

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a global agreement to combat world poverty, with the objective of making the world a better place in 2015 than it was in 2000. The eight goals focus on key development issues such as income poverty, education, child mortality and gender inequality. There has been good progress with some of the goals in some regions, but slow progress has been made in others, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. With regards to the world as a whole the overall progress has been quite slow and uneven. This has resulted in many criticisms towards the MDGs.

The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 countries at the United Nations (UN) Millennium Summit in September 2000. The formation of the goals represented a “response by the international community, to the intolerably low levels of well being experienced by so many people living in developing countries” (McGillivray, 2008, p. 3). In other words, they were formed to address the growing gaps in living standards between the developed and developing countries.

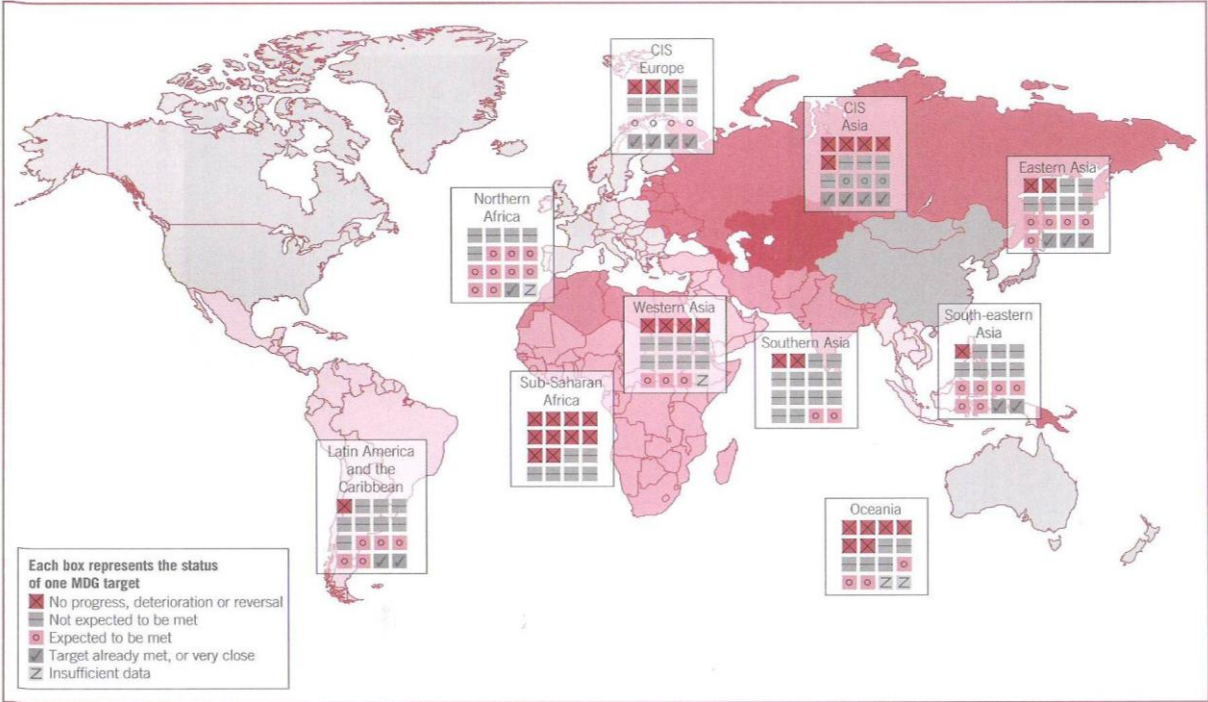
As shown in Figure 1, each MDG is a “statement of broad intent” (McGillivray, 2008, p. 3). Each goal has associated targets which are linked to various development indicators. The map in Figure 2 shows the disparities in progress towards the targets between regions. The biggest concern is in Sub-Saharan Africa where hardly any progress has been made and, if anything, reversal has occurred. However Northern Africa is making steady progress. In Eastern Asia and South-East Asia some of the targets have already been met.

When the MDGs were established, income poverty and hunger were seen as two of the biggest concerns for developing countries. One of the targets for the first MDG is to: “Reduce by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 US a day” (MDG Report, 2010). Figure 3 shows the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 (in purchasing power parity terms) a day. There are major concerns in Sub-Saharan Africa. From 1990-2005, Sub-Saharan Africa only managed to decrease its proportion by seven percent. In 2005 just over half of its population was still living on less than \$1.25 a day. Since the goal is to reduce this proportion to just under 30 percent by 2015, it is highly unlikely that this target will be reached.

However sharp reductions in income poverty have been recorded in Eastern Asia, where the target for 2015 has already been reached. From 1990-2005, the proportion of the population living on less than \$1.25 a day had declined by 44 percent. There have also been steady declines in Southern Asia and South-East Asia. The progress in these regions has meant that developing regions, overall, are on track to achieving the first MDG.

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

**Figure 1. The eight Millennium Development Goals.**  
*(Source: UNDP, 2010).*



**Figure 2. Trends towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015.**  
*(Source: Potter et. al. 2008, p. 41)*

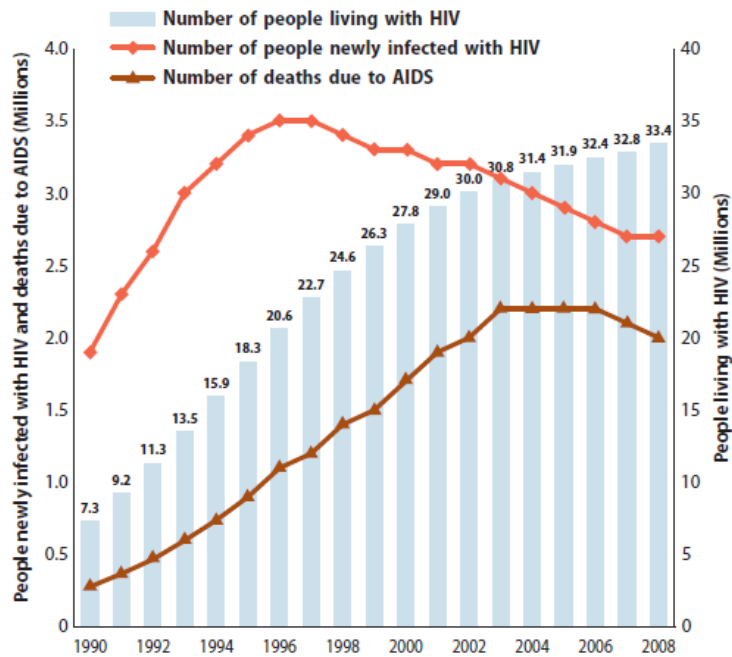
	1990	2005
Sub-Saharan Africa	58	51
Southern Asia	49	39
Eastern Asia	60	16
South-East Asia	11	4
CIS Asia	2	5
Western Asia	2	6
Latin America and the Caribbean	11	8
Northern Africa	5	3
Developing regions	46	27

**Figure 3. Proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day, 1990 and 2005 (percentage).** (Source: 2010 MDG Report, p.6.).

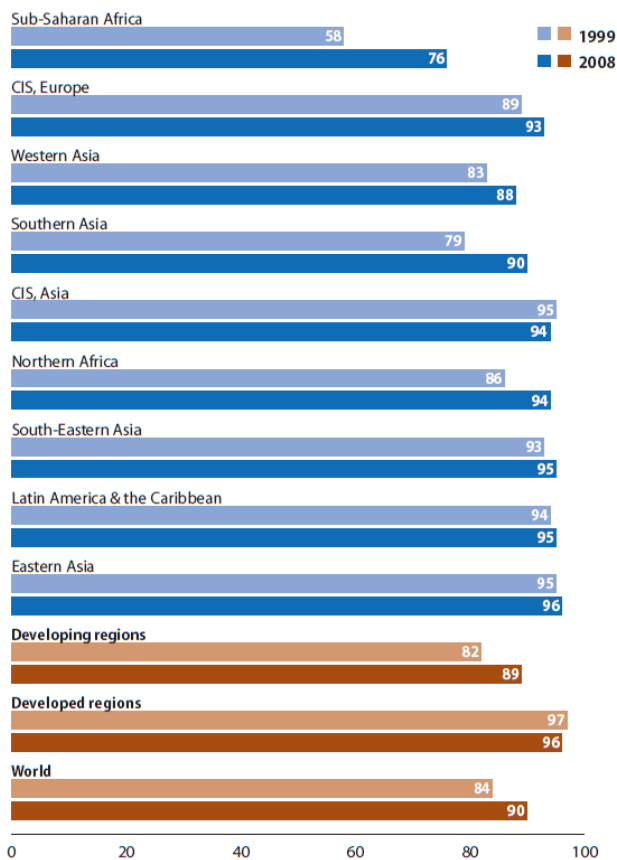
The sixth MDG is focused on combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as malaria. Figure 4 shows how the number of people newly infected with HIV has slowly declined since 1996. Although the number of deaths due to AIDS increased quite considerably from 1990 to 2003, there has been a downward trend over the last five years. One of the reasons for this is that many countries are implementing proven strategies to combat diseases. These include: promoting correct and consistent use of condoms, changing sexual and drug-using behaviours, promoting medical male circumcision, and improving the management of sexually transmitted infections (UNAIDS, 2008).

Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic has stabilized in most regions, the number of people living with the HIV virus is still increasing. This is a significant issue for the CIS Asia region, which is experiencing the world's fastest growing HIV epidemic (World Bank, 2010). Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the most affected region. In 2008 it was estimated that out of all the people in the world living with HIV, two-thirds were from Sub-Saharan Africa (MDG Report, 2010). One reason for this is because many young people still lack the knowledge to protect themselves against HIV. This goes to show that the MDGs are all related in some way. In this case the progress of goal two influences the progress of goal six.

Achieving universal primary education is the second MDG. Education is a human right and is vital for allowing development to occur. Education gives people more understanding on health and sanitation issues and also a higher chance of being employed. The target of this goal is to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. One indicator used to measure progress towards this goal can be seen in Figure 5, which shows the net enrolment ratio in primary education, from 1998/99 to 2007/08.



**Figure 4. Number of people living with HIV, number of people newly infected with HIV and number of AIDS deaths worldwide, 1990-2008 (Millions).**  
*(Source: 2010 MDG Report, p.40).*



**Figure 5. Adjusted net enrolment ratio in primary education, 1998/1999 and 2007/2008 (Percentage).**  
*(Source: 2010 MDG Report, p.16).*

Unlike with the first MDG, Sub-Saharan Africa has made sufficient progress toward this goal. The net enrolment ratio has increased from 58 percent in 1998/99 to 76 percent in 2007/08. However the 2007/08 percentage is still significantly lower than all the other developing regions. Southern Asia and Northern Africa have successfully increased their 1998/99 percentages into the nineties, and regions such as Latin America and East Asia are well on track to achieving the primary education target.

With regards to developing regions as a whole, enrolment in primary education has continued to rise, reaching 89 per cent in 2007/08. However, “the pace of progress is insufficient to ensure that, by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling” (MDG Report, 2010, p. 16). The increasing number of children being enrolled in primary education also means that more classrooms and teachers are required. The 2010 MDG Report points out a problem in Sub-Saharan Africa concerning this need: “The number of new teachers needed equals the current teaching force in the region” (p. 18). Put simply, it will be extremely difficult for this region to achieve 100 percent primary education for boys and girls.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is another issue addressed in the MDGs. When the MDGs were established, the UN was concerned with the large gap between boys and girls enrolled in school. This resulted in the UN creating the following target: “To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015” (UNDP, 2010). As of 2008, Eastern Asia has achieved this target at all levels of education, and South-East Asia has been successful at the secondary and tertiary levels (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 also shows that even though some regions have made progress, it seems that most regions will fail to meet the target at all levels of education by 2015. As of 2008, many developing regions have not yet reached gender equality in primary education. It is of great concern that Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a reversal in secondary and tertiary education. Southern Asia and Western Asia have made progress, but have yet to reach the target at any level of education. So basically, even though more girls are enrolled in school than ever before, it is unlikely that this goal will be achieved by 2015.

	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary	
	1998/99	2007/08	1998/99	2007/08	1998/99	2007/08
Sub-Saharan Africa	85	91	83	79	71	67
Southern Asia	84	96	75	87	65	76
Eastern Asia	101	104	93	105	66	100
South-East Asia	96	97	95	103	95	107
CIS Asia	99	99	101	98	121	130
Western Asia	87	92	76	86	82	92
Latin America and the Caribbean	97	97	107	108	115	125
Northern Africa	90	94	93	98	74	95
Developing regions	91	96				

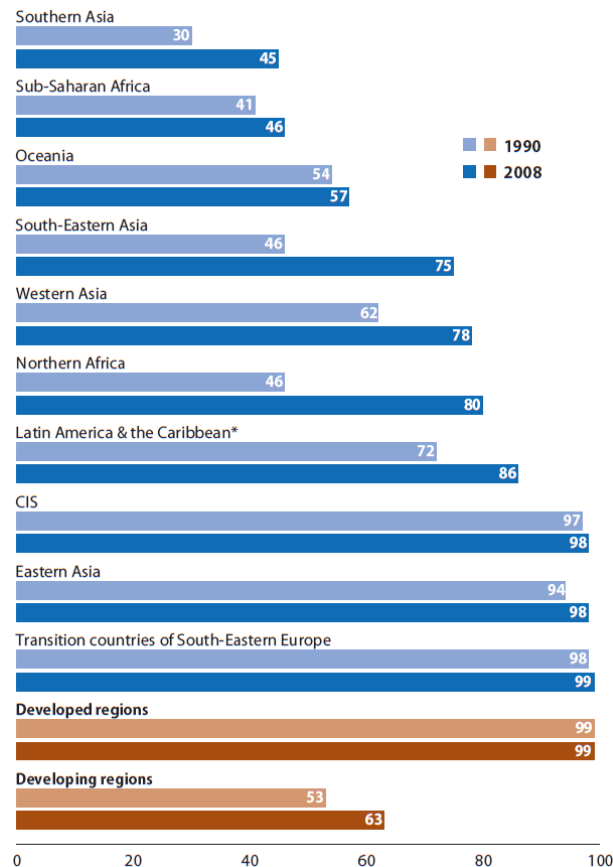
**Figure 6. Girls' primary-school enrolment in relation to boys', 1998/1999 and 2007/2008 (Girls per 100 boys).** (Source: 2010 MDG Report, p. 20).

Maternal health is another problem that must be addressed in order to reduce poverty. Complications during pregnancy and child birth are leading causes of death among women of reproductive age in developing countries. Women in Africa face a one in 22 risk of a pregnancy-related death (WHO, 2010). In order to improve maternal health, family planning services must be implemented to allow women to limit or space their births. Also, the proportion of women who deliver with the assistance of a skilled health-care provider must be increased (World Bank, 2005).

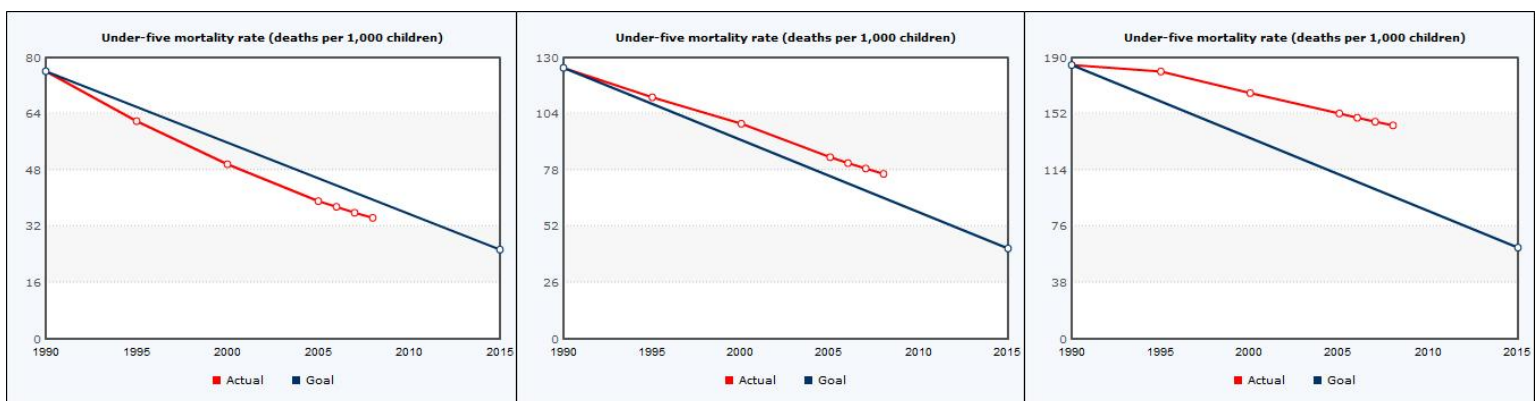
Figure 7 shows the proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel, in 1990 and 2008. South-East Asia and Northern Africa have made extraordinary progress while Latin America and Western Asia have also made noticeable gains. However the slow progress in Sub-Saharan Africa is of great concern. One reason for this is because, since 1990, Sub-Saharan Africa has made the least progress of any developing region, with regards to the number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 (MDG Report, 2010). Young mothers are vulnerable in many ways. "When mothers are poor and uneducated, the risks to themselves and their children multiply" (African Economic Outlook, 2010, p. 58).

This leads onto child mortality. Every year almost 10 million children in developing countries die before reaching the age of five (World Bank, 2010). The three graphs in Figure 8 show varying progress towards reducing the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds, from 1990 to 2015. They also illustrate the uneven progress between developing regions towards the MDGs. Northern Africa and Western Asia have shown substantial progress in lowering their under-five mortality rates and are on track to meet the two-thirds target. It looks likely that

South Asia, and especially Sub-Saharan Africa, will not meet their targets. Despite the fact that progress has been made in Sub-Saharan Africa, it has been slow. Malnutrition, low immunisation coverage, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic have all meant that infant and child mortality rates have not declined as much as hoped for (African Economic Outlook, 2010).



**Figure 7. Proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel, 1990 and 2008 (Percentage).**  
*(Source: 2010 MDG Report, p. 31).*



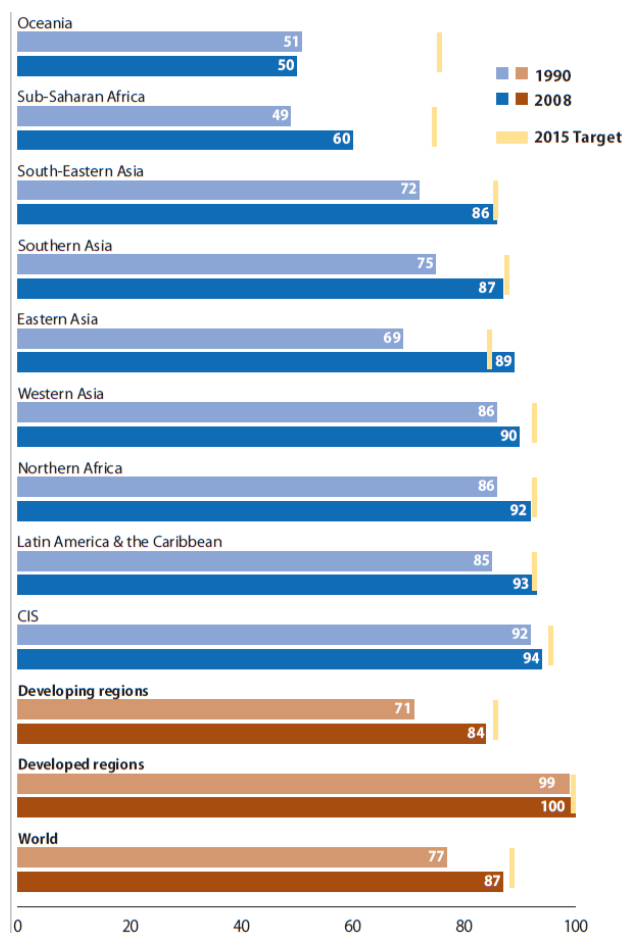
**Figure 8. Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 children).** From left: Western Asia and Northern Africa; Southern Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa.  
*(Source: World Bank, 2010).*

The seventh MDG is based on ensuring environmental sustainability. This involves integrating principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, and decreasing biodiversity loss. “Despite increased investment in conservation planning and action, the major drivers of biodiversity loss—including high rates of consumption, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and climate change—are not yet being sufficiently addressed” (World Bank 2010). In other words progress towards environmental sustainability has been very slow. Around the world forests are being lost and land is continuously being degraded.

A key indicator of development, at all geographical scales, is the quality of water available to people. One of the targets of the seventh MDG is to increase the proportion of the population using an improved water source. Figure 9 shows that if current trends continue the world will reach, and possibly pass, the target by 2015. Since 1990, Eastern Asia has made dramatic progress and has already met its target. Latin America has also met its target and Northern Africa and Southern Asia are well on track to meet their targets. But Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania are well behind their respective targets. Just over one-third of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa still does not have access to safe drinking water. This will go on to affect the progress of other goals, in particular disease prevention, which again proves that the MDGs cannot be looked at individually.

Even though the MDGs have had some success, they have also failed in many respects. This has led to many criticisms concerning the MDGs. Firstly, they are global goals and it is unrealistic to expect all regions and countries to reach them. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa is off track with many of the targets contained in the goals. This leads onto another problem with the MDG’s. Many people believe that the goals can only be successful in open, participatory cultures, and that they must be supported by the government if they are to be achieved (UICIFD, 2005). This could explain why the progress in Sub-Saharan Africa has been well behind other developing regions. Many countries such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Kenya have experienced corrupt governance and inter-ethnic conflict. If Sub-Saharan Africa is to make more progress, targets focused on civil and political rights need to be established. The MDGs do not focus on these issues.





**Figure 9. Proportion of population using an improved water source, 1990 and 2008 (Percentage).**  
*(Source: 2010 MDG Report, p. 58).*

Another criticism of the MDGs is its use of statistics to evaluate progress. The statistics provide averages and while they give a good sense of overall progress between regions, they can be misleading (UICIFD, 2005). They do not present us with the vast inequalities that exist between countries in a single region. Regions such as Oceania and Latin America are clear example of this. Inequalities within countries, such as Brazil, also exist in Latin America.

The MDGs do not take into account changing global issues. The recent global economic crisis resulted in declines in export and commodity prices, reduced trade and investment, and higher food prices (UNDP 2010). This has negatively impacted developing regions, as it means that poverty rates will be slightly higher in 2015 than what they would have been had the crisis not occurred. Another issue is climate change. This has slowed poverty alleviation because of its effects on agricultural production. Climate change is a concern, especially in agricultural based societies, because it has slowed progress towards the hunger reduction target in the first MDG.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2010, the UNDP presented the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF). “It addresses disparities and inequalities, one of the major causes of uneven MDG progress across and within countries, by responding to the needs of the most vulnerable” (UNDP, 2010). In the MAF it explains how that in early 2010, ten countries began to pilot the framework. Countries selected specific MDG targets where progress had been disappointing, and recognised what was constraining progress. The Sub-Saharan African countries of Togo, Ghana and Uganda were all pilot countries that commitment to the MAF. By pointing out problems and proposing solutions, it is hoped that many other developing countries will be able to accelerate their progress.

Overall, it is clear that progress towards the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven around the world. Parts of Asia have made pleasing progress towards the goals, but Sub-Saharan Africa is well off track. This has resulted in several criticisms towards the MDGs, with one being that they are too ambitious on a global scale. In order to speed up progress the UNDP has recently established the MAF, which puts more emphasis on addressing specific inequalities within regions and countries. This should increase the confidence for billions of people around the world and help to make the world a better place in 2015 than it was in 2000.

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