

ROSA Newsletter

Zoom

The Millennium Development Goals: Progress, challenges and the way forward

In the Millennium Declaration (2000), representatives of United Nations Member States drew up a reference framework for fighting poverty and taking into account different dimensions. Priority goals, called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were defined to focus the efforts of the international community¹.

As the end date of 2015 approaches, date by which the MDGs should be achieved, it is time to review progress. The UN Summit in September 2010 was the occasion for a new revision of progress made, two-thirds of the way to this date. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying best practice and lessons learned in order to speed the implementation of the MDGs. But the results are mixed and the scope of new problems, particularly related to food and financial crises, highlight the need to rethink action strategies.

This article presents an overview of the state of play and issues for the future. It also looks at the results of the New York Summit and asks about the capacity of national governments and the international community to commit collectively to tackling the major development problems.

OBJECTIFS DU MILLENAIRE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT



Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger



Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education



Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women



Goal 4: Reduce child mortality



Goal 5: Improve maternal health



Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and others diseases



Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability



Goal 8: Global partnership for development

Assessment of progress made: a mixed outcome

By fixing quantitative goals for 2015, the MDGs were intended to be real drivers that would increase the mobilisation of the international community. Despite the limitations due to the lack of statistics (cf. Box 1) and the choice of indicators, the monitoring and assessment of progress made makes it possible to identify advances made, and also the obstacles and gaps in implementation.

Box 1: The weakness of statistical data for assessing the progress of MDGs

Whereas the MDG approach is to meet quantitative goals, statistics are difficult to collect, especially in the poorest areas and for the most recent statistics. This means that most data date from before the 2007-2008 crisis and the 2009 world recession, and so the quantitative impact of the crisis on the MDGs remains very inaccurate.



¹ The eight MDGs are divided into 17 measurable targets and according to 48 indicators for assessing the progress made.

Added to the lack of available means of collecting statistics regularly is the fact that the whole population is not always officially registered in developing countries. This means that statistics need interpreting with care.

Source: CNCD (Centre national de coopération au développement), September 2010

Ten years after they were adopted, progress has been made in several areas: i) the number of children in primary schooling, ii) key interventions for controlling malaria, HIV/AIDS and measles, iii) improved access to water in rural areas and iv) slackening of deforestation rates (although they remain alarming). On a global level, the incidence of extreme poverty decreased between 1990 and 2005². However, these statistics need to be analysed with care. The drop is partly linked to the growth of emerging countries (mainly China).

A report from the British Overseas Development Institute³ (ODI) intends to be encouraging, highlighting progress made: 11 of the 20 countries that showed progress in absolute terms are among the poorest in Africa⁴. For the ODI, even if the date of 2015 is not met, many countries are going in the right direction.

Despite some advances, much remains to be done to achieve the MDGs. Large disparities exist. Sub-Saharan African countries and “fragile” states show the least progress. Key objectives related to child mortality⁵ and maternal mortality and sanitation infrastructures lag behind the most. In addition, the recent crises have speeded the deterioration of the situation and threatened the progress made.

Considering the indicators for MDG 1, the 2010 report shows that the number of people suffering from hunger is still increasing, whereas in certain regions, progress which was already slow, and slowed further between 2000-2002 and 2005-2007. Approximately one quarter of children under five are underweight, mainly because of lack of food and quality food, water unfit to drink, insufficient sanitation and health services and inadequate healthcare and food practice⁶.

Major issues for the next five years

➤ Consolidated links and interdependency between the MDGs

The MDGs are intimately inter-related. Progress made or setbacks recorded on one goal can have a multiplying effect on the others. This applies for example to the link between food security and health (MDG 1, 4, 5 and 6), the interdependency between the environment and efforts to eradicate poverty (MDG 1 and 7) and the importance of gender equality to meet the MDGs.

MDG 1 is considered to be the forgotten goal, but it is primordial given the interconnections with all the other MDGs (see the diagram below). Malnutrition (target 3 of MDG 1) is a good illustration of these inter-relationships. It is one of the main underlying causes of child mortality. It leads to irreversible long-term effects on cognitive and learning abilities of children at school and their professional potential. There are also serious effects on future generations. Their lower income, poor health and limited access to suitable food continues later to have an impact on the health of children in the next generation, so a vicious circle is created⁷.

Therefore increasing efforts to meet MDG 1 implies going beyond a vision for each goal and adopting an integrated, multisectoral approach that aims at all areas that help improve the food and nutrition situation, such as access to food, resources, water and sanitation services, and health and education, especially for girls.

² It decreased from 1.8 to 1.4 billion people, i.e. 42% to 25% of the world population.

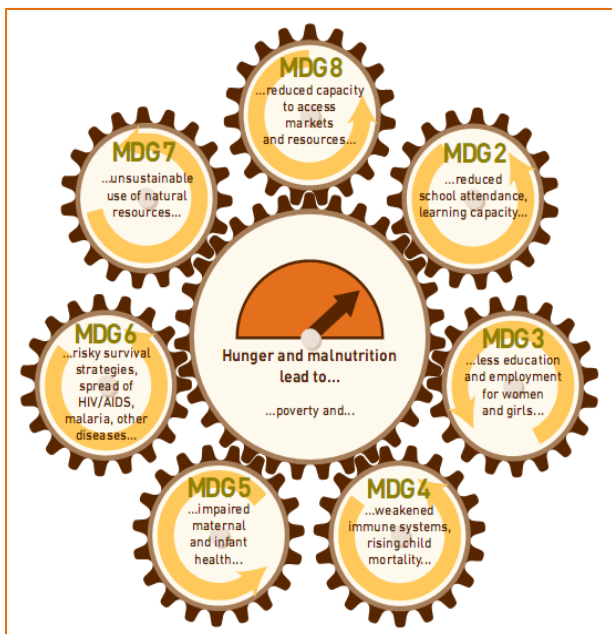
³ ODI, Millennium Development Goal Report Card. Learning from progress, June 2010.

⁴ The list of the 20 main countries that have recorded progress in absolute terms for 7 of the MDGs include Benin, Mali, Ethiopia, Gambia, Malawi, Vietnam, Uganda, Nepal, India, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Honduras, Mauritania, Ghana, China, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Togo.

⁵ Mortality of under 5 dropped by 22% since 1990. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, improvement remains insufficient. Central and West Africa have the lowest levels (one child in six dies before the age of five).

⁶ United Nations Millennium Development Goal. 2010 Report, New York, June 2010.

⁷ The Lancet, Series on child and maternal undernutrition, February 2008.



Source: FAO

➤ Remobilising needed to speed progress

The report entitled “The Global Partnership for Development at a Critical Juncture”, drawn up to prepare the New York Summit⁸, finds serious shortfalls compared with commitments made. It asks for extra efforts to be made to meet the target of 0.7% of the GDP of donor countries to be given to Official Development Assistance.

The September Summit was presented as an opportunity to boost efforts to meet the goals. One of the main results of this meeting is the implementation of a global strategy for maternal and child health. It is ambitious and means that efforts will be coordinated to build up what has already been achieved - at the local, national, regional and global levels. This is a major step forward but must not lead to the other MDGs being pushed aside, especially MDG 1⁹. Priority must be given to a global approach concentrating on food security.

⁸ It was drawn up by the Discussion Group on the delay in achieving the MDGs. It analyses progress in the global partnership for development, the eighth Millennium Development Goal.

⁹ Cf. ROSA Newsletter No. 22.

During a forum organised on the fringe of the Summit, two initiatives for tackling malnutrition were launched. They insist on the importance of acting in the most critical period between the beginning of pregnancy and the child's second birthday (The 1000 Days Movement)¹⁰ and to scale up actions (The SUN Initiative – Scaling Up Nutrition)¹¹. The United Nations General Secretary strongly advocated support for these initiatives. But as he emphasised, the main problem lies in the capacity of all stakeholders to move from commitment to practical action. *“If the progress made has been insufficient, it is not because it is impossible to meet the Millennium Development Goals, or because the lead times are too short, but because commitments have not been met, resources or determination has not been enough, because the principle of responsibility has not been adhered to and there is only limited interest in sustainable development.”*

It is possible to speed progress in meeting the MDGs through implementing coherent policies and very broad partnerships.

➤ Ownership by developing countries

For the developing countries, ownership of the MDGs and applying them in national policies is a vital factor for success. This takes place through helping build their capacity to define their own development strategies. They also need sufficient leeway to be able to adapt the strategies to the specific situation and needs of each country. “One size fits all” policies and programmes are bound to fail. Countries which have made progress have managed to implement a set of policies based on strengthened national capacities. It is also important to learn from experiences over the last 10 years to create better strategies and give priority to large-scale effective actions.

For further information:

United Nations 2010 Report on the Millennium Development Goals, June 2010
ODI, *Millennium Development Goal Report Card. Learning from progress*, June 2010.
World Bank, *The MDG after the crisis. Global monitoring report 2010*

¹⁰ <http://www.thousanddays.org/about/>

¹¹ The action framework “Scaling Up Nutrition” recommends two complementary approaches for tackling malnutrition. The first involves interventions centred on pregnant women and children under two, with direct short-term interventions. The second approach consists in a way of addressing nutrition-oriented development that aims to deal with the causes of malnutrition.

Views on current news:

Towards a renewed Committee on World Food Security

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was established in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum in the United Nations System for review and follow-up of policies concerning world food security. During 2009, the CFS underwent a reform process in order to include a wider group of stakeholders and become the central global governance mechanism.

From 11 to 16 October, the CFS held its first session since it was reformed. Discussions focused on the reform process and important issues related to food security such as land tenure and investment in agriculture, food security in protracted crises and ways to manage vulnerability and risk.

Based on an interview made with Maryam Rahmanian (HLPE)¹², this article looks at the ongoing process, the main outcomes of the meeting and the way forward for the CFS.

What are the main changes introduced by the reform? What is the role of the CFS in improving global governance?

The reformed CFS will play a key role in the new global food governance architecture. It is considered to be a central component of the Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (GPAFSN), a project initiated at the Madrid High Level Meeting (January 2009). As part of its new mandate, the CFS should become a multi-stakeholder forum for discussion, coordination and policy convergence.

The opening up of this space is one of the main changes introduced by the reform. It aims to ensure that voices of all relevant stakeholders are heard in the policy debate. This is an important step towards improving global governance. But the success of the CFS reform depends on the engagement and support of its member governments. Even if there is now a growing emphasis on the need to support a shared decision making process, it will take time to bring all players around the table. Long-term commitments will be needed to adopt appropriate solutions and put them into practice.

The reformed CFS will remain an intergovernmental body. To make it a more inclusive platform, the CFS is broadened to include stakeholders from both public and private sector and NGOs¹³. Ensuring full and equal participation is extremely important and some changes are on the way. The 2010 session was the first to include members of civil society. There was a strong presence in Rome, including interventions from the floor, participation to working groups and advisory group activities. Also, civil society is building its own autonomous mechanism for participation in the CFS¹⁴. Particular attention must be paid to strengthening the capacity of all stakeholders (including developing countries) to participate and negotiate in decision-making.

What are the main outcomes of the 36th session of the CFS?

The CFS agreed to move forward in the preparation of a global strategic framework for food security and nutrition (GFS). A consultative and inclusive process will be launched. It will be essential to involve all stakeholders and to take into account existing frameworks.

The HLPE has been requested to undertake studies in key topics in a comprehensive manner. For example, the study on price volatility should consider its causes and consequences, but also all possible solutions that are appropriate (not only market-driven responses). Results will be presented at the 2011 session of the CFS. The key challenge here is to ensure that analyses lead to concrete actions.

On land issues, the Committee decided to support the development of voluntary guidelines to improve the governance of tenure of land and other natural resources¹⁵. It was a sensitive point in discussions and civil society play an important role in final decision.

The CFS reform is an important step towards improving global governance for food security and nutrition. But it is only a starting point, much remains to be done. Political will remains the biggest challenge to be met.

¹² She is the Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition. The HLPE was created to serve as the expertise and scientific arm of the CFS.

¹³ Although voting rights will continue to be reserved for member governments, civil society and NGOs and their networks will be "non-voting participants".

¹⁴ More information on the International Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism at <http://cso4cfs.org>

¹⁵ Regarding the principles for responsible agricultural investments that respect rights, livelihoods and resources (RAI), the Committee asks for more coherence and consistency between the two processes.

Agenda

Past events

- **Conference on «Food security during challenging time** (5-7 July 2010, Kuala Lumpur). This conference gathered academics and representatives from a dozen Asian countries. They discussed and exchanged technological and scientific findings and information about agriculture and food security in Asia.
- **Climate Change talks** (2-6 August, 2010, Bonn). This was the third session of the year before the Cancun conference from 29 November to 10 December. Negotiations were particularly affected by the postponing of the climate change and energy bill in the USA and did not make much progress. A new, long negotiating text was published after the talks.
- **Africa Green Revolution Forum - AGRF** (4 September, Accra): It aimed at channeling investment and increase cooperation to foster agricultural development in Africa. The forum gathered stakeholders from the public and private sectors. Technological improvements and the structuring of agricultural organizations were presented as crucial.

Forthcoming events

- **11-14 October:** 36th session of the World Food Security Committee (FSC) – Rome
- **31 October - 5 November:** Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change – La Hague
- **29 November - 4 December:** World Food Security Forum – Cap Town
- **29 November - 10 December :** Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-16) – Cancun
- **December :** 26th annual meeting of the RPCA (Réseau de Prévention des Crises Alimentaire) – Accra

For further information: [Upcoming events](#)

EC's latest news

- **An analysis of the United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The European Union's contribution**

The UN 2010 Summit, held from 20 to 22 September 2010 in New York, focused on the progress made towards meeting the MDGs. Before the Summit, the European Commission prepared several documents, including an action plan for speeding the EU's progress in meeting the MDGs, adopted on 21 April 2010, and a brochure on the EU's contribution to the MDGs. During the summit, the Commissioner for Development, Mr. Piebalgs spoke at a series of panel sessions to highlight what the Commission is doing to meet the MDGs. [>>>](#)

- **A comprehensive integration of nutrition in EC interventions**

In September 2009, EuropeAid set up the Nutrition Advisory Service (NAS), in collaboration with the DG DEV and ECHO, in order to integrate the nutrition problem in the interventions of the Commission. The issue for the NAS is to promote a joint approach to nutrition involving delegations, the different General Directorates involved and Member States, in terms of implementing, monitoring and assessment of EU cooperation. [For more information](#)

New online documents

➤ Food security indicators

Indicators for Assessing Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices, WHO, UNICEF, USAID, AED, UCDAVIS, IFPRI - 2008: These organizations published a series of documents on indicators to assess infant and young children feeding practices. Documents include an operational guide on measurement issues and an update on the indicator values for 54 countries using data from demographic and health surveys. [>>>](#)

➤ Food and nutritional situation

Niger's hunger crisis. A legacy of lessons unlearned, The Lancet - August 2010: This article examines the current food crisis in Niger. Aid agencies have trouble finding the necessary financial support. The article presents the following factors as being the main causes of the crisis: a lack of international financing from donors, difficult national political contexts, slow and inefficient short-term food aid, and a lack of interest from donors in implementing long-term sectoral interventions. [>>>](#)

Cross-border trade and food security in Western Africa: the case of the Western basin, CILSS – March 2010: This collaborative research paper by CILSS, FAO, FEWS NET, WFP, and RESIMAO about commercial flows provides information for the implementation of food security programs, and to policy-makers at the national and regional levels. The article reveals the existence of cross-border trade flows between countries in the West basin. These flows are crucial to the survival of households who are vulnerable to food insecurity. When these mechanisms are functioning without any barriers, food security in the area is preserved. However, trade has been disrupted by the successive food and financial crises. The authors recommend adopting eight measures to ensure households' food security. For each intervention, the article explains the pros and the costs of taking action. [>>>](#)

➤ Nutrition

Diabetes in Sub-Saharan Africa, The Lancet - June 2010: This academic article reveals that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence and burden of diabetes are rising quickly. Rapid, uncontrolled urbanization and major lifestyle changes may be driving this epidemic. The increase presents a substantial public health and socioeconomic burden in the face of scarce resources. Therefore, a multisectoral approach to diabetes control and care is crucial for expansion of socioculturally appropriate diabetes programs in sub-Saharan African countries. [>>>](#)

Why is Africa getting fat? Jeune Afrique's series of articles (in French) about obesity in Africa - July 2010: These articles of varying length aim at increasing awareness about overnutrition, a problem that has been neglected in policy discourses in Africa. All of the articles are accessible freely on Jeune Afrique's website. The article "Why Africa is getting fat" shows in particular that feeding practices in Africa are not without negative effects on populations' health. Besides the 32% of the sub-Saharan population who suffer from under-nutrition, there is also a significant part of the population with hypercaloric feeding habits. This part of the population consists mostly of the urban population (40% of the African population), who has gradually abandoned rural areas' traditional feeding practices, even though those are less fat, less sweet, and provide more fibers and slow-release sugar. [>>>](#)

Analyzing nutritional impacts of policies. An empirical study of Malawi, IFPRI - 2010: Widespread malnutrition in developing countries calls for appropriate strategies, presupposing good knowledge about nutritional impacts of policies. Little previous work has been carried out in this direction, especially with respect to micronutrients. The authors use representative household data from Malawi and develop a demand systems approach to estimate income and price elasticities of food demand and nutrient consumption. Findings show that given multiple nutritional deficiencies, income-related policies are better suited than price policies to improve nutrition. [>>>](#)

➤ Social transfers

Cash transfers and high food prices: explaining outcomes on Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Stephen Devereux - January 2010: The article studies data from PSNP and presents an analysis of food and cash transfer programmes. Due to the food price increase, the effectiveness of social transfer programmes is now questioned. This feeds the cash or food debate about food-insecurity alleviation strategies. The study's findings reveal that the susceptibility of social transfers to price inflation has been under-acknowledged and that food transfers or a combination of food and cash transfers are superior to cash transfers alone. The article makes recommendations on mechanisms that should be put in place to protect households who receive cash transfers from inflation. >>>

➤ Other thematic areas

Progress for children N. 9: Achieving the MDGs with equity, UNICEF - 2010: This report examines data to estimate progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For each MDGs, it shows the significant disparities between countries and regions of the world. Despite progress achieved during the 1990-2008 period, inequalities are increasing. Causes are mostly related to poverty, gender and geographical issues, but also to the world financial crisis, food price volatility, urbanization, etc. The first chapter particularly examines the MDG 1. For this MDG in particular, there has been some progress; however, results are insufficient. This shows the multiple dimensions of nutrition. For some dimensions, progress remains very limited. >>>

*This bulletin was written by the GRET team in charge of animating ROSA. The network is an initiative of EuropeAid (Unit E6 – Natural Resources in collaboration with Unit G4 – Training and Knowledge Management).
The points expressed do not reflect the official position of the European Commission.*