

Minority Rights Group International



MRG Briefing

Executive Summary

The impact of discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples must be factored into strategies for reaching the International Development Goals (IDGs). In all regions of the world, minorities and indigenous peoples are among the poorest of the poor, and often lack the political influence to overcome their marginalization. They should therefore be the prime beneficiaries of the international efforts to halve poverty and to improve human development. There is a risk, however, that the IDGs could be said to have been 'achieved' for a country, yet their impact on minorities

and indigenous peoples could have been negative, as resources are diverted to majority groups.

The IDGs can best be met if minorities and indigenous peoples are at the centre of poverty reduction strategies. Ensuring that programmes address the particular inequalities faced by minorities and indigenous peoples will yield more effective development projects, fewer barriers to economic participation, a stronger voice for minority and indigenous communities, and good conditions for conflict prevention.

Governments and multilateral and

bilateral development agencies need to immediately review their IDG policies to ensure that the rights and needs of minorities and indigenous peoples are taken fully into consideration. They must ensure minorities and indigenous peoples' participation in the development of programmes aimed at meeting the IDGs for 2015. They also need to move beyond the limited set of indicators used to measure progress towards the goals, to include a regular assessment of whether minority and indigenous communities are benefiting equally from development programmes.

Minority rights and the IDGs

Discrimination against minority and indigenous groups is often the root cause of their poverty, and social and economic exclusion. Systematic discrimination reduces individuals ability to benefit from and to contribute to human and economic development. Discrimination can lessen individuals prospects for decent health, housing, education, financial credit, or political participation. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted recently in a statement on poverty: '[s]ometimes poverty arises when people have no access to existing resources because of who they are, what they believe or where they live'.¹ The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, has stated: 'no concept of poverty can be satisfactory if it does not take note of the disadvantages that arise from being excluded from shared opportunities enjoyed by others'.² Redressing exclusion is therefore a means

to poverty reduction and development.

While disaggregated data for minorities and indigenous peoples is not routinely collected by national surveys or development agencies, thereby masking gross inequalities between different poor communities, there is quantitative evidence of discrimination to draw upon. Surveys in Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru indicate that the average years of schooling for Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples is roughly half that for white people, while monthly mean earnings are similarly half of those made by white people.³ In Bulgaria, 84 per cent of Roma live in poverty, in contrast with a 36 per cent national rate; and in Romania, Roma poverty levels are more than twice the national average.⁴ In India, 50 per cent of Dalits live below the poverty line, compared to 30 per cent of the overall population.⁵ In the Great Lakes region in Africa, less than 0.5 per cent of the indigenous Twa population has completed

secondary school.⁶

There is a need for disaggregated data to determine to what extent minority and indigenous groups are being excluded from other aspects of development. Systematic collection and evaluation of such data should be a routine part of measuring progress towards the IDGs.

Using some of the IDGs, here are several examples of how development programmes can take minority and indigenous rights into consideration:

A reduction by one-half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015

If minorities and indigenous peoples are not included in the one-half of the people lifted from extreme poverty by 2015, then the IDGs will surely have failed. Overcoming the poverty experienced by minorities and indigenous

Minority and Indigenous Rights in the International Development Goals

What are the IDGs?

The IDGs (also known as the International Development Targets) define the primary objectives for development cooperation to the year 2015. There are seven goals centred around three categories:

'Economic well-being

- *A reduction by one-half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.*

Social development

- *Universal primary education in all countries by 2015.*
- *Demonstrated progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.*
- *A reduction by two-thirds in the mortality rates for infants and children under age 5 by 2015.*
- *A reduction by three-fourths in maternal mortality by 2015.*
- *Access through the primary health-care system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and not later than the year 2015.*

Environmental sustainability and regeneration

- *The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.'*

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was the first to formally adopt these goals in 1996; the IDGs have since been endorsed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF); by the European Union (EU), and 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as part of the Cotonou agreement on cooperation between the EU, and these states; and most recently by the Third United Nations (UN) Conference on the Least Developed Countries. Many of the IDGs are central to the UN Millennium Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000.

peoples is aided as much by the process followed as by the number and quality of specialized programmes. The process must involve consultation with minorities and indigenous peoples at all stages of the poverty-reduction programme. This participation is a right of minority and indigenous communities. Disaggregated data will also be necessary to monitor the impact of these programmes on minorities and indigenous peoples. The prescribed set of indicators for measuring progress towards the IDGs should be revised accordingly. Donors should provide necessary resources to enable the collection of this data.

Universal primary education in all countries by 2015

Education systems must be compatible with minimum standards of minority and indigenous rights, and culturally appropriate. Exclusion of minority and indigenous children from school is often a result of discriminatory treatment either by teachers or pupils, a curriculum that perpetuates negative representations of minorities and indigenous peoples, or the lack of education provision 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 minority and indigenous peoples' first languages. Minority and indigenous groups may also wish to establish education that promotes and develops their culture. This should be facilitated as part of the IDGs to have universal primary education by 2015. Development agencies should also monitor funding for primary education to ensure that schools in minority and indigenous areas do not receive disproportionately less funding than other poor communities.

A reduction by two-thirds in the mortality rates for infants and children under age 5 by 2015, and A reduction by three-fourths in maternal mortality by 2015

Health and sanitation conditions are often worse in regions where minorities and indigenous peoples live. In hospitals, minority and indigenous peoples may face discrimination and a lack of medical professionals able to communicate in their languages. The cultural practices of minorities or indigenous peoples are also often

unfamiliar to mainstream medicine, which may inhibit the effective prescription of, for example, pre- and post-natal care. All of these factors combine to reduce minorities and indigenous peoples' access to good health care, and impact negatively on their infant and maternal mortality rates. Development programmes aimed at reducing these high mortality rates must measure progress using disaggregated data to discern whether general strategies are failing these communities. The participation of minorities and indigenous representatives – particularly women – in programme design and evaluation is also essential.

Implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2015

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development identified indigenous peoples as one of the major stakeholders in Agenda 21. Yet the rights of indigenous peoples regarding the environment and natural resources have frequently been overridden by governments, transnational corporations or multilateral agencies. 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 that of other interest groups because their culture, and thus their very existence, is under threat. For example, when designating protected areas of forest, preservation programmes must be consistent with indigenous rights to certain lands and/or the use of those lands. Minorities must be meaningfully involved in devising national strategies for sustainable development.

Each of the IDGs should be interpreted in light of the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples – using the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, among other international human rights standards.

Implementing the IDGs

While a set of indicators has been selected to measure progress towards the IDGs,⁷ there are no guidelines as to how they should be achieved. Yet in development the process

is at least as important as the goal; and can make the difference between sustainable and successful outcomes, and an ineffectual or even harmful outcome.

Minorities and indigenous peoples should be asked for their views on what kind of social and economic policies will reduce inequalities and support human development. Their participation not only benefits project outcomes, but it is incumbent upon project leaders to involve all those affected. The poor have a right to participate.

Two international agreements recognize minorities and indigenous peoples' right to participate in development programmes. The UN Declaration on the Rights of ... Minorities 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 programs for national and regional development which may affect them directly' (Article 7.1).

For many minorities and indigenous peoples, the right to participate is one of the few ways to influence the development process. Most minorities and indigenous peoples are severely under-represented in the political sphere, and therefore have little input into determining how national resources are distributed. Furthermore, from their position of social and economic exclusion their opportunities to negotiate for their rights to better education, to health care, to land or to protection of their cultural identity, are limited. The provisions within international development programmes for participation offer minorities and indigenous peoples the opportunity to articulate their development needs where national mechanisms have failed to provide.

For such participation to be meaningful requires the following steps. To begin with, there is a need to recognize that minorities and indigenous peoples exist. This may seem rudimentary, but one of the major barriers to participation concerns states' refusal to acknowledge that certain groups within their territories constitute minorities or indigenous peoples. This recognition should be made publicly and is strongest when constitutionally entrenched. Once

recognition is secured, it is necessary to acknowledge that minorities and indigenous peoples may suffer discrimination, which often leads to social and economic exclusion. States and development agencies must name the discrimination faced by minorities and indigenous peoples as a first step to eradicating it.

The process of participation must be equitable, informed and transparent. Several new bilateral and multilateral development cooperation schemes have participation as a central tenet but most fail to make this pledge a genuine opportunity for the poor to influence the development process or its outcomes. The consultation is often cursory and many groups, including minorities and indigenous peoples, are excluded. Minorities and indigenous peoples must be invited to participate at all stages of the development project, from policy and programme design, to implementation and evaluation. Impact assessments should be a fixture of the consultation process, and should measure the way in which proposed development plans will impact on minority and indigenous groups' economic, 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.

It is also important to recognize that minority and indigenous groups have the right to opt out of the development process. The ILO Convention 169 states that indigenous peoples:

'have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use' (Article 7.1).

Development is a choice, not an obligation. Similarly, the wishes of minority communities to terminate or redesign development projects that will affect them negatively must be respected.

Facilitating the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples can also contribute positively to conflict prevention. Participation is a form of empowerment and can also give excluded minority groups an opportunity to increase their participation in the political sphere – this can also enhance political stability. The UN Secretary-General's *Millennium Report* states:

'Conflicts are most frequent in poor countries ... where there are sharp inequalities between ethnic or religious

IDGs as Human Rights

IDGs are also human rights. The drafters of the IDGs chose not to explicitly acknowledge these goals as human rights but all of the goals are strongly rooted in 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 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 in connection with 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 (e.g. Article 2.2 ICESCR). 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 IDGs do not address, such as the right to food and the right to work – these are as important to poverty reduction as education and health. While the IDGs focus on discrimination on the basis of sex, they fail to acknowledge that other forms of discrimination can be equally damaging.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization working to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities. We work with the United Nations, among other international bodies, to promote awareness of minority rights, in conjunction with partner organizations. We coordinate training on minority rights internationally and work with different communities to counter racism and prejudice. We have a wide-ranging publications programme covering issues facing oppressed groups around the world.

Minority and Indigenous Rights in the International Development Goals

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*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.*⁸

Notes

- 1 UN Doc. E/C.12/2001/10 (10 May 2001), para. 11.
- 2 Sen, A., *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny*, Social Development Papers No. 1, Asian Development Bank, June 2000, p. 44.
- 3 Zoninsein, J., *The Economic Case for Combating Racial and Ethnic Exclusion in Latin American and Caribbean Countries*, Research Report, Inter-American Development Bank, May 2001, pp. 9–10.
- 4 Ringold, D., *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 11.
- 5 *Racial and Economic Exclusion: Policy Implications*, The International Council on Human Rights Policy, Geneva, 2001, p. 12. Statistics from 1993 measurements of poverty.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 7 For a list of the proposed indicators see: <http://www.developmentgoals.org/>
- 8 UN Doc. A/54/2000.

Recommendations

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

1. Design and implement policies and programmes to protect and promote minority and indigenous rights, to be consistent with international human and minority rights standards, including those articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of ... Minorities and the ILO Convention 169.
2. Measure the state's achievement of the IDGs within the majority, minority and indigenous communities.
3. Revise the designated indicators for measuring progress towards the IDGs 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 IDGs.
4. Ensure the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation of development programmes. This participation must be equitable, informed and transparent, and be consistent through all stages of the project cycle. Special attention should be given to enabling the participation of those groups subject to differential discrimination such as older people, people with disabilities, and women.
5. Monitor the impact of 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.
6. Undertake studies to measure and evaluate the nature, extent and dynamics of social and economic exclusion, and discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples.
7. Provide appropriate guidelines and training to staff on the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. This should be provided for staff in central, local and national agencies, so that they can achieve the above-mentioned objectives in implementing programmes related to the IDGs.

MRG Briefing Series

MRG Briefings provide concise, accurate information about issues and situations of immediate concern to minorities and indigenous peoples, and those working with them. Briefings deal with questions which warrant the attention of governments, policy-makers and the international community, and include recommendations for effective action.

MRG Briefings are available online at www.minorityrights.org. Copies can also be obtained from MRG's London office. MRG would like to thank all expert readers who commented on this Briefing. MRG gratefully acknowledges the support of all organizations who gave financial assistance for this Briefing.

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