

The European Union and the Millennium Development Goals

Ten years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration on development and five years before it expires, the time has come to ask questions, learn lessons from past experiences and step up efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Re-launching adequate and effective intervention will be the major challenge of the UN MDG summit to be held on 20-22 September 2010.

What are the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)?

In September 2000, 189 Member States of the UN, from the South as well as the North, agreed to work together to support human development and eradicate poverty. By adopting the Millennium Declaration on development, they made the MDG the reference framework for international cooperation for the next 15 years and agreed to measure the fight against poverty using quantified indicators grouped by specific targets, which in turn were grouped under the following eight objectives:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. To achieve universal primary education;
3. To promote gender equality and empower women;
4. To reduce the child mortality rate;
5. To improve maternal health;
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. To ensure environmental sustainability;
8. To develop a global partnership for development.

The Millennium Declaration considers the MDG as a whole, i.e. achieving any one goal depends on the results obtained from pursuing the other goals. However, the 'MDG framework' is simply a reference framework, which means that it is up to each state, in the South as well as the North, to implement political and administrative measures and to activate budgets efficiently.

A useful approach

The MDG have allowed unprecedented mobilisation of donors, states and non-governmental organisations. They are also a useful instrument for measuring progress or lack of progress in the field of development and hence therefore a means of exerting pressure on development actors to achieve results.

Where are we today?

Some progress has been made, but efforts will need to be rapidly stepped up if the goals are to be achieved by 2015. In terms of health, it is still only the target for tuberculosis that has been attained. Experts agree in general that it will be very hard to attain the other goals.

What are the challenges?

The principle of shared responsibility is one of the cornerstones of the Millennium Declaration. This means that the states in both the North and the South have stated that they are collectively responsible for human development and hence for achieving the MDG.

For 'developing countries', the main challenge is to appropriate their development process. This appropriation is achieved through 'good economic governance', through mobilising national resources and allocating resources effectively, through solid political will and an aptitude for coordinating local and international actors and through the ability to develop adequate and effective political and administrative measures.

At international level, the donor countries, in liaison with multilateral actors (UN, EU etc.) and NGOs in the North, need to provide effective support to developing countries in developing their capacities and pursuing the MDG. This is a question of the quality of intervention or the efficacy of aid. These actors will also need to work to set up a more secure and equitable global economic order and find new sources of financing for development. The actors in the North will also need to harmonise their interventions, while aligning with the national priorities of developing countries.

The EU position at the MDG summit in September

The question of the efficacy of aid will certainly be a key item on the agenda of the MDG Summit in September. As it holds the Presidency, Belgium will defend the EU position at the summit. It intends to reiterate the usefulness of the MDG and reaffirm the need to attain them. It will also insist on the need to implement the principles of appropriation, harmonisation, alignment, shared responsibility and results-oriented management. The EU will also argue in favour of increasing the Public Aid for Development (PAD) paid by the 'rich nations' to at least 0.7% of their Gross National Product (GNP). In this sense, the EU's engagement for the PAD was reaffirmed during the European Council meeting on 17th June 2010.

In terms of strategy, the European Union has also decided to focus on the countries in which the goals are 'making the least progress', especially fragile states and countries coming out of conflict. It also wants to attack the continuing effects of the economic and financial crisis, exploit the potential of the private sector and tackle the questions of demographic growth, climate change etc.

Calendar of events

20-22 September 2010

UN MDG Summit (New York)