

d.i.e

Deutsches Institut für  
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development  
Institute

# The United Nations MDG +10 Summit: Development consensus renewed, implementation nowhere in sight

By Silke Weinlich,  
*German Development Institute /  
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*

# The Current Column

*of 20 September 2010*

# The United Nations MDG +10 Summit: Development consensus renewed, implementation nowhere in sight

Bonn, 20 September 2010. Today marks the start of the United Nations (UN) Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in New York. In the year 2000, more than 150 heads of state and of government agreed in the Millennium Declaration on an Agenda for International Development Policy in the 21st century. Eight MDGs which are to be achieved by 2015 were derived from this. In the next three days, an interim balance sheet of the implementation so far will be made and a plan of action for achieving the MDGs by 2015 will be approved.

Despite substantial disagreements in the run-up, the international community was able to agree on the outcome document *"Keeping the Promise – United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals"* ten days before the start of the summit, which is now to be approved by the heads of state and government who have travelled to New York. This is a positive sign that even one decade after the Millennium Summit industrialised, emerging and developing countries continue to stand behind the MDG project and remain committed to their obligations. The global consensus regarding development and the fight against poverty was confirmed yet again. In the negotiation process, however, the contentiousness of this minimal consensus, which is potentially explosive thanks to specified goals and time tables, became clear. The outcome document is a highly-polished compromise, which leaves unresolved whether the political will is sufficient for achieving the MDGs by 2015.

## Confirmation of the global development consensus

The MDG project is now almost ten years old and has established itself as global frame of reference in an unprecedented manner. The eight goals are well known worldwide and serve as a catalogue of objectives and source of authority for different actors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), grassroots NGOs or philanthropic founda-

tions. The Millennium Declaration and the MDGs were also established to strengthen the UN's role as a global forum for processing the collective problems of humankind and visibly focus on development policy.

The international system has changed significantly in the last decade. Many governments have inherited the MDGs from their predecessors. Events such as 11 September 2001, the unilateral policy of the Bush administration, the advancement of emerging countries such as India and China and not least the recent economic and financial crisis have changed the auspices under which states come together in the United Nations. Despite increasing global pressure and evidently greater need for multilateral solutions, finding agreement at similar large-scale events (UN World Summit 2005, Economic and Financial Conference 2009) was difficult. At the Climate Summit in Copenhagen 2009, it even failed. Against this background, the successful negotiation of a 31-page outcome document, the confirmation of the MDG project and the reaffirmation of values such as human rights and joint responsibility for development are to be taken as a success.

## Sharing of responsibilities and global opposition

The MDG balance sheet five years before the home stretch turns out very mixed. While in some countries clear progress has been observed, in many countries the speed of progress has not been sufficient. Also in relation to individual MDGs there are clear differences. Headway has been disappointing not least of the "Donor MDG" 8, which measures the progress on a global development partnership based among other things on a fairer trading and financial system or the increase in ODA. It is generally acknowledged that the jointly agreed goals by 2015 could only be achieved with a greater commitment. The UN General Secretary, for example, estimated the additional need at 100bn US dollars.

The three-month long negotiations in New York proceeded along the well-known North-South conflict line. Developing countries wanted industrialised countries to take more responsibility and pushed for additional financial commitments. This did not go down well amid the financial and economic crisis. In addition, from the Western perspective, a key factor in MDG implementation is attributed to domestic issues such as good governance, human rights and democracy. State fragility and violent conflicts also play an important role. Correspondingly, industrialised countries pushed for these topics to be considered prominently in the outcome document. In turn, some developing and emerging countries rejected this as meddling in their internal affairs. They also placed the responsibility for achieving the MDG squarely with the industrialised countries, while those in turn were insisting on joint responsibility.

The position of developing countries – far from a uniform group with homogenous interests – was again dominated by those states which use the UN to express their opposition to prevailing power structures in the international system. Thus, topics which at first glance had little to do with the MDGs were also included in the agenda. Last-minute mediation was necessary, for exam-

ple, for finding an acceptable way of dealing with the Israel-Palestine topic. From New York, it was said that little could be seen of a moderating influence of those emerging countries which sit at the table with industrialised countries in the G-20. A clear common voice among African states, whose continent trails furthest behind in the implementation of the MDGs, was also missing.

### **Keeping the promise or keep promising?**

In the run-up to the summit, many representatives of civil society organizations have not only called for a clear plan of action, which describes how the MDGs are to be achieved. They have also made proposals for how acknowledged weaknesses and blind spots of the MDG concept and its implementation strategies can be remedied. That states will now restrict themselves to repeating promises already made may appear unsatisfactory and bordering on the scandalous. However, if the high-level review summit generates greater commitment and political will for implementing the promises, it will fulfil its purpose. For this, no new declarations of intent are required. In 2013, governments will have to explain themselves again in New York.



**Silke Weinlich**

*German Development Institute /  
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)*