

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Key Statistics

- One billion people do not have access to safe drinking water
- More than one billion people live on less than one dollar a day with over 70% of these being women or children
- By 2020 140 million children will be malnourished
- Of the 150 million children aged 6-11 not in school, 90 million are girls

Overview

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000 the largest gathering of world leaders in history adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets, with a deadline of 2015 that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals

There are 8 key goals:

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. Global Partnership for Development

History

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration, adopted by 189 (now 192) nations, and signed by 147 heads of state and governments, during the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. This was the first time the UN had developed a common set of specific targets and dates for reducing extreme poverty by half, greatly reducing child mortality and eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education.

The MDGs represent a global partnership that has grown from the commitments and targets established at the world summits of the 1990s including the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995.

Millennium Development Goals and Gender

Women are disproportionately the victims of poverty and discrimination while also playing an indispensable role in grassroots change, the welfare of their families and management of natural resources. Goal 3 reaffirms an international commitment to gender equality but the targets and indicators linked to this goal are narrowly defined. None of the MDGs will be achieved without progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Experience has shown that those development programmes which address gender equality and women's empowerment are more successful.

What is the relationship between the 8 MDGs and gender?

Goal 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

The target of this goal is to halve the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The issue of poverty reduction has to include the aspect of gender as women are the prime sufferers of poverty due to social stereotypes, cultural behaviours, and a lack of equal access to health, education and rights associated with land and financial assistance. It has been estimated that by 2020 there will be 140 million children suffering from malnutrition. This estimate is directly associated to gender equality. 'There is a strong negative association between the mother's schooling and child mortality, because low levels of education translate into malnutrition and poor quality of care for children.'¹

Goal 2 Achieve Universal Primary Education

The target for this goal is ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

With 150 million children aged 6-11 not in school and 90 million of these being girls², education is an essential aspect of achieving gender equality and in turn the Millennium Development Goals.

The achievement of Goal 2 is interlinked with that of Goal 1 as education plays a vital role in reducing poverty and hunger.

There are several ways in which to achieve universal primary education including the abolishment of school fees in developing countries, incorporating nurseries within schools to allow female children who have the responsibility of looking after siblings to be educated and the abolition of school uniforms and free text books which take the financial pressure off those families who are unable to provide these for their children.

Goal 3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

The focus of this goal is education, especially primary and secondary education, the representation of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

Education

It has been proven that there is a direct link between education and reducing poverty. Unfortunately in some developing countries it is not seen as important to educate female children. This is highlighted through the number of female primary and secondary students compared to that of males. This is a result of females bearing the responsibility of being the primary care givers and many female children are responsible for caring for their siblings and also that the role of women is seen to be that of the bearer of children.

Since the first World Conference on Women in 1975 there has been progress within this area however there is still a long way to go in order to achieve this MDG.

Wage Employment

In developed countries women in the wage sector earn an average of 77 percent of what men earn; in developing countries, they earn 73 percent.³ Only about one fifth of the wage gap can be explained by gender differences in education, work experience, or job characteristics.⁴ This wage gap highlights that we still have a way to go in order to achieve gender equality in the employment sector.

Political Representation

The goal of achieving more female political representatives is vital to achieving gender equality. In national assemblies women represent less than 10 percent of the seats on average.⁵ In most regions of the world there has been an increase in female political representatives since 1975, however in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and East Asia and the Pacific there has been a significant reduction. Even with the increase in female political representatives overall the number still remains extremely low.⁶

Goal 4 Reduce Child Mortality

The target for this goal is to reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate. This Goal is interlinked with Goal 2.

Education is seen to be an essential aspect in reducing child mortality rates. It has been found that in between one and three years of maternal schooling would reduce the child mortality rate by 15 percent.⁷

In addition, child mortality rates are affected by social norms of a community, for example some societies consider the male child to be more important than the female child, therefore, and female children have a smaller chance of survival.

Goal 5 Improve Maternal Health

Every minute a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, with the overall number of these women being located in developing countries.⁸

The target for this Goal is to reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate.

This Goal is dependent upon on a greater equality for women both within the society as a whole and also in access to health care.

Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

As a whole women account for 48% of HIV/AIDS infected adults, however the percentage is much higher in developing countries compared to developed countries.

It has been proven that women are far more likely to be infected than men due to physiology and also their role within society.

Malaria and other communicable diseases are a result of poverty. Due to lack of educational and access to health care, poor women are extremely vulnerable to these diseases.

Goal 7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability

The target for this goal is to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies.

The limited or in some cases no access of women to ownership of land and agricultural financial assistance in a plays an integral role in the success of this goal. Furthermore, with limited access to land and assistance, the access of new technologies to female farmers is also limited.

In addition to issues of land, access to sustainable drinking water is included within this goal. Over one billion people having no access to safe drinking water, this lack of access directly affects other Millennium Development Goals such as eradicating extreme hunger and poverty and also reducing child mortality.

Goal 8 Global Partnership for Development

The targets within this Goal include further developing an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system, addressing the special needs of the least developed countries and countries which are land-locked or small island developing States and dealing comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries.

Gender equality and the promotion of women play an integral role in each of these targets.

UNIFEM and the MDGs

UNIFEM is deeply involved with four critical entry points: monitoring, analysis, advocacy and operational programmes.

Monitoring Progress: UNIFEM helps women evaluate whether or not their countries are on-track to meet the MDGs through analysis of data.

Analysis: UNIFEM's background papers, proven strategies and network of gender experts have made essential contributions in how to achieve the MDGs.

Advocacy: Longstanding partnerships with women's organisations have ideally positioned UNIFEM to spread awareness, spark debate and encourage participation in MDG activities.

Operational Programmes: The branches of UNIFEM's operational programmes contribute to the MDGs: reducing feminised poverty, ending violence against women, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and achieving gender equality in democratic governance.

MDGs and Australia

Australia has committed to the Millennium Development Goals especially in relation our region.

In the 2008–09 Budget, Australia allocated 0.32 percent of GNI for overseas aid. There has been an increase since 2003, but the percentage is still well below the internationally agreed figure of 0.7 percent.

By increasing aid to the agreed figure, the Australian government paying its fair share of the cost of achieving the Goals.

Australia has a strong commitment to reducing trade barriers in developing countries and Less Developed Countries (LDCs); however, greater flexibility in agricultural-related tariff reduction would facilitate a fairer trade regime.

Useful Links

<http://www.undp.org/mdg/>
<http://www.mdgender.net/goals/>
www.millenniumcampaign.org/

References

World Bank, *Gender Equality & the Millennium Development Goals*, April 2003.