INTRODUCTION

Every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, equality, a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence and encourages tolerance and solidarity. So said the Millennium Declaration, the pre-cursor to the Millennium Development Goals. Along with other large institutions of development - the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – the Millennium Development Goals were agreed. Now, much development funding is channelled in order meet these goals. This briefing explains what the goals are, the pros and cons, progress and what comes after 2015, the deadline.

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

What are they?

There are 8 goals to be achieved by 2015:

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

Each goal has one or more targets attached (find the full list at www.un.org/millenniumgoals/). For example, the single target for goal 2 is for all children to complete primary school. Each target has indicators to use to monitor progress. The primary school target is measured by net enrolment in primary school, the proportion of children who reach the final primary school grade and literacy rates for 15-24 year-olds.

What are the pros and cons?

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<th>PROS</th>
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<td>Goals give a framework around which political support can be gathered.</td>
<td>Pressure to reach goals leads to targeting the easiest to reach. For example, one target under goal 1 is to half the number of people living on less than a dollar a day. It’s theoretically easier to get people from 99 cents to over a dollar, than from 50 cents.</td>
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It can reduce fragmentation by focusing resources on specific areas.

They help developed countries to decide where to focus limited resources.

The measurements required to monitor progress help to improve the collection of data in developing countries.

Some ideas are not sufficiently included, such as participation, empowerment, disability, gender and environmental sustainability. These are difficult to measure and the proxy measures are not considered sufficient. For example, measuring equality in education by looking at how many girls and boys enrol doesn’t account for discrimination in schools that can affect quality of education.

A lot of the data to measure progress is missing or not reliable. For example, literacy is measured by asking people if they are literate.

Focus on the goals can divert resources from other areas. For example, the focus on primary education may lead to less support for secondary or further education. Some argue that this reinforces existing northern dominance.

Will they be reached?

According to the latest World Bank and IMF report...

**Developing countries are on track to:**

- achieve the same number of boys and girls in school
- halve the number of people who can’t get safe drinking water
- get close to the target of universal primary education

**It is unlikely that targets will be met on:**

- child and maternal mortality
- access to sanitation

For goal 1, to tackle poverty, the picture is mixed. It is likely that the goal will be reached in that the number of people living on less than $1.25 a day will be cut in half. But, a lot of this is because of growth of China and India. 17 countries in Africa are far from reaching this goal.
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What comes next?

The big picture numbers show progress towards the MDGs and there are lots of stories of success to complement the numbers, from women’s mango cooperatives in Mali to giving free HIV treatment in Botswana. But there are only two years until the 2015 deadline. Also, the global economy has changed and the environment is increasingly on the agenda.

At the moment, the UN is working with governments, civil society and other organisations to decide the way forward. The Rio + 20 Summit included discussions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to supersede the MDGs. These involve building a green economy that reduces poverty without destroying the environment.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There is no agreed way to measure sustainable development, although some key issues and measurement ideas were discussed at Rio + 20 (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=327&menu=35).

There is also still debate over the effectiveness of goal setting for international development.

- How have the MDGs impacted on your work? Have they been helpful?
- What do you think are the most important targets to include in the SDGs? How would these be measured?

FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

www.un.org/millenniumgoals: The United Nations website about the MDGs. The fact sheets about each goal explain what’s involved in the goal, the progress made so far, and some examples of work under the goal.

www.beyond2015.org: An international campaign website that is campaigning for a successor to the MDGs

www.worldbank.org/mdgs

Ends