

Faith Communities and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

As time is racing closer for the 2015 deadline, the question on many minds is how to accelerate the progress of many nations towards the successful attainment of the MDGs. This is an especially pertinent concern in the light of the recent cascade of difficult crises that have interrupted the smooth path of these plans to achieve the MDGs for many nations.

During an informal meeting on the preparation of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals convened during the UN General Assembly's 64th Session, a zero draft of the outcome document was presented to delegates in the house for feedback.

Many of the representatives who spoke shared similar concerns:

The length of the document, the extent of descriptive detail it contained and its presentation, which many classified as in a 'shopping list' format; a lack of adequate representation of certain ideas; as well as a call for honesty and transparency, amid other suggestions for the message to be submitted during the summit this September.

In the process of refocusing efforts on the attainment of these goals, the role of faith communities cannot be overlooked. Below are some comments on the outcome draft vis-à-vis what input faith communities can contribute to this process.

Item 29:

Faith communities are vital to the process of strengthening the idea of national ownership of the cause. Despite the obvious need for involvement from other development partners, it is important that the people of these countries, especially those facing large difficulties in meeting the MDGs by 2015, feel some responsibility for helping to turn around their situations.

Faith communities can help galvanize the sense of urgency and support needed by the national governments to help achieve the goals.

Item 33:

Especially in developing countries where religion is a big part of people's lives, faith communities are a vital component if we want to achieve the MDG 3 by 2015. Women tend to act as the backbones of their families and if the faith communities lend them moral and other forms of support, the path to MDG 3 may just become easier to tread.

Items 35&36:

It is of essence that faith communities strive to provide a sense of unity in order to foster social harmony for countries as they look to meet their MDG targets.

Individually and collectively, faith communities ought to work together to ensure that their contribution to the maintenance of social harmony as well as providing social services is at a significant level. This will relieve some of the pressure national governments face. Remembering that faith communities are development partners, it is imperative that they act together to foster a sense of unity, in order to increase the hope that the MDGs can be achieved in the stipulated time frame.

Goals 4, 5 & 6:

Faith communities may contribute by organizing information sessions through which information on basic cleanliness, and an awareness of the need for pre-natal care etc can be inculcated in the people whom they can reach. Faith communities have an advantage in their position as many people are drawn to religion as a source of support and many people, especially among the poorest of the poor, rely on faith communities for encouragement and do as they say. Religious communities can also raise funds and help the distribution of preventative measures like treated mosquito bed nets and ARV drugs for HIV/AIDS to remote areas where the need for them is high, but the availability is low.

Taking advantage of this, faith communities can work with national incentives and NGOs concerned with global public health, to raise awareness and suppress the rates of these around the world.

Goal 7:

Faith communities are in a good position between the people and national governments to advocate for environmental sustainability. National governments can take advantage of this delicate position to distribute their goals towards environmental sustainability to the people, after which the faith communities involved can be entrusted with the task of making sure people understand and are committed to achieving these goals. Also, the faith communities can act as a check on governments and national progress toward these goals, giving encouragement where necessary and drawing attention to stagnation if necessary.

Goal 8:

Faith communities can also consider how they can contribute, as global partners in development, to development financing. Global churches such as the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches stand in a very strategic position between the UN and its members, national governments, civil society organizations and private sector organizations as well as businesses and international financial institutions.

Religious communities stand the chance of becoming one of the most crucial development partners in the race to the 2015 deadline.