

How to Make Poverty History



The central role of local organizations
in meeting the MDGs

Edited by Tom Bigg & David Satterthwaite

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Summary of the Millennium Development Goals and their targets

8 Millennium Development Goals	18 Millennium Development Targets
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	1 and 2: Between 1990 and 2015, halve the proportion of people: * whose income is less than US\$ 1 per day * who suffer from hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education	3: By 2015 all boys and girls able to complete the full course of primary school.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.
4. Reduce child mortality	5: 1990–2015: reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate.
5. Improve maternal health	6: 1990–2015: reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	7 and 8: By 2015, to have halted and begun to reverse: * the spread of AIDS * the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	9–11: * Integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies, and reverse the loss of environmental resources. * 1990–2015: halve the proportion of people without safe water and basic sanitation. * Significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.
8. Develop a global partnership for development	12–18: * Establish a fairer trading and financial system, including a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally. (Also targets that include aid flows equivalent to at least 0.7% of high-income nations' gross national income.) * Address special needs of least developed and land-locked countries and small island states. * Deal with debt problems. * Strategies for “decent and productive” work for youth. * Provide access to affordable essential drugs. * Make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technology.

For the complete text and also details of the indicators to be used to monitor progress, see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp

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Foreword

Camilla Toulmin, Director, IIED

“One thing that we have learnt over the years is that neither doom-and-gloom scenarios nor destructive criticism will inspire people and Governments to act. What is needed is a positive vision, a clear road map for getting from here to there, and a clear responsibility assigned to each of the many actors in the system”.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan⁽¹⁾

In this book, IIED’s colleagues and partners lay out the case for why local institutions matter. If we, as a global community, are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and “make poverty history”, our global ambitions must become more firmly anchored in local realities. As we have seen at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, there are many millions of people in the rich world – old and young – who yearn for a fairer world, in which increased aid, trade justice and debt relief provide the planks for constructing a better world. At the level of ordinary people and civil society groups, the vision and values are alive and well. At global level, some cynicism is in order, given the ease with

UN Secretary General ‘From Doha to Johannesburg by way of Monterrey: How to achieve, and sustain, development in the 21st century’. London, 25 February 2002.



which most governments sign up to new initiatives and agreements. World leaders may sign up, knowing that in practice they won't be held responsible for failing to meet the terms of the agreement. In other cases, they hope to be able to fudge the figures, to show that they have indeed doubled aid, or done away with debt. The reality is often less magnanimous, with the same money being pledged away several times, and re-cycled from one context to another.

The MDG process faces many of the same risks as all big global initiatives. But thanks to the UN Secretary General, the Millennium Project was put in place to shift our leaders from bland platitudes towards finer calculation of what our global ambitions might imply, for particular places and goals. The process led by the Millennium Project of consultation and gathering of evidence through multiple task forces has helped greatly to focus minds on the big gaps remaining between what our leaders say they seek to achieve, and where progress stands to date. And as the process shows, the score-card is pretty mixed, with African countries particularly far behind in reaching the goals set. The response from donors and recipients has been to talk of doubling aid, channelled through new-style Poverty Reduction Strategy processes amended to include the MDGs as principal targets, with associated budgets for investment and recurrent costs needed to achieve these goals.

The aims are admirable and the vision clear, but such an approach will not make poverty history without a much stronger focus on local institutions and processes. Central governments are obviously important in setting the scene within which others can act. They can make life easier or more difficult, for traders to operate, for entrepreneurs to set up a business, or for farmers to secure a decent livelihood from their crops. But there are also many risks from channelling very large sums of money from western governments into the Ministry of Finance in the capital cities of many developing countries. These reservations are made up of well-rehearsed arguments about governance, power, and decision-making in recipient countries. Large sums from

donors for budgetary support (sometimes 70% or more of the recipient government's operating budget) shift the balance between government and citizen. Heavy reliance on donor support inevitably means that those in power look upwards to their paymasters, and discount the priorities and views of their people. No amount of "participatory process" can replace this missing link. Similarly, many people recognise the importance of decentralising power and resources to lower level structures, to ensure that policy and practice are tailored to fit local contexts. Yet such local structures are starved of funds by central governments, reluctant to give up any resources or powers that might cut back on the perks of patronage. Governance issues have been rightly flagged by the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), raising the need for transparency and audit of how such donor funds are used.

Less well known is the timely match between this approach to aid-giving and the political, financial and administrative convenience of donor nations. Governments throughout the western world are under political pressure to cut back on personnel. It's much easier for administrative and financial reasons to write a few large cheques to recipient government Treasuries, than provide a large number of smaller funding packages, guidance and technical support to a mosaic of field-based projects. Yet it is at this local level that the substantial gains for achieving the MDGs and reducing poverty will be made.

The Millennium Project has generated knowledge of great value for policy-makers around the world, feeding into global debate and government plans. But the question of "how" the MDGs will be met remains unresolved – hence the title of this book. Unless we learn from the past and find ways to build on the success stories of the present, we risk repeating the many and multiple failures with which the development landscape is scattered.

What does this mean in practice? The most vital challenge is to find ways to support local level institutions and processes, whether municipal governments, farmer unions, women's





savings groups or citizen associations. Examples exist of decentralised funds and other mechanisms which can reach local people most effectively – some are governmental, others NGOs. The status of the organisation matters less than their accountability to poor people, and their proven capacity to deliver. Whatever their status, they need more support.

Bringing politics back into the debate is also essential. Meeting the MDGs requires actively supporting the civil and political rights of groups who often have little voice. World leaders are very vocal and ardent supporters of the “fight against poverty”, yet rarely do they seek out the views and voices of poor groups. The poor sometimes appear as photo-opportunities for a visiting politician keen to spruce up his image as a caring, committed person in his home constituency. But the voices of pastoralists, forest dwellers, scattered rural populations or those living in farming and fishing villages, small towns and large cities have been absent from the current MDG debate. Neither national nor local governments speak for them, and instead are deaf to the needs of poorer groups. The organizations formed by the poor – the landless, “slum” dwellers, smallholders, pastoralists – are critical to bring politics back into the process, since they provide their members with greater voice.

Achievement of the MDGs has another 10 years to run. As we yearn with our hearts for a fairer world, we must also put our minds to work on ways to get better progress over the next decade. “Making poverty history” must recognise the local dimension at its core, or risk being no more than the latest global development fad.