

Millennium Development Goals: Meeting the challenges for the Future

A paper prepared by Erol User

It would be an understatement to say that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are important; they are vital to both the developing world and the developed world. In fact perhaps we can say that a measurement of how “developed” a world we are, is our ability to meet these goals as a global community. Not only are they a demonstration of humanity but also a personification of the human condition. Having won the ovarian lottery, often individuals in the developed world are not aware of how simple actions can improve or restrain the lives of others. I feel that as a UN Goodwill Ambassador, a person should embody these goals wholly and strive to meet them with even in the simplest of actions. The following paper is my analysis of the goals and explanation of how, if chosen for such an august post, I would work effortlessly to help realize them. Going through the goals one by one, I will be able to demonstrate to the deciding body that I understand the ramifications and have an organized and well constructed philosophy for these eight paradigms of peace, progress and compassion.

The first MDG, “eradicating extreme poverty and hungry” is certainly a lofty target. Yet the alternative of not meeting this goal is quite severe. Within the context of this goal, as a UN Goodwill Ambassador, I will need to help meet targets: 1A to half the number of individuals living on \$1 a day; 1B Achieve employment for men, women and young people; and 1C half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. We know that since 1981, the number of people living in extreme poverty has been cut in half, a lot of this occurring in South and East Asia, yet recently we have seen a rise in poverty estimates by the Food and

Agricultural Organization of the UN, from 854 million in 2006 to 1.02 billion in 2009. It is clear that there is still a great deal of work to do.¹

Target 1A is based on the possibility that a global ideological change can occur. \$1 a day is very little money, regardless of the location. Although efforts to increase this rate to \$1.25 were improving until 2005, it is clear that the last 5 years have seen a further slide downward of people in precarious economic situations.² In order to address this issue, essentially three areas of developing countries must be dealt with, the economy, regional conflicts and climate change. If we look at the present global economic system we can see that it is obviously on the side of a powerful and wealthy minority. What we need is an ideological and economical change to occur. The wealthy minority which has a great deal of political power needs to understand the obligations it has to rest of the human race. In fact their financial stability is a result often of the disproportionate global economic system. While perhaps an immediate change to the system may not occur if we can help issue an ideas change, meaning realization of responsibilities eventually the system will begin to change.

Secondly, regional conflicts such as Iraq, Somalia or even Sudan have created a large number of refugees. These individuals are definitely living on \$1 a day or less. In order to reduce the number of individuals at or below the poverty level, a Goodwill Ambassador, will need to encourage the resolution of such violent and disruptive conflicts. Peaceful regions have a higher possibility to improve and grow economically, giving citizens a way out of the poverty cycle.

¹ FAO: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

² World Hunger: <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

My suggestion is to use international law as a carrot and a stick for those who create refugees. Induced poverty should be a crime because it leads to loss of livelihood as well as introduces poverty into precarious regions. Before we can talk about improving the infrastructure of a nation so that it can produce strong and intelligent generations, we must ensure that individuals are safe and able to live a healthy and violence-free life. Therefore, a Goodwill Ambassadors must encourage the development of international law that holds individuals, organization, governments and nations accountable to their citizens. By making such as strong declaration, it will be clear that eradicating hunger for all individuals is a priority.

Thirdly, in order to help decrease the number of individuals living on \$1 a day, we as a global village must address the issue of climate change. As abnormal atmospheric phenomena begin to occur, we will see an increase in flooding, hurricanes and other weather that may reduce the world's total ability to produce foodstuffs. Reduced food output will increase prices, once again putting the world's poorest at risk as global food prices begin to rise. Developed nations must be encouraged to help developing countries such as Bangladesh or the Maldives which are right on the geographical and geological front line of global climate change.

To meet target 1B, "Achieve employment for men, women and young people", it is obvious that a lot of effort as well as cooperation is necessary. Yet by stimulating economic growth in the developing world we will empower the country and its people to take control of their lives and try to improve them. In the

wake of the present global financial crisis it is questionable about how this can be done. But I will posit to you that there are always going to be crisis, the difference between the developed world and the developing world is that the skills for dealing with crisis situations are different. When developed countries are affected by any number of economic, social or even environmental crisis, there are systems in place that temporarily assist individuals in times of crisis and other programs to help ensure the gradually return back to pre-crisis normality. Yet the return depends on an individual's as well as a society's tools to stimulate their economy and growth. Employment numbers will not be met unless there is a flexible economy that has the ability to absorb and shed workers as changes arise. What the governments of these nations must provide for its citizens is a way to reinvent themselves and keep up with the changes in technology and the work place. As we can see many developed countries have shed most manufacturing jobs yet the economies of these nations have expanded into the service sector for example and have allowed individuals to focus their goals in other fields. If we do not want to repeat the continued mistakes of our past, the developed world needs to provide the developing world with greater and greater investment opportunities.

Additionally, for target 1B to be met, I think that education about family planning needs to be included under this goal. For example, countries such as China and India have enormous populations yet it is not reasonable to think that the population can go on increasing infinitely. Because as it increases there might not be jobs for these individuals to fill then bringing us back to the same \$1

a day challenge. We need family planning programs to educate women and men about future responsibilities of both the developed and developing world. As more humans inhabit the planet, it is obvious that more food sources will be needed yet if we can help to ensure sustainable family planning, major issues such as extreme poverty and hunger will eventually be eradicated because individuals will be able to wisely plan their own lives and families.

Target 1C seems to me a pivotal target. If we could work together as a world community, I believe that world hunger could be eliminated. According to “worldhunger.org” the definition of world hunger is “the want or scarcity of food in a country”. Throughout the world it is estimates that there are 1.02 billion people suffering from this pandemic problem; with 642 million and 265 million in Asia and the South Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa respectively, it is obvious that we need to concentrate our efforts in these regions.³ When I think about what this statistic means, it can be translated into all of China or all of India suffering from endemic hunger; yet the problem exists all over the world affecting the poorest nations and its peoples the most. We can see that persistent hunger affects nearly every aspect of a person’s life. Children that are malnourished are unhealthy and are at a high risk for death and disease. Also they are less likely to go to school because of their lack of energy. This means that the poverty cycle can repeat itself. I would posit that we do not just have an alarming rich to poor ratio in the world but rather countries with calorie rich diets versus countries with calorie poor diets. At any rate it is obvious who the winners and the losers are in this situation.

³ <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

I feel that another approach that is essential to meeting target 1C is to help improve the land use policies of developing nations. By helping farmers gain access to modern farming techniques, the UN will be able to increase the output of staple crops such as grain, corn and rice. Since a large portion of the world uses rice as an essential ingredient to their daily diet it is obvious that we need to help individuals make more of this crop. Poor land use policies in countries such as China or Sudan help make access to food a daily struggle.

I do support the idea of the developing world donating more food stuffs to the developing world. This though I see as a temporary solution, the developing world cannot go on receiving food welfare from nations around the world; it is obvious that they will need to produce enough food to feed their own populations. Plus in the event that a donor country is unable to meet its obligations, the receiving nation will see serious food shortages and the consequences that come with it. Improving the access to technology, sustainable water access projects and improved land use policies will greatly aid in the developing world's ability to meet their daily calorie necessity. Plus as farmers begin to generate greater output of crops, this will add a new dimension to the economy, allowing farmers the ability to sell in the global market place. This also assumes that a body like the UN can help to ensure that food export prices are fair under the free trade system that exists.

Achieving universal Primary Education

Undoubtedly, the manner in which we can help individuals with the other seven goals is through education. Countless studies have been conducted that demonstrate with higher levels of education come increased economic output, decreased social problems as well as improved political situations. By ensuring that all men and women of the world have access to at least a primary education, I will help to ensure that future generation will be able to make informed decisions about their lives.

Target 2A is key in the world's struggle for progress as well as gender equality. Firstly, an informed and educated population can do the simplest tasks with relative ease. Routine daily actions such as reading a medicine bottle are impossible for many men, women and children around the world. Yet these simple actions can have colossal impacts. Not being able to read a medicine bottle means that perhaps administration of vital medicine or awareness of potential dangers will go unperformed.

Organizations such as the UN, Doctors without borders and Rotary International have greatly assisted countries with vaccination programs. Yet this is an example of external groups coming in and informing individuals about problems such as malaria or polio. What needs to occur is an awakening within the countries to the daily dangers that individuals face. With an improvement of the educational situation in countries, men, women and children will be able to decide for themselves the type of life they would like to lead rather than having it

proscribed to them. My country of Turkey is a clear example of trying to meet MD goals. Just ten years ago the nearly 78% of the Turkish population could claim a primary education. Yet today universal primary education is a government mandate and the country claims 93% success rate.⁴ Education is empowering and we need to support programs that set up and ensure the continuation of universal primary education for all individuals. A literate population has the ability to transform its country from developing to developed with the knowhow and experience gained from education.

Goal 3: Improving Gender Equality and Empower Women

Both men and women are invaluable human resources for this planet. Yet often women as a gender have been ignored and not prioritized for education, health or politics. Yet within this belief system there is a great fallacy because women are globally the main caregivers for children. Since behavior is generally learned, we can say that women provide the strongest influence for both male and female children. Therefore, uneducated, unhealthy and non-politically active women lead to uneducated, unhealthy and non-politically active children. We also can agree that children are our future leaders. So by not investing in women and children we are essentially saying that we are nonchalant about our future as well. As UN Goodwill Ambassadors we must realize that a policy toward women is a de-facto policy towards children. It will be impossible to meet our millennium goals without the help and support of women.

⁴ http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?tb_id=14&ust_id=5

Target 3A, which is “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015” is essential to meeting the other seven goals. When we look at the situation in education and the discrepancy between men and women in some countries it is alarming. Even in my own country, Turkey, there are some frightening statistics. What I can say is that programs focused on educating young girls are proactive and will improve the situation of women around the world. Yet, I also feel that the education of men about women’s right to education is even more vital. Often we see in many countries, Turkey included, that men do not allow women, whether wives, daughters or mothers attend school or work outside the house. By educating men about the importance and usefulness of educated women, we can avoid help to change gender inequality issues. There is one program in Turkey that has been especially successful “Baba beni okula gonder” (Dad send me to school) which encourages families to send their daughters to school by paying for all the education related expenses. It is a donation based program with the goal of eliminating the male-female education discrepancy. Globally we need to increase the number of these programs and focus on helping families to realize the importance of female education.

Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality:

Death is certainly a painful subject for everyone. It is unfortunately when adults pass on yet it seem extremely unnecessary when children, who never had

the chance to really live, die. Child mortality is due to mainly inadequate access to health care and nutrition. As a UN Goodwill Ambassador, I would make it my priority to improve the condition of children throughout the world.

Meeting Target 4A, to “Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate” encompasses many subcategories, all of which focus on children. I especially like the attention that is paid to children under 1 and under 5. So many young children do not make it to their first birthday because of inadequate care and malnutrition. The lack of resources, whether they be in health services or food stuffs can be overcome once again by investing in developing countries. When I say investment, I do not just mean financial alone, if we could create communities in which children and families can live healthy and peaceful lives, we will be able to ensure that the child mortality rate will drop.

Education is of paramount importance to this topic because countless studies have shown that as the mother’s education level increases, the chance for infant mortality decreases. It is obvious that the more a mother knows about ways to avoid dangers, the more consciousness she will be. Knowledge is empowering and by giving that to women, we in fact are giving children greater chances at survival. This target also has a provision for increasing the number of children immunized against measles. According to the WHO, in 2008, 164,000 people died of measles last year, mostly children under the age of 5. A very inexpensive vaccine when administered in high-risk areas reduced measles deaths by 78% between 2000 and 2008.⁵ Areas that have been affected by natural disasters are especially vulnerable to this disease. Yet if program such as

⁵ WHO: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/>

the ones conducted by the WHO, UNICEF, the American CDC and the American Red Cross continue it is reasonable to believe that this goal could be met. With such an inexpensive vaccine it is unfathomable to think that we as Goodwill Ambassadors cannot achieve this goal. By helping to keep this issue in the global media eye, we can contribute to a continuing dialogue and dedication to the issue.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

As aforementioned, the support of women is vital in the campaign to meet the MDGs. It is not untrue to say that in most societies today women are the center stone of families. Although men do contribute a great deal, from initial pregnancy through early adulthood, on the whole women spend more time with children than men. Because of this truism it is undeniable that there must be a dedicated program towards ensuring that women have access to adequate health care. As a Goodwill Ambassador I realize it will be my job to keep this topic in the media circles to encourage change.

Target 5A, "Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio" is a necessity if we want to ensure that we will have healthy children. In most maternal death cases, the child dies as well. According to the University of Essex most maternal health cases are due to obstetric complication such as infection, unsafe abortions or even unsafe extended labor. Furthermore, 74% of these deaths could be prevented with access to adequate

emergency care.⁶ In order to be able to meet target 5A, a careful examination and discussion of target 5B should be conducted; “Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health”. This includes a variety of topic from contraception to family planning to decreasing the adolescent birth rate. Women need to be aware of the options that they have available and the control that they have over their own lives. These types of program especially need to be encouraged in regions of the world such a Sub-Saharan Africa where the number of children per women is high, between 5 and 8, and the infant mortality rate is also high.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

One of the worst diseases to strike the human race is AIDS/HIV. As a virus that attacks the immune system, it does not allow for full recovery. What this means is that the only way to reduce the impact of AIDS/HIV on the world is to be proactive and prevent it from becoming an epidemic or pandemic. Although it is not a serious issue in Turkey, AIDS/HIV has ravaged Africa. Due to war or other conflicts many countries have a “lost generation” but Africa is a continent with a loss generation. The 15-49 age workforce population is reduced by a quarter or 35% in some Sub-Saharan countries, and it will become exceedingly difficult for countries such as South African and Nigeria country to recover these lost members of society. There is essentially a braun-drain rather than a brain drain. Millions of individuals are dying every year unnecessarily. We need to support programs that provided education as well as free contraception for individuals. While abstinence education can be part of the program, it can not be

⁶ UNFPA http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/750_filename_reducing_mm.pdf

all because it is impossible and reckless to think that all individuals will see the merits of such a program. Reversing the trend means being proactive about the solution, it needs to stop before it starts. Furthermore, we need to encourage universal access to treatment programs for individuals with the disease; the treatment should not just be for individuals who can afford the treatment. There also need to be education programs to try to address the stigma associated or the myths about the disease. After these untruths have been accepted by a society then treatment will become commonplace in these societies.

Finally, MDG 6 deals with decreasing the malaria incidents worldwide, especially in children. As we have already discussed infant mortality, it is clear that inadequate health care is one of the major reasons for this social malady. Malaria and its devastating effects are one major factor in both infant and child mortality. Although Turkey does not have a problem with malaria, it is clear that many tropic countries are in serious danger when it comes to malaria. Many individuals are not even aware that they are infected until it is too late. Often they are too far from health clinics in order to help them in time. We need to encourage government to widely distribute anti-malarial drugs and insecticide treated bed nets. With greater resources at their disposal, individuals, especially the children will be better protected.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 7 is another crucial goal that must be realized simply because without the environment that has helped humans to sustain life on the earth in sedentary communities for the last 10,000 years or so, there will be no

continuation of the human race. This goal is so large that I at times think it is too large to solve. Yet I can remember at one time when we thought preventing the production of CFCs or the increasing of the ozone layer was impossible. Yet with government and UN mandates, industries, corporations and individuals find ways to change technology and ensure that former harmful practices are stamped out.

First on the agenda would be to ensure that sustainable development policies are closely integrated into the fabric of national policies. We can no longer afford to have industries or individuals acting as they like because the world is so closely linked; an action in one country can have a serious effect on neighboring nations. This is clearly seen in my country, Turkey, with the Chernobyl explosion of 1986. While it may have happened in Ukraine, the radioactive gas floated over all the nations surrounding the Black Sea. There are extremely high rates of certain typed of cancers in the region, higher than the rest of the country. Although it can not be definitively traced to Chernobyl the connection seems likely. We need to find real solutions to the problems of industrial pollutants as well as cleaning up industrial waste. Although we may send waste to another country, landfill or out into the ocean, it does not rid the area of the problem. Turkey and the world need a consistent policy of sustainable development as well as individuals to implement it.

The second issue to address under MDG 7 is the loss of biodiversity. If we sit idly by and allow species to disappear at the current rate, we will be doing a great disservice to future generations. In fifty years, common animals such as the polar bear may end up being an interesting skeleton to see in a museum.

Biodiversity is a valuable resource for this planet and we need to support programs in sensitive areas such as the Brazilian rainforest as well as the defrosting Arctic. At some point very soon in the future we will have to realize that man's encroachment on nature must stop in order for it to recover.

Targets 7C and 7D are quite closely related because they concern improving people's lives. First by increasing people in the developing world's access to potable water and sanitation, we will be able to help many individuals to avoid waterborne diseases. Drinkable water is becoming a scarcity in many regions of the world, especially with droughts caused by climate change. Turkey and the Middle East as a whole, is a region that in the near future is on course to have serious water shortages. We need to educate individuals about making wise decisions when it comes to water use. Additionally, industries must be forced to use treated water rather than drinking water for their production processes. By giving individuals access to improved sanitation we can help prevent the spread of malaria and other pathogens.

Goal 7D proposes to improve lives of urban dwellers. In Turkey's largest metropolis, Istanbul there are an estimated 17 million people. As a resident I can testify that the services are not adequate. Improving the lives of urban dwellers, especially the poorest ones, means stricter laws on safe housing, improved water and sanitation transport system as well as other infrastructural improvements. Major cities around the world need to undergo an ideas change, there must be serious urban planning models to prepare for increase populations. Because cities do not get smaller due to the rural-urban migration, governments need to

be proactive about the possibility of an Istanbul, a Lagos or a Sao Paolo with 20 or 25 million people. Basic needs such as transportations, housing safety and sanitation need to be planned for at least 20 years in the future.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

The final MDG is one that is inherent in all previous goals, which is to develop a global network in different sectors to ensure an ideological shift in the way the present systems are implemented. While the present system of trade is established there needs to be a rethinking of this program with a more humanist spirit. The present global trade and financial system is weighted toward wealthy nations and is a difficult marketplace for developing countries to compete in. There must be a commitment by both developing and developed nation to a fair system focused on reducing poverty and good governance. It is not enough for one nation to meet its own MD goals, as a global community we need to ensure that all nations meet their goals.

Yet in order for countries to meet these goals special attention must be paid to LDCs or least developed countries. It is possible to hold these countries to the same MD standard but only if they have been given an adequate amount of resources to succeed. Since developed nations have had nearly a 200 year head start we need to take into account the history of the nation before we judge it. Furthermore the special needs of landlocked and island states have to be brought into the equation. Island nations such as the Maldives will eventually suffer because of global climate change. There need to be plans set up today in

order to provide for that future inevitable event. Developed nations, which have arguably caused global climate change, need to devise a strategy to meet future problematic events. Finally, as with most problems between nations, financial are always are a major issue. Not being able to compete in the global marketplace means that many nations have had to borrow extensively from organizations such as the IMF. Being unable to repay their loans, they often make crippling concessions. Yet recognition of the challenges facing these developing nations as well as their ability to repay these debts need to be reanalyzed. The policies toward them need to be rethought and put on a level playing field. If MDG 8 is not address under the auspices of the other seven it is not probably to think that any of the other goals can be met on a global scale.

My Personal Contribution to MDG as a Goodwill Ambassador

I have believed all my life that the way to accomplish a goal is through cooperation. Looking over the MDGs it is obvious that the world community must work as a cohesive network in order to realize these goals. After considering the post of Goodwill Ambassador, I thought about whether or not I would be able to fulfill the duties the position bestows. As my twenty five years in the financial sector demonstrate, I am quite versed in helping companies and individuals participate in mergers, acquisitions as well as consulting about financial matters related to the Turkish economy. Having worked, studied and lived abroad extensively, I am also well versed in the expectations and relations in other

countries. I see that Turkey is a country with a great deal of potential and I would like to make that potential a reality.

Furthermore, as a well connected individual in the Turkish business community, it has become clear to me that the power this group wields, if harnessed correctly can help to ensure that the MD goals are all met in Turkey. As I consider my candidacy, I realize what steps I have to take in order to do my part in this global initiative. Firstly, I will need to ensure that there are dedicated individuals not just in Turkey but globally that are committed to the task of the Turkey and other countries meeting MDGs. Secondly, using my influence, I will try and convince other individuals, to participate in on-going sustainable development projects that will contribute to a positive outcome for all 8 goals. Making sure that the MDGs are always on the public's mind and in the media is one way to generate interest from third parties. Promoting the cause and keeping it close to people's hearts and minds will once again contribute to its success. Thirdly, I will myself contribute to the effort both financially and with my time in order to ensure the goals will be realized.

Finally, when I reflect on the position and why I am interested in being a Goodwill Ambassador, many reasons come to my mind, but the two that are the most influential are Ali and Omer, my two sons. I see that they will inherit a world that has some serious challenges. Not meeting MD targets and goals might be unfortunate but not attempting to meet them would be a tragedy. It would be a demonstration of indifference and this world cannot afford this emotion. I would like my children and theirs to live in a world in which men are truly concerned

about the welfare of their neighbors. While I can not personally accomplish all the goals, I can start by helping to make the 8 goals written on a piece of paper in 2001 a reality.