



# Economics Matters

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FEATURED ARTICLE:  
The Millennium Development  
Goals and Beyond

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# The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight international development goals that were established at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations (UN) in 2000. There was also a total of 21 targets set to achieve these goals. All UN member states were committed to help achieve the following MDGs by 2015.



The MDGs certainly raised awareness in the international community, helped in recent years by the support of President Obama in the United States. Following Prime Minister Cameron's pledge, the United Kingdom recently became the first country in the G7 to honour its commitment to ring-fence 0.7% of its Gross Domestic Product for foreign aid. The 0.7% figure is a UN target set in 1970 for developed economies to help promote economic development in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDs). Over

the fifteen years since 2000, however, progress on the eight MDGs has been patchy, with some communities even going backwards, although this has often been the result of bad governance and conflict.

MDG number 1 was to reduce extreme poverty: between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day should be halved. The global number of extremely poor people in the world has indeed declined from 1.9 billion in 1990



to 836 million in 2015. Although this figure looks impressive, the reduction to achieve this goal can be explained in part by economic growth in China which has lifted millions of the Chinese people out of poverty. Nevertheless, absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa has fallen by over a quarter since 1990.



MDG number 2 focused on achieving universal primary education, since literacy and numeracy can provide a route out of extreme poverty. Globally, the number of children not attending school has fallen from 100 million in 1990 to 57 million in 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa has seen the greatest progress, with school enrolment rising from 52% in 1990 to 80% today. It is not just the number of children in education that matters, however; it is also the quality of education they receive that counts. This is much harder to quantify, with, for example, disproportionate numbers of

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undergraduates in sub-Saharan Africa studying for social science degrees (which are linked to jobs in government) rather than degrees in science, engineering and agricultural economics.

MDG number 3 was designed to promote gender equality. While some progress has been made, women's empowerment has not been achieved and vast inequalities remain between the sexes in terms of access to education, land rights, participation in the political process and attainment of senior positions in the business community. Cultural and religious factors have held back women in many countries and measuring progress on this goal is often difficult. It remains an area of continuing concern as women are more likely to be poorer than men in most countries, and the worldwide employment rates of women have been rising at a relatively slower pace,



according to a recent UN report. On the other hand, about two-thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education and 90% of countries have more women in their parliaments than in 1995, although this is often from a very low base. In some countries, microfinance initiatives such as Grameen Bank are helping more women to start businesses.





MDG number 4 was to reduce child mortality. There has been a reduction in deaths of children under five years of age from 12 million in 1990 to 6 million in 2015. The child mortality rate has fallen from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births, but it has failed to meet the MDG target of a drop of two-thirds compared with 1990. Global measles vaccine coverage has risen from 73% in 2000 to 84% in 2013, which will help to reduce child mortality in the future, just as the global eradication of smallpox did some years ago.



MDG number 5 is designed to improve maternal health. The global maternal mortality rate has fallen by nearly half from 380 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 210 in 2013, but this means that the two-thirds reduction stated in the MDG target has still not been reached. The number of births attended by skilled health personnel has risen from 59% in 1990 to 71% in 2014.

MDG number 6 targeted HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The target of halting and starting to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 has not been met, although the number of new HIV infections fell from 3.5 million in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2013. The

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tuberculosis mortality rate fell by 45% between 1990 and 2013, and up to 6 million deaths from malaria were prevented through simple measures such as tablets and improved sanitation. Nonetheless, 1.3 million people die of malaria each year, 90% of whom are children under the age of 5.

MDG number 7 was to ensure environmental sustainability. The target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water was achieved in 2010, five years ahead of schedule. As a result 2.6 billion people have now gained access to improved drinking water since 1990. However, 663 million people across the world still do not have access to adequate drinking water.

MDG number 8 was to develop a global partnership for development between More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) and LEDCs. Between 2000 and 2014, overseas development assistance from MEDCs to developing countries increased by 66% in real terms, reaching \$134.8 billion (£80.3 billion). However, apart from the UK, only five other countries – Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and the United Arab Emirates – met or exceeded the UN aid target of 0.7% of GDP in 2013, although the Netherlands has consistently met it in the past.





The MDGs expired in 2015 and in September of that year the UN approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are meant to be achieved over the next fifteen years to 2030. Within the 17 SDGs are a total of 169 targets which detail exactly what must be achieved to reach each goal. For example, targets under goal one (no poverty), include reducing by at least half the number of people living in poverty by 2030, and eradicating extreme poverty (people living on less than \$1.25 a day). Under goal five (gender equality), there is a target on eliminating violence against women, while goal sixteen (peace, justice and strong institutions) has a target to promote the rule of law and equal access to justice.

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The SDGs are much more ambitious than the MDGs, setting out in much more detail what must be achieved. There were only 8 MDGs with 21 targets, whereas there are 17 SDGs and 169 targets. The SDGs, however, have been criticised for being too numerous and that some cannot really be measured; for example, how do you quantify a fall in discrimination against women? There is also a real worry that some countries will pick and choose the goals they want to meet.

The SDGs are aimed at all countries rather than solely LEDCs (as was the case with the MDGs), and there is a bigger focus on justice, jobs, good governance and the empowerment of women. Many analysts believe that, in order to achieve these goals, huge amounts of money will have to be spent. Governments will have to behave differently towards their people and private companies will have to change their business practices, particularly large multinationals.



On the latter point, Lise Kingo, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact, has said: 'Businesses today are expected to be part of the solution to our world's greatest challenges – from climate and water crises, to inequality and poverty – as captured in the Sustainable Development Goals. For companies ready to take on the agenda, the SDGs provide a platform to show responsibility, pursue opportunity and innovation, and inspire other businesses to get on board.'

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The SDGs came into force in January 2016, although there are doubts about how much is realistically achievable before 2030. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that the MDGs need to be built upon and that the 17 SDGs are worth working towards over the next fifteen years. Only time will tell whether the SDGs can be more than just wishful thinking.

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### Follow up work:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-34347198>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06drxls>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-33337787>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-34908108>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p032ml8h>

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