

Countdown to 2015: How can Ireland and the EU help save the Millennium Development Goals?

Key points

- Over the past decade since the MDGs were adopted, progress has been made but this has been uneven across goals and regions. Poverty remains high in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. The MDGs can still be achieved but not without real political will, commitment and sufficient financing.
- At the UN Summit in New York this September, Ireland and the EU must champion a massive MDGs “bail-out” including the resources and reforms necessary to achieve the Goals.
- Aid is a crucial element in delivering the MDGs. Ireland must recommit to delivering 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2015 and set out a realistic and binding timeframe for getting there.
- With hunger on the rise worldwide, Ireland and the EU must prioritise efforts to tackle hunger and its root causes by adopting a right to food approach to agriculture and food security.
- Policy Coherence for Development – ensuring that developed countries’ policies in areas such as trade, climate change and security do not undermine development – remains key to the achievement of the MDGs.

“Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains feasible with adequate commitment, policies, resources and effort. The Millennium Declaration represents the most important collective promise ever made to the world’s most vulnerable people. This promise is not based on pity or charity, but on solidarity, justice and the recognition that we are increasingly depending on one another for our shared prosperity and security.”

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General, February 2010

1. Introduction

In 2000, world leaders made a historic pledge to deliver a set of global anti-poverty targets by 2015: the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals have since formed an important framework for the international response to poverty in the developing world which, although far from comprehensive, has nevertheless proved a useful tool for galvanising action on sustainable development and the fight against poverty. However, to date, progress towards the MDGs has been mixed and the financial crisis and increasing impacts of Climate Change have further impacted on the prospects of achieving them.

This September, the international community will meet at a UN Summit in New York to review progress on the MDGs with only five years to go to the 2015 deadline. This will be a crucial opportunity to agree a much-needed “stimulus” package for the MDGs involving substantial commitments to action and to delivering on promised large-scale financing without which no poverty bail-out will be possible.

Responsibility for achieving the MDGs rests with a variety of stakeholders worldwide including developed and developing country governments, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the international community. This paper focuses primarily on the role of Ireland and the EU in delivering the Goals.

Ireland has become recognised as a dynamic international force in the area of development both within the EU and further afield. Our commitment to development comes from a long standing sense of solidarity with people in developing countries arising from our own, at times, difficult and impoverished history, our experience of famine, conflict and injustice.

As the world's largest donor, giving 56% of world aid, a major trading partner for many developing countries and with a legal foundation based on human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development, the EU has a unique responsibility towards developing countries. Therefore, it must lead in mapping out a course for the next five years towards the 2015 MDG deadline and beyond. Over the coming months, both Ireland and the EU will agree their positions for the UN MDG Summit. They must be prepared to take a stand at that Summit and give a much-needed boost to the MDGs.

The paper briefly outlines progress on the MDGs as a whole and then highlights two key areas of Trócaire’s work: tackling global hunger (MDG 1) and the fight against HIV and AIDS (MDG 6). Section four focuses on MDG 8 - “Developing a global partnership for development” - which is crucial to achievement of the other goals. Section five sets out some of the key measures that Ireland and the EU will need to implement and champion in order to put the world back on track towards achieving the MDGs.

2. Human Rights should be at the heart of the MDGs

One of the weaknesses that has been identified in the MDG framework is that they were not developed from a human rights perspective.¹ Reaching the MDGs depends, in large part, on tackling the global and social injustices which underlie them. This implies reform of global governance and greater accountability of governments, both North and South, for protecting, respecting and promoting human rights and delivering on their MDG commitments.

Central to a human rights based approach are the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment. Existing state obligations under legally-binding human rights instruments² must also be used to create greater accountability of governments for their MDG commitments. In order to help people realise their human rights, governments must also invest in basic social services such as health and education.

In the context of this year's review of the MDGs and consideration of the next steps after 2015, the human rights-based approach must be an integral part of the next generation of commitments to combating poverty in the developing world.

3. Mixed progress on the MDGs to date

During the ten years since the MDGs were adopted, the world has undergone a seismic shift in terms of the dynamics of poverty in the developing world. Climate change, international security concerns, persistent governance issues, access to energy and raw materials as well as the emergence of new powers such as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have brought change and challenge to the struggle for sustainable development.

On top of this, the financial crisis has threatened or reversed progress on the goals. The spinoff effects of the crisis for developing countries in terms of reduced access to resources and opportunities for sustainable development are likely to be enduring.

As Table 1 (below) illustrates, progress to date on the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven and varies significantly across regions with sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia lagging behind.

According to the UN Secretary General's recently published review of progress towards the MDGs,³ China's advances have led to a decline in overall poverty numbers from 1.8 billion people living in extreme poverty in 1990 to 1.4 billion in 2005 but, discounting China, poverty actually increased by 36 million people between 1990 and 2005. A shocking 50% of people in sub-Saharan Africa still live in extreme poverty and over one billion people worldwide do not have enough food.

On the education and health goals, some progress has been made although they are unlikely to be met by 2015 and there are considerable challenges such as effectively preventing the spread of HIV, addressing inequalities in access to primary schooling and ensuring good quality of education. There has been insufficient progress on the cross-cutting gender equality goal with gender-based violence continuing to be a problem of extreme magnitude, undermining development gains in less developed countries.⁴ Reducing maternal mortality is one of the goals where least progress has been made. More efforts are needed on the environmental goal, in particular, by stepping up efforts to combat climate change which is one of the major underlying causes of poverty. On the eighth goal, "Developing a global partnership for development", there has been stalemate on many of the critical issues such as trade reform, debt and delivery of financing for the MDGs.

¹ On this point and for previous commentary on the MDGs on the occasion of the 2005 UN review see Trócaire's report "More than a Numbers Game? Ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals address Structural Injustice", April 2005.

² Eg the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

³ 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, United Nations, 12 February 2010 (A/64/665).

⁴ For more information on the links between GBV and achieving the MDGs see 'Keeping Gender on the Agenda: Gender Based Violence, Poverty and Development' which Trócaire has contributed to as part of the Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence (2009). <http://www.gbv.ie/2009/11/06/keeping-gender-on-the-agenda-gender-based-violence-poverty-and-development/>

Table 1: Summary of progress on the Millennium Development Goals⁵

MDG 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Some declines have occurred in poverty levels between 1990 and 2005 but, as is the case with most of the Goals, progress is spread unevenly across regions with sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia faring the worst. Over 50% of people in sub-Saharan Africa are still living in extreme poverty. Whilst the target of halving the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day may be met globally by 2015, in part due to advances made by China, at least 1 billion people will still be living in extreme poverty at that time. Global hunger is also rising with 1.02 billion people (one-sixth of the world's population) living in hunger.
MDG 2 Achieve universal primary education	Relatively good progress on this Goal with many countries having passed the 90% enrolment threshold. However many challenges remain such as quality of education provided and high drop-out rates particularly amongst the poor.
MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Progress has been uneven and slow. Women's share of waged non-agricultural employment has increased by only three per cent since 1990 and only less than one in five (18%) of members of parliament worldwide are women. Lack of progress on gender based violence and all forms of gender inequality continue to threaten the achievement of all the Goals.
MDG 4: Reduce child mortality	Deaths in children under five worldwide have been declining. However in sub-Saharan Africa, one in seven children still die before their fifth birthday.
MDG 5: Improve maternal health	This is one of the Goals where there has been least progress. Access to reproductive health remains poor. Maternal mortality declined only slightly between 1990 and 2005 from 480 to 450 deaths per 100,000 live births.
MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Some progress has been made on the health Goal but, based on current trends, many countries are unlikely to achieve the health targets by 2015. The number of people receiving anti-retroviral treatment increased from 5% of those in need in 2000 to 42% in 2008. However, this is still far from the target of achieving universal access to treatment by 2010.
MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	Only limited progress has been made on this Goal. Progress has been made on the target on access to clean water but, as regards the sanitation target, the proportion of those still needing improved access to sanitation decreased by only 8 percentage points between 1990 and 2006. International efforts to control climate change, which is having devastating effects on developing countries, have been insufficient largely due to rich countries' intransigence and inertia.
MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development	Lack of political will is hampering progress on this key cross-cutting goal. Global aid has increased but few countries have met the UN target of 0.7% of GNI. Ireland's aid declined from a high of 0.59% of GNI in 2008 to 0.54% in 2009. The EU is off track from its collective interim target of 0.56% ODA/GNI by 2010 with its aid amounting to only 0.42% of GNI in 2009. Progress on bringing about fairer trade, relieving the debt burden on poor countries and ensuring they are fairly represented in international institutions has been slow.

⁵ The information in this table is based primarily on The UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2009 and Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Report of the UN Secretary-General, February 2010. Information gathered from Trócaire's partners in developing countries has also informed this analysis.

BOX 1: FOCUS ON HUNGER: THE LOST DECADE?

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1c: Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

The right to food is one of the most basic human rights yet over one billion people, a shocking one-sixth of the world's population, do not have enough to eat on a daily basis. When the MDGs were agreed in 2000, around 850 million people were hungry and, even before the food and financial crises of 2007-08, this number was actually increasing. In 2009, the number of hungry people continued to rise, reaching 1.02 billion. Hunger is particularly acute amongst vulnerable groups such as women, small children and people living with HIV. On current trends, it looks most unlikely that the target of reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger will be achieved by 2015.

The persistent high levels of hunger worldwide are not caused by lack of food. Instead, they arise from a complex set of factors which affect the ability of different countries and regions to produce and access food. Amongst the main reasons for the lack of progress on hunger are failures in global food governance, underinvestment in agriculture and an almost exclusive focus on increasing food production instead of a more holistic response based on addressing the structural causes of food insecurity.⁶ An effective global partnership on food security, agriculture and nutrition is urgently needed to address these issues and to put the world back on track towards realising MDG1.

2 Key Recommendations on MDG 1 for Ireland at the UN MDG Summit:

- Actively support delivery of a **more effective global food security partnership** which overcomes the fragmentation of past efforts and supports sustainable food production systems.
- As a member of the EU, Ireland must work towards **promoting policy coherence** in areas relevant to addressing global hunger as recommended by the Irish Hunger Task Force.

Trócaire's work on hunger and food security

As well as advocating on hunger and food security issues at an international level, Trócaire works with local civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities in developing countries to help people affected by hunger and food insecurity on a practical level but also, crucially, to tackle the root causes of hunger.

One example of this work is the support we provide to the "Land and Equity Movement", a Ugandan-based CSO. Land rights issues are a key underlying cause of food insecurity in developing countries as, for many people in those countries, even a small plot of land can enable them to grow enough food to survive or perhaps earn a small income. These rights can be threatened for a variety of reasons such as lack of proper legal title, land grabbing and gender inequality. Land and Equity Movement works to ensure land rights are protected and respected, particularly for vulnerable groups such as widows. They promote access to land rights through a range of activities such as mediating in communities on land disputes, providing legal assistance to clients at local level, leading a national campaign against land grabbing and sharing their understanding of customary land law with international organisations.

⁶ For further details on Trócaire's analysis of the hunger dimension of MDG1, see "Food for All: An agenda for addressing the root causes of hunger", Policy Report, Trócaire, March 2010.

BOX 2: FOCUS ON HIV & AIDS: MORE INVESTMENT IS NEEDED TO HALT THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

Target 6a: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

Target 6b: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it

MDG 6 sets targets for HIV, Malaria and Tuberculosis. These diseases have huge implications in developing countries where ill-health compounds the already crippling effects of poverty. There has been some progress on the HIV targets with the epidemic stabilising in some regions and anti-retroviral treatment for people living with HIV increasing substantially from 7% in 2003 to 42% in 2008. However, with 33.4 million⁷ people living with HIV globally, and 5 people newly infected for every 2 that commence treatment,⁸ we are far from delivering on MDG 6.

There is an urgent need for stronger and sustained investment to address HIV and ensure lifelong treatment for those in need. It is also vital to target the underlying causes of HIV such as gender inequality and violence against women as well as mitigating the impact of the disease on the lives of people living with HIV, their families and communities.

Ireland has demonstrated political commitment to HIV through the Taoiseach's UN addresses in 2001 and 2005, and by allocating an additional €100 million for HIV and other communicable diseases. However, recent cuts to Ireland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) have had a detrimental impact on HIV responses and on progress towards MDG 6.

2 Key Recommendations on MDG 6 for Ireland at the UN Summit:

- Provide **sustained and predictable support for effective global HIV initiatives** by re-committing to a minimum of 2007-09 levels (€26.1m per year) of funding to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria through the 3rd voluntary replenishment cycle in October 2010.
- Act as a **global advocate to strengthen policy dialogue** and ensure continued commitment and action to confront HIV through its engagement at, and beyond, the UN summit this year.

Trócaire's work on HIV and AIDS

Trócaire takes a dual approach to HIV and AIDS: supporting partners who provide prevention, care and treatment services and challenging injustices that contribute to the spread of the virus in developing countries.

For example, in Zimbabwe where there is a HIV prevalence rate of about 15.6%, Trócaire is working to support people living with and affected by HIV to access their rights. One of the individuals participating in Trócaire-supported programmes in Zimbabwe is Alice Basira, a 42 year old who has been living with HIV since 1997 and who lost her husband and two sisters to the disease. Through her involvement with the programme, Alice has felt empowered to disclose her HIV status and pioneer a local support group for those living with the disease. She receives counselling, treatment and nutritional advice as well as assistance with school fees through the group. This has helped her live "positively", raise six children (her own son and her sister's five children) and reach out to others who are affected in the community through her work as a Community Based Counsellor.

⁷ UNAIDS 2009 AIDS Epidemic Update www.unaids.org

⁸ UNAIDS 2009 Mapping Progress Towards Universal Access www.unaids.org

4. The elusive “global partnership for development”

MDG 8 - “Develop a global partnership for development” - cuts across all the goals in that it is about addressing injustices in the international economic, financial and trading systems in order to liberate the necessary resources to fund the MDGs and eliminate structural obstacles to their achievement. This requires high-level political commitment and the will to act across a range of policy areas on a global scale in the interests of sustainable development.

However, to date, there has been inadequate progress in relation to many of the key areas covered by MDG 8. The international financial system is still heavily weighted against developing countries whilst in the key area of **trade**, development continues to take a back seat to developed countries’ economic interests. Touted as a “development round”, the WTO’s Doha Round has stalled. In the absence of agreement on Doha, developed countries and blocs such as the EU have pursued bilateral trade agreements with developing countries (such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, the Association Agreement with Central America and the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia) that are driven by self interest rather than development objectives.⁹ Furthermore, the current international trade regime which predominantly favours rich countries’ intensive agricultural production systems militates against local producers in developing countries. Combined with skewed agricultural trade liberalisation, such production systems have significantly contributed to hunger and food insecurity in the developing world through practices like “dumping”.

Aid continues to play a critical role in progress towards the MDGs. Although there has been some increase in global aid levels, donors have largely failed to deliver the level of increases promised. 2010 is the year when the EU is due to reach its collective target of giving 0.56% of GNI as aid en route to achieving 0.7% by 2015. However, in 2009, collective EU aid stood at only 0.42% of GNI with key Member States such as France, Italy and Germany well off track towards their individual targets. Ireland’s aid dropped from a high of 0.59% of GNI in 2008 to 0.54% of GNI in 2009 following an 18.9% cut to the aid budget which has been blamed on the financial crisis.¹⁰ However, a number of countries, including the UK and Belgium, increased aid in line with their promises showing that aid increases are a matter of political will, not resources.

Increasing aid quantity alone will not suffice to achieve the MDGs. Improvements are also needed in the quality of ODA to ensure that the resources committed are targeting the poor effectively. However, so far only limited progress has been made on the international commitments agreed under the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.¹¹

As regards the **debt** target of MDG 8, international debt relief efforts have been insufficient to bring about sustainable debt relief for developing countries. While the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) have benefited from large debt relief, many of them are still at risk of debt distress and with the proliferation of new donors in the aid arena, a new debt crisis could be looming for many African countries. Haiti’s debt crisis in the wake of last January’s earthquake has put the spotlight again on the international financial institutions and the key role they play in the elimination of illegitimate debt in poor countries.

⁹ For a detailed explanation of the impact of EPAs on developing countries see Trócaire’s position paper “Poverty Looms: How 50 years of EU-ACP Cooperation is threatened”, August 2007: <http://www.trocaire.org/sites/trocaire/files/pdfs/policy/TrocaireEPAfinalbriefingpaper.pdf>

¹⁰ Table 1: NET Official Development Assistance in 2009. Preliminary Data for 2009. OECD, 14 April 2010. www.oecd.org

¹¹ These two documents outline a series of international commitments on aid effectiveness in areas such as making aid more predictable, promoting ownership and mutual accountability for aid, reforming aid conditionality.

It also highlights the need for emergency assistance for countries like Haiti to be given in the form of grants, not loans, as the latter are likely to increase the debt burden in the long run.

MDG 8 also includes a commitment to good **governance**, development and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally (Target 8a). Part of this is the obligation to put in place the frameworks to ensure that multinational corporations (MNCs) play a constructive role in fostering development and that developing countries can benefit from private sector investments. Some progress in this area has been made at international level with the adoption by the UN of a policy framework on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations based on the principles of “protect, respect and remedy”.¹² The UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights has received a new mandate to translate this framework into action. It is vital that Ireland, the EU and the international community actively support the UN Special Representative in carrying out this mandate and ensure that robust mechanisms are put in place to ensure the implementation of the framework.¹³

The recent financial and food crises have exacerbated the challenges faced by developing countries. Not only are they likely to receive less aid than promised (and less predictable aid), they are also faced with a return to the debt spiral and fewer possibilities to mobilise domestic resources (eg through taxation). Given these increased challenges, it is vital that more is done to translate MDG 8 into reality and construct a real and effective “global partnership for development”.

5. Recommendations to Ireland and the EU

The MDGs are not lost. Too much is at stake. The fates of 1 billion people who face starvation every day depend on the achievement of the Goals. So too do our own fates which are intertwined with those of people in developing countries. Therefore it is imperative that Ireland and the EU take a strong stand at the UN MDG Summit in September and implement the following measures:

1) Increase financing for the MDGs

Ireland should:

- Set out annual binding targets to reach its commitment of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2015 at the latest and legislate for a minimum of 0.7% thereafter.
- End support for the practice of “policy conditionality” at the international financial institutions and promote the development of internationally binding fair and responsible financing standards.

The EU should:

- Put in place an annual “peer review” of the Member States’ progress towards the 0.7% ODA target including a debate on the results in the European Parliament.
- Promote further aid coordination amongst the EU-27 through implementation of the Code of Conduct on Division of Labour, ensuring that Southern governments are involved in the process.
- Outline further guidance on mutual accountability, conditionality, untying aid and predictability in the EU Operational Framework on Aid Effectiveness.

¹² <http://business-humanrights.org/Documents/RuggieHRC2008>. The UN framework rests on three pillars: the State duty to protect against human rights abuses by business, through appropriate policies, regulation, and adjudication; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights and greater access by victims to effective remedy, judicial and non-judicial.

¹³ For further details on the issue of business and human rights concerns in developing countries, see Recommendations to reduce the risk of human rights violations and improve access to justice: Submission to the UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights, CIDSE, February 2008 and Operationalising the “Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework” CIDSE Submission to the UN OHCHR Consultation on Business and Human Rights, October 2009. www.cidse.org

- Provide developing countries with the tools they need to mobilise and retain domestic resources effectively, through supporting the creation of a multilateral information exchange agreement on tax and a country-by-country financial reporting standard for transnational and multinational companies.

2) Deliver fairer trade policies

Ireland and the EU should:

- Undertake a fundamental review of the EU trade and investment agenda in order to prioritise development objectives and the fulfillment of universal human rights as part of the EU2020 process.
- Support the “early harvest” proposal from Least Developed Countries elaborated on in the Dar es Salaam Declaration prior to the Seventh WTO Ministerial meeting.¹⁴
- Ensure Irish/EU Aid for Trade (AFT) strategy is coherent with development and human rights objectives such as the right to adequate food and systematically provides support to small-scale producers.¹⁵

3) Take action on Climate Change¹⁶

Ireland should:

- Pass legislation on Climate Change which commits it to a 40% emission reduction target by 2020 to be achieved through domestic action.
- Ireland should ensure that its contributions to climate finance are entirely additional to its target to provide 0.7% of national income in Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The EU should:

- Adopt a target of 40% emissions reductions by 2020 and take effective action towards achieving this goal.
- Provide adequate resources for developing countries’ adaptation to Climate Change and ensure these are additional to ODA.

4) Support International Governance Reform

Ireland and the EU should:

- Play a key role in reforming the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to become more transparent, accountable and development-focused.
- Support the implementation of the UN framework on business and human rights: “protect, respect and remedy”.

6. Conclusion: Political will, action and more financing are needed to achieve the MDGs

With only five years left to achieve the MDGs, a major international effort is needed to marshal the political will, international collaboration and finances necessary to reach the Goals. The increased challenges to the MDGs due to climate change, the food, financial and energy crises *can* be overcome but this will require sustained action on the part of all stakeholders including governments, Civil Society and the private sector, North and South. In order to succeed, this global effort must be embedded in a strong human rights-based and partnership approach. Crucially, developed countries and regions, such as Ireland and the EU, must be prepared to honour their commitments to deliver the resources and reforms needed to achieve the MDGs.

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¹⁴ Because of failure to conclude Doha Round WTO negotiations, decisions on measures in favour of Least Developed Countries such as duty free, quota free market access agreed at the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial in 2005 have not been operationalised. At the WTO’s Seventh Ministerial Meeting in Geneva last December, Brazil announced that it would provide duty and quota free market access to exports from LDCs covering 80% of tariff lines by mid 2010 and that within four years all tariff lines would be covered.

¹⁵ See further Trócaire’s policy paper “Implementing Aid for Trade (AFT) to Reduce Poverty”, March 2009.

¹⁶ For the latest Trócaire update on international Climate Change negotiations see Trócaire policy paper “Copenhagen: what went wrong and what happens next?”, February 2010.