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# Millennium Development Goals number 4 and 7

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## **1. Introduction**

The Millennium Development Goals (or MDGs) are eight global goals set to eradicate extreme poverty and narrow inequalities in the world's population. All of the 189 United Nations member countries agreed to this plan to be achieved by the end of 2015. The goals were established on the Millennium Summit in September of 2000 where United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted. The main idea behind this declaration, is that every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, equality and basic standard of living.

Not only individual countries joined, but also independent international institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) take part. The result is 8 goals, 18 specific targets and 48 indicators. They were set so the progress can be objectively measured and therefore in the end decided as a success or failure.

These targets are unquestionably a proof of good will by the UN and if achieved, they will make Earth a better place for life. There are however several issues with the concept as a whole, and with individual goals, as will be explained in upcoming paragraphs with emphasis on African continent, where the problems are most severe.

## **2. Goal #4 – Reduce Child Mortality**

The first goal to be looked at closely, is reduction of child mortality. In 2010 7.6 million children under five years of age died. 90 per cent of which are caused by six conditions: neonatal causes, pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, measles and HIV/AIDS, which means, that most of these deaths can be prevented by availability of proper healthcare.

The specific numbers are to reduce under-five mortality rate by two thirds between 1990 and 2015, and also infant (under 1) mortality rate and to increase proportion of 1 year-old children immunised against measles.

### **2.1 Progress so far**

There has been a certain improvement in under five death rate. In 1990 one hundred in one thousand used to die, that number has decreased by 28 per cent to 72 by 2008. However, it is not enough to reduce this number to one third (33 deaths per thousand)

by 2015. Most significant improvement was seen in least developed countries, where there has been drop by 40 per cent or more. Currently 19 countries are on track and 47 have accelerated progress since 2000. Even some of the poorest sub-Saharan countries are on track (like Botswana and Malawi). Understanding why these countries have succeeded will hold many lessons for their neighbours and for what now must be repeated for maternal and neonatal survival.

On the other hand, Sub-Saharan Africa has seen only very little progress in recent years. Countries in this part of the world have some of the highest child mortality rates. The relative number is quite optimistic, there has been drop by 22%. In absolute numbers however, thanks to higher fertility rates and slow pace of reducing death, more children die before reaching the age of five than before. It was 4 million in 1990 and increased to 4.4 million in 2008.

Health outcome gaps are increasing between the richest and poorest countries. Some countries are being left far behind, especially in Africa. With only 11% of the world's population, Africa carries more than half of all maternal and child deaths, two thirds of the global AIDS burden, and 90% of deaths from malaria. Within countries there are also important gaps for the poorest—if all the families in Nigeria had the same neonatal mortality rate as the richest 20%, then 127 000 fewer newborns would die each year. Governments should be held to account for reaching their poorest and the most vulnerable citizens.

## 2.2 Discussion

The main problem seems to be too high fertility and therefore unavailability of proper health care to every childbirth. Each year 60 million births occur at home which is critical for maternal and child health and chance of survival. Even when the best equipment and personnel are available at local hospitals, they are useless if the women cannot reach them and have to go through labour with unqualified personnel in insufficient conditions. This problem can be solved from both ends, either somehow reduce the number of childbirths through use of contraception, or increase the number of qualified medical assistants who will help during labour at home.

Wide use of contraception, especially in relation to spreading of HIV/AIDS, has proven unsuccessful. It is somehow deeply set in minds of Africans to not use contraceptive measures. However **family planning** can help achieve not only this MDG, but also every other. Because there is a common denominator to all of them – overpopulation.

Therefore this is not the way. Solution lies in securing safe conditions for childbirth with at least basic equipment and knowledgeable personnel. This condition is firmly dependent on universal education system (MDG #2) and require not only money for building necessary schools, but also enough economic prosperity for families, so the children have enough time to go to school and not to work. This is a long term target.

### **3. Goal #7 – Ensure Environmental Sustainability**

Goal number 7 includes four sub-targets:

1. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs; reverse loss of environmental resources.
2. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss
3. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (for more information see the entry on water supply)
4. By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers

These targets are very complex and especially the first two also surpass to the first world. The entire planet aims to meet these goals, for the climate change is currently the most discussed topic among world leaders. The term *sustainable development* is widely used as a target for the entire civilisation, but path to this wonderland is very long and require collective work from all of us. Even the rich countries, with this target among the primary ones, struggle to achieve it. It is therefore unlikely for the third world to succeed.

The upside here is however, we can provide our theoretical knowledge about sustainability to help the third world build their economy and infrastructure basically from scratch. Like building energy infrastructure which is based on renewable sources, building efficient recycling and waste disposal systems, etc.

What environmental problems are affecting the development of Africa today? Africa suffers from many environmental problems including deforestation, degradation and fragmentation, desertification, the loss of soil fertility, a dramatic decline and loss of biodiversity, air pollution, and water pollution. These problems hinder Africa from making progress with regard to economic development. Due to the fact that these issues are not fully understood, many Africans have been delayed in solving the problems.

A big cause of the pollution of the water in Africa is that they accept the solid waste from the United States, the European Union, and Japan. Africa is paid for accepting the waste, but they are not able to treat it properly to make it non-harmful to the environment and to the people of Africa. Access to water that is clean is a problem throughout Africa. Water is polluted mostly by human waste. Diseases like typhoid, cholera, and diarrhoea come from contaminated water. Water pollution is the reason for many infant mortality rates and health problems of people of all ages.

The Millennium Development Goals have highlighted the importance of ensuring environmental sustainability to mitigate and prevent climate change and to prevent any further deterioration of the health of the people of the world.

Progress to achieving these goals, however, has been limited and climate change may threaten gains in environmental protection and in health improvement. Climate change induced drought, land degradation and increasing food prices are resulting in food insecurity for millions of poor South Africans and increasing malnutrition among children and may lead to increased internal and external migration.

### **3.1 Progress so far**

The target, that most probably will be met, is improved access to drinking water, given the current trends will continue. If so, 86 per cent of people in developing countries will have access to drinking water, up from 71 per cent in 1990. Four regions — Northern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia — have already met the target. There is however an imbalance in local situations. Even though most advance has been made in rural areas, still 80 % of people not living in cities do not have access to drinking water.

The target to improve lives of slum-dwellers has been achieved twice-over. Target was 100 million, but in last ten years, more than 200 million slum dwellers have gained access to improved water, sanitation and less crowded housing.

## **4. Criticism**

There is no doubt about the good-willingness of the project, however not all targets are achievable in the given timeframe, at least not for most of the developing countries. In order to achieve such tremendous and rapid development, these countries would have to achieve economic growth by hardly achievable rate of 7 %. Also the amount of international aid would have to increase by \$50 billion a year, which in current economic climate is unreal.

But even such great amount of money cannot miraculously push the least developed countries to achieve 100% primary school enrolment, halve the amount of poor people or decrease child mortality by two thirds. Large amount of literature examines the link between received aid and economic growth, and the results are not very promising. In social sector it is also well known, that more money does not mean significant improvement.

The solution to this is not to be found easily, there are deep structural changes needed, changes in people's behaviour and mentality. Such things cannot be bought, but hardly

worked on by the populations themselves. Sure, we can provide the knowledge, money can provide the infrastructure, but in the end, it's all in the people.

There is also a risk of being too optimistic. The UN had many development programmes for the third world during last century, but none of them was so dramatic. By current state of things, we can presume that the MDGs as a whole will inevitably fail. Few countries will achieve the given milestones, but that's not enough. So the conclusion will be: We failed. Did we however? We have proofs of mostly good development even in the poorest of countries, but is it fair to call this progress a failure? Only because it didn't meet our utopian expectations. Let's not forget how long it took current wealthy states (The West) to achieve the levels of development we want for the third world, it wasn't ten, twenty or even thirty years, it was a century.

## **5. Conclusion**

The MDGs as a whole are unrealistic to achieve by 2015. But that doesn't mean they are a bad thing, setting ourselves ambitious targets means we will try harder. The important thing is, in 2015 looking backwards, to look at what was achieved, and not the other way round – what wasn't achieved. And as simple thing as extending the deadline for another five or ten years might do the trick to call the MDGs as a success.

This development program has several issues. One of them is the general opinion that everything can be solved by pumping more money into developing regions. This is wrong, despite current social believe, not everything can be solved by money. Money is important, no doubt, but it's not everything. The main thing that has to be changed is the mentality and behaviour of people.

Other issue is our way of thinking and living. We, as a western civilisation, promote western lifestyle. But nobody in UN stops to think, whether this is the lifestyle the Africans, the Caribbeans, the Asians want. It's just like Americans bring western democracy to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, whether the Iraqis or Afghans want it. But on the other hand, as a western civilisation we do not know any other social-economic system that has proven successful.

## 6. Resources

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