

WE CAN END POVERTY 2015 MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS CAN WE?

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Editorial

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight specific objectives for enhancing the human condition, including goals of poverty reduction and improvement in education, gender equality, health, and environmental quality among others. Each goal is associated with specific targets – eighteen in total – and each target is related to quantifiable indicators –forty-eight in total.

In this issue of *Tatimma*, and on the occasion of the 10 year anniversary of the MDGs Declaration, we focus on this problematic which is of the utmost importance, but from a local perspective. In this context, George Azzi from the Arab Foundation for Freedom and Equality gives us an overview on the situation in Lebanon regarding HIV/AIDS (page 2) while Gisèle Achkar from the Mouvement Social briefs us on their initiatives to contain the drop out phenomenon in the country (page 3). On a more general note, we also have contributions from Dr Ahmad Baalbaki (page 10), a translation of an interview with Damien Millet (page 9) and a paper from Samir Amine (page 5) that shed light on different criticisms that have been formulated in the past few years on the MDGs by activists, the global justice movement as well as academics and practitioners.

In a few words, the aim of this issue is to initiate a space of debate on this question in the development and humanitarian community in Lebanon.

Finally, at a time characterized by the growing protest movements in the Arab world and the region, one could only wonder how the MDGs could produce change while disregarding the specific context and institutional environment of countries of the Global South...

Lebanon Support, March 2011

from the field

Note on HIV/AIDS in Lebanon

George Azzi, Executive Director, Arab Foundation for Equality, December 2010



The situation in Lebanon

The number of reported HIV/AIDS cases is limited in Lebanon. The first case was detected in 1984, and by November 2007 the number of detected cases had reached 1056. However, the WHO estimates the number of unreported cases at 2,500. Reported cases are still few, particularly among children (2.1100,000/ cases for 014--year-olds), while incidence is higher for older age groups (2.9100,000/ for those aged 15- 24) and most cases are found among those aged between 3150-, constituting around 52% of total cases reported in 2006. The ratio of females to males is 1:4, showing an increase in the earlier ratio of 1:9.

So what is Lebanon doing in order to combat this issue knowing that goal 6 of the MDG's is to "Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases"?

First it would be worth mentioning that this goal entails:

- 1- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- 2- Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it;
- 3- Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

According to the National AIDS program (NAP) in Lebanon, 1271 HIV/AIDS cases were reported from 1989 up to December 2009. 45.70% of these cases are HIV positive, 39.5% are advanced HIV cases and 14.80% were unspecified. Infections occur mostly in males (82%) mostly through sexual transmission. Data analysis of the reported cases in the past three years (2007 till 2009) has revealed that 36% of the cases are below thirty years of age (1% between 15 and 19 yrs old, 9% between 20 and 24, 25% between 25 and 29 yrs old). Sexual transmission accounts to 87% of the cases. Out of those, 42% of cases are among heterosexuals, 32% are among males who have sex with males (MSMs), 4% among bisexuals and 22% unspecified. It is worth noting that 12 mother to child cases were reported in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

NAP's Strategy is to focus on the "Most at Risk Populations" (MARPs): namely prisoners, men who have sex with men (MSM), injecting drug users (IDUs), and female sex workers (FSW).

Sexual health services

The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) in Lebanon, hosting the National AIDS program, provides all persons receiving antiretroviral treatment with appropriate medication. 2006 reports show that of the 387 registered individuals at the MOPH, 213 receive antiretroviral therapy. In 2007, 432 persons were reported to have advanced HIV infection; only 246 of which were receiving antiretroviral therapy.

MOPH has also been running HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and providing free testing services through different centers in the country, in addition to providing free condoms.

Basic Facts

The 2008 national report to UNAIDS for Lebanon included a study on the MSM community in the country. Lebanon estimates a 1% HIV prevalence among its population (World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, UNAIDS, 2009).

The report indicates that only 13.8% of the MSM who have been tested for HIV are aware of their results. The prevention program reached 14.6% of the population. Additionally, 39% of the individuals interviewed stated that they used a condom the last time they had sex.

In 2008 and 2009, 2700 service beneficiaries visited the voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) centers across Lebanon. The majority of these were males aged between 16 and 25 years. Most at risk populations who undertook the service account for 40% of the total beneficiaries. 25 service beneficiaries

tested positive and undertook a confirmatory test at respective labs/hospitals. Of those: 16 MSMs; 2 Bisexuals; 1 Ex-prisoner; 1 IDU; 1 Sex worker.

MARPs communities though, are still under-represented in the national report and national HIV policies and strategies, as has been represented in the latest country report to UNAIDS.

However the unpublished strategic plan for 2010 – 2012 includes a strong section on MARPs that includes enabling access to services for MARPs as well as fighting stigma and discrimination and lobbying to change existing laws against them. NAP is still waiting for the approval of the ministry of health before publishing the strategy.

Civil Society

Five main organizations have been working on HIV/AIDS in relation to the MSM community in Lebanon: SIDC - Soins Infirmiers et Développement Communautaire (MSM, IDUs, Sex workers), Helem (MSM, community based), SKOUN (IDUs), Dar Al Amal (FSW) and MARSA (sexual health clinic for sexually active people).

The five organizations have been working on community mobilisation, outreach work and peer education, participatory development of educational materials, setting up specialised communication and support services such as telephone hotlines and safe spaces/drop-in centres, referral systems to help provide access to medical and support services for sexually transmitted infections, voluntary counselling and testing centres, psychologists, and small scale advocacy activities.

Main Obstacles

Major obstacles are faced by MARPs in Lebanon, the most salient ones are:

- Discrimination / stigmatization towards these groups making it difficult to link stakeholders with this population group;
- Violence (psychological and physical);
- Illegality;
- Difficulty to reach MSM who are outside the big cities.

Clearly a lot of work needs to be done on MARPs and HIV related stigma, however, additional, rigorous data is needed to identify the exact mechanisms in greater detail to help reduce stigma and discrimination and facilitate access to services for MARPs. More work should be done in cooperation with community based organizations and progressive organizations such as Helem, Skoun and MARSA.

Worthy of note here; according to Helem/MARSA report 25% of their beneficiaries are heterosexual women. Obviously sexually active women face the same kind of stigma and discrimination from society and health service providers. Yet they are completely overlooked in the NAP national strategy.



Stop AIDS, source: <http://chatmosphere.files.wordpress.com/201011/stop-aids.jpg>

“The term Stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting...” causing a person’s very identity to be “spoiled (Goffman, 1963:3).

AIDS-related stigma refers to prejudice, discounting, discrediting, and discrimination directed at people perceived to have AIDS or HIV and at the individuals, groups, and communities with which they are associated. (Herek, Mitnick and al. 1998).

Double burden of stigma:

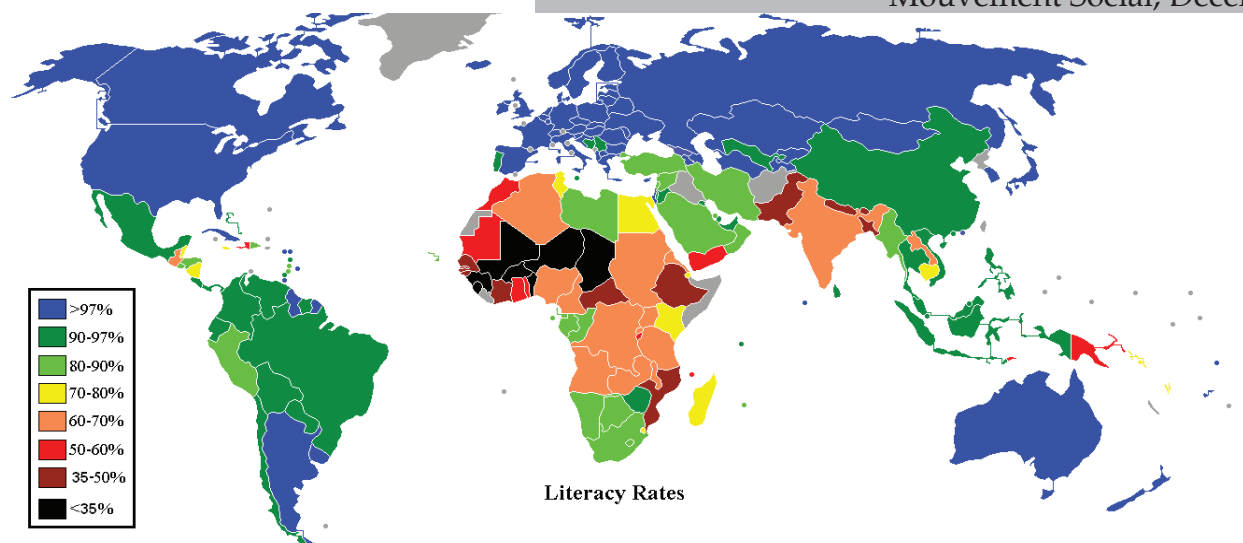
- Stigma associated w/ HIV/AIDS
- Stigma associated w/ vulnerable populations: IDU;
- Men and women with multiple sexual partners;
- MSM;
- Poverty

Stigma complicates all aspects of programming: Reaching people at risk; Targeting; Mobilizing support and resources for services; Engaging people to learn and take action;

i on civil society initiatives

Education a key medium to achieving the MDGs

Based on an interview with Giselle Ashkar,
Mouvement Social, December 2010



There are some 72 million children in the world still not enrolled in school today. Indeed, the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to guarantee that by 2015, all boys and girls are able to complete primary school education. The “2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report” launched by the UN in January, showed that while this number has dropped by 33 million since 1999, the report concludes that at the current pace, the world is set to miss the education MDG by about 56 million children. However, the report also shows that the number of children not enrolled in school is still decreasing, and the gender gap in education is narrowing in many places, with the number of girls out of school decreasing by 4 percent since 2000. Some unexpected countries have also made amazing progress. Tanzania, for example, had one of the highest rates of children not in school in 1997, around 50 percent. Today, Tanzania has a primary education net enrollment of 98 percent, and is on target to achieve the education MDG.

As for Lebanon, the country ratified the Convention of the Rights of the child on October 1990, and the Law 686 on free and compulsory education was voted in 1998. This law stipulates that elementary education - up to age of 15- is free and compulsory (art.49). Nevertheless, the law has not been enforced and the implementing legislation has not been promulgated yet. Lebanon has made important progress in achieving the second millennium goal but still falls short from fully achieving it. Indeed, significant challenges remain, notably regarding the quality of education and the high drop out rate at higher educational level.

Gisèle Ashkar, Mouvement Social, briefs us on the situation in school education in Lebanon and on their action programmes in that regard.

School dropout is a serious phenomenon that has been increasing continuously in Lebanon since 2000-2001. It would be interesting to note however that dropout rates are higher among boys than among girls according to the High Council of Childhood (2007). Between 2005 – 2006, in basic education, this rate was close to 4 %. 8.1 % for grade 7 and 6,8 % for grade 8 and 19%

for grade 9. Moreover, it's important to note that 25 % of students drop out before reaching grade 9 (Brevet).

In this context, the Ministry of Education has established a unified framework for collaboration between the Ministry and the civil society organizations, in order to ensure the success of all initiatives aimed at improving the educational level of children in Lebanon and achieve the goal of “Education for all”.

The Mouvement social is now part of the national committee for the prevention of school dropout. The Mouvement social has been historically an important actor in dealing with the question of school dropouts and has consequently developed a number of related programs. In addition to this, mouvement social has a pioneering role both locally and nationally laying the groundwork for a national coalition. This coalition consisted of 8 permanent municipal committees that fought against the dropout phenomena.

These committees have addressed the question of the causes and consequences of dropping out. Furthermore, they discussed the method of work that the coalition could take to achieve the desired objectives. In fact, each committee has investigated a problem, and prepared a comprehensive report noting the causes and consequences of dropping out, as well as proposals for solutions and alternatives. These documents have been submitted to the Ministry of Education in 2007. In 2009, after having completed the pilot project “School Integration”, the Mouvement Social has made available to the Ministry and experts, three years of combined experience with students with learning difficulties in 16 public schools and more than 10 years of experience with children outside the school system.

The Mouvement Social has been involved for years with children and young people to better understand their reality and develop and enhance their skills. Fighting against school dropout and for children enrollment in schools is everyone's responsibility and a priority so as to ensure education for all in Lebanon.



in focus

MDGs | 2011

The millennium development goals: a critique from the south

Extracts from an article by Samir Amin, Pambazuka.org

In September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, the 191 member countries in the United Nations agreed to a set of eight Millennium Development Goals for the world's poor nations. These goals, targeted for fulfillment by 2015, have since become the fulcrum for public policy discussions and actions concerning economic and social development. Meetings and conferences on the goals under the auspices of the United Nations and the governing bodies of member countries have been held regularly since 2001, most recently at the 2005 Millennium+5 Summit. Most of the Millennium Development Goals may seem at first sight unobjectionable. Nevertheless, they were not the result of an initiative from the South itself, but were pushed primarily by the triad (the United States, Europe, and Japan), and were co-sponsored by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. All of this has raised the question of whether they are mainly ideological cover for neoliberal initiatives. Samir Amin's systematic and revealing critique of the Millennium Development Goals is therefore of the utmost significance. The declaration adopted by the general assembly is available at <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>. —Ed.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by acclamation in September 2000 by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly called "United Nations Millennium Declaration." This procedural innovation, called "consensus," stands in stark contrast to UN tradition, which always required that texts of this sort be carefully prepared and discussed at great length in committees. This simply reflects a change in the international balance of power. The United States and its European and Japanese allies are now able to exert hegemony over a domesticated UN. In fact, Ted Gordon, well-known consultant for the CIA, drafted the millennium goals!

The claim is made that the MDGs follow up on the conclusions reached in the cycle of summits organized in the 1990s. That's going a bit too far. The preparatory meetings to these summits had tried something new by organizing assemblies of so-called civil society representatives parallel to the official conferences where only state representatives were seated. Although things had been organized to reserve the best places for the charitable NGO's, which are beneficiaries of financial support from large foundations and states, and largely to exclude popular organizations fighting for social and democratic progress (authentic popular organizations are always poor by definition), the voices of the latter were sometimes heard. In the official conferences themselves, the points of view of the triad and of the South often diverged. It is often forgotten that the triad's proposals were rejected in Seattle not only in the streets, but also by states from the South. It is also important to remember that the reconstruction (or at least the first signs of reconstruction) of a group (if not a front) of the South took place at Doha. All of these divergences were smoothed away by the supposed synthesis of the MDGs. Instead of forming a genuine committee for the purpose of discussing the document, a draft was prepared in the backroom of some obscure agency. The only common denominator is limited to the expression of the pious hope of reducing poverty. In what follows, I will examine how these goals are formulated and the conditions required to reach them.



The Official Millennium 'Development' Goals

Eight sets of goals were defined for the next fifteen years (2000–15). The accomplishment of each of the targets that specifically define them is based on measurable indicators, generally altogether acceptable in themselves.

Each of these goals is certainly commendable (who would disapprove of reducing poverty or improving health?). Nevertheless, their definition is often extremely vague. Moreover, debates concerning the conditions required to reach the goals are often dispensed with. It is assumed without question that liberalism is perfectly compatible with the achievement of the goals.



poster on women's rights violation.

source: <http://good50x70.org/2009/imagecontest/poster/3080.jpg>

Goal 1: Reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half.

This is nothing but an empty incantation as long as the policies that generate poverty are not analyzed and denounced and alternatives proposed.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.

UNESCO devoted itself to this goal beginning in 1960, hoping to achieve it in ten years. Progress was made during the two decades that followed, but ground has been lost since. The almost obvious relationship between this lost ground, the reduction in public expenditures, and the privatization of education is not examined in fact nor in theory.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

The equality in question is reduced to access to education and the empowerment is measured by the proportion of wage-earning women. The neoconservative Christian fundamentalists of the United States, Poland and elsewhere, the Muslims of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other countries, and the fundamentalist Hindus agree on eliminating any reference to the rights of women and the family. Without discussion, declarations on this question are only empty talk.

Goals 4, 5, and 6: (Concerning health) reduce infant mortality by two-thirds and maternal mortality by three-fourths; stop the spread of pandemic diseases (AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis).

The means implemented in these areas are assumed to be completely compatible with extreme privatization and total respect for the "intellectual property rights" of the transnational corporations and, curiously enough, are recommended in Goal 8 concerning the supposed partnership between North and South!

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.

A general principle is asserted ("to integrate the principles of sustainable development" into national and global policies), but no definite content is made explicit. Moreover, any mention of the refusal of the United States to promote conditions necessary for environmental protection (i.e., their rejection of the Kyoto Protocol) is carefully avoided.

It is presupposed, then, that the rationality of capitalist economic strategy is compatible with the requirements of "sustainable development." That is obviously not the case since capitalist strategy is founded on the concept of the rapid discounting of economic time (with the timespan governing investment decisions never exceeding a few years at maximum), while the questions raised here relate to the long term. The specific goals are thus in fact reduced to nothing much: reduce by half the population having no access to clean water, improve living conditions in the slums—two ordinary goals of simple public health.

The criteria for measuring the results (CO2 emissions, change in the ozone layer) undoubtedly make it possible to monitor the degradation of the environment, but certainly not to curb it. Note the strange timidity of the writers concerning biodiversity (there is no question of infringing on the greater rights of the transnationals!): they propose only "to observe" the evolution of land areas protected from the destruction of biodiversity! But above all not to stop it!

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

The writers straightaway establish an equivalence between this "partnership" and the principles of liberalism by declaring that the objective is to establish an open, multilateral commercial and financial system! The partnership thus becomes synonymous with submission to the demands of the imperialist powers. Progress in access to the market is measured by the share of exports in the GDP (an increase in this ratio is thus synonymous with progress regardless of the social price!), progress in the conditions of nondiscrimination by the reduction in subsidies.

To carry out this "liberal partnership" would require, in the end, nothing more than the fight against poverty (the only "social" goal allowed). To this is added, like hair in soup, "good governance," a phrase favored by the U.S. establishment that is never defined and is taken up uncritically by the Europeans and the institutions of the global system (UN, World Bank, etc.).

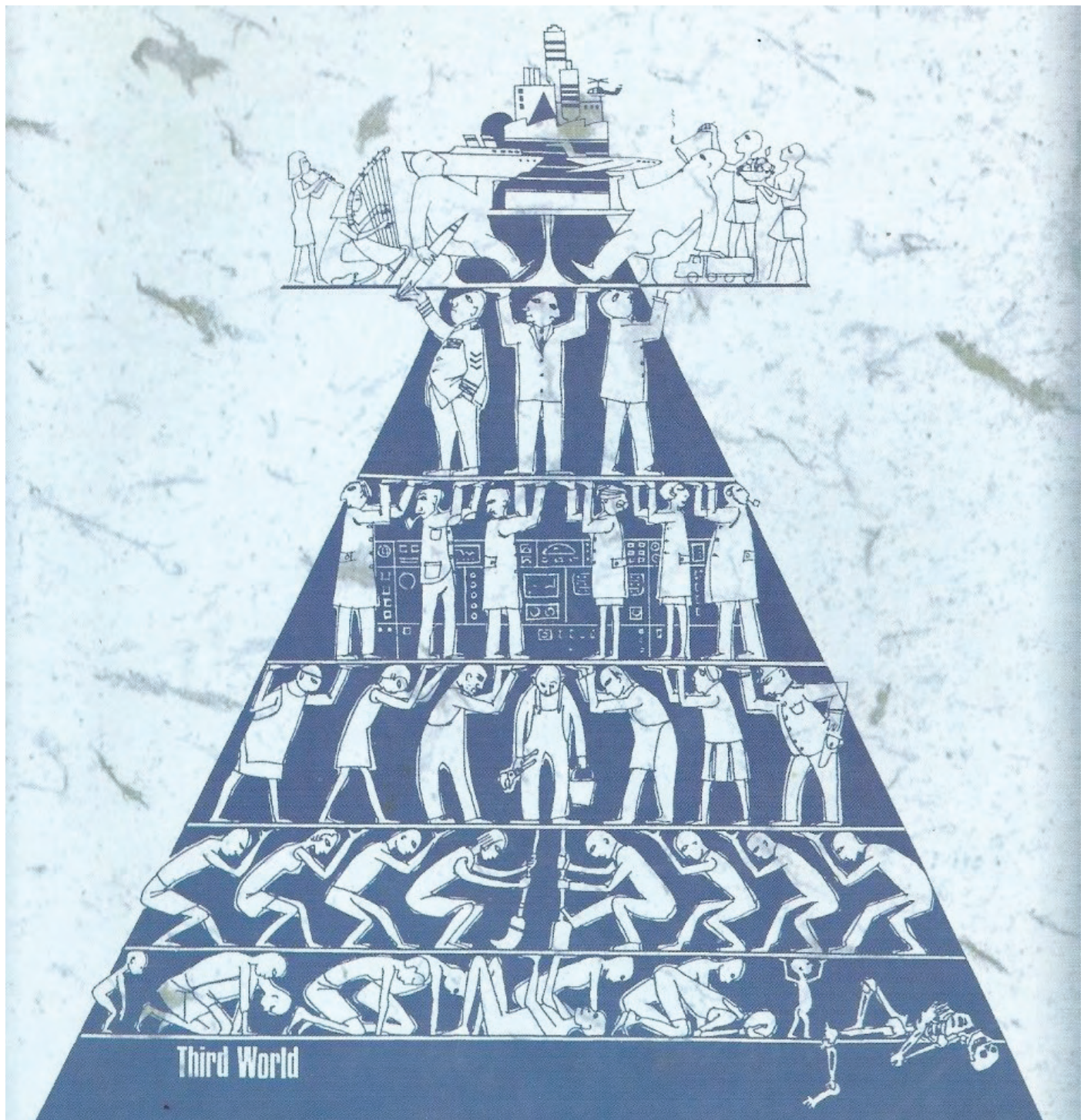
Many targets are added to this completely contradictory text, which fill in its gaps and offer recommendations. I am singling out five of them for further examination:

Enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries.

In fact, the program implemented in this regard for the heavily indebted poor countries imposes a genuinely colonial tutelage on them. That the governments of the countries in question have internalized the abandonment of their sovereignty changes nothing. Indeed, in the past, heads of state had sometimes abdicated in the face of colonization. But such abdication had never been accepted as legitimate by the peoples involved.

Deal comprehensively with developing countries> debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term.

This exhortation is not accompanied by any further information concerning what is to follow (international negotiations? within what framework?) or the principles on which such a measure should be founded. However, certain reasonable things can be said on the subject, such as the necessity for an audit that makes it possible to classify the debts (immoral, illegal, acceptable...) and an elaboration of legislation that makes it possible to define for



Third world, Poverty and Global Economic Policies, Oxfam

the future the legal conditions of debts and the creation of courts charged with deciding the law in this area. It is perfectly obvious that all of this is ignored by the writers of the MDGs!

In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

The significance of the generous intention to provide access to drugs is immediately nullified by the specification that this would be “in cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry,” precisely those who prohibit anyone from calling their abusive monopoly into question!

In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies.

Here again an intention is subjected to a condition that empties it of any meaning—“in cooperation with the private sector”!

More generous official development assistance for countries

committed to poverty reduction.

Is there a better comedy than this proposal, endlessly repeated for the last fifty years by those who are responsible for implementing it and yet never do it?

The Real Goals of Dominant Capital

A critical examination of the formulation of the goals as well as the definition of the means that would be required to implement them can only lead to the conclusion that the MDGs cannot be taken seriously. A litany of pious hopes commits no one. And when the expression of these pious hopes is accompanied by conditions that essentially eliminate the possibility of their becoming reality, the question must be asked: are not the authors of the document actually pursuing other priorities that have nothing to do with “poverty reduction” and all the rest? In this case, should the exercise not be described as pure hypocrisy, as pulling the wool over the eyes of those who are being forced

to accept the dictates of liberalism in the service of the quite particular and exclusive interests of dominant globalized capital? Besides, the MDGs cannot truly be taken seriously by their promoters in the imperialist triad, which implements them only when it is convenient and ignores them otherwise, nor by states in the South that, not wanting to take any risks at the present time, refrain from formally rejecting the proposals. In another time, a text of this type would not have been adopted and the states of the South would have, at least, imposed a compromise.

The MDGs are part of a series of discourses that are intended to legitimize the policies and practices implemented by dominant capital and those who support it, i.e., in the first place the governments of the triad countries, and secondarily governments in the South. The real goals, openly recognized as such, are:

1. Extreme privatization, aimed at opening new fields for the expansion of capital. Such privatization calls into question the existence of national state property, which should be liquidated on open markets, by foreign capital among others. Beyond that, privatization aims at eliminating public services, particularly in education and health. Here, the ideas developed in the MDGs concerning the elimination of illiteracy and the improvement of health lose all credibility. The privatization of property and access to important natural resources, in particular petroleum and water, facilitates the pillage of these resources for the wastefulness of the triad, reducing the discourse of sustainable development to pure, empty rhetoric.

2. The generalization of the private appropriation of agricultural land. Just as with agricultural and food products, land, too, must be subjected to the general law of the market. This general offensive aims at nothing less than extending the policy of “enclosures” (referring to the “enclosures” implemented in England in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries and then extended to the rest of Europe in the nineteenth) to the entire world. Its success would lead to the destruction of the peasant societies that make up nearly half of humanity. This destruction, now underway (and liberalism would like to see the tempo accelerated), is already the major cause of pauperization in the third world, which results in emigration from the countryside to the urban slums. But that is of little importance, since the minority of so-called modernized rural producers who will survive the massacre, and be subjected to the demands of agribusiness, will produce the superprofits that the latter aspires to capture. Nothing else matters.

3. Commercial “opening” within a context of maximum deregulation. This is a way of lifting all obstacles to the expansion of a trade that is as unequal as it can possibly be in conditions characterized by a polarized world development and a growing concentration of power in the hands of the transnationals that control the trade in raw materials and agricultural products. The example of coffee illustrates the disastrous social effects of this systematic choice. Twenty years ago, all coffee producers were paid nine billion dollars and all the consumers paid out twenty billion for this same coffee. Today these two figures are respectively six and thirty billion. The gap between them is the gigantic profit margin captured by a handful of oligopolistic intermediaries. It goes without saying that in these conditions campaigns in favor of so-called fair trade, even when their promoters are moved by the most impeccable moral intentions, are not up to the challenge. The correction of these deteriorating terms of trade for the producers can only be obtained by the political intervention of government authorities—both national legislation and international negotiations and legislation.

4. The equally uncontrolled opening up of capital movement. The fallacious pretext advanced is that deregulation would make it possible to attract foreign capital. Yet it is well known that China, which attracts more of this capital than other countries, has maintained a tighter control over foreign enterprises. Elsewhere, direct foreign investments are targeted at little more than pillaging natural resources. In fact, the IMF imposed the opening of “capital accounts” in order to facilitate the indebtedness of the United States, allow speculative capital to engage in pillaging raids, and subject the currencies of the South to systematic undervaluation. This undervaluation, in turn, makes it possible for local assets in these countries to be purchased for next to nothing, to the evident advantage of the transnational corporations.

5. States are forbidden in principle from interfering in economic affairs. Internally, the state is reduced to narrow police functions. Internationally, it is reduced to guaranteeing debt service, as the first (and almost exclusive!) priority in public expenditures. The debt is hardly anything more than a particularly primitive form of exploitation and pillage.

This model is presented as being without an alternative because it is imposed by the “objective” requirements of globalization, which negate the power of national states. In reality, the causal relation is just the reverse: this particular form (among other possible ones) of globalization is allotted the objective of destroying the ability of nations and states to resist the expansion of transnational capital.

That is why all these principles, openly adopted by the writers of the MDGs, can only produce what I have elsewhere described as apartheid on a world scale, reproducing and deepening global polarization. As a counterpoint, the restoration of a margin of autonomy for states and the recognition of the legitimacy of state intervention (the definition even of democracy) within a multipolar perspective are the inescapable conditions required to attain the social objectives proclaimed by the MDGs.

In fact, then, the social goals proclaimed by the MDGs do not constitute the real goals of the whole exercise. Their supposedly democratic packaging must, in turn, be subject to a legitimate doubt. No democracy can possibly take root if it does not support social progress, but, instead, is associated with social regression. This is undoubtedly the reason why the vapid term “governance” is served up as an accompaniment to the empty rhetoric of the MDGs.

The writers of the document appear to have paid no attention to the facts. In the course of three decades following the Second World War, the highest rate of growth known in history took place, along with full employment and notable upward social movement and, if not always a reduction in inequality, the stabilization of structures aimed at more equitable income distribution. But it appears that because the systems in existence at that time regulated markets, these procedures were “irrational” and their results “bad.” In the course of the following three decades, accompanying the welcome deregulation, there has been a collapse of growth, a breathtaking increase in unemployment, precariousness, and other manifestations of pauperization, and mounting inequalities. Yet it appears that this system is nevertheless better and more rational. That is undoubtedly because in the preceding systems the rate of return for capital was in the range of 4 to 8 percent and since then it has doubled, moving to between 8 and 16 percent.

[To read the complete text please check the website:
<http://www.lebanon-support.org/tatimma/>]



MDGs: tools for a better world?

Damien Millet, Hugo Combe, January 8, 2011, www.cadtm.org

In September 2000, UN Member States took on an important challenge: they committed, individually and collectively to achieve, in fifteen years, eight targets to reduce world poverty. Objectives that remain very controversial: in the meantime some international organizations consider it as only half a victory, the anti-globalization movement, meanwhile, strongly questions the foundations of the approach of the MDGs and even goes so far as declaring it as a scandal.

«These objectives are shy, modest and unsuitable!»

Hugo Combe: *The Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (CADTM) seems extremely critical of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Why?*

Damien Millet: Our criticism of the MDGs is consistent with those we formulate against the logic of the global economy. The major problem is that the means to achieve these goals are not provided, even though they exist. For example, with or without MDGs, countries of the North had already decided in 1970 to allocate 0.7% of their gross national income to Official Development Assistance. Yet in 2008, only five of them have met this commitment: Sweden, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway and Denmark. What would be the added value of setting MDGs in such a context? All this seems very hypocritical: it gives the impression that the problem is being treated where in fact it is not, simply because rich countries have not been accountable for fifteen years towards their own commitments. In addition, countries and organizations that are behind the idea of the MDGs are trying to convince us that poverty can be alleviated without changing the global economic system, while in reality it is the latter that is its main cause.

Can we consider these goals to be better than nothing?

D. M.: in principal, we have nothing to say about the eight goals, especially the first seven. But if you look closer, we are entitled to ask questions about how they have been developed and how were the indicators been selected. For example, the first objective is to halve world poverty.

First, why halving poverty and not simply eradicate it? Indeed it is about reducing the proportion of poor people by half, but not their absolute number. However, given the global demographic change, if the number of poor remains the same, the proportion will decrease by itself. In addition to this, to make sure the outcome is rather satisfactory, they took as a reference data from the 1990 when the goals have been set in 2000. This is absurd. But the most dangerous is the eighth goal, which plans to «pursue the establishment of an open predictable and nondiscriminatory multilateral trading and financial system» This is applied to the whole world opening up to competition without putting into question the unjust economic rules that govern the world. The real question should have been asked is «What would be the most appropriate economic model to fight poverty?».

CADTM sharply criticized the actions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. In your opinion, what

roles might they play in the fight against poverty?

D. M.: None. I believe, these institutions should be abolished. They are organizing the world in the benefit of the great powers, by contributing to the impoverishing of the poorest through coercive measures. One problem with the MDGs, is that unlike measures dictated by these two institutions, they have no binding force. Even though the UN has produced a large number of reports that are often very interesting about the nature of problems and stating possible solutions, whether through the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Food and Agriculture (FAO Food and Agriculture Organization) and UNESCO. But they only give recommendations. On the contrary, the IMF and World Bank impose policies that impoverish poor countries, and leads to increasing their debts which prevents them from implementing policies aimed for better education and health...

Do you think the objectives have a chance to still be achieved?

D. M.: Absolutely not. Nobody seems to be ready to provide the means to achieve any result. Some efforts have been undertaken of course, but the funds released are minimal. In order to eradicate world poverty, charity is not the answer, but it is justice and the billions that are needed to be available. For example, a study of the World Bank in 1998 showed that 80 billion dollars per year for ten years, or 800 billion, would provide the entire world's population access to basic social services: drinking water, basic health care with sanitation, primary education for all. If one compares this sum with the wealth of the 1125 billionaires and multi-billionaires on the planet, we see that there are many possible ways of action. CADTM proposes a tax on wealth of billionaires to solve many of the problems of humanity. But what can be done without an action plan, a bidding agenda, without any sanctions on the rich? Nothing. Not only these goals are cautious, shy, modest and inadequate, but also they will not be fulfilled.

Is the opinion of the CADTM listened to, shared, followed?

D. M.: There are two categories of NGOs: radical and reformists. Reformists argue that even if things are not done as it should, we must succeed to draw what is positive, what goes in the right direction. They participate therefore in the implementation of the MDGs and do what they can to achieve results. In opposition, radical NGOs, reject compromise and can not be satisfied with a mediocre in-between. CADTM is part of the second category. Our position is widely shared, especially in the global justice movement among which are associations like ATTAC, Survival and Jubilee South..... These networks and organizations are important but are still not enough to overthrow and reverse the balance of power.

For information about the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (CADTM) see: lebanon-support.org/tatimma



perspective

MDGs: eradicating the consequences of inequality rather than the causes?

Based on an interview with Dr. Ahmad Baalbaki



Source: <http://filipsagnoli.files.wordpress.com>

Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided the basis for a new international development consensus. MDGs were presented as a real commitment for change and as an effective “tool for development” for countries of the South; nevertheless promises were not fulfilled and major criticisms were addressed on the MDGs upon their adoption. Indeed, many researchers, academics as well as experts and practitioners have considered the MDGs as a product of United Nations agencies and International Organizations (IO) “whose role was to inject doses of hope in the neo-liberal system under the slogan “development is possible” and “open the markets and deal/cope with globalization” with the underlying thought that markets are merciful while in reality the market is a jungle” as Ahmad Baalbaki explained.

The context

In fact, since the end of the Second World War, several paradigms of development have been adopted by International Organizations to lead poor countries on the path of development. In the 1950's, development policies were imposing a linear pattern of development whereas the latest stage was the “Western model”. These policies consisted on focusing on growth and investment assuming that the benefits of growth will result in the gradual disappearance of poverty. In fact, the 1960's and 1970's showed that the effects of growth lead to

increased inequalities.

The limitations of this model were taken into consideration as many debates emerged questioning these concepts of development, issues of poverty and inequality were seen as interlinked and deeply related and dependent.

The main critiques

In this context, the main criticism addressed on the MDGs has been notably articulated around the first goal which aimed at reducing poverty, as it has been considered by many as a stepping back from previous international commitments. The change in terminology signaled that regression, whereas in past international community declarations the concept focused on «poverty eradication», the current MDGs mentions «poverty reduction».

The MDGs are also found “guilty” of abandoning issues and concerns related to inequality, concentration of wealth, redistribution and allocation of resources, while more than ever the situation of global inequality seems alarming and constitutes an obstacle to “development”. In addition to this, the detractors of the MDGs express fears regarding the reaffirmation of the principle of market growth - with a major role given to the private sector (Objective 8)- in the development policies, in a context characterized by the “retreat of the state”.

MDGs a shared responsibility?

Indeed, a crucial point is the concern related to the role of the southern States as development policies are no longer determined by national decisions but are rather linked to regional and global markets in the current context of extreme liberalization.

In fact, the first seven MDGs are all under the responsibility of the Southern countries (i.e. their administrations, their resources etc...) whilst the 8th is under the responsibility of rich countries. The question would be: “are countries of the South capable of addressing their own weaknesses? Can we say that the actions of industrialized countries constitute merely impediments and obstacles to the development of poor countries”, asks Baalbaki.

Moreover, there is a clear contradiction between the promises and the actions of the rich countries. Rich countries are urging poor countries to liberalize their markets while they are themselves applying protectionist measures. Baalbaki adds “the first seven goals consist actually of requirements to poor countries with the underlying obligation to liberalize their markets. However shouldn't there be transition policies before opening the markets?”.

Finally the last objective that states: “global partnership for development” as a target is one of the key MDGs as all the goals are related to its implementation. However Baalbaki explains that “It is

the most important goal only if countries of the South are properly supported”. Indeed, rich countries took a commitment to commit 0.7% of their gross national product (GNP) to Aid with the belief that it will provide enough resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals. However in practice aid allocations have never attained the agreed target and on the contrary have been declining over the years, while the needs of countries of the South are increasing with the increase of the demography and the consequent increase of the number of the poor.

In a few words one could sum up as follows : The 8th Goal is the only goal that involves responsibilities of the rich countries. However it does not include bidding mechanisms and processes that would oblige these countries to respect their engagements and responsibilities. That is what makes baalbaki affirm that «there is a need to add mechanisms or the goals will remain wishful thinking».

The core of the problem addressed?

In fact International Organization (like the World Bank, UNDP among others) have been playing a normalization role regarding the new paradigm without addressing the socio-economic realities that lead to the current situation. In other words the main problem with the MDGS as Baalbaki sais “are addressing the results and consequences of the existing inequalities instead of working on the causes”.



Source: <http://1.bp.blogspot.com>

About terminology

The 1st MDG goal aims at reducing between 1990 and 2015 by half the proportion of people whose income is less than 1 USD per day. This amount (1 USD) is the poverty line or level of income required to meet the basic survival needs as defined by the World Bank.

This approach is flawed. A poverty line determined by an income should reflect the real cost of the monetary needs of an individual or household. However, using the same standard measure for all does not take into consideration variations in the level of income from one country to another or from one location to another within the same country.

Moreover, poverty is not confined to a single monetary dimension but includes social and economic dimensions (lack of control over resources, access to a decent job...). Therefore, it's necessary to question the very definition of poverty and how to measure it.

The 1st MDG states that the objective is to reduce by half the “proportion” of people living in poverty and not to reduce by half the number of the people living in poverty (according to the adopted definition of poverty). That means that in countries with high population growth a large number of persons will not be of concern. Also, without taking into consideration the growth population worldwide between 1990 and 2015, this goal seems already very unsatisfactory because it would “délaisser” of nearly 500 million people living in extreme poverty.

These changes in the terminology and in the objectives adopted by the MDGs are considered as a regression in comparison with previous international commitments where the settled objective was simply and clearly to eradicate poverty.

featured publications

AlternativesSud, *The Millennium Development Goals. Criticism from the South*, Volume 13-1/2006, Centre Tricontinental and Éditions Syllepse, March 2006, 206 pages.



As it is difficult to be against virtue, few criticisms of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 2000 - have been formulated and raised to the public sphere. Who would object to, inter alia, reducing the number of poor, providing basic education for all, fighting against infectious diseases, achieving gender equality and sustainable development?

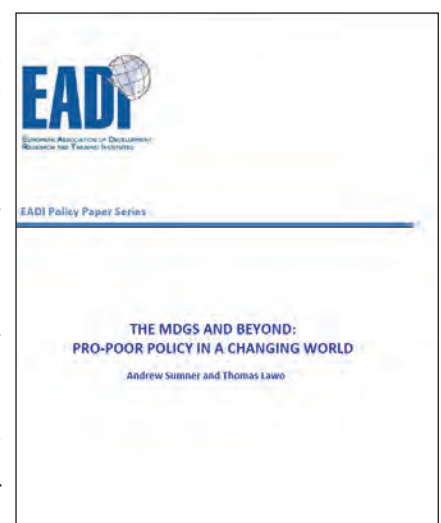
However, the texts published in this book highlight the inadequacies, inconsistencies and unspoken that lay behind the MDGs. The eleven authors show that the MDGs avoid tackling themes as important as the reduction of inequality and social justice. They also maintain that the recommended approaches for implementing these objectives are problematic. By adopting the Millennium Declaration, the UN General Assembly has effectively endorsed the principles of the World Bank and IMF on good governance, open markets and private sector support. Strategies that have been applied for nearly 25 years in the Global South and that have resulted, for the authors, in an exacerbation of poverty and inequality.

Even though concepts may be a little repetitive - as this may happen in all collective books- this publication does have the merit of letting us hear alternative voices that question the consensus proclaimed on the evolution of the world order. The ultimate objective of this publication is to appeal for the authentic democracies that would respect social rights whether in the so called «Northern countries» or in the South.

Andrew Sumner and Thomas Law, *The MDGs and Beyond, Pro-Poor Policy in a Changing World*, EADI Policy Paper Series, EADI Policy Paper March 2010.

The MDGs have had a significant impact so far at a global level, but national level impacts are less clear and need more exploration.

The paper tackles the issue of the 2010 MDG review: it stresses on the importance of undertaking an assessment of the MDG experience and lessons learnt, building an MDG global action plan, and laying the political groundwork for a global commission on 2015 and beyond.



Key issues for the 2010- 2015 MDG «big push» are cross-cutting ones:

- need more focus on a stronger linking of the Rights agenda in the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs;
- more focus on gender (and the new UN agency); more focus on poor people's adaptation to climate change;
- and more focus on equity and social justice issues (and the poorest).

The paper underlines the urgent need for answers on some of the political questions:

Why is there clear evidence in some countries of national «ownership» of the MDGs and little in others? Can the global political momentum that led to the MDGs be maintained and renewed in an uncertain world with aid and public expenditure under pressure?

ilm khabar | the civil society newswire

► March 21st, 2011

COSV and Insan Association organized a press conference to launch their report on the «Culture of racism in Lebanon» by Ms. Simba Shani Kamaria Rousseau in the frame of the «Multimedia Virtual Space for Human Rights» project, implemented by COSV, Kafa, CLDH and PPM.

► January 27th, 2011

The Lebanese Center for Human Rights organized the 2011 Human Rights Festival in between the 27th and the 30th of January 2011 at cinema Metropolis Empire Sofil in Beirut. The festival focused on women's rights, refugees rights, migrants' rights and discrimination and on detainees' rights and arbitrary detention.

► January 13th, 2011

Heartland Alliance (for Human Needs & Human Rights) in partnership with Caritas Lebanon Migrant center organized a training for NGOs and service providers on identifying and responding to Human trafficking.

► December 14th, 2010

UNRWA and the American University of Beirut launched the results of the Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. The survey is the first of its kind in Lebanon to assess in a comprehensive manner the living conditions of Palestinian refugees residing in the country

► December 11th, 2010

UMAM D&R organized a screening of Zeina Daccache's documentary, 12 Angry Lebanese and was followed by a discussion with the director.

► December 10th, 2010

KAFA organized a closing ceremony of the «16 Days of Activism to end Violence Against Women 2010» campaign in Unesco Palace, Beirut.

► December 9th, 2010

Ma3bar and SMEX organized a discussion in Balamand University, Koura, North of Lebanon, entitled: «Should social media sites be blocked on campus?»

► November 12th, 2010

The Lebanese Center for Human Rights released a statement pointing out the Ministry of Interior and UNHCR are unable to protect refugees against the scandalous practices of the General Security.

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NEWSLETTER TEAM

Marie-Noelle AbiYaghi, Dia Abou Mosleh, Cynthia Aoun, Bassem Chit

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Professionals involved in the field of Aid, Recovery and Development are invited to contribute their views and opinions, or to exchange and share information with other professionals in the sector.

Let us know what you think of individual articles, or suggest topics you feel we should take up in future issues.

Contact us at the following address:
tatimma@darem.org



March 8, 2011

The 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day



«Full equality between men and women» a banner held in a pro-secularism demonstration in Beirut, photo by Hisham Ashkar

2011 year marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

The day was commemorated for the first time on 19 March 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, following its establishment during the Socialist International meeting the prior year. More than one million women and men attended rallies on that first commemoration. In 1975, during International Women's Year, the United Nations began celebrating 8 March as International Women's Day.

Two years later, in December 1977, the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions.

On this occasion let us try and make a difference: think globally and act locally!

Make everyday International Women's Day. Do your bit to ensure that the future for women is bright, equal, safe and rewarding.