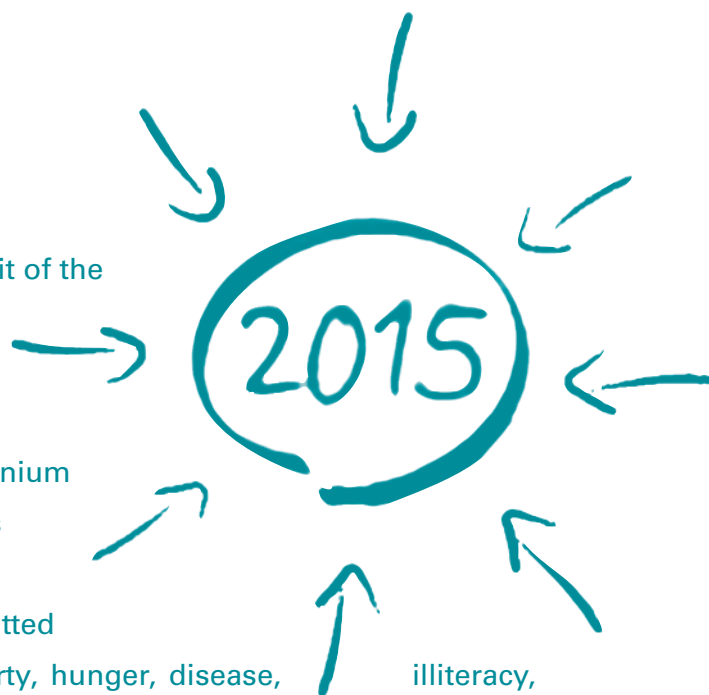


During the Millennium Summit of the United Nations (UN) in September 2000, 147

Head of States and Governments and 191 member-states adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration embodies structured development goals and targets. The adopting countries committed to achieve its targets to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation and discrimination against illiteracy, women by 2015. Expert studies projected the resources required to attain the goals and what are expected to be available. These became the basis of development planners in government and the private sector in working out reforms and plans.



What are the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs?

- Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.**
- Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education.**
- Goal 3. Promote gender equality.**
- Goal 4. Reduce child mortality.**
- Goal 5. Improve women's reproductive health.**
- Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.**
- Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability.**
- Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development.**

The UN MDGs: An arena for advancing farmers' rights?



AFA and ASIADHRRR ISSUE PAPER

8 MDG goals 18 targets

Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

1. Halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (persons who earn less than \$1 a day) between 1990 and 2015.
2. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education.

3. Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3. Promote gender equality.

4. Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and all levels of education not later than 2015.

Goal 4. Reduce child mortality.

5. Reduce under-five mortality rate by two-thirds by 2015.

Goal 5. Improve women's reproductive health.

6. Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters by 2015.

Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.

7. Halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.
8. Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability.

9. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources
10. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and nutrition.
11. By 2020, achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development.

12. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system; Include a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally.
13. Address the special needs of the least developed countries (includes tariff and quota free access for their exports, enhanced program for debt relief, cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction.
14. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries
15. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debts sustainable in the long-term.
16. In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and more productive work for youth
17. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.
18. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies.

What is the importance of MDGs to farmers in Asia?

Three out of four poor people in the world (or 75% of the world's poor) live in Asia. Many of them live in the rural areas (see Table 1 below) and are dependent on agriculture for livelihood.

Table 1. Population in Poverty, 2001

Country	Total	Rural	Urban
Bangladesh	44.7%	44.9%	43.3%
Cambodia	35.9%	40.0%	25.2%
India	26.1%	27.1%	23.6%
Indonesia	23.5%	26.1%	19.5%
Lao PDR	38.6%	41.0%	26.9%
Nepal	42.0%	44.0%	23.0%
Pakistan	32.2%	36.3%	22.4%
Philippines	40.0%	54.4%	25.0%
Sri Lanka	26.7%	28.7%	13.4%
Thailand	12.9%	17.2%	1.5%
Vietnam	37.0%	45.0%	9.0%

Asian Development Bank

The document, "Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action",¹ said that: "Poverty is a violation of human rights. With some 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty, it is the most widespread violation of human rights in the world. ... Particularly affected are disadvantaged and under-represented groups – indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, women, children, youth and the elderly. Hunger and the HIV/AIDS pandemic are also closely related to poverty. Processes of impoverishment inherent in the global economic system are resulting in increasing inequity, social injustice and violence worldwide.

"The eradication of poverty has become a matter of urgency. Poverty eradication is not an automatic consequence of economic growth; it requires purposeful

action to redistribute wealth and land, to construct a safety net and to provide universal free access to education."

A discussion paper entitled "The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger",² said that: "The Asia-Pacific region is home to stark national inequalities in wealth, assets, incomes and opportunities. .. In both rural and urban areas, ethnic minority and indigenous peoples' communities, marginal farmers and fishers, forest and upland communities, migrants, workers, and women carry a disproportionate share of the burdens of extreme poverty and hunger."

How can we view the MDGs?

Participants of AsiaDHRRA's 2004 DHRRAW Workshop³ recognize

that national governments, especially developing countries, relate with MDGs as their development targets. Therefore, civil society groups can view MDGs as a tool to monitor and demand government accountability.

However, in engaging the national governments, civil society groups should emphasize the need to change the governments' framework for development, which is basically that of economic globalization, privatization and liberalization.

Poverty has structural causes – such as inequitable distribution of land and capital – which has to be addressed, for example by agrarian reform programs, which is sadly not explicitly stated in the MDGs. Poverty has cultural causes

as well – as values on materialism, consumerism, greed, dependence, apathy and homogeneity of culture pervades the mindset of many people.

Many civil society leaders have looked at MDGs as “minimum development goals”; for a number of reasons. Firstly, MDGs are perceived as not contributing strategically to the restructuring of power relationships at the local, national and international levels (for example : between the industrialized and developing country, between the rich elite and the poor tenant in a rural area).

Secondly, some leaders think that goals related to stop corruption and promote peace building should have been included; as billions of dollars are wasted on corruption or in war-building. Thirdly, MDGs seem to water down, or put lesser emphasis, or even sideline, other international treaties and covenants which civil society leaders think are more important frameworks for development. These include the covenants forged during the World Council for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), and International Declaration of Human Rights.

What is the Millennium Development Project and what is its relation to MDGs?

The Millennium Development Project has been launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown to support the Millennium Development Goals. The project will be recommending best strategies in achieving the MDGs and will work out a recommended plan of implementation that will allow all developing countries to meet the MDGs. The project has researches focusing on identifying the

operational priorities, organizational means of implementation, and financing structures necessary to achieve the MDGs. Ten thematic Task Forces comprised of representatives from academia, public and private sectors, civil society groups and UN agencies were formed, with majority of the participants coming from outside the UN system. Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University is directing the Millennium project and serving as special advisor to the Secretary-General on the MDGs.

The findings of the Millennium Project was directly reported to the UN Secretary-General and UNDP Administrator last January 15, 2005.

Last January 28, 2005, PAKISAMA, a national peasant organization in the Philippines, together with representatives of national and Philippine - based regional organizations,⁴ had a discussion on the UN Millennium Project and came up with the following comments:

1. The UN Millennium Project’s recommended strategies, interventions and action points are in coherence with and reinforce existing world order of market economy, globalization and trade liberalization.
2. The strategies in agriculture favor the big agri-business and transnational corporations since the main strategies are in the areas of better seeds, infrastructure and use of chemical fertilizers.
3. There are unresolved questions about the long-term effects of hybrid seeds and the use of chemical fertilizers.
4. There are few strategies and interventions for fisheries; much of the focus is on land-based agriculture.

- 5. There is an absence of strategies promoting community-based appropriate technologies.
- 6. The strategies promoting extensive big mining activities in developing countries are highly objectionable.

What can civil society organizations do with regards to MDGs and the Millennium Project?

While considering the deficiencies in terms of the framework and approaches of the MDGs, many civil society leaders still believe it is best to engage governments through the MDGs.

Participants to the Asian Civil Society Forum (ACSF)⁶, stated in their declaration that they will engage with the MDGs in a critical manner and from the viewpoint of the MDGs' impact upon the rights of Asian peoples especially the excluded and discriminated against including among others women, indigenous peoples, and farmers/peasants.

Some actions can include :

- 1. Calling governments to be more participatory, specifically to involve civil society, in the various MDG implementation reviews and monitoring activities
- 2. Helping governments in defining poverty and putting a human face of poverty; such as defining specific people in a specific locality experiencing absolute poverty. We can insist that governments generate and disaggregate data on poverty and on all goals of

- MDGs per excluded and discriminated sector – eg. Farmers/peasants.
- 3. Helping governments identify impact points – how best to measure poverty reduction work, and what more meaningful indicators over and above numerical targets
- 4. Demanding governments of the north and international development agencies and financial institutions, fulfill their commitment in the spheres of debt relief, fair and just trade and official development assistance.
- 5. Calling on governments to reduce military expenditure and channel these resources to basic social services.
- 6. Intensification of own work with the poor, through concrete programs and projects.
- 7. Active monitoring of government's implementation of MDGs ; and development of alternative reports if necessary.
- 8. Continue work for the fulfillment of our social development vision-mission-goals, as many of our work contribute to poverty reduction, and much more for empowerment of the excluded and discriminated sectors .

The UN will review the first five years of implementation of the MDGs in September, 2005. During its General Assembly in June 2005, the UN also hopes to approve the Millennium Project. Civil society groups are encouraged to monitor closely and critically engage with governments their positions on the Millennium Project as well as their five year reports on MDG implementation.

Reflections on MDGs and Farmers

By Tri Heru Wardoyo, Chairperson, AFA



I am Heru Wardoyo. I am a farmer in Medan, North Sumatra province in Indonesia. I am also Chairperson of Asian Farmers' Association, an alliance of farmers' organizations in ten countries in Asia. We work together to promote farmers' rights, welfare and development and sustainable agriculture.

Talking about MDGs, the first goal strikes me at once. It is good to know that UN member nations still has not given up the fight against poverty. I remember that UN had been waging a war against poverty since 1960s, and had three Development Decades since then.

But still, poverty is growing especially in the rural areas. Lives of many small farmers like me, fishers, rural women, indigenous communities continue to be miserable, even more miserable at times. Especially in Asia, where half of the population of the world live.

Why are we, farmers, poor? We are poor because we do not own the lands we till; we get only a fourth or a third, at most, a half of what we produce.

Even if we have lands to till, we have to grapple with increasing production costs of chemicals and fertilizers because our government taught us to use these; we have poor roads so we cannot bring our products to the central market and thus rely on middlepersons who buy our products at such a low price.

We are poor because when we harvest our product, everyone else is harvesting the same product and so prices drop. We do not know how to process our products. Even if we do, we do not have the capital to do this.

We are poor because some lowlanders have said that the lands which have been the land of our forefathers and ancestors, are theirs and they have titles to prove these and so we are forced to give up these lands.

We are poor because commercial fishers have fished in the waters we used to fish, and with their better fishing nets and gears, are able to catch more fish than us.

We are poorer now that our governments have entered WTO because our countrymen and women are buying cheaper corn and soya from the US than our corn and soya. We are poorer now because our governments continue to make policies which are not favorable to us or which does not respond to our concerns.

With globalization and trade liberalization, the lives of our small rice farmers are continuously being threatened. Because of poor support from our governments, the entry of cheaper rice from other countries, massive conversion of rice lands to the planting of "high value" crops or to non-agricultural uses, many of our rice farmers feel discouraged in planting rice.

For those of us living in countries who have achieved surplus production, we were likewise discouraged to plant rice. Furthermore, with the strong lobby of giant transnational corporations, our governments are starting to aggressively promote the use of hybrid seeds, which will make us forever dependent on these corporations for our seeds.

Does the UN MDGs address these causes why we, farmers and fishers and indigenous peoples are poor? Is the implementation of an effective and efficient agrarian reform a crucial component in halving the number of the poor by 2015? Does the UN MDG help protect the rights of indigenous peoples and small fishers? Shall the UN MDG include as targets the promotion of a

more just, fairer world trade? Shall it include as targets the promotion of sustainable agriculture rather than chemical-intensive farming?

In the promotion of environmental sustainability, shall it take into consideration the protection of people's rights as well as of the forests and waters? We know that we don't have to rely so much upon our government to lift us up from being poor.

We have made small initiatives on the ground like organizing farmers groups from the villages up to the national levels, doing land occupation, using sustainable organic farming technologies, establishing market cooperatives.

I appreciate UN MDGs. But I am not sure that it will be successful unless it addresses the main causes of our poverty: landlessness, food insecurity, unfair global agricultural trade rules, poor government support services, inadequate skills in appropriate technologies.

I hope member countries of UN shall be as passionate in implementing and monitoring previous international declarations or conventions which mean very much to us like the UN charter on peasant rights, the Beijing declaration, the Rio declaration, among others.

For us, farmers, always there is a challenge to rely upon ourselves, and to work together in influencing government to respond to our needs.

How Poor Are The People Living In Asian Countries?

Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

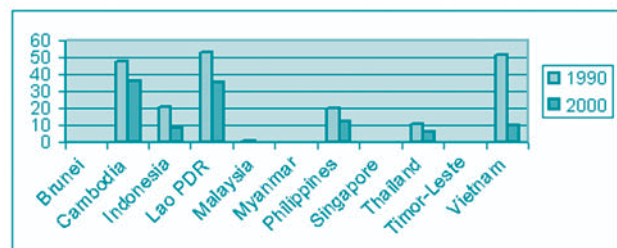
According to UN-ESCAP's report in 2003, the record of Southeast Asian countries in alleviating poverty and hunger has been varied.

Target 1. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

The MDG target for poverty reduction between 1990 and 2015 had been attained in Malaysia before 1999, when the poverty rate declined to 7.5 percent. By 2000, Vietnam and Indonesia have already surpassed the target of halving the proportion of people with income of less than \$1 a day. The Philippines is close to attaining it.

However, Lao PDR and Cambodia still have a long way towards accomplishing this target. A national government survey in 1997 showed that 13 million people or one fourth of the population in Myanmar are still living below the minimum subsistence level. These three countries are placed at the bottom in Southeast Asia due to poor health status, low educational attainment and low standard of living.

Table 2. Proportion of population below \$1/day at 1993 PPP



In Cambodia, civil society groups have said that the 19.5% target for poverty reduction by 2015 is not attainable. The country's Multi-Fiber Agreement ended in 2004 and its many are projecting slow and volatile economic growth in Cambodia. Also, civil society groups in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia have cited major concerns such as the higher rate of income inequality and unchanging ethnic income differential.

According to the United Nations, the Southeast Asian region reduced poverty from 34% to 24% during the 1990s.

Target 2. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Table 3. Underweight Children and Population below Minimum Level of Dietary Energy Consumption

Areas	Indicator 4		Indicator 5			
	Percentage of children under 5 yrs old, moderately and severely underweight	Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (%)	1990-1996	1995-2001a	1991b	1999c
Brunei Darussalam	-	10	-	-	-	-
Cambodia	40	45	43	36		
Indonesia	35	26	9	6		
LAO PDR	44	40	29	24		
Malaysia	23	18	3	-		
Myanmar	43	36	10	6		
Philippines	30	28	26	23		
Singapore	-	14	-	-		
Thailand	26	19	28	18		
Timor-Leste	-	-	-	-		
Vietnam	45	33	27	18		

By 2001, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were on the way to attaining the target of halving the proportion of underweight children. The other Southeast Asian countries were however still slow in achieving this target.

By 1999, most SEA countries were on track in halving the proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy. Only the Philippines was out of step in concern.

Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education.

Despite free primary education, access to primary education is affected by the poverty situation in the countries of the region.

The UN-ESCAP reported that half of the children left school at early stage in Cambodia. In the Philippines, the participation rate has reached 97%, but only 50% of the children in elementary school reached high school.

Malaysia achieved its target of universal primary education in 1990 with 99% enrolled and 97% completing five years of primary education. Indonesia reached high levels of access to primary education for 7-12 year-olds with a ratio of 89% in 1992 and 93% in 2002. Other countries in the region were difficult to assess due to the lack of data.

Goal 3. Promote gender equality.

According to UN-ESCAP, the proportion of women in decision-making positions reached 18% to 26% between early and late 1990s in Vietnam. With the effort of Cambodian government to include

women in policy-making and political administration, there was an increase of women representation in legislative and executive branches. Positive attitude towards gender equality and integration in values and education has also been seen in Myanmar.

In Malaysia, boys and girls have equal access to primary schools but there is still gender disparity in the selection of courses. Only 5% of Malaysian parliamentarians in 1990 were women.

Although women in Indonesia have better access to education, there was a decrease from 37.6% in 1998 to 28.3% in 2002 in non-agricultural employment due to economic crisis. This resulted to massive lay-offs of women workers.

The region has 46 out of 56 countries facing moderate or severe gender disparities in primary enrollment.

Goal 4. Reduce child mortality.

Before reaching five years old, millions of children die from preventable diseases. Only 18 of the 44 countries in the region with available data were projected to meet the target of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds. Indonesia has halved child mortality rates during 1990s. Malaysia achieved low levels of under-five mortality rate.

In Cambodia, there was an increase in under-5 mortality rate between the early and late 1990s, from 115 deaths for every 1,000 live births to 138. Infant mortality and malnutrition rates were also very high in Myanmar.

Goal 5. Improved Women's Reproductive Health.

Thousands of women die each year due to pregnancy-related complications, most of which can be prevented. The UN reported that there has been little progress in this goal in the 1990s.

ESCAP has cited Vietnam for its 70% coverage of obstetric care for pregnant women compared to 34% in Cambodia. Malaysia has less than 2 maternal mortalities for every 10,000 deliveries. The Philippines has an estimated maternal mortality ratio at 17 per 100,000 live births.

East Timor has the highest maternal mortality rate in Asia with 850 women dying / 100,000 live births. Indonesia has an estimated maternal mortality ratio of 307 per 100,000 live births. Myanmar's maternal mortality rate ranged between 230 to 580 per 100,000 live births.

Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability.

According to Social Watch-Asia, a non-government organization, there were serious losses of forest due to deforestation and pollution made by industry, agriculture, wood burning and human waste. Soil erosion, water siltation and loss of beneficial insects happened in the region.

Environmental policies in many countries have not been strictly implemented. Cambodia's forests cover decreased to 59% of the total area by 1997 despite government's efforts to replant 11.25 M hectares between 1985 and 2002. There has also been significant forest cover loss in the Philippines.

Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development

Global partnership for development is a continuous effort that must be worked out especially by developing countries.

However the amount of official development assistance (ODA) is declining since the 1980s. Many governments committed to 20/20 initiative during the World Summit for Social Development. Under this initiative, at least 20% of national budgets and ODA will be allocated to social development. Globalization and trade liberalization promises many benefits for all countries, but also bring dislocation and unfair competition to many developing countries.

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NOTES

¹ adopted by civil society organizations who convened and organized the Millennium Forum last 22-26 May 2000 at the United Nations headquarters in New York

² written by Focus on the Global South, an international non-government organization

³ The workshop was conducted last August 2004, in Manila, Philippines. It was also attended by leaders of AFA and other partner regional organizations

⁴ Representatives from PhilDHRRA (Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas), Social Watch-Philippines and of regional organizations SEACA (Southeast Asian Committee for Advocacy), TWN (Third World Network), and Sustainability Watch Network and AsiaDHRRA also attended the discussion.

⁵ ACSF was conducted last 21-25, 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was facilitated by the Working Group on Asia of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CONGO). AFA Executive Committee members attended the ACSF.

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