

Are the Millennium Development Goals achievable?

*“The Millennium Development Goals are the most broadly supported, comprehensive, and specific poverty reduction targets the world has ever established, so their importance is manifold. For the international political system, they are the fulcrum on which development policy is based. For the billion-plus people living in extreme poverty, they represent the means to a productive life. For every-one on Earth, they are a linchpin to the quest for a more secure and peaceful world”.*¹

In the year 2000, 189 member states of the United Nations promised to reduce poverty in the world by half. This promise was translated in eight Millennium Development Goals. It was for the first time in history that all countries – rich and poor – promised to give their best to outlaw poverty. And it was also for the first time that they made concrete, measurable and time-bound agreements. If the Millennium Development Goals are achieved in 2015 then 500 million people will be lifted out of extreme poverty and more than 300 million will no longer suffer from hunger. There will also be huge progress in child health: rather than die before reaching their fifth birthday, 30 million children will be saved and so will the live of more than 2 million mothers. Besides, much more people in the world will be able to drink safe water and use the benefits of basic sanitation, allowing them to lead a healthier and more dignified life. Hundreds of millions more women will go to school, access economic and political opportunity and have greater security and safety.²

The eight Millennium Development Goals are:

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

To achieve the goals, the developing countries should adopt and implement a national development strategy that is ambitious enough to achieve these goals. The industrialized countries simply need to fulfil the Monterrey commitments by making concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7 % of Gross National Product as Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries.

2005. The world has made significant progress in achieving the goals. But progress has been far from uniform across the world and across the goals. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the goals are far from achieved. There is continuing food insecurity, a rise of extreme poverty, stunningly high child and maternal mortality, large numbers of people living in slums, and a widespread shortfall for most of the Millennium Development Goals. Asia is the region with the fastest progress, but even there hundreds of millions of people remain in extreme poverty, and even fast-growing countries fail to achieve some of the non-income Millennium Development Goals. Other regions have mixed records, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa,

¹ Millennium Project: Report to the UN Secretary-General: Investing in Development, a Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Overview – New York 2005

² Figures from webpage: www.unmillenniumproject.org

³ From webpage: www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals

often with slow or no progress on some of the Millennium Development Goals and persistent inequalities undermining progress on others.⁴

One could consider the Millennium Goals as a confession of failure. That still, after 40 years of Development Corporation, half of the world population is poor and more than 1 billion people live in extreme poverty, shows that something went wrong. But it might be considered as a first step in the right direction.

But after the UN Top in New York this September it is clear that these simple and good goals are a (first) step too far for lots of member states. The rich countries don't want to finance the project. Poverty should disappear by a well functioning market and more export.

I'd like to discuss three problems.

In the first place the amount of money given by the industrialized countries decreases. There is a lot of money needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals: 0.45 – 0.54% of GNP of the industrialized countries. But in spite of the Monterrey Commitments the funds decrease every year. In 2003 the G7 paid 0.25% of GNP to 'help' and 70% of this amount has never reached the poor.

Secondly, the Millennium Development Goals are not enough. Decreasing extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015 by half, means that the other half (500 million people) will die. And the Millennium Development Goals don't mention a lot of subjects: human rights, economic and social rights, infrastructural problems, demographic problems, geographically and climatologically circumstances, failure of natural resources or the existence of just one natural resource (like oil or diamantes) which is a source for civil wars, mismanagement, etc. The Millennium Development Goals will never be able to solve the problems of these 'failure states'.

And thirdly: there is no industrialized country that will finance the remission. It is impossible for the developing countries to decrease poverty with their huge burden of dept. The conditions of the World Bank and IMF make it impossible for the poor countries to rent money for their reconstruction, without enlarging their burden of dept. And the rich countries will not remit this burden of dept.

What is needed is solidarity, real help.

It is time for everyone to stop thinking on their own, but to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and upgrading the life standard of the poor by education in medicine, building, economics, agriculture and technology, by a fair trade system over the world and safety and political rest. And there is also a lot of money needed. So, when all industrialized countries just give 0.7% of GNP to Development Aid, then there is 200 billion \$ available for the poor countries. These funds should be managed and divided by the UN. With a transparent and controlled system the poor countries will be helped.

Is there nothing positive to comment to the Millennium Development Goals? There is. Spectacular improvements of the life standards of people in the Third World are possible. Lots of countries have already proven this. Besides some governments, among ours, keep the commitment of Monterrey and give the money and aid that is needed. The Millennium Development Goals are a step forward in the right direction and when everyone participates and tries to do his best, we will be able to equalize the world.

Marloes van Ginkel, 19 September 2005

⁴ Facts from: Millennium Project: Report to the UN Secretary-General: Investing in Development, a Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Overview – New York 2005