



## Global Voices: Celebrating International Development Week 2008

### For a Better World: The Millennium Development Goals

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*It is not in the United Nations that the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved. They have to be achieved in each country by the joint efforts of the Governments and people.*  
– Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the United Nations

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in the year 2000, 189 world leaders signed the Millennium Declaration, a commitment to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. 192 countries are currently committed to achieving the MDGs.

Most of the MDGs are not new. They were derived from goals established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and in global conferences throughout the 1990s.

Some advancement toward the goals has been made, but not without setbacks. Globally, poverty rates have decreased; however, in some areas of sub-Saharan Africa poverty rates have increased. Between 1990 and 2004, the portion of the world's population living on less than \$1 a day was reduced from 31.6 to 19.2 per cent. Over one billion people still suffer from hunger, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where at the current pace the goal to reduce by half the percentage of people living in extreme poverty will not be reached until 2147 (we don't know about you, but we don't think they can wait that long).

Globally, enrolment of children in primary school has increased. In developing regions in 1990, enrolment was at 80 per cent; by 2005 enrolment was increased to 88 per cent. While enrolment has increased, there have been drop-outs. Efforts to ensure children are able to remain enrolled in school need to be increased. Globally, 133 million youth do not know how to read or write, 115 million children do not go to school, and 100 million children that are currently enrolled will be forced to leave before they learn to read and write. In sub-Saharan Africa, 30 per cent of school age children are still unable to enroll in school or have no school in their area to enroll in.

Women's participation in paid employment is still very low compared to men in almost all developing countries. The gender gap is improving but at an unacceptable rate. In developing countries between 1990 and 2005, the portion of workers in non-agricultural wage employment who are women marginally increased from 44 to 47 per cent. Women are still not paid equally to their male co-workers for the same work. This is not a matter of the male workers having more experience or ability. It is based on deep-seated prejudice and oppression embedded in cultural values and social policies. Less than 20 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women. 21 per cent of Canadian parliamentarians are women. We aren't as equal of a society as we like to think.

Child mortality rates decreased from 10.6 per cent in 1990 to 8.3 per cent in 2005. 11 million children under the age of 5 died in 2005, mostly from preventable or treatable diseases. The main reasons for these tragedies are lack of access to basic health services, HIV/AIDS, malaria and war. Improved access to healthcare also reduces maternal death rates. Between 1990 and 2005 in developing regions, the percentage of deliveries attended by skilled healthcare personnel increased from 43 to 57 per cent. Maternal death rates have declined significantly in the last 15 years in some middle-income countries. Maternal death rates remain unacceptably high in many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.



Teenage pregnancies carry a higher risk of illness and death. One in every ten births worldwide is to a teenage mother. In the least developed countries, the ratio increases to one in every six births is to a woman between 15 and 19 years old. Having a child as a teenager significantly reduces women's potential of finishing grad school and attending post-secondary school.

AIDS is the fourth largest killer disease in the world. In 2007, 33.2 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS; in the same year, the population of Canada was 33.4 million. Sub-Saharan Africa has just over 10 per cent of the world's population, but is home to approximately 60 per cent of all people living with HIV – 22.5 million. 7,000 young people are newly infected with HIV every day. Almost 12 million youth live with the HIV/AIDS today. In developing countries between 1990 and 2006, the proportion of adults aged 15 years and older living with HIV that are women increased from 47 to 50 per cent. In sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is one of the main causes of premature death, and the majority of new cases are among youth aged 15 to 24. HIV is spreading rapidly in parts of Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis are other major causes of death in developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. Immediate action is needed to prevent the further spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and other preventable viruses and diseases.

Though most countries are officially committed to principles of sustainability, there has been little progress in preventing the unnecessary and destructive commodification of natural resources. Human activities are causing losses in biodiversity up to 100 times faster than would otherwise be expected. If environmental management is not significantly improved, the Earth's capacity to provide resources to future generations will be greatly diminished. The vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions are produced in developed countries like Canada, for instance. Every year almost 13 million hectares of forest are destroyed. Despite their already being more than enough food available to feed everyone on the planet, the main reason for deforestation is the conversion of forests to agricultural land, particularly in Southeast Asia, Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. While some parts of the world like Canada, the United States and Britain are fighting an obesity epidemic, others are suffering from hunger and extreme poverty.

Though access to safe drinking water and sanitation in developing countries has increased, today nearly half of the population of developing regions still do not have access to toilets or sanitation facilities. From 1990 to 2004, the portion of the population in developing regions with access to sanitation increased from 35 to 50 per cent.

In developing regions between 1990 and 2005, the proportion of urban populations living in slums decreased from 47 to 37 per cent.

Youth unemployment rates in developing countries decreased from 16 to 13 per cent from 1990 to 2006. According to a recent International Labour Organization study, more than half of the world's jobless are under the age of 24, some 88 million worldwide and 38 million in Asia alone.

Most developed countries, including Canada, are far from reaching their commitments to the MDGs. Developing countries have done better to fulfill their commitments, but are also not on pace to reach the MDGs by 2015 or shortly thereafter. We all have a role to play in making a better world. The issues highlighted by the MDGs affect all of us in one way or another, and cannot be effectively addressed without all of our participation.

Visit the website of the Millennium Campaign at [www.millenniumcampaign.org](http://www.millenniumcampaign.org) to see the many ways you can work for a better world and get involved!

For a better world: cancel the debt, make trade fair, make poverty history, make affluence history,



don't support sweatshops, value water and the environment, plant a tree, reduce, reuse, recycle, respect women, listen to youth, cherish and celebrate difference, your neighbours and other people's cultures, ride your bike instead of driving your vehicle, take public transit, clean a park, shop with reusable bags, acquire few needs, make cheap, generic drugs available to those who need them desperately, make technologies available to everyone, stop dumping subsidized agricultural commodities from rich countries onto the markets of poor countries, write a letter, sign a petition, talk to politicians, reach out, listen, speak up, become the media, question the bottom line, adopt a triple bottom line, live your values, live in peace and harmony, put your money where your mouth is, pledge allegiance to people and the planet, think for yourself.

What other activities can you think of to do for a better world?

*Works cited: All figures and statistics were retrieved or derived from United Nations' The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 and official websites of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization*