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HALF-HEARTED, HALF MEASURES THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

HUMAN RIGHTS = LESS POVERTY

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The major global response to the scourge of poverty is encapsulated in the UN Millennium Development Goals. These eight goals – known as the MDGs – were agreed to by all governments at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. They lay out what the international community hopes to achieve by 2015 – such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and reducing child mortality.

As an effort to end poverty and to benchmark progress towards that end, the MDGs are hugely welcome; but they are also woefully insufficient. They reflect a truly remarkable, global consensus. For the first time all important actors, including both rich and poor countries, have agreed that the purpose of their development work is to end poverty, that there are specific steps needed to do so, and that the responsibility for doing so is shared. Goal 8 talks of a “global partnership” that includes commitments by rich countries to debt reduction, to an open and non-discriminatory trading system and to provide more aid to countries committed to reducing poverty.

While this distillation of the vast array of development programmes into a single set of measurable goals and targets has provided a crucial unity of purpose, the Goals risk some real dangers. Crucially, as they stand, they mask continuing discrimination, which is a major cause of poverty; they fail to address the pervasive human rights abuses that keep people poor and directly obstruct progress towards the MDGs themselves; and they provide no consequence for governments, rich or poor, that fail to fulfil their MDG commitments.

The eight Goals, some more precise than others, have specific targets – 21 in all – which specify the precise commitment governments have made by signing up to the Goals. The Goal to end extreme poverty, for example, translates into target commitments to halve the proportion of those living below \$1 a day, to achieve full

and productive employment for all and to halve the proportion of those who suffer from hunger. The Goal to empower women translates into a target commitment to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education. The Goal to improve maternal health commitments governments to reduce their maternal mortality ratios by three quarters, and to provide universal access to reproductive health. There is also a set of some 60 even more precise indicators – agreed by all governments – to measure progress in meeting the targets.

Progress towards achieving the Goals has been uneven. The food crisis, and growing unemployment and the risk of less foreign aid as a result of the global recession, has put further progress in jeopardy. There are serious gaps both in the manner in which progress is being measured, and in the targets chosen to indicate progress.

But above all, the key problem with the Goals is a lack of accountability. Developed countries promise aid and fair trade but don't deliver. Poor countries buy expensive weapons rather than invest in education. Commitments to women's empowerment are not translated into effective policy and pervasive violence against women keeps women marginalized. There are no real consequences for governments' failure to deliver – except on the lives of the poor.

These flaws could be addressed if the Goals embraced human rights fully. As they stand, some of the MDG targets fall short of the existing international legal commitments that governments have freely entered into to respect and protect human rights. One of the criticisms of the MDGs is that they only set partial goals. To halve the proportion of those who are hungry by 2015, for example, or reduce by two thirds the under-5 mortality rate. Yet under existing human rights treaty commitments, many entered into decades ago, states have already pledged to meet these commitments in full. These human rights commitments demand that states

proactively commit to strategies to realize rights, not just reduce by half violations of these rights.

In September 2010, world leaders will assemble at the UN to mark 10 years of effort. No doubt they will redouble their commitment for the remaining five years – which of course must be encouraged. But when governments meet in 2010, they must also agree to put human rights at the centre of the global effort to end poverty. This requires action in three areas.

- 1) **Changes are needed in the way the UN measures progress to achieve the MDGs, in particular to highlight progress, or not, among the most marginalized and excluded communities, and to a greater extent among women and girls.**
- 2) **The MDG process must give attention to the full range of human rights abuses that keep people poor, especially those ongoing abuses that obstruct progress to achieving the MDGs.**
- 3) **Governments must ensure people have access to accountability mechanisms to hold both state and non-state actors liable when their policies or practices drive or deepen poverty.**

EVERYONE COUNTS

Unmasking discrimination is key to addressing the political marginalization and exclusion that accompany poverty. If governments can identify those groups in society who are subjected to discrimination, whether it is intentional or in effect, they will have determined who must be at the centre of their poverty eradication programmes.

When countries report on their progress towards meeting MDG targets, however, with few exceptions, they do so through aggregate data – general averages drawn from the results of the population as a whole. To take the most often quoted figure in relation to

Cover image: Demonstrators oppose violence against women in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in front of the Palace of Justice.

This page: A woman and child in makeshift accommodation in Calcutta, India. Worldwide, 1 in 3 urban residents lives in inadequate housing with few or no basic services.

poverty as an example – those living on less than \$1 a day – governments provide data on how many people in the country are at that level. The MDGs do not require them to break down this number by gender, ethnicity, caste or other social group. It is entirely possible, therefore, that the position of already marginalized groups may stagnate or worsen, even as total numbers of people rise above \$1 a day, and out of “poverty”.

The same holds true for other goals and associated targets. Reductions in maternal mortality may be reported, even though Indigenous or minority women may see no improvements. Primary school enrolment may increase, but not for the children of migrant or minority families. Only with regard to ensuring girls are attending school do specific MDG targets demand disaggregated data, in this case on the basis of gender. (There is additionally a specific indicator regarding the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, as a means of measuring progress towards women’s empowerment.)

That minority groups and the politically marginalized, including women, are generally less well off, or fare worse on indicators of health and wellbeing, is widely recognized. A major study by the Minority Rights Group International in 2002 concluded: “In all parts of the world, developed and developing, minority groups are more likely to be poor, either in relative or absolute terms.” It noted the difficulty of getting reliable data but cited the following: “In Bulgaria, 84 per cent of Roma and 40 per cent of Bulgarian Turks live in poverty, in contrast with a 31.7 per cent poverty rate for ethnic Bulgarians. In Nepal,

90 per cent of Dalits live below the poverty line, compared to 45 per cent of the overall population, and Muslims have a human development index rate that is less than half the national average. Surveys in Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru indicate that monthly mean earnings for Afro-descendants are roughly half that earned by white people.”

The UN Independent Expert on Minorities concluded in 2006: “The poorest communities in almost any region tend to be minority communities that have been targets of longstanding discrimination, violence or exclusion.”

Members of Indigenous groups are estimated to account for 15 per cent of the world’s poor, but only 5 per cent of the world’s population. According to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, “Indigenous peoples face huge disparities in terms of access to and quality of education and health.”

The problem is not exclusively one of discrimination on grounds such as race, ethnicity, caste or gender. The poorest segments of societies are often discriminated against simply on account of their poverty, even though they may share the same



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language, religion and race as dominant and richer groups. In these cases, it is imperative that states look at how people living in poverty are denied access to services and justice simply because they are poor. And states must ensure such obstacles are dismantled.

As long as countries' reports on MDG progress rely only on aggregate figures, it is difficult to assess whether the poorest and most marginalized are progressing or not. There are difficulties in gathering disaggregated data. It requires more sophisticated surveys and the capacity to administer and interpret them competently, free from political manipulation. There may be reasons too why minority and Indigenous groups don't want to be "counted", arising from their distrust of central authorities. But the fact remains that poverty is experienced differently by different groups, and until we take account of that difference in measuring progress we cannot be sure whether the policies being pursued are successful.

Many countries, including some of the world's poorest, do collect disaggregated data, so although difficult, it is not impossible. Further, in reporting on MDG progress, some of these countries draw on this data to indicate the relative performance of disadvantaged groups. Data collection alone is not enough, of course. It must be freely available, and must inform decision-making. But the point is that it can be done.

THE FULL PICTURE OF POVERTY

The Millennium Declaration, from which the Goals were drawn, equally committed governments to the protection of a broad range of human rights. In a dedicated section on human rights, UN member states committed themselves, among other things:

"... To spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law...; to respect fully and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for

human rights, including minority rights; to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries; to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information."

UN declarations and government statements repeatedly link the problem of development to the realization of human rights. Yet the MDGs and their targets include very few concrete benchmarks to measure progress in implementing existing human rights commitments. There is no Goal with associated targets, for example, to realize access to justice for the poor, to abolish discriminatory laws, to address violence against women, to ensure people living in slums are accorded protection of the police, or to enact and implement right to information legislation. Yet action in each of these areas would speed progress on the MDGs.

There are many UN-led efforts to monitor progress on human rights – such as countries reporting to the UN Human Rights Council, responding to the inquiries of various Special Rapporteurs, reporting periodically on implementation of treaties, and so on. But these have only varied success vis-à-vis accountability. Crucially, the real problem is the scant linkage between UN entities that promote human rights and the UN-led effort to monitor governments' progress to ending poverty.

The MDG process pays scant attention to progress on human rights goals that, if achieved, would considerably strengthen progress to tackle poverty. The experience of those living in poverty includes deprivation – the lack of those basic necessities essential to a life in dignity, including adequate food, shelter and health care. But it equally includes insecurity, exclusion and a sense of voicelessness. Discrimination shuts the



poor out. Violence at the hands of state and non-state actors threatens their lives and livelihoods, keeping them poor and driving them further into poverty. Those who live in poverty are denied a meaningful voice in the design of policies ostensibly meant to improve their well being. So to end poverty, we must do more than tackle deprivation, where the MDGs focus, we must work for inclusion, for security and for effective political participation.



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Surui children in the Amazon, Brazil. Progress on goals to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health is impeded by the failure of states to collect data that are disaggregated by Indigenous status and other relevant categories.

De-linking the MDGs from the full human rights agenda is risky for many reasons. Firstly, it obstructs progress as specific human rights abuses continue to hamper action towards MDG targets. Secondly, the de-linkage fails to ensure that in pursuing MDG targets governments are not contributing to further human rights abuses. And thirdly, it fails to exploit the mobilizing power of the human rights framework in the struggle to end poverty.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES OBSTRUCT PROGRESS ON MDGs

There is no specific MDG target to end violence against women, nor are there any benchmarks to monitor progress on the steps that might be taken to this end and that are known to be effective. Yet studies repeatedly show domestic violence inhibits poor women's efforts to overcome poverty through employment (Goal 1 aims for full employment). Violence against girls, including in or on the way to school, means fewer girls attend school (Goal 2). It perpetuates gender inequality and disempowers women (Goal 3). Women who have suffered violence have twice the risk of miscarriage and four times the risk of giving birth to babies that are below average birth weight (Goal 5). Abused women are at greater risk of HIV infection, and such abuse is recognized as an obstacle to women receiving effective treatment (Goal 6). Finally, violence against women is both a significant factor pushing women to leave rural areas and their continuing exposure to it in slums (Goal 7).

Goal 7 also includes the target to improve the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers; it included, until recently, an indicator measuring the extension of security of tenure to those 100 million. This already inadequate measure – as more than 1 billion people live in slums and all deserve security of tenure – was removed in 2007 due to the difficulties in collecting data. The provision of secure tenure rights is an essential step to prevent forced and arbitrary evictions – which are an abuse of rights and the threat or reality of which create insecurity

for tens of millions of slum-dwellers. If states fail to recognize the role of security of tenure, they are more apt to address the issues of slums through slum clearance programmes that make no provisions for ensuring that people living in these slums are relocated to a better situation.

RISK OF HARMING RIGHTS IN PURSUING MDGs

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has drawn attention to the risk that infrastructure projects undertaken to meet MDG targets, such as the provision of clean water, for example, may lead to forced and arbitrary displacement of communities. In its report, *Claiming the Millennium Development Goals*, the OHCHR also details how improving the lives of slum-dwellers, an MDG target, has been cited as the goal by some governments when they undertake slum clearance initiatives that are arbitrary and in violation of their treaty obligations.

FAILURE TO INVOKE MOBILIZING POWER OF RIGHTS

Achieving the MDGs requires the active participation of affected communities. All agree that efforts to eradicate poverty will be most successful where the poor themselves are able to mobilize, and have the capacity to input meaningfully into projects and policies meant to better their situation. The rights to organize, to free speech and assembly, to information, to be consulted on decisions that impact on one's livelihood, to hold leaders accountable – these are all the essential foundation upon which the active engagement of poor communities is built. The right to participation is among the most crucial contributions that the human rights framework provides to development efforts.

Yet again, however, the MDG process largely ignores this aspect in the Goals and targets set (although there is an attempt to promote larger numbers of women in parliaments). The mobilizing and



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empowering language of human rights is thus not brought to bear as explicitly as it might be in the MDG process. This process could, for example, build on states' existing treaty commitments, set targets to remove laws that hamper the formation of independent civil society groups, the public debate on development options, or the dissemination of information crucial to meaningful engagement with poor communities. Putting inclusion and voice at the heart of the MDGs – identifying targets that would concretize the empowerment of the poor – would give an enormous boost to the profile and relevance of the MDGs in poor communities. Finally, by denying, through discriminatory practices, poor people's equality before the law, when state policies violate their rights, people living in poverty have no access to justice and redress.

SO WHERE NOW?

What can be done to address these three problems? It may make little sense now to seek a full revision of the Goals – for example to include a target measuring efforts to end violence against women. That

may need to await a new, post-2015 MDG agenda. In the meantime, states must promote a closer linkage between respect for human rights and the MDGs.

The 2010 Summit on the MDGs should prioritize human rights issues. In their reports to the Summit, all states should be asked to include explicit information on how obligations to protect human rights in their countries are upheld within the MDG process. This does not have to be a finger-pointing exercise. States can highlight examples of success as well as failure. When preparing the Summit itself, sufficient space for human rights issues to be discussed must be planned.

The 2010 Summit Declaration should identify and promote areas where human rights reform would assist in achieving MDG targets.

The 2010 Summit should require that states do an audit of laws, policies and practices which actively support discrimination or which obstruct equal access to services and equality before the law – both on the grounds prohibited under human rights standards as well as on the basis of poverty.

A woman begging on the street, Afghanistan. Many women have been left destitute, having been widowed during the war, deprived of an education and then forbidden to work by the Taliban.

Beyond the 2010 Summit, Amnesty International will seek ways to ensure global development frameworks, such as the MDGs or their successor, give due attention to the full human rights dimensions of poverty, not least how to link states' existing human rights obligations to poverty eradication efforts.

GOALS OR OBLIGATIONS? BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Governments have made repeated, public commitments, to meet the MDG targets. But what if, as seems likely, they fail? Will we simply await a new set of goals, with modified targets and new deadlines, and set to work again to build support to achieve them? MDGs 2.0? How many versions can we expect before there is sufficient progress to claim success? We cannot wait another millennium. The price of failure is too high.

If there is any possibility to meet these Goals and targets, it lies with closing the accountability gap. Linking the MDGs more closely to the human rights framework provides the legal obligation on all governments to meet the targets. Viewed this way, the failure to deliver is more than a failure of policy or programmes, it is a gross neglect of legal duties owed to rights-holders. The failure to meet the MDGs is not just the result of omissions or haphazard implementation; in some situations, the failure to meet these Goals is the consequence of state efforts to undermine human rights.

There are practical steps every government could take towards greater accountability. Projects and plans to meet the MDGs should be developed with the full and active participation of civil society and grassroots organizations. The UN and other agencies which promote the MDGs should encourage governments to follow through on their commitments on this point.

In some countries, activists and campaigners for the rights of the poor are imprisoned; in many others they are harassed or their work obstructed. An independent and periodic report should be published by the UN identifying countries that are failing to adequately allow for meaningful civil society participation in the MDG process.

Parliaments should be encouraged to play a role in agreeing MDG plans and projects; regional and local governments too, and their legislative bodies, ought to be involved.

National human rights institutes exist in many countries, many of these in the developing world. National human rights institutions should be encouraged to monitor progress on the MDGs, and to draw attention to continuing human rights abuses that hamper such progress.

Governments must report fully and in public on development plans directed at achieving the MDGs.

The international community must speak with a single voice to condemn the violation of human rights justified on political grounds, such as the expulsion of humanitarian aid agencies by the governments of Zimbabwe and Sudan; the pervasive and continued exploitation of migrant workers in every region of the world; the targeting of hospitals, schools, destruction of homes and civilians in armed conflict.

Beyond action at the national level, ways must be found to make existing UN monitoring of MDG progress more rigorous and more consequential. When arms purchases take precedence over funding for education, when corruption

much that can be done to strengthen the global commitment to end poverty. Sustainable progress to end poverty cannot be made without efforts to tackle the underlying human rights issues. Moving forward, if the commitment to ending poverty is going to succeed, all states must commit to promoting human rights both within and beyond their territory. If this principle can bind the promises of the MDGs to states' implementation plans, if those states can be held to account on delivery of those plans, then maybe those in poverty will be able to enjoy their right to live in dignity.



undermines reform efforts, when civil society input is blocked and grassroots activists harassed or imprisoned – in these and other cases the UN ought to call countries to account.

As we move forward through the remaining six years of the MDG process, there is

Kosovo Albanians fleeing ethnic conflict. Armed conflict causes upheaval, loss of homes and livelihood, and leads to further violence and instability, keeping people poor and making them poorer.

THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

GOAL 1 ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

TARGET: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

TARGET: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people

TARGET: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

GOAL 2 ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

TARGET: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

GOAL 3 PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

TARGET: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

GOAL 4 REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

TARGET: Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-5 mortality rate

GOAL 5 IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

TARGET: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

TARGET: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health care

GOAL 6 COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES

TARGET: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

TARGET: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it

TARGET: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

GOAL 7 ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

TARGET: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources

TARGET: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss

TARGET: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

TARGET: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers

GOAL 8 DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

TARGET: Address the special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states

TARGET: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

TARGET: Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt

TARGET: In co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

TARGET: In co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications

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Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

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