

Millennium Development Goals: How Far?

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On the eve of the new millennium, 189 governments of the world made a joint declaration pledging their commitment to universal human rights and social justice. Substantially comprehensive, the document sought to achieve the targets—the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -within 2015. In a brief outline, the MDGs are :

- a) To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people suffering from malnutrition and also of those whose income is less than \$ 1 a day
- b) To achieve universal primary education, ensuring complete primary education for all children, both boys and girls, within 2015
- c) To promote gender equality and empowerment of women, eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably within 2005 and no later than 2015
- d) To reduce, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds
- e) To reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate
- f) To combat meaningfully HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- g) To ensure environmental stability and to reduce by half within 2015, the proportion of people living without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation
- h) To reform aid and trade policy with provisions of special treatment for the poorest countries.

After more than five years of the announcement, an assessment of progress, specially of the millions of world population living in abject and dehumanizing conditions, seems to be in order.

Poverty Eradication

Overall incidence of extreme poverty indicated by less than \$1 a day income line, appears to have declined between 1990 and 2001 (Table-1). In most Latin American and the Caribbean countries, the increase in per capita average income is only marginal, while there has been a significant increase in poverty in Europe and Central Asia. Africa and the Middle East have also become poorer today than in 1990. In Madagascar, Zambia and Mozambique, more than two-thirds of the people live below national poverty line. In ten more countries of the region, such people constitute more than half of the total population.

Table-1: People living on less than \$1 a day (%)

Region	1990	2001
East Asia & Pacific	29.5	14.3
Europe & Central Asia	0.5	3.5
Latin America & the Caribbean	11.6	9.9
Middle East & North Africa	2.3	2.4
South Asia	41.3	31.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	44.5	46.4
World	27.9	20.7

Global inequality level is also extremely high. Total income of the poorest 416 million people of the world is less than that of the richest 500 individuals. In countries making 80 percent of the world population, income inequality is on the rise.

Universal Primary Education

Over 800 million people, of which women constitute two-thirds, are still illiterate. About 115 million children do not get admitted in any schools. Ninety million of them are from the South Asian and the Sub-Saharan African countries. In the developing countries, eighty-five percent of boys enrolled in grade one complete primary education. For girls, it is around seventy five percent.

Providing no education to a large section of the society along with this huge gender difference which widens in higher stages, is not just a violation of the universal human right to education. The Human Development Report 2005 reckons it as a severe threat to future human development. "Girls' education", it asserts, "is one of the most powerful catalysts for social progress".

Countries under the low Human Development Index (HDI) category had, during 1985, an adult literacy rate of 41 percent which increased to 57 percent in 2003. Corresponding figures for medium and high HDI countries are 71 and 79.4 respectively. Table-2 shows adult literacy data, during 1985 and 2003, for some low and medium HDI countries.

Table-2: Adult Literacy (%)

Country	Female Male (1998)		Female Male (2003)	
	Saudi Arabia	31	71	69
China	56	82	87	95
Tunisia	41	68	65	83
Algeria	37	63	60	80
Indonesia	65	83	83	93
Egypt	30	59	44	67
Morocco	22	45	38	63
India	29	57	48	73
Pakistan	19	40	35	62
Nepal	12	39	35	63
Bangladesh	22	43	31	50
Zimbabwe	67	81	86	94
Cameroon	49	68	60	77
Senegal	19	37	29	51
Benin	16	37	23	46
Zambia	67	84	60	76
Mali	11	23	12	27

The MDG target of primary education for all, both boys and girls, within 2005 has already been missed. With the current trends, the goal will, the HDR2005 projects,

remain unattained in 2015 too, when 47 million of developing country children will still remain out of schools. Forty-six countries are moving backwards. They share 23 (out of a total of 110) million out of school children.

Empowerment of Women

Discrimination against women is an injustice strongly entrenched through ages in the social norms of all societies. The theme of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women held in 1979 was ratified by almost all of the 165 participating countries.

After all these years, women have less access, *inter alia*, to education compared to men. In more than 40 countries accounting for 20 million out of school girls, gender parity cannot be achieved until 2040.

Activities of women remain mostly invisible in national accounting though they work longer hours than men. Rural women are the worst victim of social deprivation. No religion has treated women equally with men. Through sustained struggle, the disparity could be addressed, and to a significant extent neutralised in the western industrialised countries. The forerunners are the Nordic countries.

The HDI, an index devised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to measure human development of a country, is based on three variables of human welfare—income, education and health. The same parameters when applied to women only, constitute what has been designated as Gender-related Development Index (GDI). Difference between HDI and GDI is a pointer for gender disparity. No difference indicates zero gender discrimination.

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is another indicator that is constructed with data on female representation in legislative bodies and their presence in other important policy making positions in government and non-government sectors. In Table-3, progress in HDI, GDI and GEM values have been shown for a few selected countries with high (above 0.8), medium (between 0.5 and 0.8) and low (below 0.5) human development indices.

Table 3: Gender Disparity

Country	HDI GDIGEM (1998)			HDI GDI GEM (2003)		
	Norway	.934	.932	.825	.963	.960
U S A	.929	.927	.707	.944	.942	.793
Japan	.924	.916	.490	.943	.939	.534
Italy	.903	.895	.524	.934	.928	.589
Malaysia	.772	.762	.468	.796	.791	.502
Saudi Arabia	.747	.715	-	.772	.759	.253
Sri Lanka	.733	.727	.309	.751	.747	.370

Turkey	.732	.726	.321	.750	.742	.285
Tunisia	.703	.688	.398	.753	.743	-
Algeria	.683	.661	-	.722	.706	-
Egypt	.623	.604	.274	.659	-	.274
Morocco	.589	.570	-	.631	.616	-
India	.563	.545	-	.602	.586	-
Zimbabwe	.555	.551	-	.505	.493	-
Cameroon	.528	.518	-	.497	.487	-
Pakistan	.522	.489	-	.527	.508	.379
Nepal	.474	.449	-	.526	.511	-
Bangladesh	.461	.441	.305	.520	.514	.218
Zambia	.420	.413	-	.394	.383	-
Mali	.380	.371	-	.333	.323	

All countries have their GDI values less than HDL. No. country is therefore free from gender inequality.

Globally, female representation in legislative bodies is not more than 15 percent. In 57 countries it is less than 10 percent. In Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates there is no woman member there. Saudi Arabia has narrowed down the gap between HDI and GDI values, but the GEM score is appallingly low. Two quite developed countries—Japan and Italy—also have relatively low GEM scores. Presence of women in important decision making positions is not that significant there.

Under-5 Mortality, Maternal Mortality

Around 12 million children die every year before attaining the age of five. Almost all under-5 deaths happen in developing countries. India alone accounts for 2.5 million. Next comes China with 7,30,000. Thirteen countries are responsible for two-thirds of the death. Malnourishment among mothers exposes them and their children to increased risk of mortality.

Table 4: Under-five & Maternal Mortality

Country	Under-five	Maternal mortality
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	Mortality rate		ratio	
	(per 1000 live births)		(per 100000 live births)	
	1998	2003	1980-87	2000
United States	8	4	8	17
Japan	4	4	16	10
Malaysia	10	7	59	41
Uruguay	16	14	38	27
Sri Lanka	19	100	60	92
China	47	37	44	56
Tunisia	32	24	310	120
Algeria	40	41	140	140
Indonesia	56	41	450	230
Egypt	69	39	320	84
India	105	87	340	540
Ghana	105	95	1000	540
Zimbabwe	89	126	480	1100
Cameroon	153	166	300	730
Pakistan	136	103	500	500
Bhutan	116	85	1710	420
Nepal	100	82	830	740
Bangladesh	106	69	600	380
Zambia	202	182	150	750
Niger	280	262	420	1600

Over 5,30,000 women die each year during pregnancy or child birth. Though most of these deaths - and also child deaths - could be prevented through low cost initiatives, nothing meaningful has been achieved all these years.

HIV/AIDS, Malaria

More than three million lives, mostly in the developing world, are lost each year under the attack of HIV/AIDS. Seventy percent of the deaths occur in Africa. In Africa again, malaria takes away three child lives every two minutes.

About 38 million people are now victims of HIV/AIDS infection, 28 million being in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has caused catastrophic drop in life expectancy there. In Botswana life expectancy has fallen, after the malady, by 31 years. Twenty years back, life expectancy in a Sub-Saharan country was lower from that of a rich country by 24 years. Now the difference stands to a staggering 33 years. This has contributed enormously to their lower HDI scores in 2003 than in 1990. The process of recovery is quite slow.

Incidence of HIV/AIDS is rapidly growing in the countries of the former Soviet Union and in the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra of India.

People with HIV/AIDS are discriminated in all societies and are denied basic human rights causing shame, silence and marginalization of the victims. This, in turn, helps quicker spread of the disease, specially in countries where the right to health, hygiene and education is neglected.

Timely intervention can halt the spread as has happened in North America and Eastern Europe. But in poor countries, only a few can afford the costly prevention and treatment services. With souring increase in medical expenses and fall in income, the affected households become financially trapped. In Africa, less than 5 percent of the affected people can arrange for medical help. However, through well designed public health strategies Senegal and Uganda have been successful in containing the curse. Brazil and Thailand also could roll back. But the response of many of the worst affected countries and also of the international bodies was not prompt enough. Neglect over the years has only accentuated the crisis, specially in the medium and low HDI countries (Table -5). In South Africa 5.5 million (18.8 percent) of the adult population are now afflicted with HIV/AIDS infection. In head count, India now overtakes SA and tops the list with 5.7 million (0.9 %).

Table 5: HIV/AIDS Cases

Category of Countries People with HIV/AIDS %

(Age 15-49)

1997 2003

High Human Development 0.34 0.3

Medium Human Development 0.67 0.8

Low Human Development 4.44 5.6

In 2004, total spending through the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria was about \$6 billion which was not big enough for a meaningful encounter. Effort to combat malaria through the Roll Back Malaria Initiative programme has also suffered a set back. What the global fund could finally provide was substantially below the additional requirement of \$2-3 billion. With the trend, the MDG target appears quite far away.

Environment, Safe Water, Sanitation

Environment, for its stability, needs to be protected from pollution caused by modern high tech development strategies. Due to man-made climate changes, over one million plants and animals stand the risk of being extinct in a few decades.

Carbon dioxide churned out by the automobiles and the industries is a major component of green house gases responsible for the climate change through global-warming. In a study of the World Fund for Nature it was revealed in 2005 that the Gangotri glacier in India is receding at an average rate of 23 metres every year due to global warming. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an agglomeration of about 30 developed countries, releases more than half and America, a member of the OECD, about a quarter of the total global emission (Table-6).

Table-6: Carbon dioxide Emission

Countries	Share of World		Per Capita	
	Total (%)		(Metric Tons)	
	1996	2000	1996	2002
High HDI	49.9	47.8	11.7	11.2
Medium HDI	43.1	38.9	2.8	2.0
Low HDI	0.7	7.3	0.3	0.2
OECD	49.7	51.0	10.9	11.2
United States	22.2	24.4	19.7	20.1
India	4.2	4.7	1.1	1.2
World			4.1	3.6

America still stands away obstinately from the Kyoto Protocol to reduce carbon dioxide emission agreed upon by almost all the countries of the world.

The warning—‘keep your nature clean, or the nature will clean you all’ remains mostly unheeded. So is the search for a sustainable technology for development.

Lack of access to hygienically safe drinking water and sanitation makes people more vulnerable to infectious diseases. About one billion people world over, are deprived from the first, and more than 2.6 billion from the second. China and India are poor performers on both the counts (Table-7).

Table-7: Safe Water & Sanitation

Countries	Without access to		Without Access to	
	Safe Water (%)		Sanitation (%)	
	1990	2002	1990	2002
Arab States	17	16	39	34
East Asia & the Pacific	29	22	70	51
Latin America	19	11	32	25
South Asia	29	14	80	63
Sub-Saharan Africa	52	42	68	64
India	32	14	88	70
China	30	23	77	56
World	25	17	57	42

About 3900 children die every day through diseases transmitted by water and human waste. Success targeted under the head is a distant dream.

Aid and Trade Policy

To fight the war against pervasive hunger and poverty, international aid must have a distinct role to play. Improving basic services such as education and health of the poor countries through aid, has been looked upon as ‘moral imperative and enlightened self-interest’ of the rich countries. It benefits both the worlds. Misery of one country sheds, undeniably, the prospect of prosperity elsewhere. It is being increasingly felt by the right thinking people of rich countries that their security threats are inseparably linked to global poverty and inequality.

In the name of aid, however, there have happened a lot of foul plays. Concern, ostensibly for development of the poor countries, has often been ruled over by considerations of self interest of the donors. Crippled additionally with corrupt and inefficient administration prevalent in the receiving countries, mission of development through aid has suffered a severe jolt.

Too often aids are attached with too many strings, such as purchase of goods and services from the donating countries. Because of this conditionality, real aid is reduced by 11-30 percent. Lack of coordination is another problem area. The Roll Back Malaria Initiative, a multilateral programme with over 200 members, is a case in point. Weak coordination has impaired progress considerably.

International trade policies have been formulated in a way to skew the benefits of globalization in favour of the rich countries. The HDR-2005 laments that after four years of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organisation, where a more fair trade deal was promised, “nothing of substance has been achieved”. “Although industrial countries apply very low average tariffs in their trade with each other”, goes the observation of the Report, “they reserve some of their highest import barriers for the world’s poorest countries”.

The agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)—transferring process patents to product patents—reduces the prospects of cheaper versions of life saving drugs through local production. Industrialised countries hold around 97% of all global patents.

The recent Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between African, Caribbean and Pacific countries with the European Union, proposes elimination of all duties and of all forms of economic protection on developing countries for the purpose of “free trade”. Prior to this agreement, 1,10000 Cameroon people lost jobs as import of frozen chicken from the EU increased from 900 tons in 1996 to 22,153 tons in 2003. Local chicken producers could not compete with the European farmers provided with high doses of subsidies. To the agitating civil society activists of Africa, EPA stands for ‘Economic Pauperisation Agreement’ that aims at re-establishing colonialism.

Nelson Mandela observed in 2005—“Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times—times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation—that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils.”

‘Massive poverty’ cannot be reduced to the desired extent within the time frame. With the current trend, of the one billion extremely poor people, 800 will remain so even after 2015. Still worse is the fate of ‘obscene inequality’. Income inequality is increasing, in countries holding 80 percent of total world population as stated earlier.

In child and maternal mortality target, India and China, said to have made a mark on the economic front, are quite off the track along with Sub-Saharan Africa. About 70 countries cannot achieve universal primary education within 2015.

With the trend so far, most of the countries will miss most of the goals. The UN World Summit held in September, 2005, characterized the exercise as more significant for what it failed to achieve than for what it accomplished. Millennium Development Goals pledged by the international community are heavily debased by now, so much so that they are being widely perceived as sheer nonsense. ???