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## Accelerating Progress on the MDGs: Country Priorities for Improving Performance

Paper prepared for the United Nations Development Group  
MDG Task Force

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September 2010

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## Foreword

This report is about learning from country experience in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It advances a set of performance priorities that are clearly identified from global development experience. These priorities highlight specific approaches and types of action needed to accelerate progress on the MDGs. They embrace the work of all development stakeholders but are most concerned with actions at country and field level. The report is part of preparations for the September 2010 high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly. The collective purpose of these preparations is to bring together all stakeholders to help world leaders gathering at the Summit to review progress, identify gaps, and commit to a concrete action agenda to achieve the MDGs.

The report was written for the United Nations Development Group's (UNDG) Task Force on the MDGs and is based on the five thematic papers prepared for the Task Force and a peer review workshop held in February 2010. These papers provide an analysis of successful strategies, the factors underpinning successful strategies and measures, the critical gaps and a summary of key lessons and future measures for accelerated progress. The thematic papers are rich in their analysis of performance on the MDGs and provide an important resource for encouraging country-level learning on how to improve development performance. This synthesis distils common factors, interventions and cross-cutting strategies that have helped create the conditions for successful national progress towards the MDGs.

The UNDG MDG Task Force is a part of a wider initiative within the UN, complemented by initiatives from many other stakeholders, to strengthen MDG performance. A core element of the performance review, and a call to action, is the recently published report from the UN Secretary General - *Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015*. The Secretary General's (SG's) Report identifies the September 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 Millennium Declaration as the highest profile articulation of internationally agreed development goals and underlines the MDG foundations in basic human rights relating to work, education and health, and for children and women. The SG's report provides a comprehensive summary assessment of MDG progress and challenges. Some countries have performed well and the report identifies seven common success factors characterizing strong MDG performance and the challenges they have addressed. *'The three critical challenges, in most cases, have been to have in place a feasible national scale-up plan, to obtain adequate financing based on both domestic and foreign resources and to develop well-functioning delivery mechanisms for public investment and service'*. Based on the thematic papers this synthesis report is built around a set of six priority performance areas which underpin success in meeting these challenges. These are country-level priorities which are echoed throughout the SG's Report.

**Summary**  
**Accelerating Progress on the MDGs**  
**Country Priorities for Improving Performance**

This report discusses six priorities for country performance that are instrumental in accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals.

**Country-led MDG Strategies**

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

**Local Accountability**

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

**Community Participation and Partnerships**

Prioritize and plan taking full advantage of the efficiency and effectiveness gains from community involvement and through the use of the private sector and south-south partnership.

**Gender-Equality and Women's Empowerment**

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

**Inclusion - addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination**

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

**Resilience - protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change**

Adopt an effective and inclusive approach to social protection. Prioritize sustainable development and promote adaption to climate change.

The report synthesizes country priorities identified in five thematic papers that provide an analysis of successful strategies, the factors underpinning successful strategies and measures, the critical gaps and a summary of key lessons and future measures for accelerated progress.

## Contents

Ideas whose time has come .....	1
The National Context for Human Development.....	3
Progress to date	
Global Crises	
Productive Sectors	
Climate Change	
Policy Coherence	
Fragile States	
Country Priorities for Accelerating Progress on the MDGs.....	6
Country-led MDG Strategies	
Local Accountability	
Community Participation and Partnerships	
Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment	
Inclusion - addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination	
Resilience - protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change	
Conclusions.....	16
References.....	18

## **Text Boxes**

### **Country Priorities for Accelerated Progress - from the Thematic Papers**

1. Poverty Reduction through Pro-poor Growth.....	6
2. Country Priorities on Delivering on Decent Work.....	7
3. Country Priorities on Reducing Hunger, Under Nutrition and Food Insecurity .....	8
4. Country Priorities on Universal Primary Education.....	9
5. Country Priorities on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment .....	11
6. Country Priorities on the Health MDGs - Health Systems strengthening .....	13
7. Country Priorities on HIV-specific Strategies.....	14
8. Country Priorities on the Health MDGs.....	15
9. Country Priorities on Environmental Sustainability .....	16

## **Accelerating Progress on the MDGs Country Priorities for Improving Performance**

### **Ideas whose time has come**

*The Millennium Declaration represents the most important collective promise ever made to the world's most vulnerable people. This promise is not based on pity or charity, but on solidarity, justice and the recognition that we are increasingly dependent on one another for our shared prosperity and security. (SG's Report p2)*

Development is no longer young. There is now a great deal of tacit knowledge of what works and what does not and why. Experiences and yardsticks abound. For the MDGs, the technical knowledge of what to deliver and how to deliver it is there and the challenge is to get on and do it. Pursuing the human development priorities reflected in the MDGs depends upon economic growth but perhaps our most important collective learning is that the size and quality of that growth is dependent upon and shaped by investments in human development. The MDGs provide the basis for growth processes that are fair and just and that enable the freedoms and quality of life that constitute human development.

Beyond unfavorable global conditions and the failure to deliver on political commitments to provide the necessary financial resources, an important set of reasons why MDG performance is sometimes less than stellar has to do with weaknesses in country performance. There are sometimes systemic weaknesses of capacity and will that have seemed intractable. But in many countries and sectors such weaknesses have been successfully addressed. A UN Task Force on the MDGs has prepared five thematic papers<sup>1</sup> that report on our collective learning about the conditions for such success. The MDGs are achievable but unless progress accelerates there will still be over one billion people in dollar a day poverty in 2015 and similar gloom on other MDGs. Applying the findings summarized here from the MDG thematic papers can accelerate progress and help deliver on the collective promise made through the Millennium Declaration in September 2000.

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

- **Country-led MDG Strategies**  
Integrate MDGs in national development strategies grounded in annual resource budgets planned through a medium term expenditure framework.

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<sup>1</sup> The UNDG MDG Task Force has focused on learning from MDG country experience and produced thematic papers on Poverty, Hunger and Decent Work (MDG 1), on Primary Education (MDG 2), on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MDG 3), on the three Health MDGs (4, 5 and 6) and on Environmental Sustainability (MDG 7). Their focus is on country-level performance; MDG 8, on global partnerships for development, with its focus predominantly on the international arena, is addressed separately in the MDG Gap Report.

- **Local Accountability**  
Plan implement and evaluate results with mechanisms that are transparent and are accountable to citizens. Policy, legal and institutional frameworks must make accountability real.
- **Community Participation and Partnerships**  
Prioritize and plan taking full advantage of the efficiency and effectiveness gains from community involvement and through the use of the private sector and south-south partnerships.
- **Gender-Equality and Women’s Empowerment**  
Recognise that progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment is critical to progress on the MDGs overall.
- **Inclusion - addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination**  
Assess and strengthen the targeting of public services and programmes to address inequality and all those that suffer from discrimination and social exclusion.
- **Resilience - protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change**  
Adopt an effective and inclusive approach to social protection. Prioritize sustainable development and promote adaption to climate change.

Collectively, these priorities provide an approach to development that underscores the fundamental importance of the accountability of the state to its citizens and to the minimum expectations –as reflected in the MDGs- of what states must deliver. As the SG’s report underlines, in addition to being a moral obligation globally contracted, achieving the Millennium Development Goals is the most effective way to lasting peace, security and social justice. There is strong political buy in to the MDGs –whether enlightened self-interest as the quote above alludes to or a more ethically-grounded support-and the General Assembly high-level plenary in September should provide a renewed commitment. Ambition and resources can enable us to achieve the MDGs. But such commitment needs to be used effectively and the priorities identified here should inform our investments in accelerating MDG progress. Those investments should be driven by a national framework for sustainable development balancing economic, social and environmental development priorities that collectively provide the basis for MDG achievement.

In relation to their respective focus the thematic papers articulate specific high-level priorities for accelerating MDG progress that contextualise these six cross-cutting priorities within sectors and within policies and policy-processes. These thematic MDG priorities are presented in the text boxes. The next section briefly sets out fundamental contextual features that inform the following short discussion of each of these six priorities.

## The National Context for Human Development

**Progress to date:** The SG's Report summarises the mixed picture on MDG performance<sup>2</sup>. Progress on poverty reduction has been uneven and is now threatened; hunger is increasing and remains an important global challenge. Full and decent employment for all remains unfulfilled. There has been good progress on universal primary education but the goal remains unmet. There has been insufficient progress on gender equality. Whilst there has been significant progress on health-related MDGs there has been least progress in reducing maternal mortality. Finally, the SG's Report describes the limited progress to date on environmental sustainability.

Accelerating progress depends on increased resources. This is not in order to match heightened ambition but to deliver what has been promised already to those for whom the MDGs are not a reality. Progress also depends fundamentally on balanced attention in public policy to economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. These three dimensions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing and provide the overarching conceptual framework for pursuit of the MDGs. The MDGs are built around this sustainable development framework and the contextual points below discuss current and critical interdependencies.

**Global Crises:** The priorities identified here are about accelerating this progress but improving MDG performance in 2010 depends on effective response to the financial crisis and restoring poverty-reducing economic growth. The impacts of the crisis affect performance on all the MDGs. Public budgets are sometimes being cut on core service delivery and household incomes of poor households are insufficient to compensate or, very often, even to maintain current levels of expenditure. The food and fuel crises that preceded the financial crisis have left households vulnerable. Public financing demands are increased for addressing basic needs through social protection and difficult expenditure choices have to be made. Recent evidence shows that aid and investment flows have been affected by the financial crisis, more so than the domestic productive sectors in developing countries where the impact was often relatively milder, though usually not where international trade-dependence was significant.

**Productive Sectors:** These differential effects of the crises underline the importance of the domestic productive sectors, especially local agriculture and rural non-traded goods and services, for economic predictability and stability. Jobs are fundamental to sustained poverty reduction and to the creation of conditions for the sustainable achievement of the MDGs. Most poor people are still dependent on agriculture and rural activities and yet in many countries there is evidence of urban bias in public policy. In developing countries, state legislative and investment policies that strengthen rural, especially agricultural, production are fundamental to achieve the output and labour productivity gains needed for the structural economic transformation experienced by rich countries. The effective use of trade, investment and productive policies within a sound macroeconomic framework can help countries lift themselves out of poverty, hunger malnutrition illness and illiteracy as was proven by several Asian economies in recent history.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report provides an up to date assessment of MDG progress and the MDG Gap Report will, amongst other things, assess financing needs. In addition, the UNDG, through its MDG policy network, is updating and expanding its good practices case studies.

**Climate Change:** Growth of the productive sectors has to be environmentally sustainable and the challenge of the environment has become starker as the consequences of climate change, due in part to productive activities, become more evident. In facing climate change, development has to confront the double challenge of mitigating climate change, through low carbon growth, and ensuring the resilience of economies and households, particularly in developing countries, to extreme climatic events. If adequately promoted, low-carbon growth will create new markets and can be a new source of jobs. The challenge of achieving just transitions to a low carbon, resilient, economy should mobilize governments, employers and workers to engage in dialogue on coherent policies and effective programmes including on environmentally sustainable provision of core services such as health, sanitation, water and education. Climate change, rightly, will be at the top of the political agenda and better understanding of the links and overlays between programming for the MDGs and adapting to climate change are a priority. Successful climate change management calls for a reformulated development paradigm that integrates climate change into strategies and plans, and that links policy setting with the financing of solutions. Critically, it is necessary to strengthen analytical research into ways of intensifying employment gains through Green Growth<sup>3</sup> as a primary objective of national development strategies and as a means of linking social progress and sustainable economic development.

**Policy Coherence:** The interdependence of all of the MDGs is a determining factor in the achievement of the goals as a whole and of each goal individually. Both in the overall framework of sustainable human development plans and in strategies around individual MDGs addressing this interdependence is vital. Failing to tackle hunger and under nutrition (MDG 1) jeopardizes the achievement of other MDGs, including goals to half poverty, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality and improve health. Decent work is not only essential for promoting the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger but contributes towards and depends upon all the MDGs. The impact of primary education (MDG 2) is felt strongly across a number of sectors and goals. Similarly, progress in education depends on advances in achieving other public goals, including the MDGs not related to education. Articulating and supporting the gender equality elements of all other MDGs will accelerate progress in achieving MDG 3. Likewise, other MDGs are directly and indirectly related to maternal and child health and to combating major diseases, (MDGs 4, 5 and 6) including reducing poverty, improving nutritional status, and reducing gender inequalities. Environmental sustainability policies (MDG 7) have on the one hand a bearing on health and on poverty eradication and, on the other hand, conservation of ecosystems will not be possible if populations are ridden by poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

A political and policy environment that recognises this interdependence of the MDGs is important. Through MDG 8 on global partnerships donors and specialized agencies have to more clearly address this interdependence of development policies in their support investments and in capacity development activities. National Development Strategies (NDS) provide the critical

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<sup>3</sup> Green growth is growth in GDP that maintains or restores environmental quality and ecological integrity, meeting the needs of all people with the lowest possible environmental impact. The approach develops and capitalizes on synergies between economic growth, social development and environmental protection; and promotes business opportunities which lead to environmental protection and investing in natural capital to increase environmental carrying capacity.

means through which policy coherence across targets can be achieved. NDS enable countries to identify and harness co-benefits of policies that contribute to different objectives, to find solutions for trade-offs among conflicting objectives, to address simultaneously intra-and inter-generational equity concerns, to address gender equality concerns, to target the most vulnerable populations, and to ensure broad participation and ownership across all major stakeholders.

**Fragile States:** Even in conflict-affected and fragile states, where capacity and will are weak and serious trust gaps exist, the country performance priorities identified remain valid though they may not always be able to effectively inform country development strategies until some minimum level of good governance is in place. However, pursuing these priorities in these countries should also contribute to state building through strengthening the legitimacy of the state. The fragile states contain many of the people who currently do not enjoy the rights associated with MDG attainment and so performance priorities there are of particular importance. Of specific and special importance is the need for international partners to effectively support transitions from humanitarian interventions to domestically owned and managed development. Whilst capacity building is usually vital in pursuit of the MDGs through nationally developed plans it is almost always a priority in fragile states during this transition.

## Country Priorities for Accelerating Progress on the MDGs

### Country-led MDG Strategies

The thematic papers<sup>4</sup> echo development orthodoxy, as spelt out in the indicators for implementing the Paris Declaration, in emphasizing the necessity of country-led development strategies. The fundamental importance of this emphasis was belatedly recognized for aid-dependent countries where dependence on foreign donors undermined the accountability of states to their citizens. In order to be effective, efforts to scale up the development process must be anchored in country-led development strategies through planning that is inclusive and that promotes state accountability. Framed against a long-term development vision, these strategies set medium-term targets for progress toward the MDGs and related development outcomes. They also define clear actions and priorities for achieving those targets, linking policy agendas to medium-term fiscal frameworks. This allows sectoral planning processes to be properly budgeted within a rolling national budget plan allowing results-based planning around sectoral targets including the MDGs.

### 1. Poverty Reduction through Pro-poor Growth

Growth-oriented policies require a well-managed macroeconomic framework and must seek to create an enabling environment for the productive sectors but for growth to deliver the MDG on poverty reduction growth policies must also be more purposeful.

- If the poverty goals are to be met, a large redistribution process is needed. This redistribution might not be in term of income or wealth, but rather in terms of *economic growth*. In other words, to reach the poverty MDGs, the poor must achieve higher growth rates than the non poor. Specific policies should aim at this, depending on the particularities of the country.
- The majority of poor live in rural areas and their incomes primarily come from agricultural activities. It is of extreme importance to increase productivity and growth of this sector which can have large impacts on poverty reduction.
- Increasing enrollment numbers in secondary education as well as education for girls is an important factor in nonagricultural growth and urban poverty reduction.

Source: derived from UNDP, 2005

As at December 2009, 67 developing countries had national development strategies (NDS), or five-year plans, focused on growth and poverty reduction. Many of these plans were influenced in their content during the last decade by Poverty Reduction Strategy formulation in order to qualify for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief. The first wave of PRSPs often made very token attempts to develop a genuine nationally-owned development strategy, driven as they were by urgent debt-relief concerns. Increasingly there has been change and much more deliberative effort to involve citizens in planning for national development priorities. A World

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted all the materials used here derive specifically from the five thematic papers prepared by the Task Force.

Bank (2007) study of national development strategies in IDA-dependent countries showed that all 62 countries reviewed had the MDGs as the basis for their development strategies.

## 2. Country Priorities on Delivering on Decent Work

- ***Achieving full employment and decent work*** for all is a major challenge that requires not only a renewed commitment from both poor and developed countries, but also persistent efforts centred on quality jobs, sustainable enterprises, efficient public services, and social protection, while safeguarding rights and promoting voice and participation.
- The global financial and economic crisis has focused attention on the ***need for a new, discernible and unambiguous determination to reorient growth towards the creation of jobs***, as expressed in the Global Jobs Pact,<sup>5</sup> adopted by the government, employers' and workers' delegates of the ILO's 183 Member States. The Pact proposes a range of tested crisis-response and recovery measures that focus on employment and social protection. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but a portfolio of tried and tested policy options that countries can adapt to their specific needs and situation.
- ***The timid signs of global recovery on the financial side should not discourage efforts towards jobs-led recovery.*** Previous crises have shown that there is generally a time-lag of three to six years between financial recovery and the recovery of employment to pre-crisis levels. The scale of the global jobs deficit calls for a dynamic response commensurate with that given to the global collapse of financial markets.
- ***Decent work is a powerful means to reduce poverty and prevent exclusion,*** and the Global Jobs Pact offers room for its realization at this critical moment of multiple crises. Extreme poverty can be defeated and successful programmes should be more widely replicated and scaled up to cover larger parts of the population.

The state has the key role in the adoption of national development plans specifically including the MDGs and the development of investment programmes to deliver them. An attitudinal change today from 2000 is the widespread recognition now that genuine country ownership of these plans, and monitoring systems to assess them, is not just desirable but understood as a necessary condition for MDG achievement. Perhaps the key component for strengthening international action on the MDGs is to provide more effective support for national decision-making processes, crucially for development and execution of NDS that are based on the accountability of the state to its citizens. This core governance concern requires that civil society should participate in the design, implementation and assessment of government policies through appropriate dialogue. Recent initiatives to promote national ownership of governance assessments are recognition that it is local accountability that has to be fostered and has important implications for how capacity building is approached.

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<sup>5</sup> Recovering from the crisis: A Global Jobs Pact, ILO, 2009.

### **3. Country Priorities on Reducing Hunger, Under Nutrition and Food Insecurity**

- Raise food and nutrition higher up on the political agenda: Accelerated progress in fighting food insecurity requires governments to put food and nutrition security much higher on their agendas.
- Focus on hunger hotspots and vulnerable populations: Hunger hotspots within countries should be a top priority. In line with the comprehensive approach, policies should address immediate needs of the vulnerable, hungry and poor, and investment in sustainable agriculture, food security, including through food safety nets, nutrition and broad-based rural development to eliminate the root causes of hunger and progressive realization of the right to food.
- Unify national strategic frameworks for food security: One national plan, one budget, one legal, policy and institutional framework and one reporting mechanism should be in place for a harmonized, streamlined effort to enhance food security. International organizations should play an active role in supporting governments by providing tools, technologies, capacity and resources to address hunger in the context of a wider, locally owned-development strategy.
- Recognize the right to food and develop state capacities to respect, protect and fulfill it: The effective implementation of a national strategic framework depends on the development of the State capacity to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food.
- Strengthen social protection, including food and nutrition safety nets: Social safety nets need to focus on food and nutrition security, focusing on the critical window of opportunity between conception and 24 months. Depending on the context and capacities, they can take various forms, including food, cash or voucher transfers, cash- or food-for-work programmes, supplementary feeding programmes for vulnerable groups, school meals and targeted food subsidies.
- Invest in smallholder agriculture and narrow the nutrition gap: Agricultural growth processes that include smallholders have a large impact on poverty, hunger and under nutrition. Address the nutrition gap by boosting the production and consumption of a diversity of high quality foods.
- Improve the information base and monitoring and accountability: In many countries, more rapid and reliable data are required and better coordination is needed between producers of food and nutrition statistics and users that monitor and assess the food and nutrition situation and interventions.
- Provide additional resources where they are most needed: There is a need for adequate, timely, predictable and flexible development assistance for food and nutrition assistance. Recent commitments to increase funds for agriculture and food and nutrition security must focus on the poor and vulnerable.

#### **Local Accountability**

The 2010 Summit is an important moment to put forward more effective strategies for achieving shared development objectives. The Millennium Declaration located the MDGs in a much broader international commitment to all human rights including the right to development. A critical dimension of strengthening development strategies is therefore the greater integration of international human rights principles and standards into ongoing development efforts. Developing the legal and institutional frameworks through which states can be held accountable for the rights of their citizens is therefore an important goal. Moreover, building protection of rights into development policies and programs has been shown to work. But we need to learn from the good practice examples that exist and scale them up rapidly if we hope to meet the targets by 2015. Effective accountability comes first through the development of inclusive planning processes as outlined above and the MDGs provide a minimum standard to assess such development strategies.

**Data for monitoring policy performance and service delivery** All the thematic papers are concerned that the need to improve accountability requires much more and better information. Improving the availability of data, the coordination of national statistical systems and the mechanisms for reporting are fundamental to making accountability real. Despite progress in many countries, there is still a huge gap in the information needed to measure welfare in general, and poverty in particular. Especially in low income countries, household surveys are not conducted regularly. In many cases they are many years apart, without sufficient attention to comparability over time. The current crises have shown that in many cases, it will never be known what exactly happened in many low-income countries due to the lack of frequent data or even recent household surveys. Significant capacity investment is needed by both countries and the development community in statistical systems. This is one area of MDG acceleration where the use of improved information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be transformational. ICTs are potentially of great importance in many forms of service delivery but have an important role in strengthening accountability mechanisms through improving the speed and reliability of providing information on development.

#### **4. Country Priorities on Universal Primary Education**

- Strengthen and maintain national political commitment to the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all and support such commitment through coordinated provision of technical and financial resources.
- Promote primary education through a holistic approach to the entire education sector, with stronger planning and implementation processes and through linking education to broader development policy and budgetary frameworks.
- Develop and strengthen inclusive and efficient education systems that are resilient to external pressures by reinforcing capacities and improving governance and efficiency.
- Commit to reducing disparities and inequalities through fostering inclusive education policies and disaggregated initiatives, programmes and interventions aligned with broader policies in education and beyond.
- Increase access to educational opportunities at primary level through removing cost and distance barriers as well as providing more accessible and flexible schools and classrooms.
- Raise quality standards in primary education through ensuring appropriate policies and measures to address different elements of the quality of education including teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, and learning and teaching materials, language of instruction, school management and leadership, and assessment of learning outcomes.
- Level the playing field through promoting multi-sectoral approaches, including social protection measures, and programmes that link education with health, nutrition, labour, environment, and other areas.
- Increase financial resources – both domestic and external – for education, in particular for basic education and use and redistribute available resources effectively.
- Promote quality dialogues and partnerships among stakeholders, including national governments, bilateral and multi-lateral organizations, NGOs, the private sector, schools, teachers, communities and parents - for designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, programmes and activities.
- Revitalize existing mechanisms and initiatives, where necessary, for better coordination and enhancement of the collective efforts, enhanced delivery capacities and also for greater accountability of partners.

## **Community Participation and Partnerships**

The MDGs targets and indicators have been identified through sectoral approaches and it is therefore not surprising that many of the same cross-cutting issues and constraints (gender, decentralization, resources etc.) are shared by the different MDG processes. Dealing with the funding and operational gaps would therefore be best done through the bottom-up articulation of these different processes. This logic is what has driven the emphasis in development on decentralization with the expectation that locally driven service development is more likely to respond to needs and more likely to be accountable for meeting those needs. Community participation extends this approach to the lowest local-level.

Pursuing the MDGs is not the exclusive responsibility of governments, but involves all sectors of society, including the **private sector**. Public-partnerships are normal in many rich countries in service delivery and are spreading rapidly around MDG agendas. They represent an important opportunity to bring new skills, know-how and resources to the Millennium Campaign.

Opportunities to include multiple MDG concerns in development activities can result in useful synergies of action. An important international example is the Global Compact<sup>6</sup> seeking to combine the private sector's ability to find solutions and resources with the expertise and capacity of other key stakeholders and is working in a wide variety of settings, including combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria also offers a good example of a successful public-private partnership (PPP). Such partnerships offer a valuable means of combining expertise and resources from a wide range of actors.

South-South Partnership is also an important emerging approach to partnership and there are now many examples of good results through this. Examples include Centers for South-South Cooperation to create and strengthen the technical and business capacities of developing countries or specific technology centers to promote the development, transfer and use of innovative low-carbon technologies. South-South partnership is important for the MDGs in reaffirming the commitment of all countries to their achievement everywhere and it also provides new forms of learning opportunity that are untainted by the inequality in power relationships that have afflicted North-South cooperation due to aid dependence.

## **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

It is widely recognized in the MDG framework and beyond, that gender equality is a vital goal in and of itself, but also that progress in this area is critical to progress on the MDGs overall. The thematic papers emphasize that women are often disproportionately represented in poverty and other MDG targets because of gender inequalities. As the thematic papers also emphasize targeting women typically produces more benefits shared by other household members, especially dependents, than directing the same resources towards men. Half the MDGs now have targets directly related to gender equality and women's rights: MDG 1 on decent work for women; MDGs 2 and 3 on girls' education; and MDG 5 on contraception. Furthermore, there is increased recognition of the linkages between gender equality and achievement of all the

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<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

MDGs. For example on MDG 4, on child mortality, given the role of women as primary care givers to children; MDG 6 on HIV and AIDS, on account of the interaction of gender inequality and the spread of the virus; and MDG 7 on water, sanitation and the environment, given among other things, women's disproportionate role in water provisioning.

For these reasons the importance of gender-based programming is more or less universally acknowledged, but rarely provided with the needed resources and direction; yet there are a large number of models and successful programmes that could be replicated. Indeed, there are no excuses for not responding to the urgency of more gender-based programming. The analyses also suggest that failure to do so is the biggest risk to MDG attainment.

### **5. Country Priorities on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

- Remove key barriers to girls' education, including by providing scholarships, cash transfers and eliminating user fees; tracking completion and attendance rates; improving the quality of education, including tackling violence against girls in school; and scaling up investments in girls' enrolment in secondary school.
- Make the generation of full and productive employment and the creation of decent work and income the primary goal of macroeconomic, social and development policies, including by promoting equal skills development and employment opportunities; reducing wage gaps between women and men; introducing social protection measures and labour laws and policies that are gender-responsive; and introducing and enforcing legal protections for the most vulnerable women workers. Particular attention should be paid to gender gaps in school-to-work transition for youth, making education and training relevant to labour market demand, based on a life-cycle and rights-based approach.
- Introduce positive action to improve the numbers and influence of women in all political decision-making, including by investing in women's leadership in local decision-making structures and by creating an even playing field for men and women within political parties.
- Invest in sexual and reproductive health, as a key foundation for achieving gender equality, including community health approaches to tackle maternal mortality and measures to ensure that women living with HIV are able to participate fully in shaping policy to tackle the pandemic.
- Improve national level capacity to track and report on progress, gaps and opportunities through better generation and use of sex-disaggregated data and statistics, including on time use.
- Reduce women's work burden through investments in infrastructure, labour saving technologies and gender-responsive economic stimulus packages.
- Strengthen accountability for enhancing women's rights and ending gender discrimination – in line with commitments made under international human rights instruments, CEDAW, the Beijing PFA, and relevant ILO Conventions – including through eliminating inequalities in access to land and property and by investing in implementation of laws, policies and programmes to prevent and address violence against women.
- Scale up and account for investments in gender equality, including by institutionalizing Gender Responsive Budgeting as part of public financial management reforms to ensure that financial commitments are commensurate with policy commitments to gender equality.

It is evident that continuing discrimination against girls and women will make it difficult to fully achieve any of the MDGs. Yet, many countries do not disaggregate their statistics by sex, especially those related to employment and/or agricultural production. For example, neither India nor China, the world's two most populous nations, have sufficient sex-disaggregated data to allow easy analysis of progress towards gender equality over the past decade. Some

countries, including in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, do not produce data frequently enough to monitor changes in patterns or trends in employment. Furthermore, there are many areas that are fundamental to achieving gender equality – from ending violence against women to guaranteeing women’s land and property rights – for which there are no global data bases.

Ending violence against women and girls is, according to many women’s rights advocates and from a human rights perspective, “the missing MDG”. Violence against women and girls has far-reaching consequences, harming families and communities, and impacting on the achievement of all the MDGs. For women and girls 16–44 years old, violence is a major cause of death and disability. There is increasing evidence on the direct and indirect linkages between violence against women and girls and HIV that stem from gender dynamics and social norms in relationships. Violence against girls in and on the way to school impacts on enrolment and learning. The persistent invisibility of this pandemic – including in the glaring absence of nationally-available data on prevalence in most countries – led in 2008 to the UN Secretary General’s launch of the global campaign, UNiTE to End Violence against Women, with five main goals: adopt and enforce national laws to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls; adopt and implement multi-sectoral national action plans; strengthen data collection on the prevalence of violence against women and girls; increase public awareness and social mobilization; address sexual violence in conflict.

### **Inclusion - addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination**

The neglect of policies that tackle youth employment, migrant workers, rural workers, and minority groups including religious and ethnic minorities and the disabled, is a major threat to all of the MDGs. Often, the costs of reaching and serving these groups are high and they lack the political support to garner the necessary budgets for service delivery. In effect this means that as countries draw closer to achieving specific MDGs the costs of further progress will be higher and it is these excluded groups that are likely to suffer disproportionately. For these groups, a rights-based approach is a valuable way of seeking to ensure that inclusion is effective. For instance, labour-intensive public works programmes have been undertaken recently in more than 40 countries worldwide but they have not always been available to all. India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is an important example where the right to work was guaranteed to *all*. Much other evidence in the thematic papers shows that even in very poor countries, commitment and good design can produce significant results on exclusion and discrimination. However, scaling up these interventions will be facilitated by legislative support and institutional development that provides means to claim nominal rights. Even if legislation is not a response to specific failure to include particular groups there is good evidence that universal provision of specific rights can be any effective means to begin addressing the problems of inclusion that are so widespread.

An increasingly widespread concern relates to the evidence that growth has often been discriminatory and has resulted in increasing inequalities within countries. At an aggregate level this results both from job discrimination and from neglect of particular, often remote and rural regions. At the individual-level this inequality in access to jobs and income is often fundamentally due to inequalities of opportunity that derive from poor or no access to decent education, to health clinics and to sanitation and water services that together undermine their development as productive individuals. The jobs market is not much of a level playing field at the best of times with connections and influence determining access in many circumstances but

these inequalities of opportunity serves to reinforce such factors. This understanding of inequalities in opportunity reinforces the need to recognise and respond to the interdependence of the MDGs, especially for young people entering the job market.

## 6. Country Priorities on the Health MDGs - Health Systems strengthening

- **National health policies** should emphasize the right to access a basic health package that includes life-saving interventions for mothers and children, including emergency obstetric care, neonatal care, prevention and treatment of infectious diseases that are determined to be the main causes of under-five mortality and other national priority health conditions.
- **Health financing** should be adequate to pay for the essential service package and should ensure that services are available to users at no cost at the point of care. Social insurance and tax-based financing (with donor support) should be explored and user fees abolished, as the latter reduce health care utilization, especially among the poor.
- **Scale-up service delivery** of integrated, high impact health intervention packages of high quality focusing on the most vulnerable/marginalized but moving rapidly to scale to ensure universal coverage; programmes that do not explicitly focus on the poorest at the outset tend to benefit the better-off and do not necessarily contribute to the achievement of MDGs.
- **Competent and motivated human resources** to staff the service delivery plan (at the three levels in each district (communities, health centres and district hospital): adequately remunerated, adequately stocked with essential supplies including life-saving drugs and kits and supervised health extension agents in every community capable of delivering many interventions supported by a functioning referral system that permit communication and patient care and transfer across the levels of the health system; specific attention will also be needed to address the workforce crisis stemming from health worker migration from developing countries through providing long-term predictable financing for human resources.
- An **effective supply chain** for life-saving equipment, supplies, vaccines, contraceptives and drugs.
- **partnerships** based on comparative advantage, including private sector, civil society and faith-based organizations as well as the public service system, working within a common framework emphasizing increasing coverage and service quality while increasing efficiency and reducing transaction costs.
- A **strong and responsive Health Management Information System**, ideally performance-driven, coupled with periodic population-based and facility-based surveys validated by rigorous external programme evaluations.

## Resilience - protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change

Resilience concerns the capacity of people to cope when hit by shocks. The vulnerability of poor people exists because they do not have the assets –economic, social and political–to provide resilience. Climate change is the most widely discussed source of vulnerability and as described above development planning has to be reformulated in ways that build responses to both the generic and specific impacts of climate change. The MDGs are based on a conceptual framework that incorporates environmental sustainability and this now has to be more meaningfully pursued as climate change threatens both progress to date and future prospects especially for the vulnerable. Climate change is a major threat that interacts with and reinforces all the other social, economic and political risks faced by the poor. Achievement of the MDGs is threatened because vulnerable people are unable to pursue them given the constraints they face in livelihood strategies, consumption patterns and service use. Some of the most important innovations in programming have been in the design of **social protection programs** that provide

people with the capacity to change that behaviour. Careful evaluative research has established clear gains to poverty, education and health MDGs from these programmes.

In the **current economic crisis**, the resilience of many more households is threatened. The challenge is to prevent it from becoming a social and a health crisis. The poor in both high- and low-income countries will be hardest hit, and identifying vulnerable populations is as important as identifying vulnerable countries. There is fear that this economic crisis may shortchange the progress on the Millennium Development Goals and may widen the gap in maternal and child health care between rich and poor. There has been an in-depth analysis of the impact of the financial crisis on the HIV epidemic, with the potential impact on prevention particularly alarming. The World Bank estimates that the global economic crisis will result in between 200,000 and 400,000 additional infant deaths each year from 2009 to 2015. The effects of the crisis on education have already been felt. UNESCO studies showed that the effects of the crisis on education seem more visible at the community levels than is indicated by government budget statistics and that vulnerable households were facing difficulties in meeting school costs. There were a number of accounts of increased absenteeism, school dropouts and child labour. In some countries, educational quality and equity in public schools were being jeopardized and the demand for education was expected to be affected due to declining household incomes and increases contributions required from families to counteract the fall in government allocations. A major issue is the lack of basic social security packages for workers in the developing world. The leaders of the multilateral organizations have included among a set of nine Joint Crisis Initiatives a social protection floor consisting of access to essential public services and a basic set of social transfers. This would establish a minimum level of income security and health care for all.

### **7. Country Priorities on HIV-specific Strategies**

- Understand better the populations at higher risk.
- Address contextual factors, especially the underlying causes of vulnerability.
- Prioritize high-burden areas and vulnerable groups.
- Increase investments for HIV prevention and treatment and sustain them over time.
- Mitigate the impact of the disease on livelihoods of affected households to prevent further risk.
- Improving the implementation of national programmes.
- Introducing accountability into HIV and AIDS programmes.

The inability to provide adequate social protection is a key issue to be addressed where jobs are unable to provide adequate security. People in vulnerable employment can descend abruptly into poverty due to the lack of safety nets that compensate for income losses during economic hardship. Even though the proportion of the global workforce that earns a living from vulnerable employment decreased slowly, from 53 per cent in 1997 to 50 per cent in 2007, there are still almost 1.5 billion workers in unstable and insecure jobs. However, the measurement of vulnerable employment excludes employees, and, especially because of the crisis, the situation would be even worse if they were included in the figures. Over 80 per cent of the female labour force in Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia were engaged in vulnerable employment in 2008.

## 8. Country Priorities on the Health MDGs

- Better national and sub-national data on the main causes of child and maternal morbidity and mortality, health risks and their underlying social determinants are needed to inform local and national strategies that would require strengthening.
- Identify and prioritize a handful of existing and doable interventions that will have the greatest impact on reducing mortality; this will vary from country to country based on existing coverage levels and epidemiologic patterns, but must be evidence-based and focused.
- Identify the main bottlenecks or barriers to increasing coverage, from both supply and demand side, including those related to socio-cultural norms and information gaps across the health system and at the community level.
- Focus on strengthening service delivery - at community level, through outreach community health services and at the health centre and district hospital levels. Evidence suggest that initial impact on mortality reduction is possible in poor country settings with limited health system development by scaling-up the delivery of a primarily preventive package of interventions through outreach and integrated campaigns (immunizations, vitamin A, bed nets etc), and many countries have now institutionalized "Child Health Days" in this regard. This can provide an initial "quick win", however needs to be accompanied by system strengthening to deliver curative services for the main childhood killers, and targeted communication activities for those interventions requiring behaviour change (e.g. breastfeeding/ complementary feeding, care-seeking, safe sex) in order to achieve maximum impact.
- Enhance access to family planning in every community and every health facility together with access to basic emergency obstetric and newborn care in health centres and comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care in district hospitals to achieve rapid reduction in maternal mortality.
- Prioritizing under-served populations and regions (with special attention to the poor, marginalized, rural and urban slums populations, women and youth) with a view to achieving high and equitable coverage for priority interventions and improving access to information and knowledge for social and behaviour change.
- Strengthening Health Systems including good governance and stewardship through a larger role in informal, formal and decentralized systems of health protection and improved accountability involving civil society and the communities themselves.
- Improving management, supervision and feedback to deliver more extensive and better quality services, especially to the poor and the most marginalized.
- Sustaining progress and accelerating investments both domestic and international, and global solidarity for advancement of health.
- Establishing a Social Protection Floor, which provides access to essential social services and transfers as well as livelihood support to the marginalized and most vulnerable households at country level.
- Strengthening maternity protection in the workplace and changing cultural and social norms towards workers with family responsibilities.
- Taking greater account of the care economy in the delivery of universal access and the role of women of different age groups (such as grandmothers, mothers and young girls) in care giving.
- Strengthening the capacity of all stakeholders to address issues of equity, gender and quality in the delivery of health services as well as promoting partnerships with civil society organizations including women's groups, most affected populations, workers' and employers' organizations, NGOs and with the private sector.
- Attending urgently to harmonizing tools and methodologies at national, regional and global levels for an integrated information system that can bring together health information across sectors and thus allow States to monitor different dimensions of the right to health and determine where policy adjustments are required.

Looking forward we have to recognise that uncertainty over global economic management, greater inter-relatedness of economies and other sources of global instability make threats to resilience likely to become more frequent. ILO and others have estimated that the costs of a social protection floor can be managed and a key priority is to mobilize wider political support within poor countries to commit resources to such a floor.

### **9. Country Priorities on Environmental Sustainability**

- The adoption of national sustainable development plans and strategies that specifically include MDG 7 related targets and indicators.
- The inclusion of environmental sustainability in all development policies (including health, education, and employment).
- The inclusion of programmes related to these objectives in national budgets.
- The involvement of local and municipal authorities as well as all active engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the planning, programming and budgeting cycle to implement the national plans.
- Efforts to ensure that rural-urban linkages are adequately recognized and applied in national development strategies.
- The adoption of strong national legislation with mandatory targets and commitments towards the attainment of the objectives.
- The existence of strong international and/or regional frameworks that promote global partnerships, concerted and coordinated action and cooperation, fostering policy coherence with related and relevant frameworks including those on disaster risk reduction<sup>7</sup>.
- Strong international and/or regional (i.e. trans-boundary) regulatory frameworks.
- Fiscal investments for the attainment of the goals.
- Multilateral funding to supplement national resources;
- Economic incentives through public-private partnerships.
- National Monitoring Systems to track progress.

### **Conclusions**

The report is based upon five specially prepared thematic papers that provide a detailed assessment on successful strategies and measures, the critical gaps and a summary of key lessons on progress towards the MDGs. These thematic papers are substantial and from their independent analyses, six country priorities have been identified for improving country performance on the MDGs:

Country-led MDG Strategies

Local Accountability

Community Participation and Partnerships

Gender-Equality and Women's Empowerment

Inclusion - addressing inequality, exclusion and discrimination

Resilience - protecting the most vulnerable, adapting to change

These six priority performance areas for accelerating progress on the MDGs relate very closely with essential elements of a human rights-based approach to development. One of those rights,

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<sup>7</sup> Such as the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

as the Millennium Declaration reaffirms, is the right to development. The MDGs are themselves therefore in part a rights-based approach but focusing on poor people and their basic needs. The moral imperative is strong and the arguments here suggest further that this imperative is best served through a more thorough going commitment to state accountability on rights using legal and policy frameworks. Moreover, even if there were no moral imperative the thematic papers provide important examples of MDG progress driven by rights-based agendas and make the independent case for pursuing rights as an effective way of accelerating progress on the MDGs. The main recommendations from each of the thematic papers, included in the text boxes above, also recognise the imperative of a holistic approach to the MDGs and the need to strengthening accountability frameworks.

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

These priorities emerge from the thematic reviews of the MDGs based on experience from across the globe but their application has to be developed nationally. The thematic papers have many examples of innovative and effective programmes but key learning for their replication in different contexts must be determined locally and by local stakeholders. A central message of the paper is the underlying importance of a more meaningful commitment to local ownership.

The performance priorities relate to the development of specific policies, and the thematic papers from which they are derived are a rich resource, but these priorities are most directly concerned with the quality of underlying policy processes and with the values informing those processes. These priorities can also help identify specific areas for investments in improved governance and in capacity building both of which must be locally driven.

Over the last decade since the MDGs were endorsed there has been a fundamental change in the way they have been understood and responded to in policy contexts and in the wider practice of development. Part of that change is because they have moved from being a distant aspiration to a grounded and purposeful agenda driven by learning about what does and what does not work for human development. The performance priorities reflect this learning and these familiar messages have added purpose today because they now provide tested means to accelerate progress. The underlying message of the report is that these performance priorities are ideas whose time has come. They provide a contemporary agenda for country development strategies that can inform and energise a renewed commitment to the MDGs.

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