Alleviating World Poverty: The MDGs Revisited

Poverty is an unresolved human tragedy. Over 1.4 billion people earn less than $1.25 a day and 2.6 billion people live on less than $2.00 per day. To alleviate poverty, the United Nations Development Program has adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 to be achieved by 2015. MDGs provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions. Additionally, the MDGs provide a framework for the entire international community to work together toward a common end: making sure that human development reaches everyone, everywhere. If these goals are achieved, poverty reduces by half; tens of millions of lives are saved; and many more people have the opportunity to benefit from the global economy. The MDGs are:

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger: This goal is to be achieved by providing support in cash and kind for the world’s poor and provide a framework for coordinating development efforts. The target is to cut in half the proportion of people in the developing countries living on less than $1.25 a day by 2015.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education: This goal is to be achieved by raising family income so that parents would be able to send children to school rather than to work. Education, particularly for girls, prepares children to take advantage of economic opportunities. The number of children of primary school age who were out of school fell from 103 million in 1999 to 73 million in 2006, despite an overall increase in the number of children in this age group.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women: This goal is to be achieved by eliminating gender disparity in primary, secondary, and higher education so that educated and skilled women find better opportunities to earn income. In poverty-stricken region, especially in Western and Central Africa, girls, in particular, fail to enroll
in and stay in school. Drought, food shortages, armed conflict, poverty, lack of birth registration, child labor, and HIV/AIDS infection contribute to low school enrolments and high dropout rates for girls.

**Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality:** This goal is to be achieved by improving agricultural production as a reliable and sustainable means of improving nutrition and reducing child malnutrition and mortality. More children die before the age of five in rural areas than in urban ones. About half of these deaths are due to malnutrition. In 2006, number of death among children under five dipped below 10 million. Nevertheless, the death of millions of children from preventable causes each year is unacceptable. A child born in a developing country is 13 times more likely to die within the first five years of life than a child born in a developed country.

**Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health:** This goal is to be achieved by reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters by 2015. Giving birth is especially risky in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where most women deliver without skilled care. Maternal mortality remains very high in many developing countries. In 2005, more than 500,000 women died during pregnancy, childbirth, or within six weeks after delivery. Ninety-nine per cent of these deaths occurred in developing countries, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia accounting for 86 percent of them.

**Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases:** This goal is to be achieved by reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and preventing the incidence of malaria and other major diseases. Every day, nearly 7,500 people become infected with HIV and 5,500 die from AIDS, mostly due to a lack of prevention and treatment services. Thanks to improvement in prevention programs, the number of people newly infected with HIV declined from 3.0 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007. However, largely because newly infected people survive longer, the number of people living with HIV rose from 29.5 million in 2001 to 33 million in 2007.

**Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability:** This goal is to be achieved by integrating the principles of sustainable development into economic policies and programs; reverse the loss of environmental resources; and reducing the proportion of
people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 50 percent in 2015. Carbon dioxide emissions reached 28 billion metric tons in 2005 and continued upward, resulting in increased atmospheric concentrations of CO2. Per capita emissions remain the highest in developed countries, about 12 metric tons of CO2 per person per year, compared with about 3 metric tons in developing countries. While no area can escape the adverse impact of climate change, the Arctic and small islands and mega deltas in Asia and Africa seem to be especially vulnerable because of their high exposure to the effects of climate change.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development: This goal is to be achieved by developing an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system to address the special needs of poor countries. With debt relief grants unlikely to return to 2005 levels, bilateral aid and contributions to multilateral development institutions will need to increase rapidly over the next three years if developed countries are to meet their commitments. Even a sudden escalation of aid dollars will not compensate for the failure to provide the continuous and predictable build-up in official development assistance that was implicit in their 2005 commitments. Non-governmental organizations, the private sector and a number of developing countries are becoming increasingly significant sources of development assistance. Special purpose funds - such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria - have become important channels for some of these resources.

Progress has been made. The international community has been able to alleviate poverty. The percentage of people living on less than $2 a day dropped steadily from 70 in 1980 to 41 in 2005. Likewise, the percentage of world population living on less than $1.25 a day declined persistently from 40 in 1990 to about 25 in 2005.

Nevertheless, the risk of falling into poverty is on a rising trend. The risk factor increased from 18 percent in 1980 to over 30 percent in 2005. Several factors have contributed to this rising trend, including insufficient investment in agriculture, massive rural-urban migration, inadequate food storage and distribution facilities, rising food prices, war and civil strife, corrupt government, and the on-going global recession. Recently, The World Bank has estimated that the global recession and rapidly rising food prices have pushed some 100 to 150 million people into poverty in 2008 and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. National governments with assistance from the international community must create an environment in which people become productive enough to sustain themselves. They must acquire the necessary tools of education and self-confidence to generate steady streams of income to satisfy their needs and wants.