



INTRODUCTION TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND FIVE KEY ASKS

We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. (Millennium Declaration, 2000)

In September 2000, the leaders of the nations gathered at the United Nations to consider what the new millennium might look like. One of their key agreements was that the future should be one in which extreme poverty was relegated to the dustbin of history. They gave expression to this by formulating eight goals to be achieved by the year 2015.

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

If achieved, these goals would see the world well on the way to being one in which all people could enjoy wellbeing. For each of these goals specific, measurable targets were set, which allows progress to be measured.

Importantly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognise that wellbeing is multi-dimensional. For this reason they address issues such as income, hunger, work, education, gender, healthcare, and the environment. They also recognise that people living in poverty are impacted by social, political and economic systems that, at their worst, impose terrible constraints and, at their best, enable people to secure their wellbeing. Goal 8 highlights that these systems extend to the ways nations relate to each other and that in many ways the international system is working to benefit richer and more powerful nations but not those nations where many people live in extreme poverty. For this reason, Goal 8 calls for countries such as Australia to enter into a genuine partnership with poorer countries to see the goals achieved.

Since their adoption the Millennium Development Goals have become a widely accepted measure for international relationships. They can be used to evaluate such things as trade negotiations – will they help each partner achieve the MDGs?; debt burdens – any country that will not achieve the MDGs by 2015 should be offered debt relief; aid flows – aid should be directed towards helping poorer countries achieve the MDGs and be sufficient to enable them to do so; climate change – if climate change threatens the achievement of the MDGs, what must we do to prevent this? For Australia the Goals serve as a tool to measure whether we are in fact being a good international citizen.

Micah Challenge believes there are five areas in particular that Australia needs to act on to see the MDGs achieved.

1. Give more and better aid

Achieving the MDGs requires developing countries to implement poverty reducing policies, such as developing health and education systems that target the poor, constructing and maintaining essential infrastructure such as roads, transport, telecommunications, clean water and sanitation, and fostering economic growth that is inclusive of the poor. Although the bulk of the funding for such services will normally come from developing countries themselves, most lack all the resources they need to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Additional resources are required, including aid from 'developed' countries.

It has been estimated that to meet the global MDG financing gap, developed countries need to achieve aid budgets of 0.7% GNI by 2015 and ensure the bulk of these resources are devoted to helping developing countries achieve the MDGs. In 2009-10 Australia's aid commitment stands at 0.34% of GNI. The Government has indicated it will increase Australia's aid to of 0.5% GNI by 2015-16. These commitments, though welcome, are well short of the 0.7% GNI international aid target and lower than most other OECD nations. In line with our international commitments Australia should therefore announce a timetable to lift Australia's Official Development Assistance to 0.7% GNI by 2015.

Quality of aid is as important as aid volume. Australia must ensure that its aid program is focused on helping developing countries achieve the MDGs. In 2008 the Government declared a renewed focus on the MDGs and has taken concrete actions to implement this. It has increased aid to water and sanitation, healthcare, basic education and rural development. Micah Challenge affirms this focus and believes it should be extended further. In 2009 Micah Challenge is asking for substantial increases in aid funding to health care and climate change initiatives.

2. Cancel debt

Loans are one way developing countries can access funds to enable their development. Unfortunately many loans made to developing countries were not provided to fund development but were used by corrupt leaders for their own gain or were directed to poor ends. It is, however, the poor of a country who suffer, as their country's resources are used to pay off debt rather than provide services to its citizens. Although significant debt relief has been provided for some poorer countries, debt still remains a problem for many. Micah Challenge believes debt relief should be extended to all countries off-track to achieving the MDGs.

3. Ensure trade justice

It has been estimated that if the 53 lowest income countries in the world could increase their share of global trade by 1% their income would increase by over US\$120 billion a year. This is three times as much as these countries receive in aid. Unfortunately the structure of the world trade system tends to favour the interests of richer nations. Micah Challenge believes the Australian Government should advocate for fair trade rules and help developing countries improve their capacity to trade.

4. Support good governance

Governance refers to the effectiveness of governments in delivering services to their citizens. Poor governance can be the result of low skills, inadequate resources, and corruption. All of these are significant problems in many developing countries and improvements are essential to achieving the MDGs. Micah Challenge believes Australia can support good governance in developing countries through actions such as programs to strengthen the capacity of the public service in developing countries, support for initiatives that help citizens of poor countries hold their governments accountable, and the promotion of international standards to combat corruption and promote good governance.

5. Tackle climate change

Climate change is one of the most serious threats to sustainable human development and poverty reduction. The Stern Report (2006) stated that: *"The poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem. Their low incomes make it difficult to finance adaptation. The international community has an obligation to support them in adapting to climate change. Without such support there is a serious risk that development progress will be undermined."*

The challenge before the international community is twofold: (1) to avoid the most dangerous impacts of climate change by keeping temperature increases below two degrees; (2) to adapt to the impacts of unavoidable climate change. Developing countries will require substantial assistance to engage in effective mitigation and adaptation.

Micah Challenge calls on the Australian Government to:

- Take a leading role in international efforts to reach an agreement to keep the global temperature increase below two degrees. This should include a recognition that while all countries must play a part in mitigation efforts, developed countries have a responsibility to shoulder a significantly larger portion of the burden due to our much greater per capita contribution to climate change (both historically and currently) and our greater capacity to finance mitigation. Australia must be prepared to reduce its greenhouse emissions by up to 40% over 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80-90% by 2050.
- Commit to its fair share of external funding required by developing countries to adapt to climate change. At present the amount required is uncertain but it could be as high as \$100-150 billion pa, of which Australia's fair share would be \$2-3 billion pa. This funding should be over and above the international aid commitment of 0.7% GNI.

See the Micah Challenge website for more details of the five areas.

