The Millennium Development Goals – A Force for Global Partnership

The Millennium Summit in September 2000 marked an historic turning point for global cooperation. Member States unanimously agreed on eight goals, now widely known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that provide a 15 year framework for the international community to work together to ensure that the benefits of development reach all individuals. Exactly ten years later, the UN General Assembly will convene a High-Level Plenary Meeting at the opening of its 65th session in September 2010 to review progress on the MDGs. With five years remaining before the 2015 deadline, it is timely to assess the successes, deliberate on the challenges, and find new ways to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs.

Thus far, the global commitment to reach the MDGs remains strong and considerable success has been achieved against many of the Goals. Accordingly, the United Nations 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report informs us that significant progress has been made to eradicate poverty and hunger. With the global poverty rate expected to fall to 15 per cent by 2015, this translates to half the number of people living under the international poverty line compared to 1990. The report also documents major advances towards achieving universal primary education with school enrolment increasing in some of the poorest countries as well as remarkable improvements in healthcare with reduction in child mortality from 12.5 million in 1990 to 8.8 million by 2008. Moreover, in the 5 years from 2003 to 2008 significant advancements have been made towards combating HIV/AIDS with the number of patients receiving antiretroviral therapy increasing tenfold, from 400,000 to 4 million. Based on the report’s findings, it is evident that setting bold, collective goals that are nationally owned and supported by the international community can yield significant results in the fight against poverty where the benefits of the MDGs can be shared by many.

Persistent and Emerging Challenges that Threaten the Millennium Development Goals

Despite considerable success, persistent and emerging challenges however threaten the reach of the MDGs to some of the poorest and the most vulnerable groups within and across countries. According to the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report, 42 million people had been displaced by conflict or persecution in 2009 and large populations of refugees remain in camps with limited opportunities to improve their lives. Moreover, the number of people who are undernourished has continued to grow, with progress in reducing the prevalence of hunger having stalled in some regions between 2000 and 2007. Furthermore, since the signing of the Millennium Declaration new challenges have emerged that may unravel some of the hard-won development gains achieved towards the MDGs. In his Report on Human Security (A/64/701), the Secretary-General warned that the impact of climate change is contributing to persistent poverty, displacement and societal tensions. Meanwhile, the global financial and economic crisis threatens the steady progress to halve the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day. And the sudden rise in global food prices has forced over 100 million people below the poverty line.

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Today, the achievement of the MDGs is more important than ever in ensuring long-term security, peace, and sustainable development. And despite the uneven progress, the past decade has shown that the resources and the know-how necessary to achieve the MDGs are available. What is needed is to turn the current and emerging challenges into opportunities that are rooted in proper analysis and the development of appropriate actions.

Securing Millennium Development Goals: The Human Security Approach

Many of those left behind reside in the least developed countries, landlocked and Small Island Developing States, and countries vulnerable to recurring natural hazards and violent conflicts. To this end, the core elements of the human security notion can help galvanise our efforts to increase the pace of change and deliver on the promises of the Millennium Summit. Human security can also help ensure that progress achieved to date can be sustained over the next 5 years and beyond. As a comprehensive, people-centred, context-specific, multi-sectoral and preventive framework, the human security notion provides Governments and communities with invaluable tools to advance programmes and policies that counter and address current and emerging threats. Improvements in human security directly and positively impact people’s daily lives and, as a result, give rise to more immediate and tangible results that extend the reach of the MDGs to the most vulnerable, including rural communities, internally displaced persons, migrants, ethnic minorities and the poorest households.

Moreover, the human security notion focuses on the interrelationship between the eight Goals and highlights how success in one goal is positively linked to progress in others. In line with such synergistic and multiplier effects, the human security notion advocates for the establishment of partnerships that draw from the capacities, resources and expertise of a wide range of actors from across the United Nations system as well as the private and public sectors at the local, national, regional and international levels. Such an approach ensures coherence on the goals and responsibilities as well as the allocation of resources among the various actors, thereby minimizing duplication and accelerating the impact of our collective efforts.

Most importantly, human security advances policies and actions that are aligned with the particular needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of those impacted. Such an approach promotes supportive programmes that enhance individual, community and national capacities and thereby ensure the sustainability of actions taken today and into the future.

The General Assembly Formal Thematic Debate on Human Security

Member States gathered at the General Assembly on 20 and 21 May, 2010 for a formal thematic debate to consider the report of the Secretary-General on Human Security (A/64/701) and a panel discussion on “People-Centred Approaches: The Added Value of Human Security.” Moderated by Ambassador Štiglic of Slovenia, panellists included Ms. Sonia Picado, member of the Advisory Board on Human Security, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, UN Chef de Cabinet, Sir Richard Jolly, Honorary Professor and Research Associate at the Institute of Development Studies, and Ms. Sakiko Fukuda Parr, Professor of International Affairs at the New School.

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Bibliography:

- **Human Security**, Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/701), United Nations 2010
- **Keeping the promise: A forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015**, Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/655), United Nations 2010
- **Millennium Development Goals Report**, United Nations 2010
- **What Will it Take to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals**, UNDP 2010

An extensive list of human security publications can be found in the Human Security Unit Digital Library.
Opening the proceedings, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the General Assembly that the interconnected nature of the world meant that today’s crises and catastrophes can transcend borders and threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people everywhere. Pointing to the recent food, economic and financial crises, the Secretary-General highlighted that no region has been left untouched as a result of these crises. Furthermore, in presenting his report on human security to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General stressed the international community’s shared responsibility to ensure that the gains of today are not lost to the crisis of tomorrow. Calling for actions that focus on people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and preventative strategies at every level, the Secretary-General noted that the concept of human security can underpin the work of the United Nations by helping rebuild war-torn societies; preventing and responding to natural disasters; and bolstering pro-poor globalization and inclusive development for all.

While some Member States highlighted the need to further discuss and define the notion of human security, others spoke of the added value of human security in providing the international community with a unifying framework to address the root causes and overcome the negative repercussions of new and emerging crises. The concept of human security was also viewed by some Member States as having important applications for longer-term economic and social development. In this respect, it was noted that the right of human beings to live in freedom and dignity, shielded from poverty and fear, is not only at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations but is also crucial to achieving and sustaining the MDGs beyond 2015.

Tackling Rural Poverty in Bhutan – A UNTFHS Funded Project

Faced with difficult living conditions due to an unfavourable mountainous terrain, inadequate landholdings, and limited communication among highly scattered settlements, the rural population in Bhutan is lagging behind in their achievement of the MDGs. Moreover, natural disasters and fluctuations in demand and supply are placing considerable strain on the livelihoods and the long-term development of these communities. As a result, 38% of the rural population lives below the national poverty line compared to 4.2% of the urban population. Literacy rates in rural areas stand at 52%, with net school enrollment below 70% in some of the poorest and most remote districts. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate is increasing, especially among the youth; and high child mortality and poor maternal health continue to persist. The combined impact of these vulnerabilities has considerable negative implications for the human security of the affected populations.

To better address the needs of rural communities in Bhutan, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security is providing support to a project entitled ”Basic Education, Literacy, Income and Employment Security for Vulnerable People Including Children and Women in Bhutan.” Implemented by UNDP in partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF, UNV and WFP, in addition to contributions by the Royal Government of Bhutan. To learn more on human security – including the work of the Unit, the Advisory Board and the UNTFHS’s current projects and guidelines – http://ochaonline.un.org/humansecurity

Supporting job creation and income generation in rural communities of Bhutan by providing vocational training at Community Development Centers established as part of the UNTFHS funded project. ©UN/2010

Empowering women and reducing rural poverty in Bhutan through skill training and income generation initiatives. © UN/2010
Bhutan and local non-governmental organizations, the goal of the project is to tackle rural poverty in Bhutan by empowering vulnerable people through the provision of multi-sectoral responses that strengthen the resilience of rural communities.

Specifically, the project seeks to enhance the capacities of the affected populations through non-formal and vocational education; expand literacy by increasing school enrolment of rural children; improve access to health services and sanitation infrastructures; support income generation and job creation schemes through micro-finance services and the establishment of Community Development Centers; advance the contributions of civil society organizations by working with vulnerable populations; and promote gender equality. The main beneficiaries of the project are geographically and socio-economically disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of the Bhutanese society, particularly in rural areas of southern and eastern Bhutan. For further information on this and other UNTFHS funded projects, please visit the HSU website.

**Latest News and Events**

**A symposium on “Human Security: Its History and Future – Towards the Achievement of the MDGs,”** was co-organized by the Human Security Unit-OCHA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Waseda University in Tokyo on 15 July 2010. The symposium reviewed and evaluated efforts in promoting human security and discussed ways to operationalize the concept in today’s globalized world. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the symposium via a video message. The Secretary-General highlighted the contributions of the symposium in view of the General Assembly’s review of the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010. Madam Sadako Ogata, Chair of the Advisory Board on Human Security and President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency provided the keynote address while other speakers included Mr. Kishore Mandhyan, Deputy Director for Political, Peacekeeping, and Humanitarian Affairs, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Honorable Lord Mark Malloch-Brown, Vice-Chairman, The World Economic Forum, and Ms Hilde Johnson, Deputy Director, UNICEF. A panel discussion including additional speakers from the academia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, UN Organizations, and the World Bank further deliberated on the topic of the symposium.

**Regional Training Workshop – ‘Applying the Human Security Concept in Project and Programme Development, Implementation and Impact Assessment’** will be held in San José, Costa Rica from 12-15 October 2010. Organized by the Human Security Unit-OCHA, in collaboration with UNDP Costa Rica and the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, participants will be invited from UN Country Teams and other interested partners from across Central America and the Caribbean. Information on previous workshops in Ghana, Thailand, South Africa and Kenya, including copies of the training materials can be found on the HSU website.

**Ninth Meeting of the Advisory Board on Human Security** will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 2-3 November, 2010. Documents in support of the meeting will be made available on the HSU website.