

# *Getting to Zero: Finishing the Job the MDGs Started*

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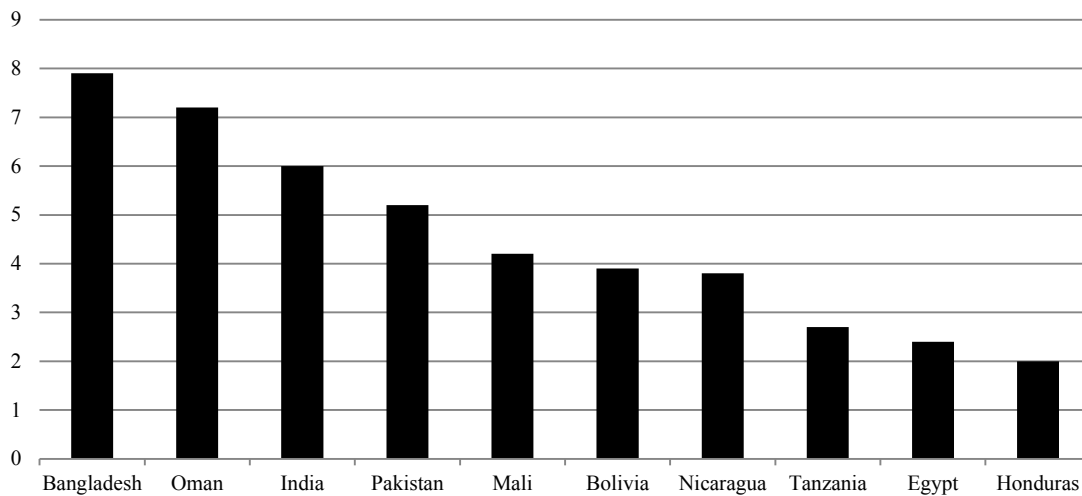
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## **I. Introduction**

The coming three years through 2015 will amount to a crossroads on the path of long-term global cooperation. The challenges will stretch far beyond the unpredictable but urgent daily macroeconomic problems emanating from the advanced economies. They will speak to the principal needs of humanity, affecting billions of the least advantaged people on the planet. Foremost among the challenges stands the fight to end extreme poverty in its many forms. Underpinning this lies the imperative for environmental sustainability. These

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was completed in March 2012 and prepared by several members of the 2011-2012 Global Agenda Council on Benchmarking Progress (GAC), convened by the World Economic Forum. The chair of the GAC was John McArthur and the Vice-Chair was Daniel Esty. All the authors contributed in their personal capacities. The views expressed are not necessarily those of all the contributors, who had different opinions on some issues. Comments are welcome and should be sent to Thierry Geiger: [thierry.geiger@weforum.org](mailto:thierry.geiger@weforum.org).

**Figure 1: Economic costs of malnutrition**

Source: Horton and Ross (2003).

Note: Discounted present value of long-term effects attributable to supplementation/fortification in a single year.

problems can only be solved through proactive efforts – spanning countries, organizations and citizens.

Ending extreme poverty is not just a matter of charity. Broad-based economic growth in the poorest parts of the world will support the expansion of global markets in all parts of the world. Investments in productive workforces, sustainable food systems and the environment will not only accelerate growth; they will also reduce the risks of costly economic disruptions and social instability.

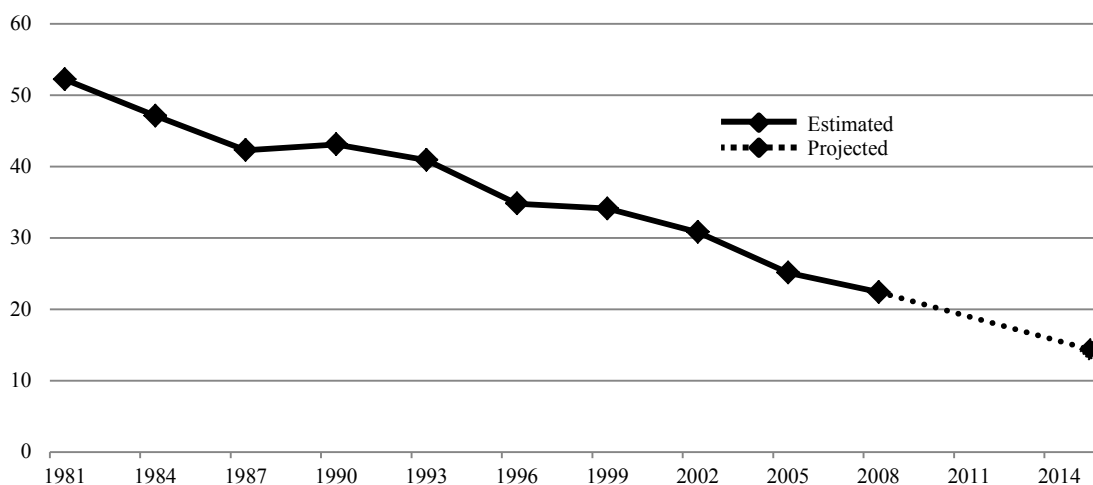
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, listed for reference in Appendix 1) have been the central reference point for global development efforts since they were established as international targets in 2000. As the first global policy vision based on mutual accountability between developing and developed countries, they set a compelling agenda to cut many forms of extreme poverty in half by 2015. Over time, the Goals have gained traction far beyond the walls of government. Bill Gates has called them “the best idea for focusing the world on fighting global poverty that [he has] ever seen.” Nonetheless, the MDGs have weaknesses to learn from, too. Moreover, they will expire in 2015, and they only mark a midway point.

It is time to start preparing the ground for new goals to mark the sustainable end of extreme poverty – a vision of “getting to zero” within a generation, i.e., by 2030. As with the MDGs, this implies much more than just boosting incomes. It entails ending chronic hunger, ensuring universal access to secondary education, ensuring universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation, reducing child and maternal deaths to current upper middle-income country (MIC) levels, and tackling key environmental priorities that will underpin development success.

Achieving this suite of goals will in turn reinforce further progress in economic growth, as shown for example in the economic returns to addressing malnutrition (Figure 1).

This paper aims to feed into high-level policy discussions that will take shape in the coming

**Figure 2: Aggregate extreme poverty headcount ratio since 1981**  
(% of total developing country population living under \$1.25/day)



Sources: Chen and Ravallion (2012); World Bank (2011a).

months. Many of the related challenges will be discussed at the 2012 “Rio+20” summit in Brazil, where world leaders will take stock on the environmental sustainability agenda set forth in 1992. An agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been proposed in this context. The core global challenges of sustainability overlap significantly but only partially with the core challenges of extreme poverty. There is a risk that efforts to secure sustainability goals could dilute or derail efforts to secure a next generation of anti-poverty goals that in turn affect key issues of sustainability.

The pursuit of new goals will need to surmount a crucial tension. On one side stands the need for simplicity and consistency. Lengthening the list of goals or adding a perceived “grab bag” of targets is likely to diminish a framework’s political traction for agreement and implementation. On the other side stands the need for improvement and adaptation to new realities. Issues like climate, energy, food prices and population growth will interact to produce new and unpredictable challenges. Global politics will continue to evolve as the binary distinction between rich and poor countries disappears. The rise of new MICs and the prominence of the G20 mean consensus can take much longer to build. And while governments maintain primary responsibility to address the needs of their people, any post-MDG framework will require broad inputs from non-governmental stakeholders in order to have the right traction for implementation.

The distribution of global poverty has shifted too. More than 70 percent of the world’s extreme poor now live in MICs and the global disease and malnutrition burdens are increasingly concentrated in the same countries (Alkire et al., 2012; Glassman et al., 2011; Sumner, 2012). Although countries do not change suddenly as they cross a line in average per capita income, the international system does treat them differently. Traditional official development assistance (ODA), though still essential for the poorest countries, will change in relevance as the number of low-income countries declines. It will also evolve in importance as new MICs raise finance

on international capital markets and many become official donors themselves.

The political calendar towards a post-MDG framework includes several key steps. First comes the Rio+20 summit in June 2012. It is crucial that the post-MDG and SDG agendas are streamlined before Rio, even if that requires distinct tracks tackling extreme poverty and sustainability issues in parallel. In 2013 the United Nations (UN) will convene a “special event” that could forge the basic principles for a new international framework in 2015. Finally, in 2015, the UN will convene an event that should be the equivalent of the 2000 Millennium Summit with heads of state and government attending to establish a new generation of goals and, ideally, agree on core mechanisms for ensuring successful implementation in 2016 and beyond.

The cascading sequence of events and the strained climate for international cooperation imply that the world must begin to prepare now for the post-2015 era. This paper therefore focuses on a few key questions:

- What have the MDGs achieved?
- Why have they been successful?
- Where do they merit improvement?
- What might a path to 2030 and the end of extreme poverty look like?

The paper does not pretend to provide conclusive or comprehensive answers on these topics and aims only to provide guiding thoughts that can contribute to the framing of the post-2015 discussions.

## II. What has been achieved since the MDGs were established?

**MDG progress is real.**<sup>2</sup> Extreme poverty (i.e., the share of the population living on less than \$1.25/day) has fallen globally from 43 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2008 and, as shown in Figure 2, is projected to fall to 14 percent in 2015 by the World Bank’s *Global Monitoring Report 2011*. Indeed, even though the figures are subject to ongoing debate, the World Bank estimates that the world as a whole met Goal 1 – halving \$1.25 poverty – in 2010 (Chen and Ravallion, 2012). Table 1 presents “best available” aggregate indicators for the seven key MDGs – income poverty, primary completion, gender equality in education, nutrition, child mortality, maternal mortality and water – and indicates that all have improved since 1990. Of course rates of progress are uneven across priorities, and those for hunger, maternal health and sanitation are generally considered to have lagged significantly. Moreover, in assessing progress, it is critical to underline that the data are imperfect, so there are many gaps in knowledge, a topic we emphasize further below.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the studies cited in this paper, readers are referred to the United Nations and World Bank websites for more detailed assessments of MDG progress around the world: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports> and <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/>.

**Table 1: Global MDG progress**

MDG	Improvement since 1990?	Distance progressed to Goal (100% = Goal attained)	On track?	Faster progress 2003-2008 compared to 1990-2001/2?	Faster than historical patterns? (1970-2000 vs 2000-2009)
	(Kenny and Sumner)	(World Bank)	(Kenny and Sumner)	(Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein)	(Kenny and Sumner)
Poverty	Y	80	Y	Y	
Undernourishment	Y	77	N	N	
Primary education	Y	90	N	Y	N
Gender equality in primary education	Y	96	Y	N	N
Child mortality	Y	69	N	Y	Y
Maternal mortality	Y	57	N	Y	Y
Drinking water	Y	88	Y	N	

Source: Kenny and Sumner (2011). Note: Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein took data for three points: the earliest available year, going back to 1990; a middle year from between 2000 to 2003; and the most recent year available to 2008. Empty cells indicate insufficient data to make judgement.

**Table 2: Country-level MDG progress (% of developing countries making progress on each target)**

MDG	Making Progress	Making Progress	On Track	On Track	Faster Progress	Outperforming historical pattern*
	(Leo and Barmerier)	(ODI)	(Leo and Barmerier)	(World Bank)	(Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein)	(Kenny and Sumner)
Poverty	63	66	49	47	51	
Undernourishment	55	57	34	25		
Primary Education	75		46	55	35	68
Gender Equality **	61		55	89/82**	46	56
Child Mortality	95	95	38	36	32	51
Maternal Mortality	83		19	30		33
Drinking Water	73	82	49	66	34	

Sources: Kenny and Sumner (2011). See also Leo and Thuotte (2011). \*Represents the proportion of developing countries for which the appropriate data is available. \*\*Gender equality for primary and secondary education, respectively.

**Table 3: Top 10 MDG achievers**

Top Absolute Progress on Indicators	Top Relative Progress against MDG Targets
Benin	Ecuador
Mali	China
Ethiopia	Thailand
Gambia	Brazil
Malawi	Egypt
Viet Nam	Viet Nam
Uganda	Honduras
Nepal	Belize
India	Nicaragua
Cambodia	Armenia

Source: ODI/UNMC (2010). Note: This table and rankings are based on a simple aggregation of rankings of the annual rate of progress on selected MDG indicators. Absolute progress measures which countries have reduced the largest share of the population living in extreme poverty, for instance, or increased primary school enrolment rates by the largest number of percentage points. Relative progress measures proportionate progress against the MDG target.

Progress also varies across regions and countries, notably sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where significant challenges remain. Further, throughout the developing world, fragile states as a group have experienced little progress against the Goals. Still, many other among the poorest countries have made impressive gains, even if they are not fully “on track” to achieve the targets, and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole has seen acceleration in gains since 2000. Table 2 shows that a majority of developing countries are making progress on most Goals, and typically at least half of all developing countries are making progress on each Goal.

While this suggests the extent of the MDG gains, the studies summarized in Table 2 also point to the pending challenge for many countries with respect to the current MDGs. However, unfortunately, there are many countries that are not doing as well on the MDGs. For example, half of all countries are not on track to reach the MDGs on extreme poverty and primary education and more than two-thirds of all countries are off-track on child and maternal mortality MDGs and undernourishment.

Progress on several indicators has accelerated since 2000. At a global level, there has been faster progress in the 2000s than in the 1990s in reducing extreme poverty and faster progress on achieving universal primary education and reducing child and maternal mortality. In aggregate, three of the key MDGs are highly likely to be met at a global level – halving income poverty, achieving gender parity in primary education and increasing access to water. Three other goals – halving malnutrition, universal primary education and reducing child mortality – are still within reach.

Roughly half of developing countries have been outperforming historical trends since the Goals were established in the areas of primary education, gender equality and child mortality. Table 3 lists the top performing countries, including Benin, Ethiopia, Gambia and Mali.

### **III. Why the MDG framework and goals have been successful and where they need improvement**

#### **1. Strengths of the MDG Framework**

The MDGs have both direct and indirect strengths that have helped to advance policy debates, spur advocacy, strengthen cross-stakeholder development collaboration, and above all, strengthen development implementation. Some of the Goals’ best attributes are as follows:

- **Ambitious.** The MDGs are framed around a highly motivating concept of tackling the challenges of the world’s poorest people at large scale on a generational basis. Big goals often inspire much more ingenuity, collaboration, and resource mobilization than do small or quotidian goals.
- **Simple.** The MDGs distill the broad challenges of extreme poverty and sustainable development into a suite of basic goals, anchored in a simple notion of cutting the problem

of extreme poverty by half within a generation. This simplicity renders the goals easy to understand and to inform advocacy.

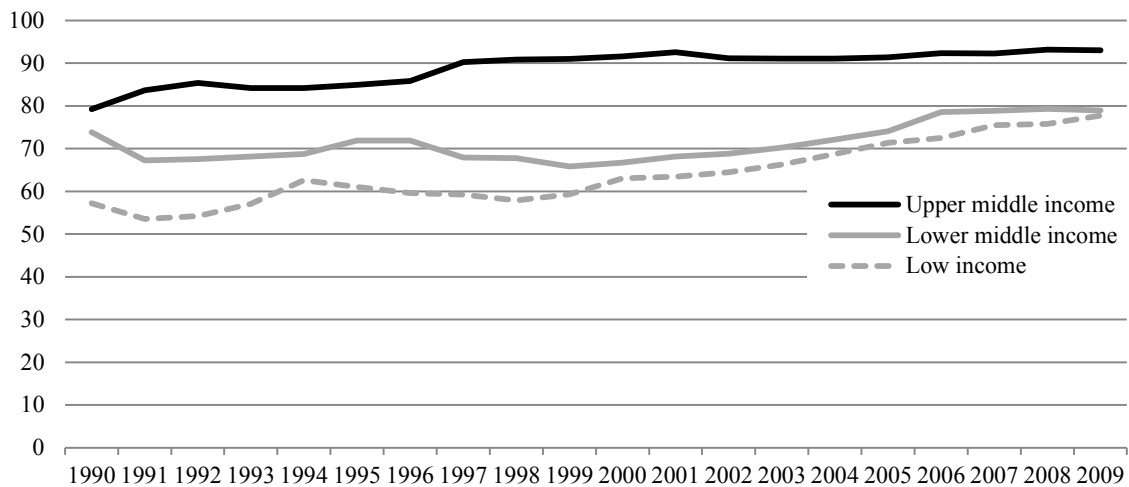
- **Integrated.** The MDGs are a useful shorthand for the different ways in which income poverty, hunger, education, gender inequality, ill health and environmental degradation lie at the heart of extreme poverty. The integrated nature of the Goals has played a major role in removing “false competition” between development priorities. In the early 2000s, it was commonplace for policy-makers to be steeped in arguments, for example, of whether health or education was more important. The MDGs helped to alleviate those arguments, so that health and education could be framed as essential complements in development, alongside agriculture, environmental sustainability and gender equality, even if budget constraints inevitably require tradeoffs.
- **Longer term.** The Goals’ 15-25 year (1990/2000 versus 2015) time horizon has helped governments and development institutions to look beyond immediate financing or electoral cycles and focus on medium- and long-term priorities for change. When the Goals were launched, international processes typically focused on partnership structures spanning three to five years at a time. In many cases, the Goals have helped to anchor those structures in longer term horizons, longer term trend assessments and, often, longer term policy and investment plans.
- **Quantified.** The crisp numerical targets underpinning most of the MDGs allow them to be tractable at every policy level. How many children are completing school? How many children died? How many mothers survived? How many people have access to safe drinking water? They also allowed motivated broader stakeholders, especially from the private sector, to engage in related efforts and help to achieve specific targets.

The MDGs’ quantitative nature helps provide a straightforward and objective scorecard through which the world can measure its progress. At the global level, it is a major policy victory that today, nearly twelve years after the targets were set, the world focuses so systematically every year on benchmarking progress, with ever-increasing attention on tackling the gaps. This is especially true when data are available for the poorest and marginalized groups (UNDP 2010a). For example, South Asia’s regional average of 42 percent of children underweight contrasts with 56 percent of children underweight among the region’s poorest quintile (UNICEF 2010).

The targets have helped to stimulate public investments, particularly in social sectors. Many ambitious low-income governments have mobilized increases in both domestic and external resources to make these investments. In many developed countries, the Goals have provided a clear motivation and set of metrics against which aid budgets have been increased.

- **Deadline driven.** The 2015 deadline provides a clear mechanism by which political leaders can be assessed against metrics for success. The 15-year policy horizon also provided time for the international community’s often slow-evolving development processes to integrate more and more MDG-focused activities into their activities.

**Figure 3: Measles immunization rates by country income group, 1990-2009**  
(% of children ages 12-23 months)



Source: Kenny and Sumner (2011) based on data from World Bank (2011b).

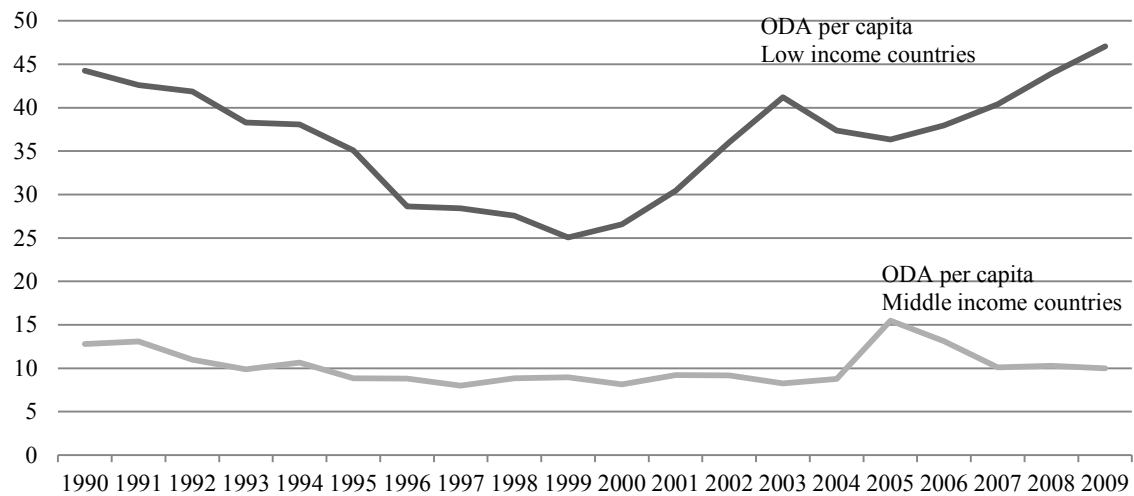
- Focused on Partnership.** The eighth Goal focuses on partnership between developing and developed countries and also between public and private sectors. On the heels of dramatic anti-globalization tensions in the late 1990s, the Goals prompted a broad recognition that all stakeholders needed to play a major role, and that, amidst many differences, the world could share a common set of anti-poverty objectives.

## 2. Where have the MDGs been most successful?

Anchored in these strengths, the Goals have helped to motivate and galvanize many development breakthroughs, perhaps most prominently for global health. The AIDS treatment movement was boosted by the MDGs, as were the efforts for malaria control, neglected tropical diseases, maternal survival and health systems strengthening. Efforts to advance global health in the poorest countries have scaled up by most any metric, ranging from dollars mobilized to commodities delivered to lives saved. The Goals have also helped to sustain major advances in primary education, which in some instances has kick-started progress in secondary education. Most recently, sustained MDG-linked policy advocacy has stimulated progress in agriculture and food security, although international commitments in this realm have fallen short amidst the advanced economies' economic slowdown.

The Goals have also helped to spur progress by drawing attention towards policy gaps and failures. For example, the launch of AIDS treatment initiatives over 2001-2005 prompted recognition of the possibilities for rapid advances in malaria control, which started to take off in 2006. Progress on Goals 4 (child survival) and 6 (infectious diseases) led to a realization that Goal 5 (maternal survival) was lagging, prompting major technical and political efforts to advance maternal health.



**Figure 4: Total recipient ODA per capita for low- and middle-income countries, 1990-2009**

Source: Kenny and Sumner (2011) based on data from OECD 2011 and World Bank 2011b.

It is important to note the significant extent to which MDG breakthroughs have been made possible by major increases in official development assistance (ODA), most notably for global health. These have often been accompanied by developing countries' own significant increases in domestic revenue mobilization. By way of example, Figure 3 shows the long-term trends in measles immunizations and Figure 4 shows the post-2000 reversal in low-income countries' ODA trends that helped to finance this progress.

At the same time, the relationship between ODA and the MDGs is often misunderstood. Many interpret the MDGs as being only about money, when in fact the formal Goals and targets themselves say nothing about financing. They merely draw attention to the areas where targeted investments are required, and the need for global partnerships if the poorest countries are to achieve their Goals. The MDGs have helped spur some of the necessary increases in domestic and foreign financing, but money alone does not achieve development goals.

In practical terms, the Goals only gained global momentum after the historic agreements at the 2002 UN Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico. This was where then-Mexican President Fox and then-U.S. President Bush joined other heads of state and government in affirming a multi-pronged approach to development finance, anchored in an understanding that the foremost responsibility for development stands with developing countries themselves. In that context, the Monterrey consensus affirmed the international ODA target of 0.7 percent of gross national income, which in turn laid the groundwork for 16 of 22 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donor countries, as of 2005, to achieve or set timetables for achieving that target by 2015. The 2002 Monterrey agreement was instrumental in breathing life in to the MDGs.

Another key attribute of the MDGs is an agnosticism on "how" the Goals themselves should be achieved. Although the Goals have helped spur many policy breakthroughs for specific

interventions, those breakthroughs have been the product of concerted policy debate rather than a particular directive of the Goals. And while many global agreements have affirmed the role of good governance as an underpinning to achieving the Goals, the Goals themselves have not crossed the political line into an argument among sovereign states on what constitutes good governance and how best to measure it. This has produced considerable debate in the development policy community.

One view is that the MDGs' agnosticism helped sustain the essence that is core to their political momentum – a consistent focus on an agreed set of development outcomes, without specifying the inputs that might lead to those results. Another view sees the MDGs as a missed opportunity to address core governance priorities and intrinsic aspects of well-being, like the capability to participate in decision-making at various levels,<sup>3</sup> which should themselves be considered critical to development outcomes. As discussed in further detail in Box 1, it will likely be a significant challenge to forge global intergovernmental consensus on how best to approach “governance” in the context of post-2015 goals.

The Goals have also spurred an important debate and focus on data poverty, one of the world's major development policy failures. Some consider this a success of the Goals, since they have forced an unrelenting spotlight on the need for better data. Others consider this a shortcoming of the Goals, since they have not solved the underlying problems. Nonetheless, most agree that there is a serious dearth of reliable systems for data collection in many developing countries. Although some indicators such as child mortality – perhaps the most fundamental life and death metric of extreme poverty – have good data across many countries, other indicators like those for hunger, access to water and even income poverty itself are beset with gaps in collection and standardization (a point described in further detail by Leo and Thuotte, 2011). Greater efforts are needed for better data collection and use in all levels of policy decision-making, as discussed further below.

### **3. Concerns and Areas Where the Next Generation Goals Need to Improve**

The MDGs have limitations. Critics note that the Goals risk oversimplifying the measurement and true nature of extreme poverty. The Goals do not directly address issues of discrimination, exclusion, inequality, violence or government repression, all of which can be defining drivers of poverty, as well as bad development outcomes in themselves. Nor do they directly address issues of risk and vulnerability, a major challenge for the extreme poor, particularly in light of climate change.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, various works by Amartya Sen and the 2010 UNDP Human Development Report for related analysis (UNDP 2010b).

**Box 1: A key debate on governance**

Contributors to this paper had differences of opinion on how best to approach the topic of governance in a post-2015 goal-setting process. All agreed that better governance contributes to better development outcomes, ranging from child survival to literacy to incomes and equality. However, there were different views on how and whether explicit governance targets merit inclusion in a global poverty target framework.

One school of thought believes the MDGs have benefited from a focus on outcomes rather than inputs, since this gives each country policy space to develop their own policy solutions, at least in concept, and avoids the typically contentious debates around what exactly constitutes good governance. Countries value their sovereignty and many dislike what they perceive as possible external political interference that might result from global governance targets. This is particularly the case among fast-progressing developing countries that have watched high-income governments struggle with their economic governance in recent years. Many people in this school also have concerns around the challenge of collecting and tracking governance data.

Another school of thought, which also acknowledges the political sensitivity regarding issues of governance, is concerned that the topic of good governance has received inadequate attention in the context of the MDGs, and that good governance – in its various dimensions – should itself be considered a critical element, or at least determinant, of development outcomes. This school finds that many countries and governments have evolved in their views over the past decade to recognize explicitly that governance is a critical input to improved development outcomes. They believe that setting targets around things like transparency, accountability, media censorship and corruption can help ensure that domestic and foreign development funds are used effectively. Many also argue that data quality and availability challenges are no less daunting for governance than for other MDG-type indicators. Under this view, a post-2015 framework would therefore identify (1) the contribution that good governance can make to development outcomes; (2) how good governance can be measured, and; (3) what targets on governance ought to be included for developed and developing countries. Goals in this vein could include:

A target for transparency in public sector budgets, public procurement and in asset disclosure by high-level officials and politicians;

- Targets for access to information laws and media freedoms;
- Targets for corruption control;
- A target for domestic resource mobilization (towards above goals);
- A target for governments to provide an enabling environment for civil society and their efforts, including private sector.

We underscore the global political challenge inherent in reconciling views on this important debate.

But these complexities highlight a very fundamental policy challenge for the next generation of goals, which is to enhance the existing framework without sacrificing the simplicity that has been essential to its success to date. In that spirit, the following is a non-exhaustive list of key priorities that a post-2015 framework would need to consider:

- **Weak environmental targets.** As a general assessment, the targets under Goal 7 are narrow and not robust. They rely too heavily on modeled data and need a much greater commitment to measured indicators. The target for drinking water is perhaps the clearest conceptually, but it has struggled with definitional issues (i.e., what constitutes “safe” or “improved” water and how close does a person have to be to it to have “access”)? The target for sanitation was added after the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, but has not yet garnered major policy attention. Meanwhile the biodiversity target for 2010 came and went with little global recognition. Basic priorities like air quality are not even included as targets.

Any post-2015 framework requires much clearer environmental targets, and robustly comparable cross-country measurement systems to assess progress. These measurement systems should apply to developed and developing countries alike. A key recommendation is for the upcoming Rio+20 summit to identify key priorities for new environment targets, and to launch a process for measuring them reliably, with a 2015 deadline for agreeing on specific targets and launching the new measurement systems. Box 2 presents more detailed considerations for some of the most significant environmental challenges.

- **Very narrow targets for gender equality.** The key targets for gender equality focus only on parity in school enrollment at all levels. This is certainly a worthy target, one that has seen major progress over the past 30 years, but the priority of gender equality requires a much broader approach to identifying targets and tracking progress. UN Women, the new multilateral agency, is well placed to launch a process for identifying specific targets and agreements on measurement.
- **Messy structure of Goals, Targets and Indicators.** At the Millennium Summit in 2000, the language was established for all of the eight goals and original 18 targets before they were wrapped together in 2001 under the banner of the Millennium Development Goals. The goals and targets themselves were pulled from international agreements of the previous decade, so the overarching MDG framework had clear sources of intergovernmental legitimacy, but the process of matching goals and targets was inherently imperfect. Even more imperfect was the ensuing inter-agency technical process that worked to identify dozens of indicators that could be used to track progress across all of the targets. Many of these indicators suffer from a variety of data gaps, analytical imperfections, and, in some cases, high-level political disputes. Some governments in turn questioned the legitimacy of the entire MDG framework based on arguments over the indicators. A post-2015 framework would benefit from a much crisper logic linking its goals, targets, and indicators.

**Box 2: Key steps for establishing for post-2015 environmental goals**

To address the MDGs' environmental gap in the post-2015 framework, based on Levy (2011) we recommend three key priorities be considered in the lead-up to the June 2012 Rio+20 summit.

***Set goals to organize deliberation and decision-making***

There is a class of environmental challenges for which the biggest problem is not that governments are not making progress toward goals, but that they are simply not engaged in the first place. There are many environmental problems for which scientific evidence points to clear dangers, but there is inadequate engagement to establish meaningful goals and targets. These include: land degradation, water scarcity, nitrogen pollution, hazardous chemical management and trans-boundary air pollution.

For these challenges, there is inadequate debate about the problems' magnitude or the appropriate nature of coordinated responses. There is no mechanism by which governments can systematically take stock of the problems and engage in the kind of review, reflection and debate that permits movement toward goals and targets. Engagement with civil society is far too limited. The MDGs that proved most effective at spurring action were those that came on the heels of long-term engagement around these foundational matters. Goal and target setting fail when attempted in isolation from such practices.

It is probably premature to set quantitative time-bound global targets for these problems, despite their severity. A key intermediate step, and a desirable Rio+20 outcome, would be for governments to set an explicit time-bound process for assessing the relevant topics, and in turn for creating appropriate goals and targets in time for 2015.

***Formulate goals around core livelihood and security issues***

Substantial investment will be required to build the institutional procedures, measurement programmes, assessment processes, and evaluation mechanisms that support meaningful target-based environmental management. Finding sources for such investment will be challenging worldwide, so it will make sense to link them to core dimensions of what affects people's livelihoods and security, rather than abstract or theoretical visions.

It might prove worthwhile to create a class of environmental goals and targets that are organized around larger-scale phenomena that already loom large on policy agendas, and which are more easily understood for their high importance in people's lives. For example, one could construct a set of goals and targets around natural disaster risk reduction, within which environmental matters would be prominent. Likewise, health goals could incorporate problems such as air quality and chemical pollution.

***Formulate place-specific goals***

Environment and development processes interact and manifest themselves in very different ways across the human landscape. The MDG regarding slum-dwellers was a partial recognition of this fact, but it was formulated in an awkward manner and did not receive significant attention. For human landscapes where the pace of change is rapid, where the cross-sectoral linkages dominate, and where business-as-usual projections are alarming, goals and targets could be framed in a place-specific manner. For example, it would be useful to have distinct goal and target processes surrounding such critical human landscapes as low-lying coastal megacities and regions at high risk of water scarcity. Enough is known about how environmental problems take shape in such areas to understand that achieving progress depends crucially on how multiple sectors are integrated and how place-specific planning processes are implemented.

- **Lack of accountability.** Although many international and national-level figures have taken responsibility for helping to advance and track the Goals, no one in any system is specifically responsible if any of the Goals are not achieved. In developing countries requiring external support to reach the targets, it can be difficult to parse out which shortcomings might be due to local systems and which might ultimately be due to external partners, such as those resulting from the Group of Eight's approximately US\$20 billion shortfall in its official development assistance commitments for 2010. Downward spiral blame games can ensue. Future goals would benefit tremendously from clearer definition of responsibilities at both the country and global levels.
- **Data poverty.** Poor quality and availability of data remains a major challenge. Too many MDG progress assessments are still subject to significant imprecision and uncertainty in the underlying data. If we look at nine key indicators most often associated with the MDGs – extreme poverty, undernourishment, primary enrolment rates, gender parity in primary school, child mortality, maternal mortality, HIV prevalence and sanitation – up to a third of countries lack data on some indicators (Leo and Thuotte, 2011). This means that a significant portion of available data is imputed, estimated or derived from modeling, rather than drawn from actual data collected. Moreover, a significant amount of the data is subject to challenges of accuracy, reliability, timeliness, and at times even manipulation. International and national initiatives are needed to improve many developing countries' statistical capacities, to carry out more frequent surveys, and to vet the robustness and integrity of the data. Targets for data quality and availability should be explicitly incorporated in a post-2015 framework. There is no point ending up with conceptually appealing goals that are not properly measurable and tracked over time.
- **Missing and emerging priorities.** The Goals have major substantive gaps, some of which have come to the fore since the MDGs were born, and some of which will come further to the fore in the period covered by any post-2015 agreement. It is a credit to the MDGs that so many professional communities advocate for their priority issues to be included among future goals. Some clear gaps for consideration include:
  - **Secondary education.** The Goals' emphasis on primary education has been justly criticized for diverting attention away from secondary and tertiary education. This needs to be addressed through any post-2015 framework.
  - **Quality issues, especially for education.** Many analysts worry that the emphasis on quantity has diluted efforts at ensuring quality. This is of greatest concern in the area of education, where enrollment jumps can be uncorrelated or even negatively linked with students' learning outcomes. Future development goals will need to tackle the core challenge of learning.
  - **Economic growth and job creation.** The Goals place clear attention on the number of people living on less than \$1 a day (or now \$1.25 a day), and in 2006 a full employment target was added to the framework, but the Goals have no explicit emphasis on the broad-based economic growth that is needed to raise those people out of poverty. Nor

do they emphasize economic indicators that are shown to correlate with growth, like investment.

- **Climate adaptation.** The MDGs were established several years before the global recognition of changing climate patterns had taken hold. Developing countries facing the most dramatic changes in temperature, precipitation, and sea level require special emphasis on resilience-based planning for the future.
- **Access to energy and infrastructure.** The MDGs include no explicit targets for access to energy or transportation, key inputs to economic development that are deeply important for agricultural productivity, health, education, and other key Goals. This area typically requires a strong blend of partnership between public and private sectors, on both the investment side and the regulatory side, in order to ensure efficient operations with equitable access for poor people.
- **Population growth.** Most of the MDGs emphasize population shares, but neglect the underlying demographic momentum. An MDG target for reproductive health was established in 2006, but it has received only limited implementation attention to date. Global population has grown by nearly a billion people in the twelve years since the MDGs were set, and it is slated to grow by at least another billion people before 2030, with the bulk of the growth occurring in developing countries. Population growth will continue to increase environmental pressures alongside those for robust food and energy systems.
- **Cumbersome for public advocacy.** The “MDG” acronym (or “OMD” in French, for example) is clunky for communications purposes. It speaks mainly to those with policy knowledge rather than the general public or the poor themselves. The uneven logic across the Goals – such as varying proportions across targets, multiple health goals but just one education goal, ambiguous environmental goals – also renders the concepts harder to explain in public debate. Moreover, some communications strategies have fostered a misunderstanding that Goals 1 to 7 applied to developing countries while Goal 8 applies to developed countries, even though success on each goal generally hinges on global partnership. Future goals need to maintain their integrity by not oversimplifying the issues, but also need to be crafted with utmost clarity and consistency in logic for communication across diverse constituencies.
- **Perception as “top-down”.** Although the Goals have gained advocacy traction over time, they have grappled with a legacy of being perceived as “top down” by many civil society leaders. Many have voiced concern that the Goals were established in donor and elite negotiating rooms, with little local participation or input from poor people themselves, and thus lack the buy-in and legitimacy required to tackle the underlying challenges of the poor. Although governments certainly have a responsibility to set policies to tackle the needs of their people, any post-MDG international agreement will need to build from broad input across non-governmental stakeholders. This will only increase in importance as more countries develop systems of open governance that empower transparency and citizen participation in decision-making, both within and across countries.

## IV. Thinking about "Getting to Zero"

### 1. The Critical Role of Process

Post-2015 success will hinge both on the establishment of sound goals and on a legitimate and globally inclusive process leading up to that agreement. This section suggests some illustrative examples of how the new goals could usefully be structured, with full humility amidst recognition that there are many related processes already ongoing, and that the consultative processes leading up to 2015 must be managed with transparency and care.

A few key elements could likely underpin a successful process:

- **Establish common principles.** Shared principles should be identified as soon as possible to guide a productive post-2015 framework and a highly inclusive global discussion that can build legitimacy and ownership around an aspirational framework of "getting to zero."
- **Maximize MDG progress to 2015.** The process to launch new goals cannot distract attention or resources from closing efforts to achieve the MDGs. Success begets success, and momentum towards the MDG deadline will support momentum in launching a new framework for ending extreme poverty by 2030.
- **Empower inputs from global publics.** Fast-evolving and expanding social network technology can empower extraordinary new forms of public consultation and crowd-sourcing of input. The new goals should include – or even be framed around – "citizens' goals." One could easily imagine a mobile YouTube-style "Voices of the Poor 2.0," with grassroots organizations and poor people posting their own stories online via video uploads and SMS reports. One could also imagine global consultation around simple but powerful things like the name of the new development goals, with global voting by SMS or online. Indeed, the new global development goals could be the first globally elected policy framework.
- **Involve all key stakeholders early and do not shy away from difficult issues.** Consultations will need to engage structurally and equally with representatives of civil society, which includes business, philanthropy, non-profit organizations and scientific research institutions. Each of these stakeholder communities will want and need to ensure its perspectives are heard. The more everyone feels genuinely heard, the more likely they will be to contribute their own energies and resources to implementation efforts that follow. Businesses and industry leaders should not be shy to take a leadership role in collaborating with other stakeholders to ensure the new development goals are robustly launched and achieved. An open discussion on sensitive issues ought to be encouraged.
- **Ensure multi-layered intergovernmental coordination.** Multiple forms of intergovernmental coordination will be needed, noting the risks if too many disparate processes do not connect. The UN is unquestionably the forum for inter-governmental



**Table 4: Current trajectories of key poverty indicators through 2030**

Indicator	Developing countries		Sub-Saharan Africa		South Asia	
	2010	2030	2010	2030	2010	2030
Secondary Completion (% of those aged 25 and older)	15.1	23.1	5.6	11.2	6.8	13.7
Child Mortality Rate (per 1,000)	49.5	27.6	122.2	66.3	65.6	33.7
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births)	192	129	718	308	279	174
Undernourishment (%)	15.3	12.6	25.7	17.6	22.1	16.6
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	67.3	71.2	52.7	59.4	64.8	69.8

Source: Karver et al., (2012, forthcoming). Note: Figures are population-weighted and represent mid-range projections.

agreement and consultation among the 193 member states that need to sign off on the Goals. The G20 development working group will likely be a crucial player, since it is now the primary forum for economic policy coordination across the emerging middle-income economies that are now home to many of the world's extreme poor. However, regional coordination will also be needed, especially since the G20 has no low-income representation from sub-Saharan Africa. Bodies like the African Union and the UN regional commissions will be important for ensuring low-income countries are not drowned out by their middle-income counterparts. Regional groupings might even choose to elect their most successful MDG achievers as coordinators for negotiations with other regions.

## 2. Current Underlying Trends Towards 2030

How close are we to “getting to zero” on the current trajectory and how much additional progress is needed? On income poverty, it is very challenging to make long-term projections for people living below \$1/day or \$1.25/day, since the trends are highly non-linear, difficult to predict and sensitive to assumptions about the nature of economic growth and inequality. For example, any rigorous global assessment would need to pay specific attention to entrenched “pockets of poverty” in fast-growing economies and similarly to the trenchant challenges in fragile states.

As an illustrative scenario, Hughes and al. (2009) published an estimate suggesting that the number of people living on less than \$1/day could be in the range of around 450 to 750 million people in 2030 – of which 250 to 400 million would be in Sub-Saharan Africa and 100 to 230 million would be in South Asia, mainly in India – or only 5-10 percent of the world's population, which is on track to be roughly 8 billion people by that time. Compared to those estimates, much faster progress would be needed for the number of extreme poor to reach, for example, 160 million people (roughly 2 percent of world population in 2030) or 80 million people (1 percent of world population), which would be very close to the elimination of extreme poverty. Wherever a line might end up being drawn for a new extreme poverty target, a large

portion of humanity will still likely be living on less than \$2/day, so an ambitious policy goal will also be needed for tackling that challenge too.<sup>4</sup>

Table 4 presents preliminary projections for a broader range of indicators. Karver et al., (2012, forthcoming) estimate that in 2030, based on historical trends, secondary completion in developing countries would reach 23 percent, child mortality would fall to 28 per 1000 live births; maternal mortality to 129 per 100,000 live births, undernourishment to 13 percent, and average life expectancy would rise to 71 years. However, on all of these measures, based on historical trends, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia would lag behind considerably, so these regions will likely require prioritized attention in post-2015 efforts.

### 3. What the New Goals Might Look Like

Part III of this paper described some of the successful MDG elements that new development goals should maintain along with some of the clear gaps they should strive to address. Here we propose some additional key principles for a post-2015 framework, along with an illustration of a potential goal framework. We stress that this is only meant to be illustrative, and does not presume to preempt the important consultation processes recommended above. We put forward concrete examples only to help stimulate and advance the debate in the context of broader consultations.

We recommend that the overarching focus of the post-2015 framework be on “getting to zero” against extreme poverty within a generation – for example, by 2030. There are four major overarching implications of a focus on zero:

- **Absolute targets.** Goals need to be established in absolute rather than proportionate terms. The MDG concept of tackling problems by half was intrinsically focused on proportion-based progress at the global, regional and national level. A “zero framework” requires absolute value targets across the board.
- **Global goals as national goals.** Global goals become de facto national goals too, since getting to zero worldwide directly implies getting to (or near) zero in every country.
- **A broad spirit of “Zero.”** The approach should not be constrained by a literal interpretation of zero. Some goals will merit near-zero targets, such as getting the percentage of people living under a dollar a day to below 2- 5 percent in every country. Goals like child mortality merit targets assessed to advanced economy standards, e.g., a child mortality goal of no more than 20 per thousand live births, rather than no deaths. Others will merit ambitious positive targets, e.g., for universal education.

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<sup>4</sup> Members of the group had different views on the merits of various types of poverty projections. There are important opportunities for more rigorous analysis that considers relevant dynamics across regional, national, sub-national, and even household levels. As one other simple illustrative calculation, a household living on \$0.50 of income per person per day would need to achieve a 4.7 percent average annual per capita real growth rate in order to reach \$1.25 within 20 years.

- **Direct targeting of lagging groups and locations.** Goals based on absolute values can facilitate a more active targeting to achieve equality and universality across groups, including those disadvantaged by geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic strata and gender. It would be very simple, for example, for the new framework to track equivalent targets for males and females to ensure gender equity on all relevant fronts.

In addition, it is important that new goals and targets meet the “SMART” criteria: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. To that end, a post-2015 development framework might include the following basic structure:

**1. Zero goal for income poverty**

- a. Zero target for eliminating \$1.25 per day extreme poverty
- b. Ambitious target for reducing \$2 per day poverty
- c. Target for job creation in line with labour force growth

**2. Zero goal for hunger**

- a. Zero target for child stunting

**3. Goal of basic health for all**

- a. Ambitious target for child mortality (e.g., 20 per 1000 live births)
- b. Ambitious target for maternal mortality (e.g., 10 per 100,000 live births)
- c. Ambitious target for reproductive health
- d. Ambitious target for non-communicable diseases

**4. Goal of education for all**

- a. Zero target for illiteracy
- b. Target for universal secondary education
- c. Ambitious target for post-secondary education (e.g., 20 percent)
- d. Target for learning outcomes

**5. Goal of gender equality**

- a. Targets for political, scientific, and corporate leadership
- b. Eliminate gender disparity in ratio of female to male births
- c. Elimination of earnings disparities in the labour market
- d. Targets for female political participation

**6. Zero goal for infrastructure**

- a. Zero target for lack of access to safe drinking water
- b. Ambitious target for lack of access to irrigation (e.g., 50 percent)
- c. Zero target for lack of access to sanitation
- d. Zero target for lack of access to modern energy sources
- e. Universal access target for broadband mobile telecommunications coverage

**7. Goal of clean and sustainable environment for all**

- a. Ambitious target for air quality
- b. Ambitious target for water quality
- c. Ambitious target for chemical and toxic exposures
- d. Ambitious target for waste management
- e. Ambitious target for biodiversity
- f. Target from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process on greenhouse gas emissions

**8. Goal of global partnership and good governance<sup>5</sup>**

- a. Ambitious target for data quality and availability
- b. Ambitious target for transparency in all public sector budgets
- c. Target for domestic resource mobilization (towards above goals)
- d. Target for official development assistance
- e. Ambitious target for civil society efforts, including private sector, scientific, and non-governmental “citizen goals.”

## **V. Conclusion**

The Millennium Development Goals have galvanized an unprecedented global movement to tackle the challenge of extreme poverty in many forms. The Goals have great strength in their simplicity and specificity, attributes that must be carried forward if any successor goals are to mobilize equal or greater momentum. At the same time, the Goals have weaknesses, especially in tackling the priorities of the environment and broad-based economic growth. In addition to a focus on the challenge of attaining the existing MDGs among countries which are not on track, it is also time to start laying the groundwork for a new generation of post-2015 global development goals, one that draws on both public and private actors to implement a broad partnership anchored in multiple dimensions of accountability.

Major efforts are required to achieve the final stretch of progress towards 2015, while in parallel establishing the foundation for tackling the next frontier. If leaders from government, business, non-profits and science work together in an open and inclusive manner, we have great hope that the world can indeed “Get to Zero” in sustainably ending extreme poverty by 2030.

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<sup>5</sup> Additional targets on good governance have not been included here due to lack of agreement among GAC members. See Box 1 for a review of issues.

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## **Appendix: List of Millennium Development Goals and targets**

### **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

- Target 1a: Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
- Target 1b: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people
- Target 1c: Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

### **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

- Target 2a: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

### **Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

- Target 3a: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

### **Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**

- Target 4a: Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five

### **Goal 5: Improve maternal health**

- Target 5a: Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio
- Target 5b: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

### **Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

- Target 6a: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Target 6b: Achieve by 2010 universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it
- Target 6c: Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

### **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

- Target 7a: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
- Target 7b: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the rate of loss
- Target 7c: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
- Target 7d: Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020

### **Goal 8: A global partnership for development**

- Target 8a: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.
- Target 8b: Address the special needs of the least developed countries.
- Target 8c: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states
- Target 8d: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries
- Target 8e: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- Target 8f: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications