

The MDGs in National Policy Frameworks

by Diana Alarcón¹

Achieving the MDGs will require an additional \$50 billion per year, specifically targeted to the poorest countries – one sixth of one per cent of annual global income. However, additional external funding and accurate allocations also call for mobilising domestic resources, improving policies and strengthening institutions at the national level.

In September 2000, 149 Heads of State and a total of 189 countries, formally adopted the “Millennium Declaration” as the means to “**create an environment** – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty” (emphasis added). In short, though the MDGs reflect an international political consensus, they do not represent a development strategy.

Although extrapolations of current poverty trends during the last decade suggest that the world is on track to halving income poverty by 2015, this has resulted largely from rapid advances in China. As Jan Vandermoortele has shown elsewhere in this issue of *Development Policy Journal*, available information also indicates that the incidence of income poverty and under-five mortality rates have

CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA

A detailed report from 14 countries of *Central and East Africa (CEA)*, where the number of people living on \$1 a day is expected to rise by some 45 million people by 2015, stressed the need to build peace and security throughout the subregion, so as to create a foundation for reduced military expenditure, improved transparency, and accountable, democratic governance structures.

Throughout the area as a whole, national economies will have to grow by at least 7 – 8%. While Uganda has already reached this rate and oil-producing countries such as Equatorial Guinea have already exceeded it, most countries are unlikely to do so, in part because of HIV/AIDS and environmental damage. These countries also suffer from marginalisation in the globalisation process, an isolation reflected by the digital divide, which in itself perpetuates exclusion from the economic integration rapidly taking place between the North and other parts of the global South. The legacy of corruption in public administration and misdirected macro-economic policies – often shaped externally – does not help. In addition, the lack of reliable data and national statistics has created a major obstacle to defining MDG priorities, as well as to providing the basis for feedback and effective management – a gap that various UN activities and initiatives such as PARUZI of OECD (see the article by Brian Hammond) must help bridge.

A significant UNDP task is assistance in integrating the MDGs into other planning frameworks, notably the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and regional New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The MDGs provide a framework for monitoring progress and ensuring consistency between short-term planning and longer-term strategies. This kind of synchronising between countries throughout the region will reduce transactional, opportunity and other costs by contributing to the coordination of approaches among donors – a necessity reinforced by intra-regional problems such as continued cross-border conflicts, migratory trends and the spread of HIV/AIDS. While governments must take the lead in these processes, local authorities play significant reinforcement roles, the private sector must shoulder its responsibilities for creating robust markets, and civil society must ensure that growth does not detract from environmental conservation and the realisation of human rights.

(Source: Geoff Prewitt, UNDP CEA Subregional Resource Facility)

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actually increased in Sub-Saharan Africa, and that the number of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America has increased by about 10 million each year since 1990 (Vandemoortele, this issue). Further, world leaders meeting in Rome at the 2002 World Food Summit concluded that the commitment to reduce world hunger was unrealistic. In fact, “at the current rate, the target will be met 45 years behind schedule” (Jacques Diouf, Director General, FAO, 2002)

Progress remains slow in other dimensions of human development as well. Providing basic education to all children by 2015 will involve accelerating current rates of progress fourfold. Advances in infant, child and maternal mortality, malnutrition, access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation actually slowed during the 1990s as compared with earlier decades (Vandemoortele, this issue).

Nonetheless, MDGs are financially affordable and technically feasible. In terms of international resources, it has been estimated that their achievement will require an additional US\$50 billion per year, specifically targeted to the most disadvantaged countries, many of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. This represents only one sixth of one per cent of annual global income.

While a strong case exists to increase the flow of ODA to priority countries, sustainable development will be possible only if external debt is substantially reduced and the international trade regime is adjusted in a more equitable manner (see the articles by Charles Gore and Martin Khor in this issue). However, additional resources will contribute significantly to reaching the MDGs if there is better targeting of investments in priority areas, particularly education, health and environmental protection. Mobilising domestic resources, improving policies and strengthening institutions will also be required – all of these at the national level.

TANZANIA

In *Tanzania*, the first country to produce an MDG Report (in February, 2001) and where the MDGs have been firmly integrated into national policies and strategies and promoted national ownership of the monitoring process since that time, the government has doubled its allocation to rural development to spur pro-poor growth and food security. The abolition of primary school fees has significantly boosted enrolment — thereby countering a trend throughout the country in which the proportion of poor children attending school fell, even as overall primary enrolment rates rose. Although the government has ensured full funding of its basic health budget requirements, many of the MDGs will not be met unless the country succeeds in containing and reversing the spread of AIDS.

In addition, national averages mask significant disparities between men and women, older and younger people, people at differing income levels, and people from different parts of the country. This last area of inequality is particularly significant because planning and poverty monitoring on the part of all stakeholders, including the UN and other development partners, takes place largely in Dar-es-Salaam. Further efforts are required to involve stakeholders at the regional and local levels, particularly in the rural areas.

However, the management of the country's poverty monitoring system permits the engagement of an ever-widening range of participants, including civil society groups and gender focal points both within and outside the capital, to hold the government to its commitments and to advocate for policy change in line with emerging findings. The MDGs provide a long-term planning framework, an important element in view of the fact that the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy, which operates within a three-year framework, has now taken centre stage.

(Source: John Hendra and Arthur van Diesen, UNDP Tanzania)

Over the next 13 years, then, progress towards the Goals will depend on the extent by which national plans and national budgets incorporate the MDGs into their national development priorities. Thus, building a national consensus is the first step towards the achievement of well-defined, time-bound, realistic goals and targets.

ZIMBABWE

In *Zimbabwe*, the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare has assumed responsibility for MDG reporting and set in motion a broad-based consultative process to that end, including civil society and private sector organisations, supported by the UN Country Team. The Team is now reviewing a draft Report, exploring the financing of its targets with IMF and World Bank experts. UNDP is assisting the government in budget classification to permit efficient expenditure tracking and, in conjunction with UNFPA, preparing a Poverty Assessment Survey to determine household priorities. The Team is also studying the optimal mix of domestic and external financing sources and intensifying its efforts to persuade the government to embark on a programme of recovery and growth.

The 18 targets selected to monitor progress (see the initial Box of this number of the *Journal*) represent a global average. In the area of poverty and hunger, for example, the international community will measure progress towards achieving Goal 1 through the use of two targets: Target 1 “to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day”; and Target 2 “to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”. Each individual country, nonetheless, should initiate a national dialogue to choose and set its own targets that reflect national conditions of development. These targets should be realistic in the sense that they can be achieved with available resources, but ambitious enough to mobilise the citizenry and the political will of the governing class. Similarly, all the other Goals — on education, equality, health, and the environment — may be achievable if targets are nationally “owned” and become an intrinsic part of the development strategy of the country.

RWANDA

In *Rwanda*, the Goals provided common ground for meetings between the government and civil society groups to discuss controversial issues that had hitherto obstructed their joining their respective strengths in spurring post-conflict recovery. Together, civil servants and CDO representatives worked out a framework of mutual responsibilities and accountability in meeting the MDGs, including a blanket mandate for counter-monitoring and evaluation. The Goals also became the basis of country-specific indicators and targets for the interim PRSP and, as such, increased the likelihood of priority budgetary allocations and external funding.

Campaigning for the MDGs

The UN Secretary General has designated UNDP as “scorekeeper” and “campaign manager” of the MDGs. In close coordination with the UN Development Group, UNDP is facilitating the process to build national consensus around the MDGs and monitor progress through the publication of national MDG Reports (MDGRs) designed to convey clear information for use in advocacy and consensus-building.

To move from the international consensus generated by the Millennium Declaration to the design of consistent national economic and cross-sectoral policies and the adoption of specific programmes

SENEGAL

In *Senegal*, one of the first countries to produce an MDGR (in August, 2001), the Report stimulated significantly greater participation in the PRSP process, along with an effort to conceptualise joint programming on the part of the international community by testing the MDGs at the local level in a particular poor region with significant promise.

EGYPT

Disaggregated MDGR analysis in *Egypt*, carried out in 2002, revealed a significant poverty reduction trend in the country's urban areas, along with a slight increase in Lower Egypt. Before the Report's publication in June, there had been little discussion of the Goals among politicians. The Report also spurred debate in the academic and NGO communities and will henceforth be issued annually to keep public discussion going. One feature of the debate was widespread lack of confidence in official statistics. CSO representatives in particular expressed a desire to see an impartial, independent institution take the lead in analysing MDG-related policy and data and in MDG projections and reporting.

Although Egypt appears to be on track nationally in halving poverty, disaggregation has not yet taken place to reveal gender differences or ethnic and regional disparities. Nor does the analysis yet identify external factors that could disrupt progress, notably a slowing of the global economy or the effects of political instability and regional conflict — or, by contrast, the MDG benefits of donor support. In this respect, OECD/DAC should standardise MDG-specific codes and add them to the sectoral and thematic ODA classifications. Different donors may also wish to assume "championship roles" for different Goals.

UNDP views translating the Goals into popular parlance as essential to national ownership, particularly the encouragement of civil society to exert pressure on government leaders for accountability in reaching the MDGs. To this end, future Reports may include a governance section without targets to take stock of governance factors that either facilitate or obstruct progress towards those Goals whose targets can be quantified more easily.

(Source: Antonio Vigilante, UNDP Egypt)

and projects that reflect those objectives, UNDP also assists countries in building national consensus among multiple stakeholders, developing national policies on the basis of trends validated by empirical research, and shifting budgetary allocations accordingly; a few such examples appear in the boxes throughout this article.

By keeping the debate focused, UNDP can play an important role creating the consensus necessary to give continuity to the policies and social change that will be necessary to achieve the MDGs. Effective campaigning will require a systematic effort to: i) promote the adoption of nationally defined MDG targets; ii) incorporate nationally defined MDG targets in the design of sectoral policies; and iii) incorporate that consensus into the objectives of specific programmes and projects.

National Policies and Resource Allocation

Setting development priorities represents the beginning of a long process that requires political will, consistent policies and technical capacity to produce social change. Consistent progress towards the MDGs will be made by removing constraints on achieving the social change needed for economic growth. Key areas that may require alternative approaches are as follows:

1. Reaching greater **consistency between the objectives of economic policy and social policy**. Social policy cannot become residual, formulated merely to fill the gaps of narrow and poorly defined macroeconomic policies. If economic policy does not provide the incentives for the creation of productive employment, the dynamic

growth of the rural economy, the growth of the micro and small enterprises in the informal sector, social policy can do very little to reduce poverty and strengthen human development. By the same token, investing in areas such as education or health without expanding employment *and* investment opportunities is unsustainable.

The notion of trade-offs between investing to boost economic growth versus investing in human development belongs to an old development paradigm increasingly untenable theoretically and unsupported by worldwide experience during the last half-century and, looking backward, by much of earlier history. Consistency between the objectives of economic and social policies facilitates growth and human development and is key to reaching the MDGs.

YEMEN

In *Yemen*, the government's monitoring and reporting system uses the MDGs as the platform of its database. The 2003 budget responds to MDG priorities, increasing allocations for education by 25%, for health by 56%, and for water and sanitation by 66%.

BAHRAIN

Bahrain, a country of relatively high human development that committed to the MDGs in 2000, has focused on reducing its 12% unemployment rate with new programmes to train its jobless and unskilled labour force and find earnings opportunities for them. A microfinance programme developed in conjunction with UNDP/UNCDF has benefited 3500 people, 65% of them women, representing 4.4% of the country's growing population of needy families.

2. While the impact of social policy is usually long-term, policy design and the allocation of resources involves short-term decisions. Today's investment in sanitation, access to water, health clinics, training of teachers and medical personnel, and more classrooms will show impacts in longevity and a better-educated population only after years have passed.

This lag, among other factors, calls for **strategic thinking and use of resources**. To implement stable policies, planners need to build consensus among stakeholders in the society around the objectives of development. MDGs can help identify their development priorities and direct resources towards specific targets.

3. There is no straightforward, linear relation between inputs/outputs or results/impacts. For example, achieving the Goal of providing 5 years of basic education to all children cannot result from a good educational policy alone. This requires not only enough classrooms, but the training of teachers for the pupils (and parents) they will encounter, ensuring school supplies – and making national provisions for child health and nutrition, which, in turn, must take account of family income, including the opportunity costs of sending children to school, as well as parental support at home for the children's educational attainment. In short, positive results in social policy and human development require the **design and implementation of multi-sectoral and participatory social policy**.

4. There is an element of low predictability in the results of social policy design and implementation, where multiple factors affect results over the medium and long term. Economic and environmental factors may have a critical effect on a child's staying in school. Building schools, training school teachers, and providing school materials may not be enough to enroll and retain children in school. In very poor communities, children often have to work to contribute to their families' income. Thus, **social policy design and implementation need to be flexible** to incorporate new elements so as to achieve the stated objectives.

PAKISTAN

In *Pakistan*, UNDP has embarked on a training programme to sensitise the country's 120,000 district councilors (including 40,000 women) to the MDGs, focusing on pro-poor development with particular emphasis on the environment and the mainstreaming of gender issues into the PRSP.

MONGOLIA

In *Mongolia*, which has used information and communications technology extensively to reach its far-flung population, the National Statistics Office is establishing an MDG database website for public access, while the government is using its draft MDGR as input to its PRSP.

TIMOR-LESTE

More than 38,000 adults and young people across newly-independent *Timor-Leste* voiced their views on the MDGs in preparations for the country's first National Development Plan, prioritising education and health in the budget allocation of 2002/2003 with 37% of core expenditures and an increase to 40% for the following year. Almost half the education expenditure will go to primary schooling and 60% of the health budget to basic health care delivery.

5. A good system for **monitoring and evaluating policy interventions** is key to producing results. Traditional exercises in evaluation at the end of a project must be replaced by mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation that produce information useful to the implementation of social programmes to produce results. Systems for policy monitoring must run parallel to the entire cycle of policy-making and project implementation, starting with the definition of indicators when designing the projects, using these indicators for feedback and management throughout implementation, and ensuring social accountability in the use of public resources.
6. Successful implementation of social policy requires a high level of **coordination among multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries**. Each MDG calls for the participation of government officials, civil society, the private sector, donor countries, and the presumed beneficiaries. Building consensus around the basic objectives of development is essential for long lasting and strong partnerships that deliver results.

Monitoring and Reporting

Systematic monitoring and reporting will play an important role to track progress towards the MDGs. It can also be an important vehicle to introduce the development actors into the practice of social monitoring of public policy. The preparation of MDG

Reports should be the occasion to assess progress made, to identify development gaps and to create conditions for the mobilisation of resources to meet the nationally agreed targets.

Monitoring and reporting of the MDGs can also play an important role in breaking down traditions of monitoring only at the end of a process and build a new culture of systematic monitoring that identifies gaps and generates debate and consensus to improve policy implementation.

The Policy Cycle

The diagram that concludes this article depicts the role that UNDP and UN can play to facilitate the process for reaching the MDGs. Realising national policies consistent with the Goals will require systematic campaigning, advocacy and building national consensus among multiple stakeholders.

Translating the MDGs into specific sectoral targets will require the transfer of expertise from the specialised agencies, including facilitation of the complex process of setting priorities, mobilising resources to meet ambitious targets with limited resources, and coordinating policy between sectors and among multiple institutions.

The objectives of sectoral policies must be translated into specific programmes and projects to achieve results. Policy implementation requires strong institutions and committed management, which are often lacking in developing countries. Strategic investments to build national capacity among government officials and leaders of civil society in the special skills required for the successful implementation of MDGs will be highly beneficial.

VIET NAM

Viet Nam's first Report, *Bringing MDGs Closer to the People*, aimed at the National Assembly, highlighted the country's success in reducing its poverty rate from 60% in 1990 to approximately 32% in the last three years, in part because of the creation of more than 50,000 new private enterprises and nearly one million new jobs. In addition, the country's integration into the regional and international economies is rapidly accelerating, in part because of trade agreements with ASEAN countries and the USA, and the prospect of WTO membership by mid-decade.

However, this very integration creates equity concerns. The MDGR called attention to dramatic social disparities across a wide range of indicators and attributed deprivation largely to isolation, primarily rural, but also ethnic and linguistic. Thus, in the Central Highlands, the maternal mortality rate is four times the national average, and only 40 miles from Ho Chi Minh City, with its net primary enrolment rate of over 90% for the 5-year cycle, about half the children, most of them girls, do not attend school at all. In addition, HIV/AIDS is a potentially explosive challenge, complicated by the widespread view of the disease as a "social evil" rather than a development problem. Experts fear that the actual number of cases far exceed those reported, even outside the urban centres, tourist areas, border provinces and corridors traversed by major highways, where high rates have been growing exponentially.

Nonetheless, *Viet Nam* may well achieve all the MDGs by 2015. However, this will require considerable decentralisation of public resources, including ODA, for effective investment in health, education and rural infrastructure, along with needs-based transfer mechanisms among provinces. The recent "grassroots democracy" decree attempts to increase transparency in local budgetary processes and increase the participation of local people in decision-making processes. While this will significantly enhance the determination of genuine local needs, it calls for a vast effort in capacity-building at the local level. This will entail accenting efforts for women. Although female representation in the National Assembly is high (25%) in comparison with other countries, including many in the global North, it drops sharply at the provincial and local levels, varying significantly among provinces and the districts within them.

(Source: Jordan Ryan, UNDP Viet Nam)

Some of these skills include strategic thinking; goal orientation; the ability to work in multi-sectoral, inter-disciplinary teams; flexibility to adapt to change; accountability for results; ability to work in partnership with multiple stakeholders; technical training in the use of modern methodologies for policy implementation; and above all, commitment to development.

UNDP can play an important role in mustering the resources for capacity development and facilitating the process of setting up effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Clear distinctions between input, output, outcome, and impact indicators are critical to assessing progress towards nationally agreed targets. Similarly, community participation in the monitoring of results and policy implementation is essential to improving governance and building national ownership. Their exclusion in this critical dimension can lead to making the costs of poverty overwhelming in the long term, betraying the intent of the MDGs, and ensuring failure to meet them.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Guatemala's 2002 MDG Report, was launched publicly late in the year and subsequently presented to the entire Cabinet by the Vice-President in a request for a follow-up report on each Goal by the appropriate Minister. In support of the country's PRSP, the government is preparing provincial and municipal strategies for tracking the Goals.

Bolivia's government has aligned its social policy to the MDGs, launching a programme of Education for All, along with Universal Maternal and Child Health Insurance. The country's forthcoming National Human Development Report, devoted to the Goals, will continue to inform the biennial National Dialogue on human development and will also serve as a key input for measuring progress at the local level, including 30 municipalities.

Haiti's Minister of Finance used the country's interim MDGR in preparing the 2003/2004 budget. The final Report, currently being prepared by a steering committee that includes government, civil society and donor partners, will benefit from a statistical survey of living conditions country-wide.

TRANSITION COUNTRIES

Armenia's 2002 MDG Report has spurred the joint preparation of a new national set of indicators by focal Ministries and CSOs and the use of MDG targets in its Social and Economic Development Programme. The country's public awareness campaign features a series of TV programmes and interviews, along with the production of a documentary on nation-wide MDG status.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is devoting its 2003 National Human Development Report to the MDGs and will use its conclusions as input to the country's PRSP. In addition, UNDP has recruited a civil society coordinator to broaden participation in both the MDG and PRSP processes.

In *Ukraine*, the country's 2002 Youth Summit, comprising 250 leaders between the ages of 15 and 19, was the occasion for one-page reports by each on a specific MDG specifying conclusions and recommendations. The young people, alumni of Model UN sessions and the European Youth Parliament, subsequently presented a consolidated paper to Parliament, with wide media coverage, and constituted themselves as the "Ukraine MDGnet". UNDP has recruited a follow-up coordinator and will feature the youth recommendations in the country's MDGR.

