

MDG Review Summit: Significant gains and failures

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Overview

The results are not surprising, but they are sobering: if there is not a decisive turnaround over the next five years, none of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) will be achieved by 2015. The United Nations is in danger of failing to measure up to the yardstick it has set itself. The interim results are especially bad in the case of the first goal: instead of the number of people suffering from hunger being halved, more and more people are affected – the figure is now over one billion people, which is more than ever before. At the *UN High-Level Plenary Meeting on the MDGs* (“MDG Review Summit”) in New York from the 20th to the 22nd of September 2010, discussions will be held on how global failure can still be averted. Chancellor Angela Merkel is planning to attend, as is US President Barack Obama, who wants to present a new initiative there – hope for a positive change of direction in the fight against poverty?

Already before the G8 summit in Gleneagles in April 2005, Welthungerhilfe was warning: “The efforts made by the community of nations to date to achieve the goals are completely inadequate.”

Over the following years there was a succession of UN and G8 summits; with powerfully eloquent resolutions and funding pledges running into billions, it was promised that hunger and poverty would be alleviated. But at the start of 2010 UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted in the *Millennium Development Goals Report*: “[...] it is clear that improvements in the lives of

the poor have been unacceptably slow, and some hard-won gains are being eroded by the climate, food and economic crises”. To

sum up: this year's summit in New York can only initiate a positive change of direction if the outcome is a binding resolution, including an agreement on a concrete plan of measures for combating poverty.

Millennium Development Goals

MDG 1**Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger****MDG 2****Achieve universal primary education****MDG 3****Promote gender equality and empower women****MDG 4****Reduce child mortality****MDG 5****Improve maternal health****MDG 6****Combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases****MDG 7****Ensure environmental sustainability****MDG 8****Develop a global partnership for development**

Half-hearted fight against hunger

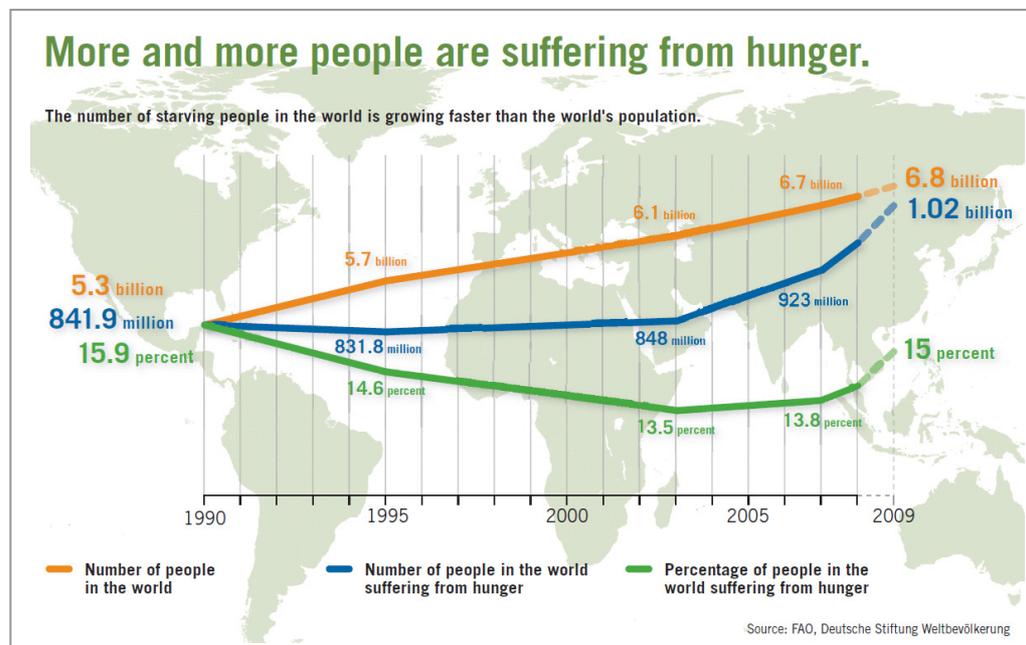
The MDG results vary greatly between regions and in respect of the individual goals. There have been only a few instances of significant progress - for example

in relation to universal primary education (MDG 2) and reducing child mortality (MDG 4), but also in fighting poverty (MDG 1a). The missing of the target for combating hunger (MDG 1c) is disastrous: the initial positive trend towards halving the proportion of people who are starving has in fact been reversed all around the world. This is despite the fact that the United Nations had given itself a quarter of a century (from 1990 to 2015) in order to achieve this goal. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the number of starving people initially decreased from 845 million in 1990 to 825 million in 1995, but it has since risen to over a billion today. Since 2005, the proportion of starving people has been increasing faster than the world population. If this trend is not reversed, there is the threat of an expansion of the food crisis in the 21st century due to the influences of climate change, the economic crisis, and the increasing demand for agricultural raw materials. Currently one in seven people already go to bed hungry. This is not just a human tragedy; it also represents a massive violation of the human right to food.

Success: Combating poverty on the agenda

The negative developments up to now - in particular as regards the increasing number of starving people - should not however lead to the erroneous conclusion that the MDGs are a superfluous or useless invention. On the contrary: in creating them, the international community of nations has for the first time created a common, globally valid measuring tool for "diagnosing" social

justice. This measuring tool is working, because the MDGs have led to a new level of transparency in development politics: progress and setbacks are recorded for each country by means of indicators, and made publicly available on an international basis. This ensures that the fight against



poverty retains a high level of importance on the political agenda despite the financial and economic crisis.

The structure of the MDGs means that they should be seen as milestones: halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger and poverty worldwide is at best only an interim objective, and it must be translated as such into overall development politics strategies. The UN indicators are operative parameters (e.g. the proportion of people in living poverty, the proportion of women etc.), and they do not replace any strategic goals (e.g. peace, good governance). Since the MDGs are therefore results-oriented rather than input-oriented, they also cannot be used as a development concept or as the key to eradicating poverty. The MDGs are merely internationally recognised parameters for measuring the fight against poverty over an extended period of time.

The discussion that repeatedly flares up about a stronger setting of priorities within the MDGs – as regularly happens at the G8 summits for instance, – should be questioned, because it brings donor objectives to the fore and further undermines the responsibility of governments to work out

and implement locally appropriate development strategies. It should be about retaining global sets of objectives, whilst the setting of priorities in terms of help towards self-help must occur at the national or regional level respectively.

After years have been spent focusing on macroeconomic development strategies, in the MDG debate human beings have once again taken centre stage in development: every starving person counts, and every child who does not receive an education prevents the development goals from being achieved. Questions about the opening or deregulation of markets are no longer the sole main focus of development debates.

Role of the donors

The governments of the developing countries are of course primarily responsible for the disappointing record of the Millennium Development Goals so far. But the areas which the donor governments have chosen to concentrate on have also contributed to this situation. Neither the Federal Government nor the EU align their priorities with the MDGs. The EU, the most important donor in the world, spent only 1.5% of its development aid funds on food in 2008, 1.3% on primary health, and 1.1 % on primary education. In 2005 the proportions were considerably greater, sometimes over three times as high. And in terms of goal 8, the development of a global development partnership, absolutely nothing has been done – because the industrial countries have blocked progress.

Nevertheless: even if the donor countries' priorities are not sufficiently oriented towards the MDGs and the goals are not being achieved, it is a mistake to conclude that this is a failure of development politics alone. For hunger and poverty can only be eradicated if in future

areas of politics that are important for this, such as economics, trade, finance, agriculture, climate policies etc., no longer shirk their responsibilities, but instead act in a concerted manner.

Empowerment at local and national level

From a development politics perspective the MDGs have nonetheless contributed towards the global development debate, for instance in the diagnosis of sluggish or delayed development efforts, the improved availability of funding, or in the efforts towards a concerted approach within development cooperation (Paris Agenda, reform of the *Committee on World Food Security*, impact orientation etc.). At the national and local level however, the MDGs have largely failed: they have no significant relevance to development processes in the field of village and community development planning, or in the field of government strategies for fighting poverty. Too rarely have mechanisms for solutions based on help towards self-help been derived from the MDGs and actually implemented. With its *Millennium Villages* initiative (see inset box), Welthungerhilfe is showing how effective local development can be in the fight against poverty.

The impact of the MDGs at national level is limited by the fact that important political controlling factors, such as good governance, respect for human rights, and support for civil society had not been included. The impact of the MDGs remains slight not least because the social dimension of development has been over-emphasised, whilst local economic development that targets poverty in conjunction with long-term structural changes plays only a subordinate role in them.

Would more comprehensive MDGs actually



In the Gandhiji Songha Millennium Village in India Welthungerhilfe is contributing to achieving the MDGs locally.

(Photo: Böthling)

have had more effect at national and local level? Almost certainly not, because the indicators are formulated in such a way that they measure global progress. More indicators would overload the system, make things harder to understand, and further reduce overall political accountability.

Comprehensible and transparent communication of development progress would then be virtually impossible. It therefore remains the job of governments to interpret and make the best possible use of global trends and guiding principles for the development of their own countries.

Welthungerhilfe's Millennium Villages: "MDGs up close"

Welthungerhilfe is making a very special contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: in 2005 it selected 15 villages or rural regions in Africa, Asia and Latin America for its "Millennium Villages Initiative": over a period of five years these locations show how hunger, poverty, diseases or environmental destruction can be successfully overcome – as long as a minimum level of financial resources and corresponding know-how are available. The inhabitants of the various villages have agreed in each case to make a joint contribution to achieving one or more of the MDGs.

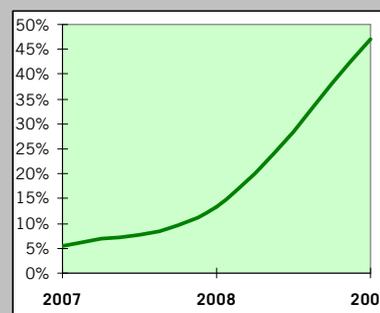
The commitment and own initiative of the population and local partner organisations are crucial to our help towards self-help approach. All of Welthungerhilfe's Millennium Villages receive the same assistance that the aid agency's other projects do. They are however observed more closely, and progress and difficulties at the individual locations are reviewed annually, with activities then being adapted to the current situation. The people involved in this "MDG monitoring" exercise look at developments in the villages through a kind of "Millennium Development Goals perspective".

Their unique feature: the MDGs are "localised" in each Millennium Village

For this purpose the inhabitants have jointly agreed which concrete, context-specific aspects they will use to demonstrate the achievement of the MDGs: in the village of Sodo in Ethiopia for example, improved agricultural methods and measures to protect the soils and drinking water are crucial factors in achieving the first MDG; in Mangué in Angola on the other hand, the universal use of draught animals in the fields and adequate supplies of agricultural products are essential to achieving it. In contrast, in Gandhiji Songha in India the primary concern is to improve capacities for combating drought, as well as methods of cultivation that are adapted for drought.

Progress becomes measurable

In addition, the representative household surveys that we carry out each year provide information on what developments that are significant in terms of the MDGs have taken place at village level. The year-round availability of food has for example improved at the following locations – from very different starting points: In Angola (Mangué) in 2007 only 29 percent of those questioned had enough to eat, compared with 87 percent now; here the peace process in the country also promoted the successful development of agriculture. In drought-stricken Gandhiji Songha (India), at the outset all those questioned experienced periods of hunger; in 2010 there is already sufficient food available for 21 percent of them all year round. There have been great changes in Mabote (Mozambique): whilst in 2007 six



Mabote survey (Mozambique): Have you experienced a period of hunger this year? Number of answers stating no (percent).

percent of the households questioned had enough to eat all year round, in 2009 this already applied to 47 percent of them; in Cambodia (Kanat Toch) the increase was from 9 to 19 percent, in Ethiopia (Sodo) from one to seven percent, and in Tajikistan (Veshab) from 45 to 71 percent. However, external influences – such as the effects of the weather, price increases or reductions etc. – may at any time partly hold back positive trends once more.

The school enrolment rate for children has also increased: e.g. in Mangué in Angola from 61 percent in 2007 to 85 percent in 2010; in the Indian villages, from 81 to 86 percent in Gandhiji Songha and from 93 to 97 percent in Sarwan in the period 2006-2009. In Mabote in 2007 only 62 percent of households had access to clean drinking water; two years later it was already 89 percent. In Sodo this applied to 28 percent of households in 2007; in 2010 the figure is 71 percent.

In this context the monitoring is not just a tool for measuring progress at village level, it also makes a tangible contribution to awareness-raising and fostering ownership. For people in the Millennium Villages, development becomes more comprehensible if it's a matter of finding one's own approaches to resolving problems. In the context of southern Asia in particular, Welthungerhilfe's local partner organisations operating in the Millennium Villages are in addition using their experience at grass roots level for lobbying and advocacy work. If a government has spelled out binding pledges as to how it intends to achieve the MDGs in its own country, civil society organizations can refer to these and hold it to account at regional and national level. In addition, there is the possibility of feeding their own expertise and concrete results at the local level into national MDG campaigns, such as in India for example. From 2011, Welthungerhilfe is planning a second phase of the initiative. Welthungerhilfe has been convinced by the approach to date, which has shown that progress towards achieving the MDGs is possible – precisely in the rural regions where many starving people live. This initiative is therefore to be continued until 2015 - the target year for the MDGs.

The one essential: a binding action plan

Business as usual is now no longer possible. In order to achieve the MDGs, quick - but also sustainable - successes are needed. Since these are easier to achieve in poor countries and emerging industrial countries than in the difficult environment of the least developed countries (LDCs), there is now the threat of development efforts being concentrated on countries and regions that offer prospects of success. However, attaining the MDG indicators must not become more important over the next five years than providing sustainable support towards the poorest of the poor: the implementing of fundamental human rights such as the Right to Food must be the paramount priority.

Development politics has now created an almost unmanageably complex system for fighting poverty: food security funds and *High Level Task Forces* are set up, committees that work on a worldwide basis are set up as new or painstakingly reformed – but only rarely do they achieve perceptible results. In line with the Paris Declaration

and Accra Action Plan, what matters is precisely not the creation of new bodies, but the implementation of the MDGs at local level, and therefore also not another toothless resolution at the MDG Review Summit which is soon to be held in New York. Instead, what matters is to stick to the target deadline of 2015, to work out action plans, and to fulfil pledges that have already been made: this also concerns investments in agriculture and in rural areas. It would nonetheless be desirable if beyond 2015 a further binding commitment was made to free all people from hunger and poverty.

German Development Minister Niebel should be taken at his word when he states that the summit provides a great opportunity to develop joint strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015: "It will depend on our partners pursuing coherent national MDG strategies in their countries. At the same time, we must work jointly towards creating favourable global framework conditions for achieving

the MDGs" Niebel has said. He said a precondition for this would however be taking into account subjects such as good governance, the implementation of human rights, gender equality and climate change.

To increase the local impact of the MDGs one also needs to consider the framework conditions in the developing countries. This is where individual governments are under a duty to drive forward development that is appropriate to their own country. Not just in the towns however, but precisely in the neglected rural areas, which are frequently bypassed by support measures and financial support. A United Nations action plan must support pragmatic solutions locally – for example in the manner practised by Welthungerhilfe in its

Millennium Villages. Reinforcing the behaviour of governments that promotes growth, increasing the level of coherence between departments in terms of policies, involving civil society, and at the same time promoting local private enterprise are some of the key phrases that a global action plan should contain. It should, in addition, pick up the idea of making use of the coming years up to 2015 in order to work out more ambitious goals, and in so doing to build on the 15 years of experience with the MDGs. The Federal Government should also speak out for this in New York – as well as for a binding action plan, and not – as currently planned – for non-binding declarations of intent.

Requirements for a successful MDG Review Summit

1. The MDGs must be retained as global objectives in their current form until 2015. This means that the United Nations has a duty to be able to continue meeting its own preconditions. Revisions would make the ongoing measuring of progress impossible, and would undermine further steps towards a more just system of global internal politics that is fit for the future. However, more account must be taken of the fact that, in line with help towards self-help, the setting of priorities must in each case be carried out locally.

2. The final resolution must be binding. Only on the basis of a concrete timetable of measures that is applicable to the international community can this year's summit in New York initiate a real turn-

around in the fight against hunger and poverty.

3. Only with a more concerted approach across all relevant areas of politics (economics, trade, finance, agriculture, energy, climate policy etc.) can development be sustainably structured and promoted. Development politics alone is not adequate for fighting hunger and poverty. This aspect must be taken into account in the resolution.

4. Governments of developing countries must be reminded more strongly of their duties. They are responsible for implementing national development strategies, in particular for rural areas.

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