

# Who Cares about the Millennium Development Goals?

Darrell Dorr

Who cares about the Millennium Development Goals? Enthusiasts for frontier mission should – as an expression of our compassion for suffering peoples and our desire to see God honored in earth's most neglected corners. But chances are that you haven't even *heard* of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). If so, here's a brief introduction.

## What Are the Millennium Development Goals?

In September 2000 the 189 member governments of the United Nations issued the *Millennium Declaration*, stating their intentions to make substantial new inroads in extreme poverty and its causes. UN leaders and others subsequently developed a cluster of eight goals to be achieved by 2015 around the world:

- Halve the population of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger
- Ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education
- Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five
- Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio
- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
- Reverse environmental loss and halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water
- Develop a global partnership for development focusing on fair trade, good governance, national debt, affordable drugs, and access to new technologies

The zeal of promising beginnings soon faltered, however, when during 2002-2003 world summits began to bog down in the details (especially the

funding) and when the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq assumed the global spotlight. By 2004 the international development community sought to regain momentum, partially through the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP's) sponsorship of the *Millennium Campaign*. Meanwhile, many faith-based and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also began to visibly throw their support behind the MDGs, including the *Micah Challenge* co-sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance.

## What's Happening in 2005?

Many consider 2005 to be a pivotal year in fostering new progress toward the year-2015 targets of the MDGs. In January 2005 the energetic Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's Earth Institute unveiled

the UNDP-endorsed, ten-volume *Millennium Project*, a detailed, interdisciplinary "practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals." Scholars, journalists, and activists have begun to dissect and discuss this how-to program.

Meanwhile, preparations are underway for the summit of G8 heads of government in Scotland in July, where Britain's Prime Min-

ister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown are expected to take advantage of Britain's chairmanship to promote their advocacy of the MDGs. UN heads of state are due to gather in New York September 14-16, when progress toward the MDGs will be reviewed; the Micah Challenge is convening a Global Day of Prayer the prior Sunday (September 11).

## What Are the Strengths and Weaknesses of the MDGs?

The Millennium Development Goals have generated an enormous volume of discussion and



reams of written critique. Indeed, the MDGs have come under fire from critics as little more than the United Nations' attempt to improve its image and standing, or as a new opportunity for specialists in the international development "industry" to further their careers and funding. Some non-governmental organizations have complained that the MDGs represent a top-down, heavy-handed attempt to centralize and bureaucratize international development planning, that the MDGs over-reach and inflate expectations, and that the MDGs emphasize economic and "macro" development to the neglect of other components of development.

There are elements of truth in such criticisms, and more could be added. Indeed, the Millennium Development Goals are decidedly imperfect, both in

substance and process. Yet the Millennium Development Goals also represent an enormous opportunity – a minimal shared framework for improving the lives of hundreds of millions of people, including many among unreached peoples. The MDGs represent an attempt to replace "compassion fatigue" and "donor jaundice" with new hope and generosity and a renewed sense of common stewardship, partially through an initial emphasis on do-able "quick wins" and by fast-tracking development aid to countries showing they can usefully absorb such aid.

## Why Should We Get Involved?

Furthermore, the UN and others are appealing to non-governmental organizations or "civil society organizations" (CSOs) – which include mission structures – to not remain aloof from the MDGs, but to take their place as necessary partners in dialogue and development, even if only through vigorous critiques. For example, the Millennium Project "how-to" plan of January 2005 notes, "Within countries, CSOs can contribute to MDG-based poverty reduction strategies in at least four ways: publicly advocating for pressing development concerns, helping design strategies to meet each target, working with governments to implement scaled-up investment programs, and monitoring and evaluating efforts to achieve the Goals. Internationally, CSOs can also mobilize and build public awareness around the Goals, share best practices and technical expertise with governments, and deliver services directly."

In addition, mission structures can utilize the MDG processes to clarify their distinctive perspectives *on the roots and fruits of international development*. The Millennium Project report observes, "The Goals constitute a *minimum set of objectives that the global community has agreed to*. In several country contexts, they can provide the basis for more ambitious national objectives. *Strategies to achieve them may also require a broader set of inputs than specified by the MDG targets and indicators . . .*" (emphasis mine). For example, the MDGs lean heavily on the vital prerequisite of "good governance" in developing societies. Don't evangelical mission structures have much to say about where good governance originates and what it looks like – and where personal and social transformation originate and what expressions they can be expected to take? (See, "Addressing the Roots of Human Problems," page 16.) Frontier mission sows the seeds of far-reaching transformation, not merely incremental development.

**Don't evangelicals have much to say about where good governance originates?**



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You've got questions?

During September 12-15 the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations, and the International Society of Frontier Missiology are conducting joint deliberations in Denver on "Synergistic Kingdom Advance Among the Least and the Lost." In a happy convergence of scheduling, this joint conference occurs the same week UN heads of state gather to review the MDGs in New York and when the Micah Challenge is convening a Global Day of Prayer. But will the convergence extend beyond scheduling to wider, substantive evangelical engagement with the MDGs?

In February 2004 Gordon Brown, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, appealed to faith communities to take their place at the MDG table:

2015 is the fixed point on our horizon — seemingly distant but closer than we think. But it is actually 2005 — as close as can be — that will determine whether we are likely to make the rest of the journey. If we let things slip, the Millennium Goals will become just another dream we once had, and we will indeed be sitting back on our sofas and switching on our TVs and — I am afraid — watching

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MDGs

[www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)  
[www.millenniumcampaign.org](http://www.millenniumcampaign.org)  
[www.unmillenniumproject.org](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org)  
[www.one.org](http://www.one.org)  
[www.micahchallenge.org](http://www.micahchallenge.org)  
[www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org)  
[www.globalfutureonline.org](http://www.globalfutureonline.org)  
 (see First Quarter, 2004)

people die on our screens for the rest of our lives. We will be the generation that betrayed its own heart.

Will we respond with Biblical discernment and compassion? 🌐

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# Addressing the Roots of Human Problems

One example of an integrated approach to international development comes from William Carey International University (WCIU), affiliated with the U.S. Center for World Mission. Note how WCIU seeks to approach the Millennium Development Goals and comparable challenges:

*William Carey International University prepares men and women to discover and address the roots of human problems around the world.*



WCIU is a specialized educational institution which uses an integrative approach to create understanding of socio-cultural aspects of international development. Its focus is the broad field of international development as understood and practiced by transnational NGOs (non-governmental organizations), most of which are faith-based. WCIU offers three degrees in this field: the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in International Development.

WCIU fulfills its purpose as an academic degree-granting institution by offering field-based

educational programs that assist NGO workers in discovering and addressing the roots of human problems. It also provides curricular assistance to educational institutions of similar purpose and constituency both in the U.S. and abroad.

Contrary to popular opinion, the roots of human problems lie deep within cultural and social systems. WCIU seeks to equip students to understand these systems, identify the roots of pervasive problems, and effectively address their causes. Only through such development practices can lasting change be achieved.

The University approaches international development as an integrated academic field involving a number of different disciplines. Students study the historical, social, cultural, religious, educational, economic, technical, and political matrix in which NGOs work. This study leads to more effective practices for NGOs and their workers.

The University's primary constituents are non-profit organizations, particularly those that are faith-based, working cross-culturally and engaged in integrated development efforts. Its graduate programs are designed primarily for working adults already serving or preparing to serve with these NGOs across cultures. 🌐

*To learn more, see [www.wciu.edu](http://www.wciu.edu).*