

Reviving the original MDGs spirit



If we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), every state must demonstrate the political will to formulate the necessary global policies as well as to improve progress on concrete indicators. This will require a new development strategy that recaptures the original spirit of the MDGs, focusing on people's needs and improving their quality of life; reaching the poorest sectors of society; promoting gender equality; and acting on the premise that the values of well-being and a better quality of life are inseparable.

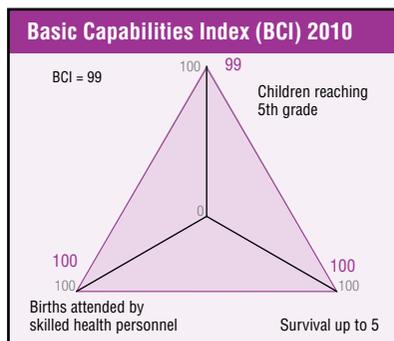
French civil society organizations, NGOs, unions and territorial organizations¹

As in recent national efforts to save the banks, the primary requirement in the struggle against poverty and inequality will be political courage and engagement on the part of the leaders of France and Europe as a whole. In 2005, French civil society organizations and local governments insisted that excuses must end and the country must honour its commitments. In 2010, just five years before the MDGs deadline, these groups are demanding that their leaders finally take full responsibility for progress and commit themselves to effective action in three areas: respect for human rights; solidarity with their own people; and the inclusion of all stakeholders in development planning and implementation.

Respecting human rights

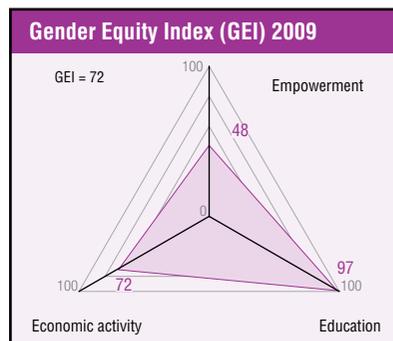
The fight against poverty and inequality is not just a humanitarian question; it also involves respect for people's dignity and therefore respect for their basic rights. It follows that efforts to achieve the MDGs must be based on the principle that all human rights are indivisible and interdependent. Consequently France must:

- Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Ratifying this Covenant will support efforts to obtain greater recognition of social, economic and cultural rights in the country's laws and courts. So far, only 32 countries have signed the Optional Protocol. In supporting the formulation of this Protocol, France made an implicit commitment to implementing the rights it establishes, but has not yet adhered to it. The Protocol will become a dead letter if not enough countries sign; 10 states will have to ratify it to guarantee active enforcement. The countries of the South are awaiting the completion of this process, which will make it possible for their inhabitants to demand that their rights be legally established.
- Sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CTM) to ensure that it takes effect internationally, as well



as within nations and communities. Immigrants frequently become scapegoats in times of high unemployment, terrorism or racial or religious intolerance. One of the primary principles expressed in the CTM is that all migrant workers and their families have fundamental rights in their new country regardless of their legal status. The Convention also guarantees protection of the supplementary rights of migrant workers who have acquired legal status, including their rights to be integrated into society in their new country and to enrich and preserve links to their country of origin.

- Support the International Labour Organization (ILO) initiative to implement the Decent Work Pilot Program. In a new study on aspects of forced labour around the world, the ILO emphasizes that in a crisis situation "it is the most vulnerable that suffer the most. In this context it is necessary to ensure that adjustments do not redound to the detriment of the guarantees that were given conscientiously to prevent forced labour and abuses in the treatment of human beings."²
- Ensure that companies respect basic rights. The recommendations of the special representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations specify that states have a duty to protect human rights, and this duty presupposes implementation of legal measures to defend people in the South who are victims of rights violations com-



mitted by subsidiaries of European companies. In addition, countries should monitor companies that receive public support (financial, export credits) to ensure that they respect human rights, procedures for handling complaints from the public, the basic rights of workers and environmental protection regulations.

Reinforcing solidarity

Governments demonstrated solidarity with their own people when they re-floated their banks and tried to limit the damage they had caused. We now insist on the same degree of solidarity with ordinary people to eliminate poverty and inequality.

In a world in which about 2% of the population owned 50% of all assets in 2006,³ redistributing wealth and expanding access to public goods on a worldwide scale is imperative. The neo-liberal policies of the wealthy countries were directly responsible for the world financial, food, social, energy and environmental crisis. Yet the common people, primarily those in the South, are paying the price. Those who have been responsible for these policies should bear the consequences of their decisions.

Progress has been made towards some of the MDGs, but much more remains to be done. Linking the goals to financial mechanisms based on social solidarity and the redistribution of wealth would ensure that they are universally achieved.

This means that the MDGs will not be reached without a truly global effort to promote development, including a commitment of additional resources. The states of the South are hamstrung by unsustainable

¹ ODM 2015: Il est encore temps de agir. Available from: <www.odm2015.fr>.

² ILO, "The cost of coercion," Geneva, 2009. Available from: <www.ilo.org/global/What_we_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/LCSessions/98thSession/ReportsubmittedtotheConference/lang-en/docName-WCMS_106230/index.htm>.

³ UN, "Only 2% of the population own half the world's wealth." Available from: <www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=13315&Cr=UNU&Cr1>.

debt service payments and very low returns from the exploitation of their natural resources. This makes it impossible for them to finance their public services without external support. It is vital for France to:

- Reaffirm its Official Development Assistance (ODA) and channel it to social sectors in poor countries. In its forthcoming three-year public finance legislation, the Government should include a budget commitment to ODA that honours France's European and international commitment to allocate 0.7% of the country's Gross National Income (GNI) to ODA by 2015. France must coordinate its efforts with other providers of funds and with the beneficiary countries to establish a more transparent and effective allocation of resources that complies with the points in the Paris Declaration. Priority must be given to subsidizing the poorer countries, in particular their social sectors, systematically and through the allocation of increased resources to counterbalance loans that may lead to a renewed crisis—the first sign of which would be a burgeoning speculative bubble.
- Implement a mechanism to redistribute wealth by taxing financial transactions. These taxes would generate additional resources that would supplement the traditional public finance allocations for efforts to reduce inequality, ensure the MDGs are attained, adapt to climate change and preserve the world's public goods. The first stage of this program would be to levy a tax on inter-bank currency transactions in European currencies (the euro and sterling) in all parts of the world. A tax of this kind is perfectly feasible from a technical point of view; in the short term, a European currency transaction tax is more viable than world-wide taxes on all financial transactions, which could be implemented in a second stage. The United Nations should determine the sectors and institutions that receive the income from this tax, as this is the only organization that has the legitimacy to determine which financial needs should have priority internationally.
- All illegitimate debts should be cancelled. The countries of the South should be able to make investments to promote the economic and social development of their people. Many of the poorer countries are still heavily indebted. For years, loans that creditors have made without any real sense of responsibility have had little or no real positive impact on their ostensible beneficiaries. Those debts are illegitimate. In some cases the loans were secured by tyrannical regimes that simply stole the money or used it to increase their military power and oppress their subjects (this is known as "odious debt"). In

other cases, the loans were obtained to finance extremely ill-conceived development projects, white elephants mired in corruption that either failed or were never completed. Far-reaching reforms in lending are essential to avoid recurring crises caused by unsustainable and illegitimate debts. They should be incorporated in a new debt framework that ensures creditors and debtors reach joint agreements based on transparency and mutual responsibility. The same principles should be applied if any problems arise, along with adherence to a sense of fairness. A related aspect of indebtedness in the South is that the many banks in the North have welcomed funds that corrupt dictators have stolen from their own people. This illegitimate wealth and the assets acquired with it should be returned to the countries that were robbed.

- Make the fiscal, social and environmental policies of companies more transparent. Achieving the MDGs, especially Goal 8, will require that companies, particularly transnationals, become more transparent. This would necessarily involve rules requiring exchange of more complete fiscal information between states. To ensure that this occurs, France and the European Union should impose a legal framework that obligates companies to disclose the impact that their activities have on development. This would include a full accounting of social and environmental impacts in each country where they have operations, provided in conformity with IASB (International Accounting Standards Board) practices and in compliance with the European directive on transparency. The framework would also reinforce the automatic exchange of fiscal information at the European and world levels. The poorer countries would not be directly involved in these measures initially, as they would be implemented progressively in Europe and then in the countries of the OECD, and would contribute to the ODA that these countries provide. The resources obtained through this process could be used to strengthen tax administration systems in the countries of the South. This would enable these countries to raise their currently low tax yields and enhance their efforts to combat fraud and tax evasion, all issues that undermine their economies.

Enabling all stakeholders to participate in development

The current crisis is a unique opportunity to re-think development and growth policies and strategies and to give the people, starting with the poorest sectors of the population, a central role in the development process.

The MDGs will only be attained if the effort to achieve them focuses on meeting people's most urgent needs, reaching the poorest sectors, establishing genuine equality between men and women, and adhering to the fundamental principle that well-being and better quality of life are interdependent values.

Ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, local governments, parliaments and companies must all participate in establishing this change in perspective. It will require a new spirit of solidarity among peoples, starting at the local level, not only within each country but in relations between countries. To achieve this, we propose the following:

- Forging a systematic association between civil society organizations and populations living in poverty capable of influencing public policy formulation. We appeal to the French Government to implement public policies on the local as well as the national level that promote the MDGs and are conceived, implemented and evaluated in a way that systematically involves civil society organizations in all their diversity. In particular, these policies should ensure the participation of organizations that represent the poor and the socially excluded.
- Promoting the role of local governments in implementing a global association. The regional administrations that came together in November 2009 at the World Summit of United Cities and Local Governments in Canton unanimously agreed on a formal commitment to making local government the 9th MDG. These regional community representatives must be participants in the formulation of relevant public policies. In the international arena, France must recognize that regional governments should have an important role in development and promote decentralized action and investment administered at the local level.
- Promoting parliamentary monitoring of government commitments. As a general principle, a parliament should receive comprehensive documentary evidence and hard data that make it possible for members to evaluate and follow up on commitments their government has made to advance progress on the MDGs. In particular, France should provide for parliamentary oversight of French development cooperation policies to ensure that they promote genuine development and reduce poverty. ■