





## **AIDE ET ACTION INTERNATIONAL - SEPTEMBER 2010**

Aide et Action, founded in 1981, became Aide et Action International in 2007. Aide et Action International is an international development organisation with no political or religious affiliations, and works in 23 countries – in Africa, Asia, Latin America-Caribbean and Europe. Through more than 100 programmes and with the help of its partners, Aide et Action International contributes to improving access to quality education for more than five million children and adults. Aide et Action International supports local communities to implement their development projects. 1 000 employees in the world work together to meet these objectives.

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**MDGs 2015:  
THE MIRAGE!**  
CITIZENS' VOICES  
ON THE MILLENNIUM  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Supervised by Claire Calosci  
General Managing Director  
Aide et Action International Organisation



Changing the world through Education



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**South Asia regional team:** Ravi Pratap Singh, Director of the South Asia regional team.

**West Africa regional team headed by Koffi Adjimon:** Pape Kane Diallo, Alioune Badara N'diaye, Abdoulaye Diepkil  , D  sir   Tom-Iteng Arfa, Francine Kuwonu, Hamidou Soukouna and Ousmane Diallo.

**East and Central Africa regional team headed by Antoine Gizenga:** Ginason Jandwa.

**South-East Asia regional team headed by Prasert Tepanart:** Doan Vu, Sovithiea Kuch and Kangqi Cheng.

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# FOREWORD

At the Millennium Summit held in September 2000 in New York, Heads of State and Government met and undertook to work together to achieve eight objectives for the world by 2015 so that *"all its inhabitants can live free from hunger and safe from violence, drinking clean water, breathing clean air, and knowing that their children will have real chances in life"*<sup>1</sup>.

Ten years later, what progress has been made in these objectives, called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)? At what stage are we? What still remains to be done and where do we go from here? It is these questions that will be at the heart of the discussions that the Heads of State and Government will be holding when they meet once again on 20-22 September 2010 in New York. It is to these discussions that Aide et Action International wishes to contribute by bringing out this publication.

In its Millennium Report published in 2000, the United Nations Secretary General stated that *"the world's inhabitants look to their leaders, when they meet for the Millennium Summit, to identify the major challenges before the world and take action to solve them"*<sup>2</sup>. Ten years down the line, how do the world's citizens view the Millennium Development Goals? What do they feel has been the level of progress achieved and what strategies can they identify to make sure that the commitments made are honored?

The report that Aide et Action International is publishing today presents citizens' opinions about the MDGs in ten developing countries – women, men and children whose countries practice policies guided by the Millennium Development Goals. They are parents, children, teachers, local representatives, media persons, NGO members or employees of development institutions – all from different horizons. Their experiences and messages may differ, but they speak of their daily lives that are

still marked by a significant amount of vulnerability and express their desire to take part actively in the development of their country. All that these various actors have said sheds new light on the MDGs.

By reviewing the eight Millennium Development Goals just five years before their 2015 deadline, Aide et Action International's purpose is to analyse their impact on people's living conditions and to help identify new strategies so that they can be fully attained. Whereas undeniable progresses have been achieved, poverty continues to persist, affecting millions of families. In addition, the effects of the world economic crisis are threatening the efforts made so far. The realities prevailing at local level highlight the concerns and needs of people who continue to suffer from a lack of facilities and from not being taken into account.

Communities have declared that they feel isolated from actions that are meant to affect them and have increasingly stated their desire to be stakeholders in such initiatives.

Aide et Action International's ambition is for this report to play a role in establishing a real dialogue between citizens on the one hand, and on the other, with the decision-makers and Heads of State and Government who will be meeting in New York. This work, based on surveys and collection of testimonies, reminds us that involving people in drafting policies that affect them is of primary importance.

Underestimating their participation means reducing the opportunities for sustainable development and building a fairer world.

**Claire Calosci**, General Managing Director  
Aide et Action International Organisation



# Executive Summary

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a consensual basis for development policies. They try to take into consideration the most worrying problems for developing countries and their indicators constitute a reference for States to measure their progress. Ten years after their launch, the UN Summit in New York is an opportunity for development stakeholders to question and review the MDGs.

The first chapter of this report focuses on data and testimonies collected from the field in ten countries where Aide et Action International works: Cambodia, China, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali, Dominican Republic, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Vietnam. The challenge was to be able to gauge to what extent people are aware of the MDGs and concerned by these goals, and the kind of impact they have had. Far from the discourses and presentations at major international forums, these citizens highlight the need to promote more inclusive and participatory policies, consider local strategies and promote community commitments. Beyond the MDGs alone, people share their desire to see the emergence of real social protection systems and acclaim the implementation of democratic processes that would enable them to take part in the definition of public policies. This chapter also analyses in what way education plays a fundamental role in achieving each of the MDGs.

The second chapter of this report reviews progress made over the last ten years, paying special attention to the issue of education. In fact, the results achieved with regard to the eight related goals are rather unequal. According to the World Bank's criteria, the world made constant progress in terms of poverty reduction between 1981 and 2005. In South-East Asia, the number of people living on less than 1.25 USD per day fell by

380 million<sup>3</sup>, down from 80% to 18% of the total population. In South Asia, the figures indicated a decline from 60% to 40%. In Africa on the contrary, the number of people living on less than 2 USD per day almost doubled, rising from 200 million to 380 million. However, since 2008, the food, fuel and economic crises have considerably worsened the situation.

With regard to primary education, enrollment rates increased in developing countries, rising from 80% in 1999 to 86% in 2007<sup>4</sup>. These rates witnessed a sharp increase in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia, growing respectively from 56% in 1999 to 73% in 2007, and 74% in 1999 to 86% in 2007. However, in the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific, the population of children in primary school fell respectively from 75% in 1999 to 72% in 2007 and from 96% in 1999 to 94% in 2007. In total, 72 million children remain excluded from education in 2010 – 54% of them are girls – and inequalities are growing in terms of access to education.

While the development of primary education made considerable progress in gender parity possible, the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* underlines that in 28 countries, less than 90 girls are enrolled in school against 100 boys<sup>5</sup>. At the secondary level, there are problems with regard to retention rates for girls in school once they reached puberty, especially in countries in which girls continue to suffer the disadvantages associated with their gender. In terms of gender equality and women's empowerment, the slow progress in literacy among women – who continue to account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate population – is hardly encouraging. Everywhere in the world, women continue to be victims of violence and discrimination associated with the fact of being female: difficulties in having



access to land and credit, the over-representation of women among poor workers, barriers in access to health care, etc.

Whereas in 2006, the number of deaths of children in the 0-5 year age group had fallen below the 10 million bar, the combined impacts of three crises – the food, fuel and economic crises – is threatening to cancel out a significant part of the progress achieved. In fact, economic crises have a sustained impact on children's development. The data collected by Aide et Action International indicate that in many countries, families reduced the quantity and quality of the food they consumed. An IFPRI<sup>6</sup> study also noted that by 2020 Sub-Saharan Africa will see its per capita consumption of calories fall by 10%, representing an additional 16 million children suffering from malnutrition on the continent. At the global level, an additional 200,000 to 400,000 children below one year could die across the world every year.

These figures are all the more disturbing since maternal health remains one of the MDGs in relation to which the world has made the least progress. The data collected by Aide et Action International show that in West Africa, 90% of pregnant women state that they are able to avail of adequate follow-up during their pregnancy. But in Cambodia, the majority of women give birth in their homes because health centers are too far away and only a relatively small number benefit from the services of midwives. In Senegal, families that were questioned about the probability of achieving each of the eight MDGs by 2015 believed that there was a medium to high probability of achieving all the goals, except for those concerning maternal health. With regard to this goal, they felt that there was a low probability of achieving it, thereby testifying to the fact that maternal health is too rarely taken into account in

the public policies drafted in their countries.

HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis or measles continue to cause millions of deaths every year. Access to anti-retroviral drugs is inadequate (only a little less than one-third of the people who need these drugs actually receive them) and prevention is still poorly adapted to target groups, as shown by the information collected in the field. Whereas real progress has been achieved in controlling malaria and infectious diseases, the fact remains that this goal cannot be attained without the implementation of sustainable health systems that enable people to have access to quality health care.

Environmental protection has been a matter of concern worldwide for the last several years. For developing countries, the efficient and sustainable management of their natural resources is likely to present a real comparative advantage and help promote not just their economic but also human development. In fact, in the studies carried out by Aide et Action International, it has been noted that the families interviewed quite frequently linked environmental protection to access to drinking water and had a clear perception of the impacts of initiatives adopted concerning water purification, provision of drinking water in schools and construction of latrines.

Achieving all these goals presupposes adequate funding and a rational management of resources. However, presently, donor countries have far from honored their commitments and the consequences of the economic crisis do not allow for much optimism. While Official Development Aid did help in making significant progress, the funding deficit has been estimated at 20 billion USD for 2010 (110 billion USD instead of the 130 billion committed by

the donors at the Gleneagles Summit in 2005).

Finally, the third chapter of this report focuses on all that still remains to be done by the 2015 deadline. The Opinions of experts from the developing countries in which Aide et Action International conducted its surveys were solicited. Long-standing observers and analysts, they pointed out changes that have taken place in living conditions in these countries over the last ten years, conducted a final review of these changes and introduced new perspectives for the remaining five years.

By giving citizens from developing countries the opportunity to raise their voices, this report attempts to show another facet of the MDGs. Far from the great discourses and declarations made on this issue, people at the grassroots also have their own opinions and their own judgments about the MDG review. And what they demand above all is to be able to take part democratically in decisions that concern them and to put to good account strategies and initiatives that lead to concrete and measurable results on the field, aimed at improving their living conditions.

<sup>1</sup> *United Nations. 2000. We the Peoples. The role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Report of the UN Secretary General. New York, United Nations.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Figures from the World Bank website [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010].*

<sup>4</sup> *UNESCO. 2010. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized. Paris, UNESCO/Oxford University Press.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *International Food Policy Research Institute.*

# DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Aide et Action International called upon two types of sources for this report.

While secondary sources were used for a review of the literature on the issue (academic articles, reports of international organisations, conferences, etc.), the core of the analysis is based on primary sources collected in ten countries: Cambodia, China, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali, the Dominican Republic, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Vietnam. In each country, data have been collected from two types of targets: families, children, actors in the field of education (teachers, representatives of parents' associations, NGO representatives) and local representatives on the one hand; and people acknowledged at the national level for their expertise in the field of development and for their knowledge of policies associated with MDGs on the other hand. 700 people were interviewed on the whole.

For the first population group, the data were gathered with the help of four distinct multiple-choice questionnaires. In each country, perception surveys were conducted by Aide et Action International reference persons trained in the administration of questionnaires, who also took care to constitute a representative population sample (in terms of age, gender, geographical location, etc.). For the parents' group, the reference persons laid special emphasis on women, because of the significant role they play in the education, health and nutrition of children.

The questionnaires aimed at measuring the level of knowledge and perceptions of people with regard to the MDGs, through three main areas of analysis concerning the following: improvement or deterioration in their living conditions (family income, employment, access to education, access to health, family nutrition, vulnerability, etc.); their expecta-

tions concerning personal, family and community development; their strategies to improve their daily lives in terms of education, health, etc. The use of multiple-choice questionnaires appeared to be the best means of collecting comparable data for different countries of the world. One or two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaires made it possible to gather additional information on the daily lives of those surveyed.

The interview-based surveys involved the second population group. These interviews were conducted at the same time as the questionnaire-based surveys. The results obtained made it possible to supplement information gathered with the questionnaire-based surveys.

The data were processed by the report's team, with the help of a research sociologist.

Generally speaking, the research was conducted within the framework of the methodological framework established.

However, some shortcomings were identified. On the one hand, some of the teams administering the questionnaire-based surveys sent in processed data, while others submitted overall results. This bias was handled by applying a lower index to the overall results. Moreover, since the survey coordination team was based in Senegal, the number of people interviewed in this country was considerably higher than in other countries. To correct this, a rectification coefficient was applied to those included in the first population group interviewed in this country.

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# MDGs as seen by citizens from developing countries

"The MDGs are a road map that States have drawn up in order to tackle the priority problems that are undermining our countries. That is a good thing – especially because it will create awareness in the States."

A Red Cross coordinator, Togo

## FROM REAL PROGRESS TO NEW CONCERNS

Adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 Heads of State during the Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, the Millennium Declaration set down the goals to be achieved by 2015 (see box 1).

In order to follow the progress achieved in each of these fields, each goal was divided into 21 quantifiable goals, and measured through sixty indicators.

Curiously enough, there is no indicator to measure the level of knowledge and the extent to which citizens from developing countries support the goals and their results, which are supposedly directed at them in the first place. And yet, their view of the MDGs constitutes a good indicator of the relevance and progress of the goals, just as it helps shed new light on them.

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### EIGHT GOALS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOST FRAGILE COUNTRIES?

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Based on precise targets to be achieved by clearly pre-determined deadlines, accompanied by tangible and verifiable follow-up indicators, the MDGs were designed in such a way as to be achieved in an organized and realistic manner. Real progress has been achieved for some of the goals, in the light of the indicators selected. Consequently, in the area of

primary education for example, primary school enrollment rates in developing countries increased from 80% in 1999 to 86% in 2007.

The regions that were the furthest behind are also the ones that witnessed the strongest growth in their primary school enrollment rates. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate rose from 56% in 1999 to 73% in 2007, whereas in South and West Asia, it rose from 74% to 86% over the same period<sup>7</sup>.

However, unequal progress has been recorded depending on the countries and goals concerned. For instance, in Senegal, the MDGs monitoring report published in April 2010 indicates that progress has been achieved in all fields, but also stresses the difficulties faced by the country in achieving the goals fixed for 2015. While the results obtained in the last few years and emerging trends have shown that Senegal is on the right path to achieve the MDGs on the whole, some sectors such as health and education are still far from achieving the goals, in particular with regard to child and maternal mortality and primary school completion rates<sup>8</sup>.

### WHO KNOWS THE MDGS?

The surveys conducted by Aide et Action International have shown that 57% of the respondents were not aware of the MDGs. Parents, community



members and teachers all stated that they had no knowledge of the MDGs whatsoever, whereas development stakeholders (elected representatives, members of institutions, NGOs and the media) were almost all aware of them and stated their support of their contents. In Mali, Senegal and Togo, almost all the development actors who said they knew about the MDGs were able to quote at least four of them spontaneously, whereas in the same countries, a third of the parents, community members and teachers were only superficially aware of them.

In Tanzania and Madagascar, 72% of the parents interviewed were not aware of the MDGs. However, when they were brought to their knowledge, everyone said that they subscribed to them. In Madagascar, the head of a school district explained: "*The MDGs concern developing countries. However, there is a problem with regard to the achievement of these goals because of a lack of awareness.*" The communication gap is partly explained by the absence of frameworks in which citizens could be involved. The coordinator of a Tanzanian NGO underlined: "*There is not, in Tanzania, a mechanism to monitor the contribution to the MDGs. It is good to be realistic: we have difficulty influencing the decision, action, initiatives and policies.*"

According to the views expressed by people in Senegal (see Table 1), progress has been noted in the achievement of each of these goals. However, there was much less faith in the probability that each goal would be achieved in 2015. While the country's citizens deemed that the probability of achieving primary education for all, reducing child mortality and improving the fight against HIV/AIDS and malaria is high, they felt on the contrary that there was only an average or even low probability of achieving the five remaining goals.

<sup>7</sup> *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized, op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Republic of Senegal. 2010. Millenium Development Goals Monitoring Report. Senegal, Dakar.*

## 1 THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education.
- Promote gender equality and empower women.
- Reduce child mortality.
- Improve maternal health.
- Combat HIV / AIDS, control malaria and other major diseases.
- Ensure Environmental sustainability.
- Develop a global partnership for development.

New York, September 2000.

Source : <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>  
(Accessed 13 July 2010).



In all the countries surveyed, we noted that the communication and awareness-building work done by the States considerably influenced people's knowledge and perceptions of these goals. A coordinator from the local NGO, Baraka Good Hope Orphan's Development, in Tanzania explained: *"I think the government, States and non-state actors need to translate the objectives into national strategies and to effectively control them if they want to achieve results. Specific programmes focus on specific target groups involved must be designed to improve inclusion and participation. They must be supported by a transparent and accountable government, and strong leadership."*

#### **POVERTY REMAINS THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO DEVELOPMENT**

According to the World Bank, poverty declined continuously between 1981 and 2005. In South-East Asia, the number of people living on less than 1.25 USD per day (i.e. the threshold for extreme poverty) declined by 380 million, falling from 80% to 18% of the population. In South Asia, a similar trend has been observed: the proportion of the population living in a situation of extreme poverty decreased from 60% to 40%. In Africa, while the proportion of the population living in a situation of extreme poverty has declined, the number of poor (i.e. people living on less than 2 dollars a day) has almost doubled, from 200 million to 380 million<sup>9</sup>. In Côte d'Ivoire for example, the last Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) indicates that one out of every two of its citizens is poor, as against one out of ten in 1985, and that the number of poor has increased tenfold within the space of a single generation<sup>10</sup>.

In 2010, the majority of the respondents of the surveys conducted by Aide et Action International were of the opinion that they enjoyed an average standard of living. In West Africa, 57% of the

families believed they enjoyed an average standard of living, whereas 37% of them declared that they were poor.

Such households are particularly sensitive to labour market fluctuations and dependent on the main income earner (depending on the family, it could be the father or the mother). In this context, child labour often emerges as a necessity for such families.

In West Africa, 58% of the children questioned said they had to help their parents meet the family's needs, either by helping in sales in small family shops, or in taking part in farm work. In India, in the States of Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, 40% of the families questioned by Aide et Action International between December 2009 and January 2010 said that their children were involved in income-generating activities and in the case of 55% of them, their contribution was necessary for the family's survival.

For the families interviewed, poverty was not just monetary, but characterized by the difficulties they faced in having access to essential facilities (health, food, water, education and housing) and by the insecurities they faced in their lives. In Mali and Niger, where the respondents came mainly from rural areas, 100% of the parents said that they visited the doctor or took their children to the doctor just a few times a year. 90% of them said that they could not provide appropriate medical follow-up for their children and 75% said that they consulted traditional doctors because they believe that the cost was much lower – and that is the case even when health structures were available nearby. As they were unable to meet health expenses, Malian parents from Fatoma said that they called upon healers and "street pharmacies" where vendors sell non-certified and tampered drugs.

**TABLE 1. VIEWS OF SENEGALESE CITIZENS WITH REGARD TO PROGRESS MADE AND THE PROBABILITY OF ACHIEVING THE MDGs IN SENEGAL BY 2015**

Goals	Progress (Yes/No)	Probability of achieving them (High/ Medium/Low)
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	yes	medium
Achieve universal primary education for all	yes	high
Promote gender equality and empower women	yes	medium
Reduce child mortality	yes	high
Improve maternal health	yes	low
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	yes	high
Ensure environmental sustainability	yes	medium
Develop a global partnership for development	yes	medium

SOURCE : REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL. 2010. MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS MONITORING REPORT. SENEGAL, DAKAR.

In Togo, 85% of the parents interviewed said that they consulted traditional doctors and adopted different strategies because of the impossibility of meeting health expenses, such as: using medicinal plants, self-medication, buying only part of the medicines prescribed, taking the help of relatives or even resorting to prayers. Only 36% of them said that they were able to take their children to the doctor every time they fell ill while 57% stated that they were only able to do so a few times a year.

However, with regard to health issues in particular, poverty gets leveled out depending on the degree of social protection to which people have access. But social protection is fairly limited. Just 25% of those questioned by Aide et Action International in the 10 countries that took part in our surveys said that they had some social protection. For despite the fact that social protection is an integral part of people's living conditions, it is a sizeable challenge both in terms of poverty alleviation, as well in terms of enabling all people to have real access to health services.

<sup>9</sup> Figures drawn from the World Bank's website:  
<http://www.banquemondiale.org/themes/crisefinanciere>.  
[Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010]

<sup>10</sup> Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. 2009. *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*.  
[http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cote%20Ivoire/Cote\\_dIvoire\\_drsp.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cote%20Ivoire/Cote_dIvoire_drsp.pdf) [Accessed 23 June 2010]

"Hence, whereas the MDG on universal primary education is the one that has made the most progress, making its realization seem plausible, in the case of the majority of countries, the actual progress achieved seems to be marking time."

The poverty families suffer and the mixed progress achieved in the very first MDG have therefore had cascading effects. With regard to food, for instance, Aide et Action International's surveys indicate that only 8% of the children had three meals a day, with almost all of them being limited to just two meals a day. And far from depending on a single source of income, poverty was therefore multifaceted and took different shapes in different contexts.

In Mali, a UNICEF report underlined that despite a slight improvement since 2001, the nutritional condition of children remained a matter of concern. In fact, 38% of children under 5 years old were affected by delayed development. The same report also indicated significant inequities, with children from poor families being affected twice as much by malnutrition than others.

To attain the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Mali drafted a Strategic Framework for Growth and Poverty Reduction whose first priority sought not just to ensure food security and rural development, but also to build capacities in the field of farm production and facilitate people's access to basic foodstuff.

In fact, according to estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), hunger probably reached historical levels in 2009, with more than a billion people suffering from hunger, the most vulnerable households being the most affected<sup>11</sup>. According to Mr. Jacques Diouf, FAO Director General, "*A dangerous mix constituted by the global economic slowdown and the persistent explosion of food prices in several countries made another 100 million people sink into chronic hunger and poverty*"<sup>12</sup>.

In all the countries surveyed, families, community members and teachers stressed the fact that poverty

remained an obstacle to education. That was all the more true when poverty was combined with other factors such as disability, the fact of living in rural areas, family status and origins. In Senegal's Kolda region, the actors interviewed in the education field mentioned poverty as the primary factor behind school dropouts, given the distance between schools and homes, and the unsuitability of the school calendar (see Table 2).

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#### CITIZENS' VIEWS OF THE MDGs

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**DESPITE THE MIXED RESULTS ACHIEVED**, it is important to note that at local and national levels, innovative strategies were adopted, enabling a notable improvement in people's living conditions in several fields.

People's views of the MDGs and the most appropriate strategies to achieve them throw new light – a different light – on the diagnoses and strategies generally recommended.

With regard to employment generation, there has been a marked growth in the informal sector and self employment. From small shops to microfinance, from small enterprises to production units, not to speak of the independent workers, a strong trend towards people developing their own income-generating activities has been noted in promising sectors and creative income generating niches.

As for health, increasingly often, people are taking recourse to complementary health schemes, developing best practices in the field of nutrition, following the vaccination calendar more closely etc., especially thanks to information and awareness campaigns on the field.

Environmental concerns are not just the prerogative of developed countries. Some developing countries have understood that environmental protection and the promotion of green growth were likely to offer them considerable comparative advantage at the economic level. Reforestation and soil conservation are a major area of activity in several countries that are trying to put the management of natural resources into the hands of the communities to which they belong.

With regard to education, people are convinced of its importance. In Tanzania, 91% of the parents questioned said that school was important and 90% of them had sent their children to school. Their motivations diverged, depending on the people concerned. In Madagascar, a local government administrator explained: *"An educated man is more open to innovation and modernisation. Hence, education becomes an effective tool even for transmitting the State's general development policies to communities. Without education, it is impossible to carry out any development project."* On his part, a pupil's parent said: *"There can be no development without security and there can be no security without the respect of human rights and peace. All this can be done through education."* Children too underscore their family's investment in education. In Cambodia, two students aged 13 and 17 years had this to say: *"Sometimes, our parents cannot buy the school supplies we need, but they advise us not to give up school. They sometimes borrow money for us. That proves that they pay attention to our education and that is an important factor that pushes us to go to school."*

### **POLICIES RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR ABILITY TO CHANGE THINGS**

Reforms promoting free primary education have undoubtedly helped in making a quantum leap towards achieving the objective of primary

<sup>11</sup> This is the highest level since 1970, the first year for which comparative data are available. <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/> [Accessed 7 June 2010]

<sup>12</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. 2008. *Soaring Food Prices: Facts, Perspectives, Impacts and Actions Required*. Reference document prepared for the High Level Conference on Food Security, Rome 3-5 June 2008.

**TABLE 2. FACTORS INDUCING CHILDREN TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL IN SENEGAL'S KOLDA REGION QUOTED BY EDUCATION SECTOR ACTORS**

Factors	Occurrence
Poverty	50%
Distance between school and residence	33,3%
Unsuitable school calendar	16,7%
Total	100%

SOURCE: COSYDEP QUALITATIVE SURVEYS, 2009.



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education for all. Enrollment rates have grown, there has been a general reduction in the gap between girls and boys (although the situation still remains a problem in a number of countries) and investment in physical infrastructure (schools, latrines, etc.) is rising. A Ministry of Education executive in Tanzania explained that 64% of the parents questioned during a national survey on the educational system had said that the national education policy had led them to register their children in primary school and to ensure that they stayed in school till the end.

Free primary education and the massification of school education resulting from it have undoubtedly changed the relationship between citizens and education. Since the increase in school attendance, the changes taking place in education are primarily governed by three educational innovations: the deployment of active methods, the development of content on daily life skills and the accessibility of teaching material.

However, the massification of education has also produced unexpected effects in some countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, 93% of the teachers believe that there are far more pupils in class than ten years ago. In West Africa, 55% of the parents believe that the reduction in number of children per class would help in improving their children's learning levels.

All those questioned, across all the countries, were aware of the existence of free primary education. However, real gaps were noted between free education policies and the practice of informal charges that continued to create exclusion within educational systems.

The report of the 2009 Civil Forum<sup>13</sup> held in Senegal

therefore showed how school can engender considerable additional costs despite free education. The survey, which covered 1000 houses and 60 elementary schools, showed that parents were increasingly being asked to share the cost of the purchase of material for the functioning and maintenance of schools, for covering maintenance expenses and those for the management of facilities, etc. These cumulated costs sometimes prevented parents from sending their children to school; some parents even compared them to "a kind of informal privatisation of a public service". On the other hand, several countries faced problems in steering educational systems. Again in Senegal, despite the efforts made by the government, which devotes 40% of the national budget to education, some constraints remained, thereby creating malfunctioning in resource management.

Through the testimonies gathered, it may be noted that education remains a "marketable" good, as the revenue of parents continue to condition their children's access to education and, finally, citizens feel that they draw very few benefits from free education.

#### **A GENERAL WISH: AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF BASIC SERVICES**

During the surveys carried out by Aide et Action International, the citizens questioned referred several times to the need to modernise basic services in their countries. With regard to education, a Haitian student even went so far as to say: "Education has rusted, it is antique and anti-pedagogical, giving birth to people who live on the margins of an evolved society. We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – we must necessarily change along with the world that is evolving around us, while we remain fossilized."

A large number of the teachers interviewed said that

they had made pedagogical changes in their teaching methods over the last ten years. Most said that they had introduced national directives and training on active methods, to improve curriculum skills and to place students at the centre of learning. On the whole, the results were seen to be positive, as the teachers had noted an improvement in their students' understanding and performance levels, as well as an increase in their communication skills (free expression, class participation) and, more generally, in their social behavior. A teacher in Senegal put it this way, *"Since students are the artisans of their own learning, they participate better in the learning process. This helps in raising the thresholds of command over French, math and science"*.

Despite such notable progress, the quality of education remains an important area for improvement. In West Africa, the EGRA (*Early Grade Reading Assistance*) appraisals made it possible to measure the students' quality of learning<sup>14</sup>. The final report's conclusions are definitive and unappealable: the reading assessment results have shown that a large number of students do not know how to read at all, those that can read have very weak reading skills and there are wide differences in level within the same class.

In Mali, a similar survey<sup>15</sup> highlighted the students' weak level, with the majority unable to read at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of primary school. The survey also threw light on the importance of the socio-economic index – the higher the index, the better the score achieved by students. Students are not, therefore, equal vis-à-vis the school institution – their results are still conditioned by some children's ability to consult books at home while others are not as lucky, their parents' educational levels, the language spoken at home, attending early child care centers, etc.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of the Civil Forum on Education. 2009. Governance and Transparency in the Primary Education Sector in Senegal. Senegal, Dakar.*

<sup>14</sup> *RTI International. 2009. Évaluation des compétences en lecture au Sénégal. Senegal, Dakar.*

<sup>15</sup> *Republic of Mali. 2009. Initial assessment of fundamental reading-writing skills based on the use of the EGRA tool. Mali, Bamako, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages.*





"It is difficult not to assert that school is very important for development. But the question is: what school?"

But the MDG concerning primary education for all does not take the two following dimensions into account: quality and equality of opportunities. However, sustainable results in education cannot be achieved without taking into account all the obstacles likely to limit access to basic services, especially education. Hence, other indicators and objectives should be included in the MDGs concerning primary education for all, such as: the need to develop the literate environment, the adaptation of teaching strategies to the local context, the assessment of teachers on the basis of the quality of their students' learning, continuous assessment of reading levels, as well as adapting teaching methods and techniques to the different levels of education.

The testimonies gathered also highlight persistent disparities as regards the purposes of education. For 33% of the teachers in Tanzania, for instance, finding a job was not a priority goal for education, whereas for the majority of the parents questioned education was an investment that should, in fact, enable their children to obtain a decently paid job. These differences in perception with regard to the objectives of education were found in all the countries surveyed. For Dr Rakotozafy Harison, Head of the Department of Education and Adult Training at Fianarantsoa University in Madagascar, *"all studies underline the link between the level of schooling and a country's level of development. It is therefore difficult not to assert that school is very important for development. But the question that arises is: what school?"* The Chairman of the National Collective for Alternative and People's Education in Senegal declared: *"A more open view of education is necessary. Education is not school alone, because society is more complex. For instance, non-formal education engages new actors and new responses for a schooling adapted to the diversity of citizens. The education process needs to be diversified on the whole, in order to*

*increase skills and shape Man on the whole."*

Students referred to the improvements they would deem relevant in more concrete terms. They basically talked about conditions in school: cleanliness and maintenance of facilities, recurring problems with electricity, shortage of material (such as tables, benches and books) and too high a number of students per class. On the other hand, a large number wished to learn about computers and to have classes dedicated to information and communication technologies.

In fact, inequalities are deepening between schools that do have computers and internet access and those that do not. The digital divide is real: whereas computers and the internet are generally accessible in large cities, 80% of the rural population does not have access to them.

#### **A DEMAND FOR PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

100% of the respondents declared that education was very important. In the case of those involved in development, the majority believed that education was a pre-condition for development, opening up minds and empowering people. Hence, for the Director of the NGO called PAHCS in Togo, *"Education is a tool for poverty alleviation, the prevention of obstacles to development, the empowerment of the human person, the culture of non violence and for planning activities for integral, human and sustainable development."* Education is also presented as one of the rights of the child and as a responsibility for parents, who believe it holds promise for their children's future and offers them a way to bloom.

For students, it is, above all, a way of "preparing for the future", "succeeding in life", acquiring basic knowledge and skills and helping their parents,

family and community. Moreover, an increasing demand for secondary education has been noted among parents and children, whereas educational promotion policies seem to stop at the primary level.

The surveys conducted by Aide et Action International have also brought out the fact that parents, communities and teachers were capable of drafting strategies that would, according to them, improve the access and quality of education (see Table 3). Curiously enough, although problems related to educational conditions were frequently quoted by parents when they were asked about the quality of education, community awareness was quoted by 42% of the people questioned as a strategy to be promoted in order to achieve the goal of primary education for all.

All the students questioned liked going to school, among others, to learn things from their teachers. Furthermore, 99% of the students questioned in Mali, Senegal and Togo felt that what they learnt there was useful in helping their parents at home, in their business or on their farm. *"Whatever I learn, I place at my village's service by taking part in meetings during which I can give my opinion"* explained a young pupil of CM2 (i.e. the last year of primary school) in Senegal. A primary school student in Vietnam added: *"I tell my parents about whatever I learn in school, particularly good hygiene and health habits, and I encourage them to follow the lessons in my book."*

Moreover, the skills acquired in school enable children to help their parents in their calculations, in reading mail or bills, in helping their brothers and sisters with their homework, as well as in helping the entire family and community to avoid diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria.





"Whatever I learn, I place at my village's service by taking part in meetings during which I can give my opinion."

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#### WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES ACCORDING TO THE STAKEHOLDERS?

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**PEOPLE EXPRESS STRONG EXPECTATIONS** relating to basic services, which are closely linked to their survival capacity. The expression of these basic concerns has sometimes instilled doubts in minds of national leaders with regards to implementation of structural policies.

In addition, people are trapped between a pressing desire to see their urgent and priority needs met, and the desire to participate in the formulation of suitable development policies that are in line with sustainable dynamics for their country's progress.

#### HEALTH AND LITERACY

During the surveys carried out by Aide et Action International, 80% of those interviewed chose prevention as the priority issue with regard to health and hygiene<sup>16</sup>. A Vietnamese social worker added: *"There is nothing more important than health. We need to know how to look after our own health."*

In the ten countries surveyed, the majority of parents declared that they took their children to the doctor every time they fell sick. In Mali, Senegal and Togo, 85% of them took their children to the doctor as soon as they fell ill and just 3% never took them to the doctor because of a shortage of funds. 12% of the women questioned, mothers of children under the age of 2 years, felt they were not able to provide proper medical care to their last born, especially because the cost of medical care or consultations was too high.

In Tanzania, 40% of the parents declared they were unable to provide proper medical care for their children, mainly due to the shortage of income, but

also because of inadequate access to health services and medicines. They also underlined shortcomings in their own health-related training as well as that of teachers. On this point, regional disparities were observed: in West Africa, 68% of the parents and community members believed that they were able to provide proper medical care to their children, but only 32% shared the same view in East Africa.

Access to health services remains strongly conditioned by family income levels. Those that have the means regularly visit medical facilities, particularly for vaccinations, and some have even taken recourse to complementary health insurance schemes. For others, alternative strategies have been adopted, between recourse to traditional therapies, healers or "street pharmacies".

With regard to reproductive health, considerable disparities may be observed between rural and urban areas. Women living in urban or peri-urban areas have observed an improvement in pregnancy care. In Mali, Togo and Senegal, 90% of the women living in urban or peri-urban areas benefited from pregnancy supervision for their last born. And 92% of those that did not receive such care nonetheless gave birth in a health centre or hospital. On the contrary, in rural areas, only the rare women have access to at least three pre-natal consultations and the majority of them continue to give birth without the presence of qualified medical staff.

In Tanzania, 20% of the women felt they were better supervised during their last pregnancy, 12% believed that they were less well supervised, and 28% were of the view that they were supervised the same way as for their first born. All of them had given birth in a hospital, dispensary or health centre, both for their first and last pregnancies. But only 40% of them believed that they would be able to provide proper

**TABLE 3. STRATEGIES ADVOCATED BY LOCAL ACTORS FOR ACHIEVING PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR ALL**

Strategies	Occurrence
Sensitisation of communities with regard to school and education in general	42%
Capacity-building of teaching staff and school supervision	19%
Endowment of educational material (supplies, teaching material, books, etc.)	18%
Pedagogical support (monitoring, assistance, support)	13%
Infrastructure construction (classrooms, tables, benches, latrines, etc.)	8%

SOURCE: SURVEYS CARRIED OUT BY AIDE ET ACTION INTERNATIONAL. APRIL-MAY 2010.

medical supervision for their last born on returning home from the hospital, dispensary or health centre, whereas 25% of them did not have the necessary financial resources, or any health facilities nearby.

In China, all the women questioned had availed of pregnancy supervision for their last child and had been able to give birth in hospital. On the contrary, in Cambodia, women were constrained to give birth at home (sometimes in the presence of a midwife) due to the lack of health services in the proximity.

The second priority identified by those questioned during the survey concerned hygiene and health as related to access to water and the lack of sanitation systems in schools.

In Cambodia, for instance, 34.8% of primary schools did not have water connections and 22.4% did not have latrines<sup>17</sup>. In India, the 2009 Report of the ASER Centre<sup>18</sup> conducted an assessment of water connections and latrines in the country's schools. Results indicate that there has been a reduction over time in the percentage of schools

<sup>16</sup> During these surveys, people were requested to choose and classify the two issues that they felt were priorities from a list of eight subjects, based on the eight MDGs.

<sup>17</sup> Bunroeun, N. 2010. *Informed Education Sector Planning and Decision Making in Cambodia*. Cambodia, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. <http://www.unescap.org/Stat/di6launch/session4.3-Cambodia.pdf> [Accessed 23 July 2010]

<sup>18</sup> *Assessment Survey Evaluation Research*.

## "Considerable disparities may be observed between rural and urban areas."

without water or functional latrines. 75% of public primary schools had access to water and 50% had usable latrines. 40% of the schools did not have separate latrines for girls, only 12-15% of the girls' latrines could be locked, and about 30-40% were actually usable<sup>19</sup>.

A similar situation can be found in several countries. In Tanzania, the coordinator of the NGO Baraka Good Hope Orphan's Development explained: *"School infrastructure needs to be improved, as it is not favorable to the girls. Services like sanitation, hygiene and other social services must be made available in schools so that girls can have access to education. More generally, strategies for girls' education must be designed in collaboration with the communities, women and girls themselves."*

Literacy was identified as the second most important priority by those questioned. Knowing how to read, write and count were the primary goals of literacy, according to the respondents. But literacy is only referred to between the lines in the MDGs (since only the literacy rate for the 15-24 age group is used as an indicator). This is all the more disturbing since literacy programmes avail of very small funds and are only rarely a priority goal for developing countries. However, literacy is likely to have a cascading impact on the other MDGs, such as health, primary education or women's empowerment. A Tanzanian farmer put it in these words: *"There can be no development in a country where the people are illiterate. They have to be educated to understand the changes occurring around them and to accept them."*

### **GIRLS' EDUCATION: THE PATH OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

According to the surveys conducted by Aide et Action International, education is recognized as a

fundamental right for all by citizens everywhere in developing countries. When they were asked about girls' education, all the actors questioned (parents, community members, teachers, local development actors) declared they favored girls' education and asserted that girls enjoyed the same rights as boys, and that they were even important links in handing on values and knowledge for their families. In Haiti, a young teacher on contract told us: *"In the dynamics of an egalitarian society, there should be no gender discrimination with regard to education. Otherwise, it would lead to the future domination of one gender by the other;"*

However, the reality is far more nuanced. 67% of development stakeholders (local associations, parents' groups, NGO representatives, local elected leaders, national education officials, etc.) believe that effectively, not as many girls are enrolled in schools as boys. 13% of the parents questioned in Mali, Senegal and Togo declared that they did not send their daughters to school and 12% said that their daughters only went to school a few days per week, essentially because of the family responsibilities they had to bear and the family's economic difficulties (cost of transportation was often mentioned). The President of the National Collective on Alternative and People's Education in Senegal said: *"There is no consensus on values. Schools still function with stereotypes. Priority funding has to be allocated to integrate girls, and parents and leaders have to go much further in changing their mind sets – whereas all agree that girls have the same rights as boys, a large number keep their girls at home. On the other hand, educational strategies and contents have to be better adapted."*

In Senegal, 48.6% of girls are enrolled in school, but they still face problems of access and retention. The success rate for girls at the certificate level at the end of primary school stood at approximately

47% and the primary cycle completion rate stood at barely 45.3% in 2004 (see Table 4), while their repetition rate was as high as 31%. Furthermore, the education of the girls suffers from the fact that not enough allocations are made for it in local government budgets and from the lack of synergy between interventions by different actors<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, positive discrimination policies in favor of the girls' education are so far only limited to the primary school level, but very wide disparities persist at the secondary and higher education levels. According to the programme in-charge for the Local Consultative Framework for Development in Pikine (Senegal), "At primary level, the parity favors girls, which is far from the case at other levels of education. Working conditions need to be strengthened and improved to protect girls from the various kinds of aggression to which they fall victim." In Togo, the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF-BSRAO) Programme in-charge confirmed: "With the efforts made over the last few years, there has been considerable growth in enrollment at the primary level, at which parity has almost been achieved and even surpassed in some localities. But at the secondary level, the situation remains alarming. We need to reflect on the determining factors that would make it possible to retain girls in school. In particular, we need to reflect on the violence against girls within the school and extra-school milieu, as well as on financial obstacles."

### LOCAL, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES

On the whole, local practices lean towards giving greater responsibility to communities. With regard to health, for instance, the actors questioned emphasized the need for the construction of latrines and health centers, health and nutritional education, awareness-building about diseases and nutrition, and vaccination campaigns. All these activities have been mentioned and recognized as having contri-

<sup>19</sup> Assessment Survey Evaluation Research Centre. 2010. *Annual Status of Education Report 2009*. India, New Dehli, ASER. <http://asercentre.org/asersurvey.php> [Accessed 15 July 2010]

<sup>20</sup> Save the Children Sweden, CNEPSCOFI, FAWE, EDEN. 2008. *Synergie banlieue, Consortium pour l'éducation des filles dans la banlieue de Dakar 2006-2007, 2007-2008 (Suburban synergy, Consortium for the education of the girl child in Dakar's suburbs)*, Senegal, Dakar, p.2.



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"Working conditions need to be strengthened and improved to protect girls from the various kinds of aggression to which they fall victim."

buted to a considerable improvement in people's health conditions, including those of the most vulnerable sections. With regard to the environment, local initiatives have focused on information and awareness-building about the cleanliness of surroundings, reforestation and conservation, safeguarding biodiversity and community accountability.

As for education, local stakeholders refer to a myriad of initiatives undertaken by NGOs or communities themselves. Local initiative schools, bridge schools, nomadic schools, community schools, relay schools etc., compete with secular and denominational private schools. However, the diversification in educational alternatives far from ensures an improvement in the quality of education, although teachers (whatever their status) say they are trying to improve their practices and the contents of their lessons, or to take part in more training programmes.

In all sectors, the respondents in the survey undertaken by Aide et Action International wished for more partnerships and synergies. The greatest expectations expressed were in the education, health and social protection sectors. People believe that the synergies between different partners working in the name of their well-being are the best guarantee for the success of the initiatives undertaken. In the education sector, for instance, the citizens interviewed believed that families and children should play a greater role in making decisions that concern them. *"If we all unite, we can improve things"* said a secondary school child in the Dominican Republic. However, there are very few mechanisms that enable people's participation in development policies, at local and national level.

Hence, 71% of the teachers surveyed in Haiti and

the Dominican Republic were of the opinion that new partnerships could enable them to improve their quality of teaching. NGOs, communities and local representatives were identified as the main support centers for problems such as teachers' training, infrastructure development or supply of teaching material. In Cambodia and China, partnerships based on greater consultation and dialogue, as well as exchanges with the outside world were identified as being likely to improve the quality of education of students, whereas relations with local representatives and State officials seemed less easy.

## CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that the people who are supposed to benefit from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals are not very familiar with them. Awareness-building and information campaigns on the goals are almost non-existent on the field. At the national level, it may be observed that States have taken into account and incorporated the MDGs in their development strategies, but their link with the everyday concerns of people remains absent.

Nonetheless, people have expressed their support for the MDGs when they are presented to them. The respondents questioned by Aide et Action International within the framework of the surveys conducted had an optimistic view of the progress achieved. The goal related to the achievement of universal primary education for all seems to have recorded the most positive opinions across the countries surveyed. Although problems remain, the translation of this goal into concrete terms in national policies, in particular through the institution of free primary education in most countries, has made it possible not only to give it greater visibility but also to achieve definite progress.

People have also demonstrated their ability to identify priorities (especially health and literacy) and to propose local strategies and initiatives that could strengthen national policies. However, all believe that mechanisms for appropriate participation are almost completely absent. While some activities have enabled families, communities, teachers, etc. to take part in decision-making, such initiatives have remained essentially local in nature. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that listening to the voices of the citizens of developing countries and allowing them to be effectively involved in development policies would help in accelerating the attainment of the MDGs, which seem to have achieved a somewhat qualified success, to say the least.

**TABLE 4. RECENT TRENDS IN COMPLETION RATES IN SENEGAL**

	2004	2008
Girls	45,3%	58%
Boys	52,3%	58,8%
Overall	48,8%	58,4%

SOURCE: MINSITRY OF EDUCATION, 2008. SITUATION OF EDUCATION IN SENEGAL. SENEGAL, DAKAR.







# MDGs Review



"The unprecedented global crisis — in the economic, financial, social, food and environmental fields, but also in the moral and ethical spheres — is threatening the achievement of the most important multilateral agenda of today — the Millennium Development Goals — and is affecting the most vulnerable countries, particularly those in Africa. The crisis makes it imperative for us to act on an emergency basis."

**Irina Bokova**, Director-General of UNESCO, November 2009.

## RESULTS THWARTED BY THE EFFECTS OF THE FOOD AND ECONOMIC CRISES

While the 2009 United Nations Report on the Millennium Development Goals<sup>21<</sup> presents studies and data attesting to the progress made in achieving these goals in several countries, it is nonetheless true that it does not seem likely that several of them will be achieved in many countries.

The situation has worsened in several sectors under the effects of the food and economic crises. The health, education and food sectors, not to speak of employment, have been deeply affected by the crises of the last three years. Furthermore, the attendant social repercussions lead us to believe that the progress achieved over the last ten years with regard to the MDGs could well be compromised.

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### WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT: MIXED RESULTS

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**THESE MIXED RESULTS ARE FURTHER UNDERMINED** by the fallout of the economic and food crisis. These crises have considerably slowed-down progress in achieving the goal of primary education for all, especially for girls. Countries are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain quality education

in the face of a diminishing demand for education from families. A large number of countries are experiencing a decrease in resources earmarked for educational purposes, due to the cumulative decline in direct foreign investments, migrant remittance flows and Official Development Aid. While countries that enjoy a larger fiscal space and have their own resources are barely holding up, what can be said about more vulnerable countries (the least developed countries in particular), who have to manage with falling budgets. In this context, priority cannot be in favor to women's education and empowerment.

### PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR ALL: SMOKE SCREEN PROGRESS

There has undoubtedly been marked progress in the goal of attaining primary education for all. The primary education enrollment rate in developing countries has risen from 80% in 1999 to 86% in 2007. This significant progress is indicative of the general public's greater awareness of the importance of education. Recognized by all development stakeholders as a key factor for improving people's standards of living, education also constitutes a transversal theme for the achievement of each of the MDGs.

80% of the pupils interviewed by Aide et Action International in Mali, Senegal and Togo claimed that all children attended school. However, when they were asked whether they knew of any children who did not, the overwhelming reply was “yes”, and they also mentioned child labour (children working in fields, for instance), the plight of sick or disabled children, as well as children from poor families. In Cambodia and Vietnam, according to the number of children interviewed, poor living conditions, child labour and the early marriage of young girls prevented children from attending school. And lastly, in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, all the students surveyed spoke about children known to them who were unable to attend school mainly because their parents could not afford to purchase school supplies or clothes, or because the children were forced to earn a living.

In fact, indicators for primary education for all fail to take some essential factors into account, such as the quality of education. Teachers' training, the availability of pedagogical material, professional training programmes or linkages with secondary education constitute equally important qualitative factors for appraising educational systems, since an increase in enrollment rates does not necessarily signify good quality education. In 2009, one child out of four dropped out of school without completing the primary level and in Sub-Saharan Africa, while just 40% of young adults who had attended school for five years remained literate<sup>22</sup>. What do progress in primary school enrollment rates and broader access to education actually mean when people are still unable to acquire and improve their skills?

On the other hand, monitoring educational systems is also a key issue, as in many developing countries, education has been transferred to local levels due to decentralisation policies. Moreover, the involvement

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, 2009. *Millennium Development Goals Report*. New York, United Nations.

<sup>22</sup> *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized, op. cit.*

## 2 A PROJECT BASED ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

This project, initiated by education sector actors and Aide et Action International, based on the general view that there is a lack of planning, monitoring, checking and assessment of educational systems in Madagascar and the Comoros Islands, is aimed at improving the monitoring and management of local educational systems in order to improve access to education and the quality of education.

Against this backdrop, local stakeholders are made aware of the education issues in order to involve them further in the process of managing education.

Hence, in 2009-2010, the promotion of educational development plans at the community or local level in 30 communes in Madagascar as well as 4 communes and 30 schools in the Comoros enabled a sound political, institutional and financial governance of the system.

Through a participatory process, the main idea was to promote operational consultation frameworks to discuss educational issues on the one hand and, on the other, to strengthen civil society skills and those of local strategic institutions in order to monitor the sector's development.



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## "Surveys conducted by Aide et Action International between December 2009 and January 2010 reveal a strong trend in many countries towards absenteeism."

of communities in the management and monitoring of educational systems constitutes a major issue that has been largely ignored in the MDGs.

Depending on the country, expenditure directed towards education is being re-directed or decreased, or school subsidies are being abolished and reforms aimed at enabling millions of children to gain access to education are being deferred. Conditions determining education are being increasingly undermined. Schools lack funds to purchase school supplies, run school canteens, or maintain school buildings and furniture. At the same time, a large number of poorly paid teachers<sup>23</sup> struggling to keep up with rising costs of living are resorting to taking up a second job, preventing them from fulfilling all their teaching commitments. In such a situation, when education is expensive and offers little in the way of future prospects, many families are opting to remove their children from school (especially, older children) and making them join the workforce.

Surveys conducted between December 2009 and January 2010 reveal a strong trend in many countries towards lower school enrollment. In Madagascar, already shaken by a major political crisis, half of the families surveyed mentioned a sudden deterioration in their living conditions that forced them to cut down on all non-essential expenditure, such as the purchase of clothes or shoes, lodging expenses and even the schooling of older children.

As a case in point, one-third of the children surveyed in Madagascar declared that they had stopped attending school since 2009, essentially because they had to take up work to help their family<sup>24</sup>. Similar situations can be found in many other countries. In Ghana and in Zambia, households cut

down on their health and education related expenditure in 2009<sup>25</sup>. In Bangladesh, the hike in food prices in 2007-2008 led half of the families to remove their children from school. In Togo, where communities participate extensively in financing their children's education, 29% of the parents surveyed declared that they spent half of their income on education, while 43% of the parents claimed that one-third of their income was spent on education. In Burkina Faso, 98% of the children surveyed confirmed that their parents paid for school supplies. Dropouts held their family's lack of financial resources as the reason for leaving school.

A study undertaken by the Poverty and Economic Policy Research Network, examining the impacts of the current economic crisis on school enrollment in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana reveals that primary education has suffered the most. Burkina Faso, which already has the lowest enrollment rate as compared to the other two countries, is the worst hit, showing a 0.8% decrease in its enrollment rate and a 1% increase in child labour<sup>26</sup>.

The situation is even more alarming since these figures fail to take into account the multiple alternative strategies adopted by families in order to try to keep their children in school. Thus, in some families, siblings are forced to share school time, some attending morning sessions while others attend afternoon classes.

While the MDG of primary education for all showed the most progress and seemed achievable by most countries, the progress made is now showing signs of slacking. Moreover, access to basic services remains marked by huge disparities. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 86% of the teachers surveyed claimed that access of children to education is marked by inequalities. These

inequalities are mainly due to family income levels – children of poorer families face more hardships. But the teachers also mentioned the condition of children with disabilities.

In spite of it all, education remains an unavoidable challenge. Indeed, one-third of the population of developing countries is less than 15 years of age and by 2050, nine young persons out of ten will be living in developing countries<sup>27</sup>. In the coming years, an increasing number of youth will be ready to enter the job market. In order to facilitate successful job entry, develop new means of livelihood and contribute to their country's development, it is essential that they gain access to quality education and professional training.

### **GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: ARE WE ON THE RIGHT TRACK?**

Gender equality and women's empowerment can be achieved above all through education – hence, measuring female literacy is one way of assessing the progress made in achieving this goal. However, the goal relating to gender equality and women's empowerment only takes three levels of schooling into account (primary, secondary and higher studies). Also, the net primary enrollment rate is viewed as the only indicator of progress. However, adult literacy rates also depends on non-formal basic education and/or continued learning mechanisms that are not included in data concerning the primary, secondary or higher levels. Hence, women's education, which has been made possible in various forms, is not exhaustively examined in the MDGs and currently, two-thirds of the world's adults lacking literacy skills (759 million of people in all) are women<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> In West Africa, 57% of teachers surveyed by Aide et Action International consider their living standard as average; while 38% view it as low or very low. In Latin America and in the Caribbean, 36% of teachers consider their living standard as average and 71 % view it as low or very low.

<sup>24</sup> For further information on the impact of the economic crisis on education, consult the report published by Aide et Action International in April 2010: Aide et Action International, *Education, rates falling!*

<sup>25</sup> Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. *Reaching the marginalized*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Cockburn, J., Fofana, I. and Tiberti L. 2009. *Simulating the impact of economic crisis and policy responses on children in West and Central Africa*. Forthcoming Innocenti Working Paper. Paper presented at the ODI/UNICEF Conference, 9-10 November, London.

<sup>27</sup> Geographical distribution of the population aged 15 to 24 years in 2050 (1.2 billion) : 134 million in industrialized countries (11%), 348 million in Africa (29%), 87 million in Latin America/Caribbean (7%), 639 million in Asia/Pacific (53%). Data: Population Reference Bureau. [http://www.prb.org.pdf/09wpds\\_eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org.pdf/09wpds_eng.pdf) [Accessed 13 July 2010]

<sup>28</sup> Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. *Reaching the marginalized*, op. cit.



Generally speaking, the MDGs indicators hardly take into account the situation women face around the world. For instance, the MDGs do not measure gender-specific violence or women's access to means of production. If these conditions and a motivating environment are not created at the national level, how can women be empowered?

In its 2009 *Annual World Report*, the International Labour Organization (ILO) announced that the number of working poor, i.e. workers earning less than 2 dollars per day, had risen from 200 million people to 1.4 billion (concern 45% of the world's active and employed population). 60% of these poor workers are women.

Results in the employment sector are no better. Women have been badly affected by the rise in unemployment in 2009-2010. In its report on *Global Employment Trends for Women*, published in March 2009<sup>29</sup>, the ILO had estimated that in 2009, the unemployment rate for women was 7.4% as against 7% for men. Moreover, the global employment vulnerability rate has risen from 50.5% to 54.7% for women as against 47.2% to 51.8% in the case of men. Women are over-represented in non-qualified or semi-qualified jobs and account for more than half the workers engaged in export sectors, which have been the most badly hit by the crisis<sup>30</sup>.

Finally, measuring women's empowerment is a limiting, rather impossible task if only indicators relating to enrollment rates at various stages of schooling, the proportion of women employed in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats occupied by women elected to legislative assemblies or to lower houses of the national parliament are used.

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## POVERTY REDUCTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH: RESULTS FAR REMOVED FROM GOALS

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**WHILE THE GOALS** related to the improvement of maternal health and the reduction of child mortality have shown the least progress, the impact of the food and economic crises has worsened an already very unstable situation.

The reduction in State resources and family incomes associated with a hike in food prices and unemployment has added a new urgency to problems related with people's survival. The 2009 *United Nations Monitoring Report on the MDGs* warns that "*progress towards the achievement of these goals is presently hindered by feeble, negative economic growth, reduction of resources, less business opportunities for developing countries and a possible reduction of aid flows from donor countries*<sup>31</sup>."

## FOOD: DECREASED QUANTITY AND QUALITY

Malnutrition affects nearly 175 million children each year, and more than a quarter of the children living in developing countries suffer from growth retardation<sup>32</sup>.

43% of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from rickets and have shown no sign of improvement since the past 15 years<sup>33</sup>. From 2008 onwards, due to the hike in food prices, poorer families have had to opt for less expensive food items and to give up food rich in proteins (meat, fish, eggs) in favor of food that is less rich in essential nutrients, such as cereals. Unfortunately, in many countries, the rise in prices has affected the staple food of the population (rice, maize, wheat). Hence, families have been forced to eat food with less nutritional value as well as to reduce their food intake.



In Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of the population suffering from hunger went from 32% in 1990 to 28% in 2004. But, the rate rose again to 29% in Africa in the aftermath of the successive crises. IFPRI's<sup>34</sup> projections do not hold much promise: by 2020, Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to witness a 10% fall in its calorie consumption per inhabitant, leading to additional malnutrition and affecting nearly 16 million more children.

Going without food seems to have become a way of life for many families. In Togo, 30% of the families interviewed by Aide et Action International mentioned that they had reduced their food intake and 32% spoke about reducing food quality. In the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, 53% of the families declared having reduced their food intake per day, while 47% mentioned choosing foods with lower nutritional quality.

In Kenya, the quality and quantity of food consumed has decreased among the more vulnerable communities. It has often been observed that women eat less and last<sup>35</sup>. This practice is also prevalent in many Asian countries, endangering the health of pregnant women and of their future children in particular.

### ENSURING CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Hence, such a situation is likely to impact directly on the attainment of the MDGs relating to the reduction of infant mortality and the improvement of maternal health. A study undertaken by the Governance and Social Development Research Centre declared that in Asian and Pacific countries, cases of maternal anemia could increase from 10 to 20%, and cases of low birth weight from 5 to 10%<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> International Labour Organization. 2009. *Global Employment Trends for Women*. Geneva, ILO.

<sup>30</sup> Emmett, B. 2009. *Paying the price of the economic crisis*. Oxford, UK, Oxfam International. [Oxfam International Discussion Paper]

<sup>31</sup> Millennium Development Goals Report, *op. cit.*, p.4

<sup>32</sup> Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. *Reaching the marginalized*, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Teller, C.H. and Alva, S. 2008. *Reducing Child Malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa : Surveys finds Mixed Progress*. Washington, DC, Population Reference Bureau. <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2008/stuntingssa.aspx/> [Accessed 2 August 2010]

<sup>34</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute

<sup>35</sup> Bakrania, S. and Lucas, B. 2009. *The impact of the Financial Crisis on Conflict and State Fragility in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Birmingham, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre.

<sup>36</sup> Governance and Social Development Research Centre. 2009. *Helpdesk Research Report: Humanitarian Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on the Asia/Pacific Region*. Birmingham, GSDRC, p.2.

### 3 IMPROVING WOMEN'S LITERACY IN CHINA

Education is fundamental for enhancing women's empowerment. The Chinese government neglected adult literacy programmes, especially rural literacy, in order to pursue national economic development. The project on women's literacy classes and teachers' training programmes undertaken by Aide and Action International reaches out to the provinces of rural China to introduce a three-year literacy programme intended for girls and women. Literacy being a key skill for inclusion in society and the economy, this project aims at promoting development strategies by means of women's literacy programmes, so that they will be able to handle the risks associated with the globalisation process in China. The project enabled more than 6,000 women to acquire necessary literacy skills.

These activities are also supported by other projects that encourage exchanges between South-East Asian countries, notably via the promotion of literacy programmes, the development of school textbooks, the creation of a digital resource centre dedicated to gender, and literacy programmes at a regional level. Apart from awareness campaigns, the project supports the development of income-generating activities and women's entrepreneurship.

"While the goals related to the improvement of maternal health and the reduction of infant mortality have shown the least progress, the impact of the food and economic crises has worsened an already very unstable situation."

In such a situation, problems relating to malnutrition and physical and intellectual developmental delays may occur among children. In fact, the lack of sufficient and proper food, notably among small children, may cause irreversible damages<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, there are considerable disparities between children whose families are impacted by the effects of economic crises: the mother's level of education, the family's income level, the place of residence and the child's gender. Time and again, it has been seen that children from poor families are more likely to go hungry, fall victim to disease and be unable to avail of adequate health care. In such precarious conditions, an increase in infant mortality rates is to be feared.

A study conducted by the World Bank's Human Development Research Centre has estimated that 30,000 to 50,000 additional deaths may occur in Africa as a result of the impact of the economic crisis<sup>38</sup>. On a world-wide level, the World Bank foresees an additional 200,000 to 400,000 children below one year could die every year between 2009 and 2015.

Unquestionably, progress has been achieved. The Inter-organizational Group for Child Mortality Estimates (GIEM) has recorded that there were 10,000 fewer deaths of children aged less than 5 years every day in 2008 as compared to 1990, the reference year for the MDGs<sup>39</sup>. But since the past two years, a disturbing reverse trend has been observed. Prevention and health education, insufficiently taken into account in the MDGs, are therefore a major focus area for action.

#### **HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES: STILL RELEVANT TODAY**

Several studies have pointed out the importance of health education coupled with access to screening

tests, prevention and health care to fight the pandemic<sup>40</sup>. In Mali, HIV/AIDS affects more than 20% of the teachers and prevents thousands of children from attending school. This disease poses a danger to education, which still remains one of the most effective means of restricting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Regarding the prevention of malaria among children under 5 years old (particularly at risk due to the weakness of their immune system), many international comparative studies have demonstrated that prevention campaigns among pregnant women, along with the distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets (ITMN) and regular medical check-ups of children yield very good results. The use of mosquito nets impregnated with insecticides alone enables a 20% reduction of mortality and a 50% reduction of disease occurrence among children under five. Combined with clinical diagnoses and early treatment, these measures lead to a 50% reduction in malaria-related mortality<sup>41</sup>.

The MDGs must therefore promote the implementation of effective policies dealing with poverty, maternal health (pregnant women are especially vulnerable to malaria), infant mortality and primary education for all.

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#### **OBJECTIVES FOR A GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**WHILE THE CHALLENGE** before this millennium is still the sustainable development of the most fragile countries, it is also true that environmental issues, climate change and natural disasters constitute important issues to be taken into account.

## ACTION FOR ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues pose a major challenge to the world. Moreover, they need to be addressed differently in developing countries as compared to developed countries. Developing countries are currently facing problems related to drinking water supply, basic sanitation services, decent accommodation, public health and hygiene and cleanliness. These are issues which cover education, training and development. How can these basic aspirations be reconciled with global development goals if we fail to adopt a pedagogical approach and in the absence of favorable conditions for integrated and inclusive development? Nearly half of the population of developing countries still lacks access to safe drinking water<sup>42</sup>, which primarily affects women and girls, who spend a considerable amount of time fetching water and are therefore unable to devote themselves to their education. Moreover, in the absence of proper sanitary facilities, girls are prevented from attending school.

But how can principles and approaches for sustainable development be implemented in national programmes and policies in the absence of related education and training programmes? What can be done to reverse the current trend of the depletion of natural resources when awareness, information and proper communication are notably absent? This explains why, since 2005, UNESCO has been appointed the task-leader for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development<sup>43</sup>. UNESCO supports projects aimed at helping citizens acquire skills and knowledge "enabling them to make informed decisions for themselves and for others, now and for the future, and to act upon these decisions".

<sup>37</sup> World Bank. 2008. *Rising Food and Fuel Crisis: Addressing the Risk to Future Generations*. Washington, DC, World Bank. [Human Development Network and Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network (PREM)].

<sup>38</sup> Friedman, J. and Schady, N. 2009. *How many more infants are likely to die in Africa as a result of the global financial crisis?* Washington, DC, World Bank. [Policy Research Working Paper, Development Research Group].

<sup>39</sup> *Common meeting of UNDP/ UNFPA, UNICEF and of WFP administrative boards*. 2010. *Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: Assessment*. New York, United Nations.

<sup>40</sup> UNAIDS. 2009. *A Strategic Approach. HIV/AIDS and Education*. Geneva, UNAIDS.

<sup>41</sup> UNAIDS. 2009. *A Strategic Approach. HIV/AIDS and Education*. Geneva, UNAIDS.

<sup>42</sup> *In Tanzania in 2006, less than half, i.e. 46% of the rural population used improved sources of drinking water*. UNICEF [http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index\\_step2.php](http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index_step2.php) [Accessed 7 June 2010]

## 4 ENABLING TOGO'S CHILDREN TO EAT IN SCHOOL

The *Mid-day school meal programme* consists of providing free lunch to 5,940 students enrolled in 32 schools in Togo. Launched by the State of Togo in partnership with Aide et Action International and with the financial support of the World Bank, this programme aims at finding a solution to the under-nutrition and malnutrition that afflicts poorer communities, hit badly by the food price crises in the Savannah region.

By providing a hot meal to students as well as proposing follow-up activities, support and advisory actions and by training adults on the benefits of deworming and vitamin and nutritional supplements, this programme helps in improving school attendance and school retention at the pre-school and primary stages. The results and lessons of this pilot programme need to be incorporated into the sectoral national education plan that will also include a national food programme in schools, supported by the Fast Track Initiative.

Hence, the problem of education is closely related to that of nutrition, as child nutrition is an essential condition for successful learning. Programmes such as these also contribute, through food and nutritional assistance, to the goal of primary education for all.



### WHAT PARTNERSHIPS AND FOR WHAT KIND OF DEVELOPMENT?

Following the example of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), Partnership Agreements for Development in the form of PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) have emerged in a context of free trade and liberalisation, with nations increasing their efforts towards achieving the MDGs.

For instance, the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a global partnership between donor and developing countries, civil society and multilateral organisations. Implemented in 35 countries, of which two-thirds are on the African continent, the FTI has reported a 52% growth in school enrollment between 2002 and 2006, especially in the least developed countries (LDCs), as opposed to 23% in countries that have not been introduced to this initiative.

However, the annual 2009 FTI report points out the recurrent difficulties that continue to plague the effectiveness of the partnership. The number of children enrolled in primary school increased by 19 million between 2000 and 2007, 11 partner countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, 17 partner countries have achieved or are in the process of achieving primary school completion rates of at least 95%, while Albania, Georgia, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Tajikistan have already attained this goal<sup>44</sup>.

On a more global level, Official Development Aid (ODA) remains crucial for many countries, especially the LDCs, for financing basic sectors. Development assistance accounts for 9.6% of the GDP in these countries. Africa is the largest recipient of financial assistance: for two out of five countries, aid levels in the national income exceed 10%<sup>45</sup>. Sectors that are

essential for populations become financially dependant on ODA. Although some studies have been undertaken on what sustainable foreign assistance levels should be, when it is above 25% of the GDP, the dependency level becomes too high. Out of the 37 LDCs in Sub-Saharan Africa, 25 can still increase the ODA share in their budget while 11 other countries have no other domestic alternative<sup>46</sup>.

However, since the end of 2008, donor countries have themselves been grappling with international economic and financial crises. Due to strict budgetary constraints, these countries have reduced their ODA levels as a priority. In general, a 1% reduction of the GDP of a donor country leads to a 1% decrease in its foreign aid<sup>47</sup>. In 2010, it was estimated that foreign aid would amount to 110 billion USD, i.e. a financial deficit of 20 billion dollars.

Africa is the first to suffer from this decline: it will lose out on 18 billion dollars in 2010 despite the initial promises made by donor countries<sup>48</sup>. Under such circumstances, it seems increasingly difficult for developing countries to make progress in achieving the MDGs.

Moreover, problems regarding the quality of aid continue to prevail, especially with regard to its predictability and its alignment with the priorities of recipient countries. Just how efficient are such partnerships when States are divested of their decision-making powers, especially in the public sector? The Paris Declaration follow-up study conducted in 2006 by the OECD<sup>49</sup> had already pointed out the lack of coordination among development partnerships: *"A new entrant studying the official development aid industry for the first time would be astonished: more than 200 bilateral and multilateral bodies play a large role in channeling and delivering foreign aid, many countries have more than 40 donors*

*financing more than 600 projects but they still remain far from attaining the Millennium Development Goals."*

While a great deal of progress has been accomplished thanks to ODA, particularly in the field of education<sup>50</sup>, it is coming under increasing criticism for its lack of effectiveness. For instance, while UNESCO estimates that 18 million new teachers' posts will be required by 2015 in order to achieve the goals set, it becomes necessary to reconsider the mechanisms governing budgetary aid partnerships for development: *"In the long term, budget support poses the problem of recurrent costs of public sectors financed through budget support, in the form of salaries of government employed education or health officials, making social sectors dependent on aid. But all forms of development aid must in the long run be withdrawn."*<sup>51</sup> It must also be noted that budget support in the absence of an operational partnership cannot yield quality results and therefore the simultaneous attainment of the MDGs: for instance, in South Asia, various kinds of budget support have indeed led to an increase in the hiring of teachers but a large number of them lack qualifications, are poorly paid and work in very unstable conditions. Issues related to the quality of aid still remain and it is unfortunate that subjects such as aid predictability or the alignment of financial backers with national priorities are not examined during discussions relating to the MDGs.

<sup>43</sup> Refer to <http://www.unesco.org/fr/esd/>

<sup>44</sup> *Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund. 2009. Annual Status Report 2009. Wahsington, DC, Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, p.2.*

<sup>45</sup> *Alternatives Internationales. 2009. L'état de la mondialisation 2010. Alternatives Economiques, Hors-série n°7 Alternatives Economiques, December 2009, p. 86. These countries are: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tomé-et-Principe, Tanzania and Zambia.*

<sup>46</sup> *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized, op. cit.*

## **5 PROJECT ON ACCESS TO WATER, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE BORDER AREA BETWEEN HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

*Within the framework of the project, Access to water, local development and environmental education, awareness campaigns, training and educational activities were implemented in order to encourage citizens to take charge of their own development, in harmony with their environment. Individual and collective responsibility in border area communities was promoted through the development of environmental education and community self-management initiatives. These measures are meant to bring about greater availability and improve the quality of natural resources, improving the quality of life of children and promoting community management abilities.*

*Currently, the project's promoters, supported by Aide et Action International, have been trained and community management capacities have been built in terms of favoring the rational use of water and its management. 100% of primary school children took part in educational activities focusing on the preservation of natural resources. 90% of the population shall be trained to use, preserve and manage water. 60% of the 700 families covered by the project are already implementing at least three ways of using and preserving water. The project aims at reducing diseases caused by drinking contaminated water by 80%.*

## CONCLUSION

In their present form, although the MDGs provide an incentive to countries to work towards sustainable development, the approaches and methods used remain debatable. In fact, the indicators proposed for measuring the Millennium Development Goals fail to take into account situations that are likely to provide clear indications regarding actual improvements in people's living conditions, especially since the elements examined fall more under macro-economical measures, quantified in terms of growth rates, rather than in terms of quality of life at the local level. Moreover, lives of people still seem unaffected, despite all the efforts made.

Finally, the indicators meant to measure the results remain insufficient and, in many instances, their focus on target figures is too limited, although more often than not, it is the quality of the MDGs programmes for action that is often called into question.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, the 1991 banking crisis in the northern countries led to a decrease in budgets for foreign assistance of 10% in Norway, 17% in Sweden and up to 62% in Finland.

<sup>48</sup> *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized, op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2007. *2006 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration*. Paris, OECD, p.9.

<sup>50</sup> *In Cambodia, Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania, primary school fees were waived thanks to aid. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of children not enrolled in school in Tanzania came down from three million to 150,000. In Kenya, the abolition of school fees enabled the entry of 1.3 million new students. ODA has also helped improve basic infrastructure in Kenya and provided school supplies and equipment for new students.*

<sup>51</sup> *Sebban, F. 2008. Efficacité de l'aide, à chacun sa méthode. Paris, Altermondes, no. 15, September 2008.*







What then, from now to 2015?

"The MDGs are achievable when countries' public policies are supported by international partners."

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, June 2010.

## HOW CAN WE ACT EFFECTIVELY TO ACCELERATE AND ABIDE BY OUR COMMITMENTS?

Not very widely known or understood by citizens in developing countries and leading to not very inclusive national policies whose relevance has been called into question, the review of the progress achieved in the Millennium Development Goals is somewhat mixed, to say the least.

How, then, can we once again get on track towards policies that enable broad based citizens' participation in the kind of development that primarily concerns them? The last section of this report – since it does no harm to do so this once – reflects the opinions of social policy experts from the developing countries in which Aide et Action International conducted its surveys, laying emphasis on the central role education plays in development as a whole.

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### LEADS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

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**INDEED, THERE ARE MAJOR CHALLENGES** related mainly to the financial and economic crises and they obviously take precedence over other important issues, which directly affect more social and cultural aspects. However, if they are not taken in hand effectively and efficiently, these issues may constitute obstacles or factors that slow-down the progress of development.

### UNRESOLVED ISSUES

This period has been marked by the promotion of gender parity and women's empowerment, especially with regard to women's rights, but issues such as violence against girls and women or their

harassment and even sexual exploitation were for the most part neglected.

In the field of health, vaccination remains the most important factor in the fight against child mortality, but no specific changes in practice seem to have taken place. Likewise, in relation to maternal health, no truly significant activities have taken place, except that maternal and child health are now a fairly specific field in preventive care. For the fight against diseases, there was a time when a great deal of emphasis was laid on sensitisation about HIV/AIDS, but vigilance now tends to be more relaxed.

As for the struggle for environmental protection and management, no major changes seem to have taken place in the policies defined since the 1990s. On the contrary, the gap between the aspirations and concerns of so-called developed countries and those of developing countries has widened in this regard, as could be observed during the Copenhagen Summit in December 2009.

The strong demand for education to which States have so far failed to provide a satisfactory response has led to an increasing number of community-based solutions, which are now being recognized. Despite the difficulties families face, education continues to be considered of primary importance by the large majority of those interviewed in the course of the surveys conducted by Aide et Action International.



For Dr Rakotozafy Harison, Head of the Department of Adult Education and Training at Fianarantsoa University, Madagascar, bridges need to be built to make the best use of all the initiatives that are likely to contribute to the improvement of education both for children and adults.

*"Inclusive education and youth and adult literacy are among the major battles yet to be waged. The policy may sometimes be likened to Noah's Ark – those within the formal system are elected and very little consideration is given to those outside it, although their existence may be acknowledged. There may be several reasons for this situation, the main one being the shortage of financial resources. But another is a general misunderstanding of the effects the existence of those excluded from the system and their consequences have on society. For instance, in Madagascar, policy-makers and actors have been struggling to eradicate illiteracy practically since the country's independence, but even today, 50% of adults are functionally illiterate. Educational reforms aimed literally at transforming the face of education were initiated two years ago, but at present, we do not know how the current changes will affect them. The system suffers from several weaknesses: exclusion from school – 10% of the country's children are of schoolgoing age and do not go to school<sup>52</sup>; dropouts – 47% of pupils do not complete the full primary cycle and leave school early; logistical and pedagogical facilities are inappropriate for universal primary education – new and old facilities and teaching material do not take persons with disabilities into account, there is a disastrous shortage of school supplies (particularly in rural areas), and landlocked areas remain deprived of any form of assistance or, at the most, receive the little help that reaches them very late."*

<sup>52</sup> *Statistics from the Ministry of National Education, 2007.*

## 6 EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT THROUGH A MULTI-PLAYER PARTNERSHIP

In India, Aide et Action International's *ILead project* (Institute for Livelihood Education and Development) is an example of the innovative capacities of stakeholders to form various partnerships in view of development. This project aims at setting-up professional training centers for 5,400 candidates per year in various fields (beauty care, automobiles, electricity, etc.) and enables a regular interface between the local market, jobs and other potential employers.

It makes it possible to develop courses, training methodologies, training courses and to establish pre and post-training connections.

This type of initiative illustrates the usefulness of development partnerships, which far from being reduced to aid or ordinary economic partnerships, actually enable people to become self-reliant and learn skills through training programmes and, in the long term, enable them to gain access to secure and properly remunerated jobs or even to become entrepreneurs or have their own income-generating activities.

Moreover, this form of partnership enables companies to finance local development and to avail the services of skilled labour. In the process, NGOs are able to provide higher quality norms. Lastly, the State is also able to provide employment and cater to the needs of Indian citizens by combining all potentialities at the national level.



### UNDIENABLE ADVANTAGES BUT CONSIDERABLE STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The shortage of skilled human resources, the lack of adequate financial resources and the difficulty in gathering funds remain the main problems. In the same way, corruption and the mismanagement of investments have undermined the process of achieving the MDGs. In the case of education, the main weakness lies in the fact that the goal of primary education for all places an excessive emphasis on access while overlooking the quality of education.

Mr. Suleiman Sumra, the Director of the UWEZA Foundation in Tanzania referred to all the constraints hindering the achievement of primary education for all:

*"The overall objective of education for all by 2015 is unrealistic for many developing countries. The persistent poverty in the country prevents children from accessing education due to various constraints. First, budget constraints: the budget allocated to education is already significant, but the population growth of almost 3% per year for the public especially school age can not cope with the demand for education without strong support from the international community. Then we have structural constraints: education is mandatory only on paper and until now there has not really been text penalizing parents who do not send their children to school. Now is the opportunity cost of education itself that is negative in some parents and they feel it is economically more profitable for themselves and their children not attend school. We must also face constraints in terms of human resources: the first generation of teachers who have received some level of training retire. In their place, new teachers are generally poorly trained and poorly motivated. The school must then deal with quality problems that affect its operation. Finally, there are political constraints: doubts persist about the existence of a genuine political will in order to achieve universal education. Of course, the language policy has*

*not always evolved, but the development of education is sometimes considered synonymous with more schools, more training of teachers, etc. It was an especially neat offer, as is always the case, but it does not really meet much of the demand. Efforts are often geared towards supporting measures and rarely affect the basic problems of desired reforms. The curriculum content is slightly improved compared to socio-economic infrastructure, thus providing a significant disincentive. For many reasons (poverty, geographic isolation, cultural considerations), the right to education remains a luxury, not a priority for the majority of the population, particularly among vulnerable groups."*

It is true that in most countries, reforms and innovations were introduced in the educational systems in terms of the school environment, improved access and retention of girls in school, an increase in the access of children with disabilities to educational and training facilities, etc. Almost all the countries in which the survey was conducted had drafted plans of action to achieve the MDGs. In some cases, sectoral plans had been prepared and implemented in order to attain specific goals.

Hence, with regard to education, in almost all these countries, efforts have been made to improve access and teaching in order to achieve universal primary education. In Tanzania, for example, primary education reforms have been stipulated in the Principal Education Development Plan (PEDP or Plan de développement principal de l'éducation), of which several aspects stand out:

- Abolition of school fees: They have always been an obstacle hindering children from poor families from being able to go to school. Their abolition is a crucial stage to ensure that all children from marginalized communities have access to schooling.

- Direct transfer of funds to schools: For the first time, primary schools received subsidies in cash to meet operational expenses, including for the purchase of text books.

- Greater role for School Committees: In charge of ensuring that school funds have been received and used for the purposes for which they were allocated (responsible for purchasing material and supervising construction), they facilitate the involvement of parents in school affairs.

- Improvement of transparency and accountability: One of the requirements schools now have to meet is to place their financial transactions at the public's disposal. They are bound to declare the amounts they have received and how they have been used on display boards in the school itself.

These measures have contributed to an increased access to education, but also to improvements in quality.

### ADAPTED CONTENTS AND CURRICULA

In order to achieve the MDGs, adapting the forms of teaching used is also necessary. With regard to primary education for all, this was one of the needs expressed in all the countries surveyed. Initiatives related to diversification, innovations and educational alternatives have seen the light of day, along with approaches like Back to Basics (B2B), initiated in India, which have started spreading to other countries, such as Tanzania.

Hence, the education sector in Vietnam reformed its secondary school curriculum in 2000 and re-drafted its text books for the 1st to 12th year of school, at national level. The new teaching methodology focuses on students and on learning, the use of information technology is given a priority and,

## 7 A PROJECT COMBINING EDUCATION AND CHILD HEALTH IN CAMBODIA

Since March 2009, Aide and Action International has been involved in setting-up a project designed for parental education called *Parental education incorporated in the pre-school programme of the Kampong Chhnang province* in the districts of Boribor and Tek Pos in Cambodia. Based on data that show that more than others, poorly informed parents tend to neglect their children and are unaware of the availability of health care solutions for infants and children, this project seeks to foster positive attitudes and behavior on the part of parents and other stakeholders involved in child development and education.

Supporting parents, especially mothers of poor families, in order to ensure the health of infants and reduce infant mortality rates is one of the many challenges that lie ahead. Involving various community members (village heads, teachers, parents etc.), these measures seek to prevent health risks sustainably and provide parents with health education regarding their children.



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finally, pupils will henceforth be classified based on their learning levels. However, the country aims at achieving even more ambitious goals, as can be seen in its 2010-2020 educational strategy.

Mrs. Huynh Thi Kim Thuan, Head of the Foreign Affairs Department at the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences had this to add: *“In concrete terms, we have 77 groups whose work is to ensure the quality of teaching in colleges and universities. Education and early childhood care are issues that the government is most interested in. Despite the limited budget available for this sector’s development and needs, pre-school education, for children under 5 years-old, is gradually becoming a reality. Furthermore, within the framework of the 2010-2020 strategy, 95% of the children under 5 years of age will attend pre-school in preparation for their primary education. In 2020, all children will attend pre-school and discover the new curriculum. The number of children suffering from malnutrition in nursery schools will fall to less than 10%. As for primary schooling, all the country’s cities and provinces have managed to achieve a 100% literacy rate and universal primary education. In 2020, 99% of children who are of secondary schoolgoing age will go to school, and special attention will be paid to the children of minorities. Integrated inclusive education will be active at all educational levels and 70% of the children with disabilities will be able to go to school by 2020. The goal is that by 2020, all children should be able to go to school and learn every day and that those in their third year should be able to start learning English. Further, the literacy rate of children over 15 years of age will rise to 94% and, on an average, children will spend almost 10 years in school. Moreover, Vietnam has already achieved gender parity in basic education. Over the last few years, greater attention has been paid to the quality of education (management and training of different departments, pedagogical tests, etc.), which continues to be improved.”*

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## THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION

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**EDUCATION REMAINS A PRIORITY AND OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE.** Social, political, environmental and economic rights as well as social justice, peace and security are also key factors of development.

### CONCERTED POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

There has been visible progress in some MDGs, but the qualitative dimension needs to be further integrated in order to prompt governments to improve the living conditions of their people. To this end, governments need to be encouraged to take greater responsibility towards their citizens in this regard.

The interviews held have shown that education alone cannot wipe out poverty and hunger from the world, without the support of concerted policies and strategies. In today’s world, living conditions and standards no longer depend on individuals and their own efforts alone. The environment is also a fundamental factor. Hence, what is important is the capacity to seize the opportunities offered in the prevailing environment so as to fight against poverty and hunger.

Here too, education is a means that can be used to make children believe that they can change their future and that of their families, and therefore be integrated in society. Well-educated children are equipped with certain key skills, both theoretical and practical, and are aware of their rights. They can work, earn their living and become part of the pool of human resources that contributing to the development of their country.

Therefore, education remains the catalyst for development in developing countries. An educated population is a population capable of taking its

future in its own hands, especially with regard to environmental and health issues.

### **IMPROVING CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION**

On the whole, the stakeholders were of the opinion that over the last ten years, changes had taken place in political and institutional decisions and actions. The efforts made by countries, especially in the fields of education and health, had had a positive impact on population groups that were previously marginalized by social policies. But some aspects of poverty, health, partnerships and school education continued to be neglected, even so close to the final MDGs deadline.

It is important to encourage the mobilisation of all intervening parties in order to obtain better results – that is a major orientation for development. For by doing so, we can ensure coherence in support and aid policies and greater linkages between different sectors (health, education, decent housing, etc.).

The lesson we can draw from the present work is that such priorities would be more relevant if citizens were able to participate more closely in their definition. Sustainable policies must first be inclusive in nature. They must set goals that are both quantitative and limited in time, but what citizens' demand is that accessibility, services as well as their quality should all be improved at the same time.

The surveys conducted by Aide et Action International have revealed the advantages of basing public policies on citizens' needs. Today, emphasis needs to be laid on endogenous communication strategies to mobilise citizens in larger numbers for achieving the MDGs, but also with regard to their ability to draw lessons from this experience for even greater effectiveness and efficiency in future development interventions and actions.





"We do not build with people. But education and democracy should be a common construction."

According to Dr. Rakotozafy Harison, Head of the Adult Education and Training Department at Fianarantsoa University in Madagascar: *"The foremost problem with the MDGs is that they are not widely enough disseminated. Often, project managers use their knowledge of them to justify their project-related or other demands, but without doing much else in their regard. We must therefore begin by initiating an extensive information and sensitisation campaign on the opportunities offered by these MDGs. In a world that is guided by fatalism to a greater or lesser extent, such as ours, we must also prepare good arguments for taking actions – something needs to be done because even the political leaders in these countries may not be fully convinced of the legitimacy of these MDGs. They just go along with everyone else as they have no other choice because of world pressure. Therefore, I personally feel that the lack of sharing and appropriation is the foremost weakness of the MDGs. The other weakness has to do with lack of clarity about the economic impact the achievement of these MDGs would have (except perhaps with regard to diseases and AIDS). In a world increasingly dominated by commercial interests and short-term profitability, it is sometimes difficult to advocate and convince people about social issues. Even governments that are in a hurry to achieve immediate results and the public at large do not necessarily see developing schools as a priority as compared to other more fruitful activities. Because the other weakness of the MDGs is that educational investments are made for the long term, whereas the life cycle of a policy is in the short term, which means that education policies mostly come low on the list of priorities and are often used only for propaganda discourses. The last weakness is that the goals are too ambitious, given the environment and the means available. Universal primary education cannot honestly be achieved until a vast number of parents have been convinced about the positive consequences of schools and a sensitisation campaign is somewhat lacking in these MDGs."*

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## Two *sine qua non* CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING THE MDGs

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**HAVING IRREFUTABLY TURNED**, into an urgent necessity, citizens' participation in defining and implementing policies and the respect of human rights are increasingly being raised as demands in appeals and advocacy by the leaders of various development bodies.

## DEMOCRATIZING POLICY FORMULATION PROCESSES

The major advantage of the MDGs seems to lie in the fact that both the international community and development actors are being jointly mobilised on one fundamental issue – the fight against poverty.

Only full mobilisation will help in acting effectively with regard to obstacles to development. For instance, while women account for half of the world's population, the gender parity goal has been reduced to mere gender disparity dialectics, despite the extensive discrimination women suffer in terms of access to employment, wages and citizens' participation. As for the goal of universal primary education, it refers to full primary education without laying any emphasis on the equality of opportunities for all, despite the fact that it is because of their very difference that so many children continue to be excluded from education<sup>53</sup>. This situation results in inequalities that keep already disadvantaged population groups trapped in the cycle of poverty and highlights the absence of measures that take the specific needs of the targeted population groups into account. Far from being the voice of the world's citizens, the MDGs have obscured the democratic principles that could have made it possible to incorporate their points of view in the processes implemented to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable sections.

However, according to Amartya Sen, one of the constituent rights of democracy is the right of citizens to social and political participation – a right that even the most vulnerable should enjoy<sup>54</sup>. This kind of participation would not only enable all citizens to be informed of their rights but at the same time to express their needs and make the necessary choices by creating better living conditions for all. *"We do not build with people. But education and democracy should be a common construction,"* says Josephine Ouedraogo, Executive Secretary of Enda Tiers Monde<sup>55</sup>.

In this regard, although the United Nations does not deal directly with States, the debate on development policies should not be limited to "experts" alone, but must be opened further to include citizens of both sexes. This exercise would only gain by becoming more democratic and by taking place in a consultative space with people who are aware of their rights and their duties. It is only if this condition of joint construction is met that development policies can be truly equitable, effective and adapted. Informed people's participation in development policies concerning them is the only way of taking individual and joint concerns into account, as they are indissociable from any improvement in their living conditions.

Consequently, development policies must strive, in particular, for equity in the responses provided to meet the needs and concerns of citizens, in accordance with the goals fixed. Accordingly, they must ensure that they are not a political process based on a power struggle, thereby furthering inequalities. However, as demonstrated by the results of the surveys in the present report, people do not have much knowledge about the guidelines directing the formulation of State policies for citizens. Hence, there is a need to disseminate them and democratize the processes leading to their implementation in the

<sup>54</sup> Sen, A. K. 1992. *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford, University Press.

<sup>55</sup> 2010. *FSM 2001 au Sénégal. L'Afrique de la base doit être présente*. *Le Courrier*, 8 February 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Annan, K. 2005. In *Larger Freedom – Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. New York, United Nations.





various countries, i.e. through the formulation of national policies. It is on this account, among others, that human rights issues take on their full meaning, as they confer each individual with the right to participate and express his or her views.

### **MAKING HUMAN RIGHTS UNAVOIDABLE**

The respect for human rights is an essential precondition for the achievement of the MDGs. By adopting the Millennium Declaration, the world's countries undertook to implement national policies with a view to achieving these goals and immediately start waging a battle to combat hunger, poverty and environmental degradation to the extent possible and to promote health and education. Consequently, the respect of the fundamental rights of girls and women, those of the child, and the rights of all citizens in the world to work and to health should become the goals to be achieved in each of the signatory countries.

In 2005, in his report, *In Larger Freedom – Towards Development, Security and Human Rights For All*<sup>56</sup>, Koffi Annan stressed that no development effort could succeed if it was not firmly rooted in respect for human dignity. He also asserted that "*without respect for human rights, there is no peace, no development potential.*"

However, the MDGs barely refer to working conditions, social protection, reproductive and sexual rights. More generally, they refer very little to human rights, whose violations are still one of the structural causes of citizens' poverty. Clearly, they do not refer to the importance of achieving these goals for the poorest of the poor in order to ensure the right to development for all. Further, they do not require States to fight against the discrimination from which large sections of the world's population suffers. Moreover, the objective of a partnership for

development to which industrialized countries have made a commitment is the only one that has not been quantified and has not, therefore, been translated into concrete obligations.

Hence, the changes associated with the requirement for a greater consideration of human rights have added to the importance of the main issues of education and health. An integral part of human rights, the rights to education and to health embody the aspirations of all people today. We cannot fail to take action to meet this demand today.

### **CONCLUSION**

Unless a decisive electroshock is given, the MDGs will not be achieved in 2015. However relevant incentives can be used to build niches and trigger certain levers: education, citizens' participation, democracy and the respect of human rights. ODA reforms also need to be added to these factors. Indeed, in a context where traditional financing mechanisms and cooperation have reached their limits, creating alternatives and innovative financing conditions are becoming more and more necessary. It is on these conditions alone that we can still hope to achieve the MDGs.



## PERSPECTIVES...

Although the Millennium Development Goals were drafted with the ambition to truly ensure the development of people and better living conditions for them, they do not, however, offer sufficiently concrete indicators to measure some aspects concerning the living standards of the world's citizens. According to the data collected by Aide et Action International, it appears that the citizens across the world, both male and female, aspire to the recognition of their rights. And yet, the MDGs have no component on democracy and governance.

*"The MDGs are achievable when national public policies are supported by international partners"* affirmed the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, last June, while appealing to world leaders to give the process a fresh impetus so that the promises made in 2000 could be kept.

*"Improvements in the lives of the poor have been unacceptably slow, and some hard-won gains are being eroded by the climate, food and economic crises"*, deplored the Secretary General in the preamble to the report published in June on the means to achieve the MDGs by 2015. *"Billions of people are looking to the international community to realize the great vision embodied in the Millennium Declaration"*, he added.

However, we have to remind that successful development processes are based on the foundations of democratic governance, the primacy of law, the respect of human rights, peace and security. Let us also bear in mind that while these principles can be

eloquently expressed by all today, they are still only rarely applied in several countries. But that too is a millennium challenge for developing countries.

The impacts of the global economic crisis have been superimposed on the effects of the preceding food and fuel crises, which are already weighing heavily on existing social policies, in particular those favoring education, maternal and child health. That is why appropriate social protection systems that make it possible to protect the most vulnerable groups, especially children, need to be developed.

The testimonies gathered through its surveys by Aide et Action International have also pointed to the need for more inclusive and participatory policies. The progress achieved thanks to the MDGs need to take concrete shape in terms of commitments by communities and partners for the fight against poverty. Promoting better democratic processes in the definition of public policies can only prove advantageous. By doing so, sustainable development policies can strive towards greater equity in responding to the real needs of citizens.

Promoting the MDGs on the basis of the human rights approach has become a necessity, so there could be no more opportune moment for this recommendation, particularly in a context in which human rights violations remain a structural factor of poverty. Hence the need to lay emphasis on the living conditions of people, in order to reduce discrimination and all other forms of exclusion.

At the same time, the most vulnerable socio-economic categories should be seen as a priority. The achievement of the MDGs should also make it possible to take the poorest of the poor into account.

The education of girls and women call for greater attention on the part of the international community. In fact, the weakness of the strategies developed for achieving the MDGs related to these issues highlights the fact that the gender issue is not taken into account transversally, which is the only way of guaranteeing the successful achievement of this goal.

The planning processes undertaken within the MDG framework raise certain questions that lead one to believe that the experts involved have, in a sense, been victims of their own success. For instance, schools have been identified as the only way of ensuring primary education for all, whereas the economic and social environment plays an overriding role in this regard. Therefore, much more work needs to be done on the purposes of education in each country.

More and more questions are being raised about the MDG system, which has demonstrated its weaknesses insofar as democratizing education is concerned. The lessons to be drawn are pointed out and some citizens are convinced that the environment has much more to contribute to education than school alone. The time has therefore come to re-think and completely change the education system.

Also, this deconstruction of the current school system will certainly have to incorporate the tools our modern society uses, such as new information and communication technologies. Indeed, more and more digital content, distance learning and other digital interactive tools have been brought up in the context of learning, both for teachers' training and for schools, as well as for literacy.

The population growth rate has led to an increase in the number of pupils, whereas the number of teachers has not risen proportionately. It is this issue that lies at the heart of the 2015 deadline. How can the number of teachers who are required to meet the needs of this mass of new pupils be recruited? Must we continue with the same ways of functioning that have already shown their limitations whereas what is needed is to help local universities to expand and to retain skilled staff?

Finally, the success of the MDGs can be ensured by taking education more into consideration. Each of the seven other objectives is likely to be impacted if we manage to ensure quality education for all, in line with the expectations and needs of people across the world. Education is not just a goal – it is also a strategy for changing the world and ensuring that citizens are able to occupy their rightful place in it.

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- United Nations: <http://un.org/fr/millenniumgoals/>







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# MDGs 2015: the Mirage!

Citizens' Voices on the Millennium  
Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are a consensual basis for development policies. They try to take into consideration the most worrying problems for developing countries and their indicators constitute a reference for States to measure their progress. Ten years after their launch, the UN Summit in New York is an opportunity for development stakeholders to question and review the MDGs.

By giving citizens from developing countries the opportunity to raise their voices, this report attempts to show another facet of the MDGs. Far from the great discourses and declarations made on this issue, people at the grassroots also have their own opinions and their own judgments about the MDGs review. And what they demand above all is to be able to take part democratically in decisions that concern them and to put to good account strategies and initiatives that lead to concrete and measurable results on the field, aimed at improving their living conditions.

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