

Micah Challenge MP Briefing Sheet 09

About Micah Challenge

Micah Challenge is a global movement of Christian aid and development agencies, churches, groups and individuals which aims to deepen people's engagement with the poor and to reduce poverty as an integral expression of Christian faith. Micah Challenge takes its name from the prophet Micah, who wrote, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

The Problem

Almost 1.4 billion people live in extreme poverty¹. This means they live on less than US\$1.25 a day, which is insufficient to meet their most basic needs. They are hungry, susceptible to disease and lack access to things Australians take for granted, such as clean water, decent sanitation and access to health care.

The devastating impact of poverty is captured in child mortality. Each year 9.7 million children die before reaching the age of five². These deaths are from causes that are mostly preventable or treatable. The reason they occur is that children in poverty are unable to access the care they need. Thus a child born in a developing country is over 13 times more likely to die within the first five years of life than a child born in an industrialised country³.

While progress is being made – the proportion of children dying before five years of age fell from 93 to 72 deaths per 1,000 between 1990 and 2006 and has fallen by 60% since 1960⁴ – this progress is threatened by the food price crisis, the financial crisis, climate change and the stalling of global trade talks. The World Bank estimates that as a result of the financial crisis 200,000-400,000 more infants will die each year between now and 2015⁵.

What We Are Asking

Micah Challenge believes Australia is not shouldering its fair share of the global effort required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. While Australia has taken some strong actions, these fall short of our stated aspirations. It is time for the Australian Government to move beyond aspirations to concrete action.

Aid Volume

Well targeted aid enables poorer nations to make investments in health, education, infrastructure, environment and other forms of capital that will help them end extreme poverty. Australia currently devotes 0.34% (or \$3.8 billion) of its national income in official development assistance and the Government has committed to increase this to 0.5% by 2015. This still leaves Australia well short of the international aid target of 0.7% GNI.

Both the current and previous Australian Governments have identified an aid budget of 0.7% GNI as an "aspirational goal". Micah Challenge believes the Government should make this a firm, timetabled commitment, calls all political parties to indicate the date by which Government will achieve the international aid target and calls on minor parties to call the Government to make good on its aspirations.

¹ World Bank (2008), *World Development Indicators 2008*. Note that \$1.25 is the new international poverty line and refers to 'purchasing power parity' in 2005. According to the WDI2008 report "PPP can be defined as the number of units of a country's currency needed to buy the same amount of goods and services in that country as one U.S. dollar would buy in the United States".

² World Health Organisation

³ UN Millennium Campaign - EndPoverty2015 (Sept 2008) Goal 4 Fact Sheet.

⁴ UN Millennium Campaign - EndPoverty2015 (Sept 2008) Goal 4 Fact Sheet.

⁵ Reported in 2009-10 International Development Assistance Budget Papers.

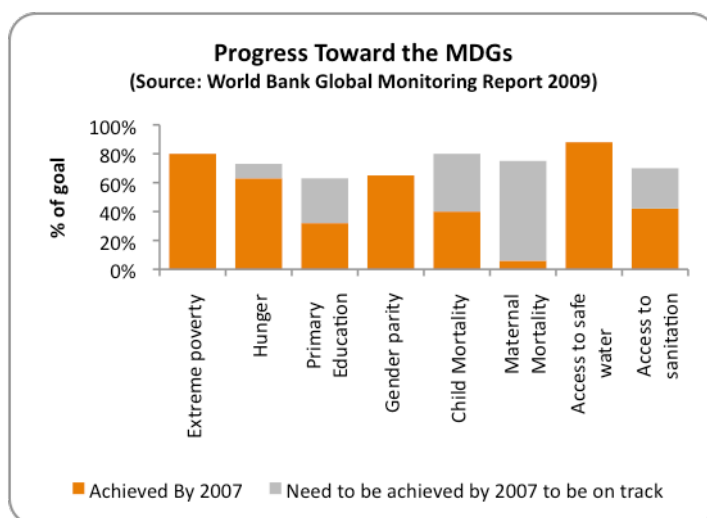
Aid Focus

The Government has made the Millennium Development Goals a central focus of its aid program, which led to substantial increases in the 2009-10 aid budget for water and sanitation, basic education, health and rural development. These increases were well-targeted given slow progress on the education and health MDGs.

Achieving the health MDGs will require \$50-60 billion a year in development assistance by 2011-12⁶, of which Australia's 'fair share' is \$1180 million.

Micah Challenge calls on all parties to support a scaling up of aid to the health

sector from the current \$600 million to \$880 million in 2010-11 and \$1180 million in 2011-12.



Climate Change

Climate change is already impacting people living in poverty and threatens to undo progress on the Millennium Development Goals. Developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change because they are more dependent on their natural resources and have a lower capacity to cope with environmental hazards. Poor communities around the world are already suffering from a range of impacts such as more frequent droughts in Africa, a destabilising Asian monsoon, rising sea levels and more frequent and intense storms in the Pacific. Climate change cuts across all development issues and it is an absolute priority that Australia, as one of the world's highest per-capita greenhouse gas emitters and largest coal exporter, makes strong contributions to global mitigation and adaptation frameworks

Micah Challenge calls all parties to:

- **Ensure Australia takes a lead in achieving a global agreement to keep climate change below 2° and assumes a fair share of the burden in achieving that goal;**
- **Advocate for an international fund to help poorer countries adapt to climate change and commit to contributing a fair share to that fund;**
- **Ensure that aid for climate change mitigation and adaptation is additional to achieving the international aid target of 0.7% GNI.**

What We Are Asking You To Do

1. Make global poverty and realisation of the MDGs a key focus of your public service. We ask that you champion the cause of more and better aid and action on climate change as critical ways Australia can assist people living in poverty;
2. Speak up on poverty and the MDGs in the Parliament (eg make an adjournment speech on this issue); among your constituents (eg electorate newsletter, speeches at schools).
3. Join the Parliamentary Friends of the MDGs group chaired by Julie Owens, MP, and Senator Guy Barnett.
4. Contact the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance letting them know of your concerns around aid, climate change and the MDGs.
5. Hold the Government accountable to make good on its stated aspirations for aid and for an effective global agreement on climate change.

⁶ Make Poverty History (2008), *Nine Steps to Achieving the Millennium Development Health Goals in Our Region*