

# IDS IN FOCUS POLICY BRIEFING

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Institute of Development Studies

THE MILLENNIUM  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS –  
PROGRESS TOWARDS 2015  
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## Priorities for Accelerating Progress on the MDGs

Since their endorsement in 2000, there has been a fundamental change in the way that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been understood and responded to. Part of this change has been due to their transition from being a distant aspiration to a grounded and purposeful agenda driven by finding out what does and doesn't work for human development. By learning from country experience in implementing the MDGs, a clear set of priorities to help accelerate progress towards 2015 has emerged.

**'The Millennium Declaration represents the most important collective promise ever made to the world's most vulnerable people. This promise is not based on pity or charity, but on solidarity, justice and the recognition that we are increasingly dependent on one another for our shared prosperity and security'.**

*Keeping the Promise, Report of the UN Secretary-General, 2010*

Pursuing the human development priorities reflected in the MDGs depends upon economic growth but perhaps our most important collective learning is that the size and quality of that growth is dependent upon and shaped by investments in human development. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon's report, *'Keeping the Promise'* provides a comprehensive assessment of MDG progress and challenges.

### Country progress on the MDGs

According to his report, progress on poverty reduction has been uneven and is now threatened; hunger is increasing and remains an important global challenge. Full and decent employment for all remains unfulfilled. There has been good progress on universal primary education but the goal remains unmet. There has been insufficient progress on gender equality. Whilst there has been significant progress on health-related MDGs there has been least progress in reducing maternal mortality. Finally, the Secretary-General's

report describes the limited progress to date on environmental sustainability.

Some countries have performed well and the report identifies success factors characterising strong MDG performance and also the challenges they have addressed. *'The three critical challenges, in most cases, have been to have in place a feasible national scale-up plan, to obtain adequate financing based on both domestic and foreign resources and to develop well-functioning delivery mechanisms for public investment and service'.*

Beyond unfavourable global conditions and the failure to deliver on commitments to provide the necessary financial resources, an important set of reasons why MDG performance is sometimes less than stellar has to do with weaknesses in country performance. There are sometimes systemic weaknesses of capacity that have seemed intractable. But in many countries and sectors such weaknesses have been successfully addressed.

### At a glance

A UN Task Force on the MDGs has prepared five thematic papers that report on the conditions for success. Exclusive analysis of these papers by IDS highlights six interrelated priorities needed to accelerate progress on the MDGs:

- The development of country-led MDG strategies
- Results that are transparent and are accountable to citizens
- More community participation and partnerships
- Better recognition of gender equality and women's empowerment
- Tackling inequality, exclusion and discrimination
- Protecting the most vulnerable and promoting adaptation to climate change

# Priorities for Accelerating Progress on the MDGs

## Conditions for success

A UN Task Force on the MDGs has prepared five thematic papers that report on our collective learning about the conditions for success. They provide a detailed assessment of successful strategies and measures, the critical gaps and a summary of key lessons on progress towards the MDGs. The MDGs are achievable but unless progress accelerates there will still be over one billion people in 'dollar-a-day' poverty in 2015 and similar gloom on other MDGs.

The thematic papers assess country-level concerns that impact MDG performance and, from their independent analyses, six interrelated priorities can be identified:

### • Country-led MDG Strategies

Integrate MDGs in national development strategies grounded in annual resource budgets planned through a medium-term expenditure framework.

### • Local Accountability

Plan, implement and evaluate results with mechanisms that are transparent and are accountable to citizens. Policy, legal and institutional frameworks must make accountability real.

### • Community Participation and Partnerships

Prioritise and plan taking full advantage of the efficiency and effectiveness gains from community involvement and through the use of the private sector and South-South partnerships.

### • Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Recognise that progress on gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to progress on the MDGs overall.

### • Inclusion – addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination

Assess and strengthen the targeting of public services and programmes to address inequality and all those that suffer from discrimination and social exclusion.

### • Resilience – protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change

Adopt an effective and inclusive approach to social protection. Prioritise sustainable development and promote adaptation to climate change.

Collectively, these priorities provide an approach to development that underscores the fundamental importance of the accountability of the state to its

citizens and to the minimum expectations – as reflected in the MDGs – of what states must deliver.

The thematic papers also underline the interdependence of the MDGs and the centrality to MDG acceleration of economic growth, of addressing the global crises, of responding to climate change and trying to address the particular needs of fragile states.

There is strong political buy-in to the MDGs. Ambition and resources can enable us to achieve the MDGs but such commitment needs to be used effectively. The priorities identified here should guide our investments in accelerating MDG progress. They provide a contemporary agenda for country development strategies that can inform and energise a renewed commitment to the MDGs.

## Further reading

United Nations (2010) *Keeping the Promise: A Forward-looking Review to Promote an Agreed Action Agenda to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015*, Report of the Secretary-General, General Assembly Paper A/64/665, New York, February

United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force (2010) *Thematic paper on MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: Review of progress*, New York, March

United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force (2010) *Thematic paper on MDG 2: Ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling*, New York, March

United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force (2010) *Thematic paper on MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women*, New York, March

United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force (2010) *Thematic paper on MDGs 4, 5 and 6*, New York, April

United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force (2010) *Thematic paper on MDG 7: Environmental sustainability*, New York, March

Greeley, M. (2010) 'Accelerating Progress on the MDGs: Country Priorities for Improving Performance', paper prepared for the United Nations Development Group MDG Task Force

## Credits

This *In Focus Policy Briefing* was written by **Martin Greeley**. The editor is **Clare Gorman**.

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