs is not guaranteed. This briefing presents an analysis of the progress of the MDGs that most affect children's lives around the world.

Nearly halfway to 2015: How is each region progressing?

In spite of increased attention and investment, overall progress toward the achievement of the goals is slow, and the majority of the goals are unlikely to be met by

What are the MDGs?

At the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000 the 189 states of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to work towards a world in which eliminating poverty and sustaining development would have the highest priority. The Millennium Declaration was signed by 147 heads of state and passed unanimously by the members of the UN General Assembly.

The Millennium Development Goals, which grew out of the agreements and resolutions of world conferences organized by the United Nations in the past decade, have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress. The goals focus the efforts of the world community on achieving significant, measurable improvements in people's lives by establishing yardsticks for measuring development progress. (World Bank <http://go.worldbank.org/NW4ZNUZ2W0>).

2015. Children's lives are still being lost at an alarming rate – 80 million children have died since the MDGs began.

Even where there is progress, it is *not* universal. An overall examination of progress toward the MDGs can mask regional differences in achievement. Sub-Saharan Africa lags far behind the rest of the world as none of the MDGs are on track to be achieved. The tableⁱ



MDG Progress Chart ⁱⁱ					
	Africa	Asia			
	Sub-Saharan	East	South-east	Southern	Western
Goal 1 – Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	Red	Green	Green	Green-Amber	Amber-Red
Goal 2 – Achieve Universal Primary Education	Red-Amber	Red	Red-Amber	Amber	Red-Amber
Goal 3 – Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	Red-Amber	Amber	Green-Amber	Amber	Red-Amber
Goal 4 – Reduce Child Mortality	Red	Red-Amber	Amber	Red-Amber	Amber
Goal 5 – Improve Maternal Health	Red	Green-Amber	Red-Amber	Red	Red-Amber
Goal 6 – Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Red	Red-Amber	Red-Amber	Red-Amber	Green-Amber
Goal 7 – Ensure Environmental Sustainability	Red	Green-Amber	Green-Amber	Amber	Amber
Goal 8 – Develop a Global Partnership for Development	Red-Amber	Amber	Amber	Red-Amber	Amber

reveals that when compared to Asia, the differences are stark. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa report little or no progress towards achieving the MDGs and, alarmingly, some are moving backwards. While the goals cannot be dismissed outright, there would need to be substantial movement and investment in the coming years for this region to meet the targets.

The truth is that many children are not being reached. For others the support comes too late. Sub-Saharan Africa trails in nearly every category and, with only isolated pockets of progress, substantial change is unlikely without major investment. Ninety per cent of all child deaths occur in only 42 countries, 39 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ At the very core of this illness and death is endemic poverty.

Poverty is particularly brutal for children. More than half of all child deaths can be linked to malnutrition – the clearest indication of the effect of poverty on children. The poorest children in the least developed countries, particularly conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS), suffer the most. Even within countries there

are considerable differences – with those children living in the poorest areas and outside cities consistently the most vulnerable.

Change for Children

The MDGs focus on global poverty, hunger, education and health. A number of these indicators relate specifically to the improved well-being of children. In this brief, we will look at those MDGs - in particular, MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), MDG 2 (achieve universal primary education) and MDG 4 (reduce child mortality). As MDG 8 (develop a global partnership for development) is related to development assistance, it is also included here.

MDG 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

The first goal measures the progress toward eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The goal specifically seeks to halve the number of people living



on less than a dollar a day, as well as halving the number of people suffering from hunger.

There has been progress toward reducing poverty, with the majority of this progress occurring in Asia. In 1990, more than 1.2 billion people – 28 per cent of the developing world's population – lived in extreme poverty. By 2002, the proportion had decreased to 19 per cent. The majority of this change is occurring in Asia. Sadly, there has been little progress in sub-Saharan Africa. However, while the proportion of people living globally in extreme poverty has decreased marginally, the actual numbers of people living on less than a dollar a day increased by 140 million through population growth. The key indicator of hunger for this MDG relates to the prevalence of underweight children. Sadly, there has been little progress on this goal. In 2000, 29 per cent of children in the developing world were malnourished.^{iv} Seven years later, there has only been a two per cent decrease on the number of malnourished children.^v

MDG 2 – Achieve universal primary education

The number of out-of-school primary aged children in the world has dramatically fallen from over 100 million to 77 million. Yet such a significant drop has not been seen in conflict-affected fragile states where 39 million children still remain without an education. This is because these countries, despite being home to more than half the world's out of school children, receive the lowest amount of aid for education.

Despite donor pledges, 20 out of 22 donor countries have, to date, failed to contribute their fair share of funds to achieve education for every child by 2015. France, Switzerland, Spain, Japan, US, Austria, Italy and Germany are the worst donors for committing their fair share of aid for education and for supporting education in countries affected by conflict.

In 2005, only US\$3 billion was committed to basic education, falling far short of the estimated \$9 billion

in aid needed each year to achieve this MDG.

However, even if the gap was to be filled, the MDG is still at risk of being rendered meaningless, as donors continue to avoid allocating their contribution to conflict-affected countries.

Instability and conflict devastate education systems. Schools are often destroyed or taken over by armed groups. Children's schooling is often disrupted during conflict when teachers and families are forced to flee their homes.

Ensuring schools and education is protected during conflict is critical - education not only provides greater economic opportunities for a child's future, but it also offers children a protective environment. Children receiving a good education are less likely to be recruited into armed groups, or subject to grave human rights violations, than those who are excluded. During a conflict, schools can become a safe place for children to play and learn. A regular routine gives children some structure to their otherwise chaotic lives and a good quality education can also offer psychological support and healing. A baby born to a mother with three years or more of basic education is twice as likely to survive than a baby born to a mother with no education. Education fuels economic growth, contributes to building a peaceful and stable society and good governance.

MDG 4 – Reduce mortality rates by two-thirds among children under five

There has been progress toward this MDG, but the regions most affected have seen the least improvement. Although survival prospects have improved globally, 10.5 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2004 – mostly from preventable causes. Sub-Saharan Africa, with only 20 per cent of the world's young children, accounts for half of the total global deaths, a situation that has shown only modest improvement. In contrast, child survival has improved markedly in Latin America and the Caribbean, South-Eastern and Eastern Asia and



Northern Africa, where child mortality rates have declined by more than three per cent annually. When we look deeper, few countries in sub-Saharan Africa are seeing any change in this indicator, in spite of the fact that there are a number of proven interventions that, if scaled up, could have a drastic impact on child mortality. For example, with nutritional interventions such as breastfeeding, complementary feeding, vitamin A and zinc supplementation, 25 per cent of child deaths could be prevented. That translates to at least 2.5 million children a year, or nearly 7,000 children per day that could be saved.^{vi}

Equally, the lives of 285,000 children in Africa could be saved every year by abolishing healthcare fees.^{vii} These fees are charged in all sub-Saharan African countries except Uganda, South Africa, Malawi, Mauritius and Liberia. The World Health Organisation estimates that 100 million people are forced into poverty each year by paying for healthcare. Families often go without food, take their children out of school, sell livestock and belongings, and mortgage crops to pay for treatment when their children get sick.

The strengthening of health systems is also essential if we are to achieve this goal. Health interventions already exist to prevent or treat the vast majority of illnesses that affect children. Thus, the challenge is not to discover new ways of treating children, but rather to improve the delivery of these interventions. Without long-term, predictable investment in health systems we are unlikely to see any improvements towards achieving this goal.

MDG 8 – Develop a global partnership for development

Although the MDGs were introduced without funding, rich countries promised to support their progress. Yet, despite the global interest in the MDGs, we are not seeing enough progress towards achieving them. The UK government needs to dramatically

increase pressure on other world leaders to ensure that overall aid levels for achieving the MDGs increases. Seven years on, there is little change for most children in Africa. Resources are falling short, and even in the countries experiencing progress, often the poorest are left behind.

In 2005, \$106 billion of aid was provided from donors to all developing countries. But this figure can be deceptive, as not all of this assistance will lead directly to poverty alleviation as aid is often still not targeted towards those countries most in need. For example, in 2005 the G8's so called 'Year of Africa', 20 per cent of the world's total aid went to Iraq in comparison to a 2.1 per cent decline in aid to Africa, excluding Nigeria which mostly received debt relief. In addition, debt cancellations get counted as aid, and accounted for over half of the aid increase since 1997 and more than three quarters of it in 2005.

In addition, £1 in every £5 of aid that is supposed to support poor countries' budgets does not arrive on time, if at all. This means that developing countries cannot provide health and education services which rely on this aid. This year's figures from the OECD Development Assistance Committee revealed that while the UK's aid contribution had risen, most other G8 countries' contributions had fallen. Additionally, last year there was an overall drop in aid for the first time in ten years.

The UK Government has positioned itself at the forefront of the battle against global poverty. In 2005, historic agreements were signed at Gleneagles. This was a key moment when the UK showed leadership in getting Africa on the international agenda. But there remains a serious lack of urgency from world leaders. There is even uncertainty as to whether the Gleneagles promises will be delivered. Since Gleneagles, some 17.5 million children's lives have been lost waiting for change to come.



Save the Children is calling for rich countries to:

MDG 1

- Set binding timetables for countries to deliver the increase in aid (0.7% of Gross National Income) as pledged.

MDG 2

- Increase funding to basic education in order to meet the annual target of \$9 billion, \$5.2 billion of which must go to education in conflict-affected fragile states.
- Make education a standard part of all emergency response.

MDG 4

- Back developing countries to help make healthcare free and end the injustice of children and their families facing unpayable bills to go to the doctor.
- Reform international policies and support to back African health plans aimed at building universal health services.

MDG 8

- Dramatically reform aid to make it work for poor countries. Aid should be predictable and untied, and all aid must be targeted at the world's poorest children.

Notes

ⁱWe have only compared progress between Africa and Asia in the table. The full progress charts on the World Bank website also compare North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the USSR). These are available at www.developmentgoals.org

ⁱⁱ Red – No progress or reversal – no chance of meeting MDG, Red-Amber – unlikely to meet the MDG goal in current circumstance, Amber – possibility of meeting the MDG, Green-Amber – likely to meet the MDG if current trends persist, Green – likely to achieve the MDG with current situation

ⁱⁱⁱ The three countries with the highest under-five mortality rates are Sierra Leone, Angola and Niger. For a full listing see *The State of the World's Children 2006*. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York: UNICEF, 2005. www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/sowc06_fullreport.pdf

^{iv} *The State of the World's Children 2001*. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York: UNICEF, 2001. www.unicef.org/sowc01/pdf/fullsowc.pdf. The data refers to period 1995-2000

^v *The State of the World's Children 2007*. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York: UNICEF, 2007. www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07.pdf The data refers to period 1996-2005

^{vi} Jones, G, Steketee, R, Black, R *et al*, 'How many child deaths can we prevent this year?' *The Lancet* 2003; 362:65-71, DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(03)13811-1 Series, Child Survival.

^{vii} *Paying with their Lives: The cost of illness for children in Africa*, Save the Children, London, 2006.