

What are the Millennium Development Goals?

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a significant worldwide statement and agreement between developing and developed nations which act as a blueprint for halving extreme poverty by 2015.

The Goals have been signed by all 191 Member States of the United Nations.

They have also received the commitment of significant institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and non-government organisations like World Vision.

The eight Goals provide a framework that, if achieved, will substantially reduce both the incidence and severity of global poverty.

By committing to the MDGs, countries have committed to a plan of action to address the needs of the poorest people in the world as well as some of the issues that are causing poverty and inequality.



In early 2004, Australia cancelled the debt it was owed by Nicaragua. The money will now be spent on Nicaragua's essential services, such as primary education for these children.

The Goals in full

1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

- Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

2. Achieve Universal Primary Education

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

3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

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

4. Reduce Child Mortality

- Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

5. Improve Maternal Health

- Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Disease

- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

- Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs; reverse loss of environmental resources
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

- Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction nationally and internationally
- Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction

More about the MDGs

Seven of the eight Goals are focused on promoting human development within poor countries. The eighth Goal is important as it recognises that in order for Goals 1–7 to be achieved, a significant commitment is needed from developed nations.

Each of the MDGs is based on the premise that human development is the responsibility of all members of the international community.

While developing countries have an obligation to improve governance, economic and social conditions, they do not have the resources to achieve the goals on their own.

To achieve the Goals, developing countries will need an injection of resources and changes to global rules including:

- increased aid
- changes to unfair trading rules
- debt relief

The MDGs are not just general statements of world hopes – they set out clear and achievable targets for action. Each goal has specific indicators which are measured to evaluate the progress made towards achieving it.

The United Nations has pointed out that to achieve change we do not need further strategies or investigations into how to carry out the Goals. All we need is the political will to do so.¹

How can they be achieved?

The Global Monitoring Report 2004 is prepared by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and reports specifically on how the policies to achieve the Goals are being implemented.

It states that on current trends, most Goals will not be met by most countries, with the most significant shortfall in sub-Saharan Africa—the world's poorest region.²

While the Goals are still achievable the Report notes that there is an urgent need for all parties to take further action if the Goals are to be met.

The World Bank estimates that approximately US\$50–70 billion per year in additional assistance is needed to achieve the Goals, roughly doubling current levels of assistance. This sounds a lot, but not when you compare it to the US\$900 billion currently spent on defence worldwide.³

The Global Monitoring Report notes that action taken by developed countries has fallen short of commitments. It also notes that the key areas for action by developed countries are in trade and aid.

What can Australia do?

Australia has committed to the Millennium Development Goals, but has not set up a specific action plan, nor is it using the Goals as specific targets in its overseas aid program.

Aid

In the 2004–05 Budget, Australia has allocated 0.26 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) for aid. Although this is an increase on the 2003–04 budget, it is still well below the internationally agreed figure of 0.7 percent.

Within the figure of 0.26 percent, 33 percent of aid will go towards governance projects, such as law and order projects in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Only 26 percent will go to basics like health and education.

Trade

Australia has worked with developing countries to try to address extremely high levels of agricultural protection (for example, subsidies which are money contributed by governments to keep the cost of their country's goods globally competitive) by the European Union, the United States and Japan.

While this is an important step in assisting developing countries in accessing the benefits of the global trading system, more needs to be done.

Debt relief

Another area in which Australia can support the actions of developing countries in achieving the MDGs is in the area of debt relief. Many developing countries face high levels of debt. This means that their governments must use a large proportion of their limited budgets to repay debts to wealthy creditor countries.

The money used to repay debt cannot be spent on basic services such as health care, education, water and sanitation—Millennium Development Goal priorities.

Every year, Africa pays out more in debt repayments than it receives in aid. In early 2004, Australia cancelled the debt it was owed by Nicaragua. That money can now be spent on essential services like health and education. However other developing countries still owe debts to Australia.

Developing countries and the MDGs

Developing countries regularly prepare strategy papers to act as action plans for development. More and more of these papers are reflecting the Millennium Development Goals as a part of their plans. Many developed countries prepare Goal 8 reports to evaluate their performance under the MDGs.

There is cause for concern that many countries will not meet the Goals by 2015. Some, particularly in Africa and areas of Asia, are lagging behind and are unlikely to reach the goals without a significant injection of resources and effort.

But there are also success stories, such as middle-income countries China and Thailand who have already met or will soon meet several of the Goals. Some countries are developing 'Millennium Development Goal-plus' agendas, where they have achieved the Goals and are now going beyond these goals.

Endnotes

¹ United Nations (10 September 2004) *Roadmap towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Declaration: Report of the Secretary-General 6 September 2001* [Online] Available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/56/a56326.pdf>

²See -

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/GLOBALMONITORINGEXT/0,,pagePK:64022007~theSitePK:278515,00.html>

³ James Wolfensohn, Brandeis University Graduation Commencement Address, May 23 2004.