

FROM THE UNITED NATIONS

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS- 2010

By Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld

In the year 2000 the member states at the UN undertook an ambitious challenge to meet the basic needs of the globe. They set eight goals to be achieved by 2015. These goals, for the world's well being, are designed to free a major portion of humanity from the shackles of extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease. They also established targets for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. The plan was designed to be affordable, measurable and doable. Progress can be monitored.

This promise is not based on pity or charity but on solidarity, justice and the increased awareness that we are increasingly dependent on one another for our shared prosperity and security.

The UN will meet in September 2010 for a full review on where we are now, what has been learned and how to use these lessons for the next 5 years.

Where are we now ?

Progress on Goal 1, extreme poverty reduction, has been uneven. In 2008 there were still 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty, less than 1.8 billion in 1990. However, China accounted for much of the decline. In 2009, an estimated 55 million more people will be living in extreme poverty than anticipated before the economic crisis.

Brazil is an instructive exception. Social progress in Brazil was remarkable. The number of poor fell significantly. At the same time, Brazil's notoriously unequal income distribution has been reduced. The progress stems from jobs and higher income economic growth. Better social services accounts for a big share in the fall in inequality. Social policy matters.

The encouraging trend in hunger since the early 1990's was reversed in 2008 due to higher food prices.

There are some successes. Major improvements were made in Goal 2, education. In the developing world as a whole, primary education enrollment was up. In some countries crossing the 90% threshold. Also, more girls are in school. Death of children under 5 years declined steadily world wide- around 9 million in 2007 down from 13 million in 1990.

There has been some progress in Goal 5, reducing maternal mortality. The maternal death toll world wide dropped from 526,000 in 1980 to around 343,000 in 2008. While encouraging the number of unnecessary deaths is much too large. Deliveries attended by skilled health workers in developing countries have increased since 1990, but is still inadequate.

The Save the Children annual state of the world's mothers recently ranked the best places to be a mother. Norway was the best, Afghanistan at the bottom of the 160 countries listed. The US did not fare well; it was 28th below Greece, Portugal and many western European countries. The chief reason cited by the report was that despite advanced medical technology, more young mothers die, either in childbirth or in the years after because American working mothers get less maternity leave and lower benefits. Social policy matters.

There has been insufficient progress in Goal 3, promoting Gender equality and empowerment of women. Redressing gender inequality is one of the most difficult tasks almost everywhere, with serious implications for many of the other goals. A root cause of gender disadvantage and oppression lies in societal attitudes, cultural norms as well as power structures.

Women and girls make up 60% of the world's poorest people and two-thirds of the world's illiterates. Yet, with education and empowerment they can lead healthy lives, lift themselves and their families out of poverty and disease have fewer children and healthier children who are more likely to attend school themselves.

There is overwhelming evidence that women's empowerment through schooling and employment opportunities has the most far reaching effects on the lives of all- men, women and children. It reduces child mortality and is more influential than economic growth in moderating fertility rates. Amartya Sen, Noble prize winner in Economics points out that some districts of India have high fertility rates, others with more gender equality already have fertility rates lower than the United States and Britain.

Gender equality has received serious resistance from many institutions and countries. Thirty years ago the UN adopted a convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and has been

ratified by 186 member states. The US has not ratified and some states resist implementation.

CEDAW has had some positive effects. Some 22 member states have asserted their right not to implement some provisions. For example some have balked if it conflicts with their "family code ". The United Arab Emirate stated that it will not implement provisions contrary to Sharia law. Many countries and most Moslem countries have significant reservations to CEDAW that nullify their commitment to gender equality.

Ultimately, full partnership of men and women is vital to the achievement of the Millennium goals.

In summary:

1. Economic growth, when it creates jobs, is important but can be insufficient for progress.
2. Gender equality and empowerment has been shown to be essential for progress.
3. Social policy matters.

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