Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty
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Human Development Report 2003

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This Report is about a simple idea whose time has come: the Millennium Development Goals.

Born of the historic Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 countries at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, these eight Goals—ranging from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to enrolling all boys and girls everywhere in primary school by 2015—are transforming development. Governments, aid agencies and civil society organizations everywhere are re-orienting their work around the Goals.

But despite these welcome commitments in principle to reducing poverty and advancing other areas of human development, in practice—as this Report makes very clear—the world is already falling short. For some of the Goals much of the world is on track. But when progress is broken down by region and country and within countries, it is clear that a huge amount of work remains. More than 50 nations grew poorer over the past decade. Many are seeing life expectancy plummet due to HIV/AIDS. Some of the worst performers—often torn by conflict—are seeing school enrolments shrink and access to basic health care fall. And nearly everywhere the environment is deteriorating.

The central part of this Report is devoted to assessing where the greatest problems are, analysing what needs to be done to reverse these setbacks and offering concrete proposals on how to accelerate progress everywhere towards achieving all the Goals. In doing so, it provides a persuasive argument for why the world is already falling short. For some of the Goals much of the world is on track. But when progress is broken down by region and country and within countries, it is clear that a huge amount of work remains. More than 50 nations grew poorer over the past decade. Many are seeing life expectancy plummet due to HIV/AIDS. Some of the worst performers—often torn by conflict—are seeing school enrolments shrink and access to basic health care fall. And nearly everywhere the environment is deteriorating.

The central part of this Report is devoted to assessing where the greatest problems are, analysing what needs to be done to reverse these setbacks and offering concrete proposals on how to accelerate progress everywhere towards achieving all the Goals. In doing so, it provides a persuasive argument for why, even in the poorest countries, there is still hope that the Goals can be met. But though the Goals provide a new framework for development that demands results and increases accountability, they are not a programmatic instrument. The political will and good policy ideas underpinning any attempt to meet the Goals can work only if they are translated into nationally owned, nationally driven development strategies guided by sound science, good economics and transparent, accountable governance.

That is why this Report also sets out a Millennium Development Compact. Building on the commitment that world leaders made at the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development to forge a “new partnership between developed and developing countries”—a partnership aimed squarely at implementing the Millennium Declaration—the Compact provides a broad framework for how national development strategies and international support from donors, international agencies and others can be both better aligned and commensurate with the scale of the challenge of the Goals. And the Compact puts responsibilities squarely on both sides: requiring bold reforms from poor countries and obliging donor countries to step forward and support those efforts.

The aim is not to propose yet another new vision or one-size-fits-all solution to the problems of the developing world; the past 50 years have been littered with the skeletons of far too many of those. Rather, the Compact seeks to highlight the key areas of intervention—from democratic governance to economic stability to commitments to health and education—that should guide national efforts and international support for the Goals. In middle-income countries these interventions should be integrated with regular budget processes and long-term development strategies. In the poorest countries Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers will likely be the most appropriate instrument. The point is not to provide something new or place additional burdens on overstretched governments, but to offer concrete ideas on how to ensure that the fine words of the Millennium Declaration—elevating poverty to the top of the global agenda—are matched by real, country-owned action plans that make those words a reality.

There are good technocratic reasons for taking this approach. As this Report makes clear, the Goals not only support human development, they are also achievable with the right policies and sufficient resources. But the real power of the Goals is political. They are the first global development vision that
combines a global political endorsement with a clear focus on, and means to engage directly with, the world’s poor people.

Poor people care about what happens to their income levels. Poor people care about whether their children get into school. Poor people care about whether their daughters are discriminated against in terms of access to education. Poor people care enormously about pandemics and about infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which are devastating communities in Africa. And poor people care a lot about their environment, and whether they have access to clean water and sanitation. Now, with democracy spreading across the developing world, poor people can finally do more than care.

In a very real sense the Goals are a development manifesto for ordinary citizens around the world: time-bound, measurable, pocketbook issues that they can immediately understand—and more important, with adequate data, the Goals seek to hold their governments and the wider international community accountable for their achievement.

That is important. Because while the main focus of the Millennium Development Compact is the first seven Goals and how they apply to developing countries, it is no exaggeration to say that the overall success or failure of the new global partnership the world is trying to build will hinge on achieving the eighth Goal: the one that sets out the commitments of rich countries to help poor ones who are undertaking good faith economic, political and social reforms.

A key conclusion of this Report is that while reallocating and mobilizing more domestic resources towards targets related to the Goals, strengthening governance and institutions and adopting sound social and economic policies are all necessary to achieve the Goals, they are far from sufficient. The Report is full of examples of countries that are model reformers—but that have not achieved strong growth because geographic isolation, hostile environments or other handicaps mean that sustained external support at well above existing levels is critical to advance their development.

Long-term initiatives to halve hunger and poverty will fail without fundamental restructuring of the global trade system—particularly in agriculture—that includes rich countries dismantling subsidies, lowering tariffs and levelling the playing field. The fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases will be lost without effective supplies of affordable, essential drugs to poor countries. Stable, long-term fiscal planning will be impossible for some of the poorest countries without more systematic, sustained debt relief. And last but by no means least, it is important to remember that estimates of an additional $50 billion a year in development assistance to meet the Goals are a minimum—and assume large-scale reallocations of and better access to domestic resources and other sources of finance.

If the fundamental vision of the Goals as a means of better managing globalization on behalf of poor people is to be met, the Goals need to be seen as an indivisible package. It is a package that holds unprecedented promise for improving human development around the world—and a promise that every country has pledged to keep. The challenge is to hold countries to their promises and help them reach the Goals.

As with previous Reports, this is an independent analysis seeking to advance the debate on human development, not a formal statement of UN or UNDP policy. Nevertheless, as an outline of the central development obstacles and opportunities over the next decade, we believe that it helps frame an ambitious agenda for UNDP and our development partners in the months and years to come.

Mark Malloch Brown
Administrator, UNDP

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Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

Director

*Human Development Report 2003*
## Contents

### OVERVIEW

 Millennials Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty  

The Millennium Development Compact  

- Giving priority to countries left behind  
- Critical thresholds for escaping poverty traps  
- Policy clusters for escaping poverty traps  
- Implementing the Millennium Development Compact  
- Conclusion

### CHAPTER 1 The Millennium Development Goals

An agenda for accelerating human development  

- Origin, evolution and followup  
- Do global goals make a difference?  
- Addressing the critics  
- Global goals must be country owned

### CHAPTER 2 Priority challenges in meeting the Goals

Stark contrasts between and within regions  

- Human development reversals in the 1990s  
- Struggles to achieve the Goals  
- Good performance by some of the poorest countries  
- Widening gaps within countries: who is being left behind?

### CHAPTER 3 Overcoming structural barriers to growth—to achieve the Goals

From human development to economic growth—and back  

- Recent patterns—and problems—of global economic growth  
- Structural challenges of unfavourable geography, small markets and high trading costs  
- Good policies, economic growth and human development  
- Weak policies, economic decline and human poverty  
- Escaping poverty traps  
- Growth policies that benefit poor people

### CHAPTER 4 Public policies to improve people’s health and education

Achieving the hunger Goal  

Achieving the education Goals  

Achieving the health Goals
Achieving the water and sanitation Goals 103
Cross-cutting priorities 107

CHAPTER 5 Private finance and provision of health, education and water 111
Why has private provision increased in poor countries? 111
Health 112
Education 114
Water and sanitation 116
Promising approaches 117

CHAPTER 6 Public policies to ensure environmental sustainability 123
Environmental resources 125
Policy responses 126

CHAPTER 7 Mobilizing grass-roots support for the Goals 133
Decentralization—its rise, its role, its requirements 134
Social movements and innovations in popular participation 140

CHAPTER 8 Policy, not charity: what rich countries can do to help achieve the Goals 145
Aid—more and more effective 146
Debt relief—faster and deeper 152
Trade—opening markets, reducing subsidies 154
Global technology—sharing the fruits of global knowledge 157
Living up to the commitments of the Millennium Declaration: policy, not charity 160

Notes 163
Bibliographic note 167
Bibliography 169

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION
Poverty, globalization and growth: perspectives on some of the statistical links Joseph E. Stiglitz 80

BOXES
1.1 The Millennium Development Goals, human development and human rights share a common motivation 28
1.2 Do global goals make a difference? 31
2.1 Building statistical capacity—unprecedented demand, urgent opportunity 35
2.2 What is happening with global income inequality? Grotesque levels, ambiguous trends 39
2.3 Measuring income poverty: where to draw the line? 42
2.4 Struggling to meet the Goals—defining top priority and high priority countries 44
2.5 Violent conflict and the Goals 45
2.6 Great leaps forward are possible in years—not decades 46
2.7 Disaggregated data within countries: national human development reports 47
2.8 Conflicts within countries 48
3.1 Growth needed to halve income poverty 67
3.2 Bangladesh—large and inland, with access to the coast 71
3.3 Challenges in the Andean region 72

xi
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>China and India—impressive growth, important differences</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>The Millennium Development Goals and conflict countries</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>What’s needed to make the Millennium Development Compact work in Uganda</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Women’s capabilities and agency—key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Policy lessons from high-achieving countries in health and education</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Increasing soil fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Farm policies and food security</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Military spending or education? The inconsistencies of government action</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Thailand’s success in preventing HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Policy priorities and technical interventions</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Integrating vertical programmes into working health systems</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Ensuring essential medicines for all—success in Bhutan</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Affordable sanitation in India</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>South Africa and the “right” to water</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Social services and the General Agreement on Trade in Services</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>User fees in South Africa and Bolivia</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Successful state-run water systems</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Metropolitan Manila and Buenos Aires: mixed record of experience with water privatization</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>The Bamako Initiative: pooling community resources for health care</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>How global climate change threatens developing countries</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Improving the lives of slum dwellers</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Involving local residents in conservation in Guanacaste, Costa Rica</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Promoting equity and the environment—a creative fiscal example from Brazil</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Global fisheries—getting sunk by subsidies</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Felling forests—with subsidies</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Policy responses to climate change</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—education policies that deliver results</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Mutual pressures for accountability—between local governments and civil society—strengthen governance in Ceará, Brazil</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Decentralization helps increase equity in Kerala, India</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Does decentralization help reduce poverty?</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal 8</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Official development assistance: the 0.7% target</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>New financing for the Goals</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Making government-led partnerships work in Tanzania</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Refocusing technical cooperation on capacity development</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>What is the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative?</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>A proposal for restructuring debt to reach the Goals</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>The long international reach of domestic subsidies</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>The Doha gamble for Africa’s cotton exporters</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>The commitment to development index</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLES
2.1 Countries that saw a drop in the human development index, 1980s and 1990s 40
2.2 Economic growth and income poverty: strong links 41
2.3 Changes in the share and number of people living on $1 a day have been uneven 41
2.4 Big countries face big threats from HIV/AIDS by 2025, even with a moderate epidemic 43
2.5 Child mortality rates: changes in levels and in wealth gaps, selected countries, 1980s and 1990s 49
5.1 Investments in water and sanitation projects involving private participation, various countries, 1990–94 and 1995–2000 116
6.1 Why reaching the environmental Goal is so important for the other Goals 125
8.1 Net receipts of official development assistance by region, 1990 and 2001 147
8.2 Trade: exploiting the opportunities—or not 154
8.3 Post–Uruguay Round tariffs and reductions in selected countries and groups 155
8.4 Rich country responsibilities 160

FIGURES
2.1 Timeline: when will the MDGs be achieved if progress does not accelerate? 33
2.2 Comparing child mortality for OECD countries and developing regions 38
2.3 Human development setbacks 40
2.4 Fast growth is the exception—with populous countries doing well 40
2.5 Growth and income poverty links: not automatic 41
2.6 HIV/AIDS cases have skyrocketed 43
2.7 Loss of life expectancy due to HIV/AIDS 43
3.1 Per capita income and income poverty, 1990s 68
3.2 Human development and incomes 69
3.3 From human development to growth—and back 70
4.1 Educated girls lead different lives 85
4.2 Food insecurity increases 88
4.3 High household costs lead to lower primary enrolment 95
4.4 A large share of aid for health goes to basic services 101
4.5 Many urban households lack water and sanitation 104
6.1 Higher petrol consumption is associated with lower prices in OECD countries, 2001 126
8.1 Aid—what’s needed, what’s given? 146
8.2 Official development assistance (ODA) in decline 146
8.3 Official development assistance, net disbursements 147
8.4 For the poorest: caught between falling aid and level debt 152
8.5 Spending shifts from debt service to human development in 10 countries benefitting from HIPC debt relief 153
8.6 Cows and cotton receive more aid than people, 2000 155
8.7 OECD agricultural subsidies dwarf aid, 2001 156
8.8 Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) reduces child mortality despite income stagnation 158

FEATURES
2.1 Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals 51
2.2 Measuring human development: the human development indices 60
2.3 Widening gaps within countries—between areas and groups 62
   Map 1 Geographic distribution of income in China, 2000 62
   Table 1 Illiteracy rates in Brazil by region, ages 15 and older, 1990 and 2001 62
   Map 2 Adult literacy in Mexico, 2000 63
   Map 3 Human development index in the Philippines, 1994 63
   Table 2 Infant mortality rates in India by state and region, 1990s 64
   Map 4 Maternal mortality in Guatemala, 1997 64
   Map 5 Human development index in Russian regions, 2000 65
3.1 Development challenges—through the lens of geography 83
   Map 1 Classification of countries by economic structure, 1995 83
   Map 2 Country classification by average annual growth in GDP per capita, 1990 83
   Table 1 Economic growth rates by country group, 1980–98 83
   Table 2 Economic growth rates by population size and location, 1980–98 84

Note on statistics in the Human Development Report 190

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL INDICATORS
MDG 1 Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
   Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education 198
MDG 2 Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women 203
MDG 3 Goal 4 Reduce child mortality
   Goal 5 Improve maternal health 208
MDG 4 Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases 213
MDG 5 Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability: land and air 218
MDG 6 Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability: water and sanitation 223
MDG 7 Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development: development assistance and market access 228
MDG 8 Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development: landlocked countries and small island
devolving states 229
MDG 9 Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development: debt sustainability 231
MDG 10 Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development: work opportunities, access to drugs and access to
new technologies 232

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS
Monitoring human development: enlarging people’s choices . . .
1 Human development index 237
2 Human development index trends 241
3 Human and income poverty: developing countries 245
4 Human and income poverty: OECD countries, Central & Eastern Europe & CIS 248

. . . To lead a long and healthy life . . .
5 Demographic trends 250
6 Commitment to health: access, services and resources 254
7 Leading global health crises and challenges 258
8 Survival: progress and setbacks 262
TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE . . .
9 Commitment to education: public spending  266
10 Literacy and enrolment  270
11 Technology: diffusion and creation  274

TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES NEEDED FOR A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING . . .
12 Economic performance  278
13 Inequality in income or consumption  282
14 The structure of trade  286
15 Flows of aid from DAC member countries  290
16 Flows of aid, private capital and debt  291
17 Priorities in public spending  295
18 Unemployment in OECD countries  299

WHILE PRESERVING IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS . . .
19 Energy and the environment  300

PROTECTING PERSONAL SECURITY . . .
20 Refugees and armaments  304
21 Victims of crime  308

AND ACHIEVING EQUALITY FOR ALL WOMEN AND MEN
22 Gender-related development index  310
23 Gender empowerment measure  314
24 Gender inequality in education  318
25 Gender inequality in economic activity  322
26 Gender, work burden and time allocation  326
27 Women’s political participation  327

HUMAN AND LABOUR RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS
28 Status of major international human rights instruments  331
29 Status of fundamental labour rights conventions  335
30 Basic indicators for other UN member countries  339

Technical notes
1 Calculating the human development indices  340
2 Identifying top priority and high priority countries in the Millennium Development Goals  347

Definitions of statistical terms  350
Statistical references  359
Classification of countries  361
Index to indicators  365