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October Roundtable: MDGs and Human Rights Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

"The UN millennium development goals can be put back on track" by Philippe Douste-Blazy. The Guardian. September 5, 2010.

Keywords

Human rights, United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit, Global economy, Global community

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MDGs and Human Rights

Article under review: [“The UN millennium development goals can be put back on track” by Philippe Douste-Blazy. *The Guardian*. September 5, 2010.](#)

In his speech at the UN Millennium Development Goals Summit, President Obama noted that "if the international community just keeps doing the same things in the same way, we will miss many development goals." Regrettably, that is what many donors and recipients seem to be doing, and the opportunity to reach the MDGs is likely to be missed unless more urgent action is taken immediately. The United Nations 2010 MDG Report indicates that about one quarter of all children in developing countries are considered to be underweight and are at risk of long-term effects of undernourishment; more than 500,000 prospective mothers in developing countries die annually in childbirth or of complications from pregnancy; in sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of people living on just over a dollar a day is unlikely to be cut in half. Additionally, in middle income countries like Mexico, Brazil, and Indonesia, inequality has also led to “pockets of poverty”—socially excluded groups that will need specific attention if their countries are to reach the MDGs.

Shortcomings in attaining these internationally accepted development goals are due to a range of factors. In this month’s centerpiece, former French foreign minister Philippe Douste-Blazy indicates that the global economic crisis is sapping developed countries' efforts to fulfill their commitments for official development assistance (ODA): “A UN report warns that annual investment from these donor countries is falling \$35bn short of the \$150bn goal.” For Douste-Blazy, one of the ways to reach these goals is to put into place innovative financing mechanisms that could tap incrementally into global financial flows without disrupting economic activity.

Our panelists take the discussion even further. For them, the Millennium Project’s agenda has focused exclusively on identifying the operational priorities, organizational means of implementation, and financing structures necessary to achieve the MDGs. To be more effective, these endeavors should also be understood within a broader human rights framework. In fact, for each one of the MDGs, there is a corresponding set of human rights obligations, standards, and norms. For example, the goal of halving poverty is useful as a benchmark, but a human rights focus would add value by helping to ensure that those working towards that objective do not discriminate against communities that have historically suffered from prejudice.

Finally, our contributors suggest that MDG-related activities must also work to change the unequal power relations that sustain poverty. Such an approach would consider the power asymmetries of the international economic system as well as inequalities within countries. Many of the barriers to progress on MDGs lie in the social and political realms, and it is in this context that the transformative power of human rights should take priority.

These issues and others are considered in this month’s Roundtable.