



Dili International Conference on the post-2015 Development Agenda

'Development for all: Stop conflict, build states and eradicate poverty'

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BRIEFING NOTE – SESSION 1a

How can we accelerate progress towards meeting the MDGs by 2015?

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The state of progress

A global overview of progress in the implementation of the MDGs shows that several targets have already been achieved or are close to achievement by the 2015 deadline. This includes the poverty reduction target, parity between boys and girls in primary education and access to improved water sources. There has been slow progress in other areas. For example, the proportion of own-account and unpaid family workers in total employment, which is considered a proxy for vulnerable employment, has dropped from 67 per cent in 1991 to an estimated 58 per cent in all developing regions in 2011. Maternal mortality has considerably declined between 1990 and 2010, although this reduction is still far from the 2015 target.

However, longer term United Nations projections indicate that in 2015 more than 600 million people worldwide will still lack access to safe drinking water, almost one billion will be living on an income of less than \$1.25 per day, mothers will continue to die needlessly in childbirth, and children will suffer and die from preventable diseases. Hunger remains a global challenge, and ensuring that all children are able to complete primary education remains a fundamental, but unfulfilled, target that has an impact on all the other goals. Lack of safe sanitation is hampering progress in health and nutrition and greenhouse gas emissions continue to pose a major threat to people and ecosystems.¹

In the Asia-Pacific region, the story is one of uneven progress and some significant headway. While the region as a whole made important progress in reducing levels of income poverty, it is off track when it comes to hunger, health and sanitation. Intra-country as well as cross-country disparities are also increasingly evident.²

In the meantime, conflict-affected and fragile states remain furthest-away from achieving the MDGs, with no member country of the G7+ on track to meet MDG1, the poverty eradication goal, for example. At least one third of the world's poor live in fragile states currently, an increase from one-fifth in 1990, with this figure expected to increase to about one half in 2013. Longer term projections indicate that global poverty will be increasingly concentrated in 'fragile, mainly low-income and African, states.'³ Conflict-affected and fragile countries also face far higher than average levels of undernourishment, educational deficits, child mortality, single female-headed households with young children and lack of safe drinking water and basic sanitation.⁴

Inequalities undermine progress

Progress towards the MDGs in the final push to 2015 is undermined by income and wealth inequalities within countries. These have increased since the early 1980s, including in high-income countries. Inequalities in access to land and other productive assets, as well as in social outcomes and service access, also remain widespread. In developing countries, nutritious food, safe drinking water, improved sanitation, basic education coverage and learning outcomes are much worse for low-income and rural families, while child death rates and stunting are two to four times higher between the lowest and highest wealth quintiles. Gender inequalities persist, as shown in wage earnings differentials, access to positions of decision-making and HIV infection rates. In many contexts, equal access to justice and political participation is not guaranteed in practice.⁵

The final push to 2015 – drivers for change

Drawing on broad consultations throughout the region, the 2010/11 Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report, published jointly by UNESCAP, the Asian Development Bank and UNDP, highlights the following seven key drivers for accelerating progress towards achievement of the MDGs in 2015. Although these are specific to the Asia-Pacific region, the drivers will have relevance in other regions, while acknowledging that each country has to address its own specific needs, dynamics and opportunities in moving towards MDGs achievement.

¹ Ban-Ki Moon, Secretary-General, United Nations, 'The Millennium Development Goals Report,' 2012.

² Taken from the forthcoming ESCAP/ADB/UNDP Regional MDGs Report, 2012/13.

³ Homi Kharas and Andrew Rogerson, 'Horizon 2025: creative destruction in the aid industry', ODI, July 2012, p. 3.

⁴ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, Realising the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General, New York, June 2012, p. 18.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 12-13.

Rebalancing economies – Given the importance of economic growth in MDG achievement, countries affected by the current economic crisis need to recover quickly and expand their economies. But in an era when western markets are likely to import fewer goods, countries will also need to rebalance their growth, basing it more on consumption of regionally-sourced goods and services.

Making economic growth more inclusive and sustainable – In light of evidence of growing inequalities and disparities worldwide, economic growth also needs to be more inclusive – derived more from economic activities, such as agriculture, that benefit the poor, especially women. The fruits of growth also need to be better allocated to support progress towards MDG targets. Governments will also need to strengthen their focus on ‘green economy’ policies and approaches that can decouple economic development from environmental pressures.

Strengthening social protection – The development of comprehensive social protection programmes will help minimize the risks and vulnerability from economic crises and natural calamities. It will also act as a ‘circuit breaker’ for vicious inter-generational cycles of poverty and hunger, as well as reducing widening disparities between the rich and poor. This should involve targeted and gender-responsive outreach to the informal sector.

Reducing persistent gender gaps – Greater investments in women and girls have multiplier effects across all MDGs. Legislative and other changes are needed to ensure that women have greater control and ownership of assets, have equitable access to employment and public services, and are fully represented in public and political life.

Ensuring financial inclusion – As opportunities for ensuring greater financial inclusion for the poor and marginalized expand, governments can play their part by improving infrastructure and the regulatory environment, while encouraging better service provision by NGOs, community-based groups and the private sector.

Extending regional cooperation – Regional solutions to shared regional challenges are an increasingly important part of the global development landscape. Cooperation in areas such as trade, finance, labour migration and development assistance can bolster country capacity to achieve the MDGs, with South-South Cooperation increasingly a key driver in this respect.

Boosting international technical cooperation – While most of the resources for achieving the MDGs will come from within the region, many of the poorest and most vulnerable countries will continue to require overseas development assistance, which needs to support country-owned and country-led solutions and the strengthening of critical national capacities for development.

From fragility to resilience

To these drivers for change, identified in the Asia-Pacific context, must be added the particular approaches developed by the g7+ countries and their development partners under the ‘New Deal for Fragile States,’ announced at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in November 2011. The New Deal contains five goals for peacebuilding and statebuilding, which provide vital foundations to enable progress towards the MDGs: legitimate politics; security, justice; economic foundations; revenues and services. Underpinning these goals are ten areas for change in approaches to international development cooperation and building mutual trust, including a shift to country-led fragility assessments; stronger support for political processes; more effective support for capacity development; greater transparency of aid and increased use of country systems.

The role of effective and accountable state institutions and rule of law is core to implementing the goals of the New Deal – underpinned by building the social contract between states and citizens, as well as the critical capacities needed to foster economic empowerment, deliver key services and address fundamental issues of justice, inclusion and security. The fact that 60% of fragile states are resource-rich economies⁶ highlights the importance of inclusive and transparent management of natural resource revenues and services. These imperatives apply to all states, not just those affected by fragility and conflict.

⁶ Wim Naude, United Nations University Policy Brief: What is the (New) Deal with Fragile States?, Number 1, 2012

In the case of the Pacific Island and other small island developing states, the role of global and regional public goods is a crucial factor in both the acceleration of progress towards the MDGs and laying the foundations for inclusive and sustainable development beyond 2015. Priorities in this respect include strengthened regional infrastructure, mitigating and adapting to the increasing consequences of climate change and strengthened disaster risk reduction policies and measures.

Some issues for discussion

- ***What are the opportunities at country, regional and global levels for accelerating progress towards the MDGs in g7+ and Pacific Island states? What barriers need to be overcome at country, regional and global levels in order to facilitate progress?***
- ***What additional key drivers for change can be identified that have relevance across countries and regions?***
- ***What examples are there of successful strategies to accelerate progress? What were the 'critical success factors' in these cases?***
- ***How can experiences and lessons in accelerating progress be better shared amongst countries and regions for mutual benefit?***
- ***Many countries and analysts believe that Goal 8 did not work well. How could the role of development cooperation be strengthened in bridging the gaps that now persist in achieving the MDGs by 2015?***
- ***What lessons and priorities from the experience of conflict-affected and fragile states in implementation of the MDGs, including in the final push to 2015, need to be carried forward into the post-2015 development agenda?***
- ***How might these be reflected in global goals and commitments in the post-2015 development agenda?***