

FFD Follow-Up: The Millennium Development Goals
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I want to begin with a bit of context-setting. While 189 UN Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in 2000, this was not a meeting in which civil society formally participated. Thus, the MDGs were birthed with very limited participation by civil society and little awareness about or involvement in subsequent reports and processes.

Yet during the last decade, civil society had put substantial energy into participating in and monitoring the implementation of the UN Conferences of the 1990s, beginning with the Earth Summit, and then Human Rights, Population, the Women's Conference and the Social Summit. These conferences set a far-reaching global policy agenda. One critical aspect was the recognition that the premise that promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to human development and poverty eradication.

But implementation of these commitments at the national and global level has proved elusive. Rapid globalization and liberalization of the world economy has widened the gap between the haves and the have nots, both between countries and within countries, thus impeding the capacity of many countries to make progress toward these goals.

Another challenge to implementation was the lack of time-bound numerical targets, thus making it more difficult to hold governments accountable for these commitments. WEDO, in a series of monitoring reports, worked with women's organizations and other groups in over 50 countries, to report on the progress

governments made and gaps towards implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

Frustrated over the lack of implementation and the failure of the plus 5 and now plus 10 reviews to really hold governments accountable, we, too, are looking for more effective approaches. There is growing realization--among the NGO community—of the central role MDGs are now occupying in the UN system and the possibilities they offer for achieving some of the commitments of the 1990s.

What are the pluses and what are the minuses? Obviously, on the plus side is first, the fact that the MDGs are a set of time-bound numerical targets---thus easy to measure if governments are meeting their goals; second, they have been endorsed by governments at the highest level; third, UN agencies are organizing much of their assistance and activities to support countries achievement of these goals; fourth, the international financial institutions and the WTO have in principal endorsed the MDGs as well.

So what is the problem? First, there is the question of political will—not just on the part of developing countries but on the part of all 189 countries that committed to the MDGs and the IFIs and the WTO. Are the MDGs targets only for the poorest countries, or for all countries? Poverty levels in all countries, including my own, the United States, are way too high. Certainly we are a long way from achieving the goal of gender equality as the US ranks #59 in terms of women’s representation in national legislatures.

Moreover, Goal#8, which encompasses global economic and finance policies is aimed specifically at industrialized countries. Yet, there are no time frames or quantifiable benchmarks here. Unless this is addressed, there will be no real “partnership.”

Second, is the question of where will the resources come from to achieve these goals—obviously it must be a combination of domestic resources, ODA, and trade and investment. This is the place for coherence—rather than contradiction—between the BWIs, WTO, G-8 macroeconomic and finance policies and the UN development agenda. This type of policy coherence should be on the agenda of the spring World Bank-IMF meetings and the April 14 EcoSoc session.

Third, is the limitations of the MDGs themselves—obviously they are a rather simplistic reduction of more extensive and complex commitments made by governments during the conferences of the 1990s. Human rights are mentioned in the Declaration, but not in the MDGs themselves. It is laudable to reduce the world's poor by half by 2015 but what happens to the other half?

While gender equality and women's empowerment is an explicit MDG—Goal #3—the target to measure this goal is limited to education. While there is overwhelming research by the World Bank, UNDP, and others to demonstrate the important link between girls education and development, we also know that education is necessary but not sufficient for empowerment. Unless gender equality and women's empowerment are made central to all the MDGs, these laudable goals, to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainability, will remain unfulfilled. I hope we don't have to wait until 2015 to figure this out.