

# Millennium Development Goals – A Blueprint for Development

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## **Introduction**

The MDGs are a set of targets agreed by the United Nations intended to improve conditions in the developing world by 2015. They include halving the number of people living on less than a dollar a day, cutting infant mortality by two thirds, cutting maternal mortality by three quarters and putting every child in school.

To wipe out poverty and to bring a completion of the MDGs, we need \$70 billion per year (0.7 per cent of GNP) which the governments of the world are finding it difficult to achieve. In contrast, \$1.7 trillion is the amount on military spending which is used in wars on Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. It is hard to believe how the priorities of our world are skewed as the most important issues like the development agenda and climate change receive less attention.

The eight MDGs were agreed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. Nearly 190 countries have subsequently signed up to them. The eight Millennium Development Goals are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

As part of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it was agreed to incorporate targets concerning fair globalization and decent work for all, including women and young people.

## **Progress so far**

At a global level, progress towards the goals has been uneven. A number of important targets have been met:

- On the latest data available, it appears that the global target of reducing extreme poverty by 50% on 1990 levels was met five years ahead of the 2015 deadline. This achievement was greatly helped by accelerated poverty reduction in populous China and, to a lesser extent, India.

- The target of halving the proportion of people without reliable access to improved sources of drinking water - again based on 1990 levels - has also been met ahead of schedule.
- Conditions for more than 200 million people living in slums have been ameliorated, exceeding the MDG target on this area.
- On average across the world, gender equality in terms of access to primary education has been achieved, and primary school enrolment rates for girls are now on par with those for boys.

There have also been significant improvements in areas such as child mortality and the number of new HIV infections.

Progress on other targets is less promising. Hunger and under-nutrition remain the most critical of global challenges, and gains in gender equality outside primary school enrolment (in areas such as employment, political decision-making, and sexual and reproductive health) have been far less marked. Nearly half of those living in developing regions lack access to basic sanitation.

### **Going Forward – Post 2015**

The new framework is being developed in a very different environment to the MDGs. The period since 2000 has seen: a shift in the global economic balance, brought into sharper focus by the financial crisis; the ‘war on terror’ and a series of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa; rapid developments in information and communications technology; and profound population changes: urban residents will soon outnumber rural dwellers in most regions, and the year 2050 could see both the largest generation of young people and of over-60s.

There have also been changes within the international development arena. First, there is increasing pressure on aid, as a concept and in practice. This has been driven by domestic economic and political pressures in donor countries, but also by an increasing push for transparency, accountability and, most importantly, results by people in recipient countries.

Second, aid itself is now only part of the development funding mix. According to the International Monetary Fund, foreign direct investment, remittances, and portfolio equity flows have all overtaken Overseas Development Assistance to developing countries. Third, more research has been undertaken on poverty in emerging economies and Middle Income Countries (MICs), indicating that around one billion extremely poor people live in these countries.

Fourth, the impact of conflict, poor governance and institutions, and climate and environmental factors on poverty are becoming more widely understood and accepted. Fifth, there is a renewed emphasis on equality. Despite a doubling of global output, the gap between rich and poor has barely narrowed over the past 30 years, and many countries continue to be shackled by debt. If you exclude China from the calculations, the number of people living on less than a \$1.25 a day is around 1.8 billion, the same as it was 1981. The top 1 per cent of the world’s population owns 43 per cent of the world’s wealth. It takes an annual income of \$34,000, less than the average annual earnings of full-time workers in the UK, to join the “global 1 per cent”.

And sixth, the number of development actors has significantly increased, with new institutions, regional organisations, companies and civil society movements now involved in policy-making, delivery, financing and evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

To make any progress on the reduction of poverty, we urgently need to complete the Millennium Development Goals, stop the unrestrained tide of globalisation and promote aid, debt relief, transfer of technology, and fair trade to bridge the gap between the rich-poor divide. **Education is key** to opening new opportunities, making improvements in infrastructure leading to the growth of the economy.

For completion of the MDGs, countries who fall short of the UN's target 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) for overseas development aid, should establish a timetable for reaching it.

For promoting development, the cooperation of global institutions (UN, EU, IMF, and the World Bank), with the assistance of government and businesses can show strategic guidance, vision and leadership for creating an effective global governance system for ending poverty.

Now is the time to aim at no less than:

- a zero target for absolute poverty reduction
- a zero target for hunger
- a zero target for preventable child and maternal deaths
- a zero target for those without safe drinking water and sanitation.

2013 will be a critical year for the coming decades of international development, as international working groups propose ideas to the United Nations for what should drive the global development agenda once the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015 and are replaced by its successor framework Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) The UN has created an online portal for civil society input at [www.worldwewant.org](http://www.worldwewant.org) and is promoting discussion on Twitter with the hashtag #SDGs.

To move forward the agenda of development, governments of the developed countries should fulfil their commitment of giving 0.7% of GDP which they have signed and obliged to do so. This is of highest priority of completion for MDGs.

When you see extreme poverty remains a daily reality with more than 1 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day, one cannot help but feel the missed opportunity of a multitude of people who could have been doctors, engineers, teachers, computer experts, business entrepreneurs, what you may say if they were given a chance to attend school or university. In so many ways they could have benefited humanity if they were given a chance. Trillions of dollars are always found to save the collapsing banking system. But money can never be found for poverty reduction and development which shows lack of political will.

In the long journey of humanity, if there was a group of people who deserved to be given a chance, it is the poorest of this world. They cannot wait. We must not use the economic crisis, the food crisis or other setbacks as an excuse to complete the MDGs. Today with the help of knowledge, know-how and the resources the world possesses, we should accept the challenge that nobody should go hungry and take actions to fulfil this goal.

Remember, each of us have the capacity to change the world. Let us make the dream of making poverty history and completion of Millennium Development Goals a reality by the year 2015. We are the generation that can make it happen – so let's go for it.

Notes:

The following publications were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

1. UNA UK, Millennium Development Goals: 2015 and Beyond, January 2013.
2. Vijay Mehta, The Role of Global Institutions in Tackling Poverty, April 2008, Magdalen College, Oxford.
3. Oxfam Media Briefing, The Cost of Inequality: How Wealth and Income Extremes Hurt Us All, February 2012
4. Food and Agriculture Organisation, UN, Hunger and Malnutrition: The Key Datasets You Need To Know, 2012
5. Vijay Mehta, We Can End Poverty, June 2010, London
6. Mark Leon Goldberg, 13 Stories That Will Drive the Global Agenda in 2013, December 2013.
7. Save the Children, Ending Poverty in Our Generation, 2012

**Vijay Mehta** is a renowned author, international speaker and global activist for peace, development and human rights. He is the chair of Uniting for Peace ([www.unitingforpeace.org](http://www.unitingforpeace.org)) and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity ([www.fortuneforum.org](http://www.fortuneforum.org)).

Working since 1979, Uniting for Peace is a non-profit organisation devoted to creating and promoting a global culture of peace, nonviolence and poverty reduction. The flagship campaign of Uniting for Peace is called 4D for World Peace. It is campaign to create global frameworks for taking actions on interconnecting global issues of disarming and demilitarising the world and the savings thus achieved to be deployed for development and democracy.

Fortune Forum was founded by his daughter Renu Mehta. Fortune Forum held summits (2005 and 2006) where Former US President Clinton, Former US Vice President Al Gore and Actor Michael Douglas were keynote speakers. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage.

Vijay Mehta's books include The Economics of Killing (2012), The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future (2006), Arms No More (2005) and The United Nations and its Future in the 21st Century (2005).

He has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Aftak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.

Vijay Mehta is the recipient of the Global Indian Karmaveer (Action hero) Puraskar (Award) by iCONGO (International Confederation of NGO's). He is now a noble-laureate 2012 – 2013 of the iCONGO team of advisors and mentors ([www.icongo.in](http://www.icongo.in)). It is an award for outstanding luminaries working for peace and social justice.

Vijay Mehta's new book "**The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels Wars and Poverty in the Developing World**" is published by Pluto Press (UK) / Palgrave Macmillan (USA) / Amazon (Worldwide). For reviews and endorsements of the book, please visit: [www.theeconomicsofkilling.org](http://www.theeconomicsofkilling.org)

"Vijay....a long standing activist for peace, development, human rights and environment"  
**The Sunday Times Magazine, London** 1st February, 2009

"Vijay Mehta lends intellectual credibility to the project and wrote 'The Fortune Forum Code for a Sustainable Future', a sort of manifesto that will underpin the group's future activities."  
**The Independent, London** 26 September 2006