

## Minority and Indigenous Peoples' Rights in the Millennium Development Goals

### Executive summary

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be met more effectively by including minorities and indigenous peoples. Paying special attention to the needs and rights of these groups can improve strategies for achieving the goals, and reduce the risk of conflict that may arise from exclusion from the benefits of the MDGs.

Globally, minorities and indigenous peoples are among the poorest of the poor. They should gain from progress

towards the goals. Yet, they are often left behind. The particular causes of their poverty and inequality, such as discrimination, are little understood or inadequately addressed. Their rights, many of which are linked to the MDGs, continue to be violated.

Greater effort is needed to ensure that these groups benefit fairly from development and the international commitment to meet the MDGs. Governments and development agencies need

to review their MDG policies immediately to ensure that the rights and needs of minorities and indigenous peoples are fully considered. They must ensure these groups' participation in the development of programmes aimed at meeting the MDGs. They also need to regularly assess whether minority and indigenous communities are also meeting the MDGs. This information should be included in the country progress reports on the MDGs.

### Minority and indigenous peoples' rights and the MDGs

Minorities and indigenous peoples should benefit from the MDGs. While disaggregated data for these groups is not routinely collected, thereby masking gross inequalities between different poor communities, there is quantitative evidence to draw upon. Surveys in Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru indicate that Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples' monthly mean earnings are half those of white people.<sup>1</sup> In Romania, Roma poverty levels are more than twice the national average.<sup>2</sup> In Uganda, only five out of every 10 Batwa children in Kisoro will reach their first birthday, compared with a national average of 82 per cent of children surviving their first year.<sup>3</sup> In India, 50 per cent of Dalits live below the poverty line, compared to 30 per cent of the overall population.<sup>4</sup>

The MDGs will only have a significant impact on these groups if the process to achieve the goals respects their rights. By examining the goals,

practical examples of how development programmes can take minority and indigenous rights into consideration are highlighted:

#### Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Despite being among the poorest, minorities and indigenous peoples in many countries may not be included in the one-half of the people lifted from extreme poverty by 2015. This is because poverty reduction strategies do not usually ensure that programmes reach these groups and do not consider the particular barriers they face for poverty reduction. So the lack of positive impact on specific communities and programme weakness may go unnoticed.

One way to improve poverty reduction strategies is to identify minority and indigenous communities and to understand the circumstances of their poverty. Some communities may be poor because they live in remote areas not serviced by infrastructure and basic services. Some may also be harmed and

displaced by development projects, and denied their land rights. In these cases the marginalized and politically weak position of these groups means they have less power to demand accountability or respect for their rights.

This is linked to a more general cause of these groups' poverty, that is, discrimination. Systematic discrimination reduces their ability to benefit from and to contribute to human and economic development. Discrimination can lessen their prospects for decent health, housing, education, financial credit, or political participation. This needs to be tackled through anti-discrimination legislation, enforcement mechanisms and special measures<sup>5</sup> in development programmes.

There is also a lack of information on the extent of minorities and indigenous peoples' poverty. For this reason, the collection of disaggregated data is essential. The prescribed set of indicators for measuring progress towards the MDGs should be revised accordingly to ensure that the MDGs' impact on these groups is monitored. The base point for meas-

## What are the MDGs?

The MDGs define the primary objectives for development cooperation to the year 2015. There are eight goals:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
  - Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than US \$1 a day
  - Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
  - Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
  - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015
4. Reduce child mortality
  - Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality ratio
5. Improve maternal health
  - Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
  - Have halted, by 2015, and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
  - Have halted, by 2015, and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
  - Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, and reverse the loss of environmental resources
  - Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
  - Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers
8. Develop a global partnership for development

The MDGs are drawn from the United Nations (UN) Millennium Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000. Previous versions of the goals were approved by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as early as 1996. Countries prepare periodic reports on their achievement of the MDGs. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the lead agency within the UN system responsible for monitoring the achievement of the goals. The UN Secretary-General recently established the Millennium Project to recommend the best strategies for achieving the MDGs.

uring poverty should be sensitive to differing cultural perspectives. For example, some communities may prioritize security of land rights over increased income as a measure of improvement in their standard of living.

### Goals 2, 3. Achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality

Education systems must be compatible with minimum standards of minority and indigenous rights, and culturally appropriate, if these groups' enrolment levels are to improve for boys and girls. Exclusion of minority and indigenous children from school is often due to discriminatory treatment by teachers or pupils, a curriculum that perpetuates negative stereotypes, or the lack of education in minority and indigenous languages. Therefore, training should be provided for teachers, and education introduced for tolerance and diversity. Textbooks that stigmatize minorities and indigenous peoples should be withdrawn, and funding provided for classes in minorities and indigenous peoples' first languages. These groups may also wish to establish education that promotes and develops their culture and livelihoods. These steps may help to prevent parents from withdrawing their children from formal education where they are discriminated against or gain no culturally-relevant skills. Development agencies should monitor funding for primary education to ensure that schools in minority and indigenous areas do not receive disproportionately less funding than other poor communities.

### Goals 4, 5, 6. Reduce child mortality. Improve maternal health. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Health and sanitation are often worse in regions where minorities and indigenous peoples live. In health care facilities, these groups may face discrimination. There is often a lack of medical professionals able to communicate in their languages or to understand their culture, thus inhibiting the delivery of good medical care.

Efforts should be made to reach remote areas inhabited by minorities and indigenous peoples, and to address dis-

crimination if child and maternal mortality rates are to decrease. The participation of minorities and indigenous representatives – particularly women – in health programme design and evaluation is necessary to devise suitable strategies for the MDGs for these communities.

### Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development identified indigenous peoples as one of the major stakeholders in Agenda 21. Yet indigenous' peoples rights regarding the environment and natural resources have frequently been overridden by governments, transnational corporations or multilateral agencies. Strategies for pro-poor economic growth that rely on natural resource exploitation often have an adverse impact on minority or indigenous communities. They may contribute to their further impoverishment or cause displacement to urban slums, thus lowering the chances of achieving the MDGs on housing and safe water.

Without the full participation of indigenous peoples the goal of implementing national strategies for sustainable development cannot be met. Their stake in the preservation of the environment and use of natural resources is much higher than others because their culture, and thus their very existence, is under threat. For example, when designating protected areas of forest, programmes must be consistent with indigenous rights to certain lands and/or the use of those lands. Forced displacement must not be used as a means of improving access to social services in the name of achieving the MDGs for these groups.

### Goal 8. Development of a global partnership for development

The MDGs' final goal is very broad but some points can be made in relation to minorities and indigenous peoples. The impact of trade agreements and debt burdens on these groups is often overlooked. For example, trade agreements and investment in natural resources may displace indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and territories. The specialized livelihoods of some ethnic groups may be adversely affected by trade liberalization.

Most importantly, these groups have few opportunities for genuine partnership in development. They do not always have a government that is accountable to them and often lack political representation to influence policy. Good governance, a key commitment under Goal 8, means respect for and participation of minorities and indigenous peoples. The UN Secretary-General's *Millennium Report* states:

*'Conflicts are most frequent in poor countries...where there are sharp inequalities between ethnic or religious groups. The best way to prevent them is to promote healthy and balanced economic development, combined with human rights, minority rights and political arrangements in which all groups are fairly represented.'*<sup>6</sup>

## Implementing the MDGs

While a set of indicators has been selected to measure progress towards the MDGs,<sup>7</sup> there are no guidelines as to how they should be achieved. The Millennium Project is attempting to give some guidance. In development, the process is at least as important as the goals, and can make the difference between successful or harmful outcomes.

For minorities and indigenous peoples this process of participation is essential if their rights and needs are to be fulfilled. Participation in development has four key elements: obligations, rights, representation, and alternatives.

### Obligations

The Millennium Declaration, among its many aims, seeks to strengthen the capacity of countries to implement 'the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights, including minority rights'.<sup>8</sup> The MDGs should be interpreted in the light of the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. Over 150 states are party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The ICCPR has explicit obligations to minorities under Article 27 to allow them to practice their cultures, religions and languages. The ICERD

requires states to ensure that all people can access their human rights without discrimination. Other international standards such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, set out states' obligations to ensure that minorities and indigenous peoples benefit equally and justly from development.

### Rights

For many minorities and indigenous peoples, the right to participate is one of the few ways to influence the development process. The UNDM says:

*'States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country'* (Article 4.5).

ILO Convention 169 states that indigenous peoples have:

*'the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development... and they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly'* (Article 7.1).

### Representation

The participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in civil society consultations is often overlooked because of their marginalization, their different language or their remote habitats. Special effort is needed to ensure that these groups can participate equally. To begin with, there is a need to recognize that these groups exist. A major barrier to participation concerns states' refusal to acknowledge that certain groups constitute minorities or indigenous peoples. The process of participation must be equitable, informed and transparent. These groups must be invited to participate in policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation. Information and meetings should be

## MDGs as human rights

Most of the MDGs reflect internationally-agreed human rights standards. Reducing extreme poverty can be correlated to the human right to an adequate standard of living as recognized by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This treaty also recognizes the right to food (Article 11); the right to education (Article 13); and the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (Article 12), including a reduction in the rate of infant mortality (Article 12.2a). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women recognizes the right to special services regarding pregnancy and family planning (Article 12). The Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates states to reduce infant and child mortality (Article 24.2a); to recognize the right of every child to an adequate standard of living for the child's development (Article 27.1); and to make primary education compulsory, free and available to all (Article 28.1). All of these rights are to be applied without any form of discrimination, including on the basis of sex. The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development is clearly articulated in Agenda 21, the document produced by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. In 1993, the UN World Conference on Human Rights agreed in the Vienna Declaration that: 'the right to development should be fulfilled so as to meet equitably the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations' (Article 11).

There are many human rights that the MDGs do not address, such as the right to work – these are as important to poverty reduction as education and health. While the MDGs focus on sexual discrimination, they fail to acknowledge that other forms of discrimination can be equally damaging.

available in minority languages, and attention should be paid to ensuring that marginalized groups within minority and indigenous communities, such as women, older people, and people with disabilities, also have their voices heard.

### Alternatives

Minorities and indigenous peoples should be asked for their views on policies to reduce inequalities and to support their human development. Such participation will aid policy-makers to respond to the expressed needs and the rights of these groups, and to the key barrier of discrimination. Impact assessments should be a fixture of the consultation process, to measure the way in which proposed MDG development plans will impact on these groups' economic,

# working to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples

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social, cultural and political lives. The results of these assessments should be expressed clearly to minorities and indigenous peoples to enable an informed participation, and the articulation of alternative proposals.

Development should be meaningful to all potential beneficiaries. Yet the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples have often been violated in the name of 'development'.<sup>9</sup> The MDGs cannot succeed unless minority and indigenous communities' wishes to terminate or redesign development projects that will affect them negatively are respected.

Achieving the MDGs for these groups will mean mainstreaming their rights into all of the goals and devising some specially-adapted programmes to overcome the particular barriers they face. The result will be improved strategies for meeting the MDGs.

## Notes

- 1 Zoninsein, J., *The Economic Case for Combating Racial and Ethnic Exclusion in Latin American and Caribbean Countries*, Research Report, May 2001, pp. 9–10.
- 2 Ringold, D., *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges*, Washington DC, The World Bank, 2000, p.11.
- 3 Baker, W.G., *Uganda: The Marginalization of Minorities*, London, MRG, 2001, p. 14.
- 4 *Racial and Economic Exclusion: Policy Implications*, Geneva, The International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2001, p. 12.
- 5 Article 2.2 of the ICERD allows states to take special measures in the 'social, economic, cultural and other fields' for the purposes of ensuring that groups discriminated against can enjoy their human rights fully and equally.
- 6 UN Doc. A/54/2000.
- 7 For the proposed indicators: [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org)
- 8 UN Doc, *op. cit.*, section V.
- 9 For an account of the impact of a resettlement programme on minorities in Laos see, Goudineau, Y. (ed.), *Resettlement and Social Characteristics of New Villages: Basic needs for resettled communities in the Lao PDR*, UNDP and UNESCO, 1997.

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## Recommendations

MRG recommends that governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental development agencies working to achieve the MDGs:

- 1 Mainstream minority and indigenous peoples' rights into all strategies for achieving the MDGs, and integrate special measures for overcoming discrimination.
- 2 Ensure the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes. This participation must be equitable, informed and transparent. Special attention should be given to enabling the participation of older people, people with disabilities, and women.
- 3 Revise the designated indicators for measuring progress towards the MDGs to include disaggregated data for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples. This data should inform the design and evaluation of all programmes related to the MDGs. Regular reports on the achievement of the MDGs should also include disaggregated data and analysis on minorities and indigenous peoples.
- 4 Monitor the impact of MDG development programmes on minority and indigenous communities. Where programmes are found to impact negatively on these communities, remedial measures should be taken in consultation with the affected minority and indigenous groups.
- 5 Provide appropriate guidelines and training on the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to staff in development agencies responsible for MDGs-related activities.

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