Explore, enjoy, and protect the planet

The Millennium Development Goals

8 Steps to a Sustainable Future
The Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 1
Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Goal 2
Achieve Universal Primary Education

Goal 3
Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Goal 4
Reduce Child Mortality

Goal 5
Improve Maternal Health

Goal 6
Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Goal 7
Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Goal 8
Develop a Global Partnership for Development
THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:  
8 Steps to a Sustainable Future

If we are to achieve a more just and sustainable future, addressing global poverty, lack of access to basic healthcare, and the root causes of environmental degradation, is paramount. Of the world’s more than 6.7 billion people, one third live on less than $1 a day.1 Because an estimated 70% of the world’s poor rely on natural resources for income and subsistence, environmental crises such as water scarcity, deforestation, and climate change disproportionately impact the poor in developing countries.2 By making long-term investments now in quality healthcare, education, natural resource conservation, and economic opportunity, we can achieve a healthier, more prosperous and equitable world for future generations.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a global commitment among 189 nations – including the United States – to ensure universal equitable development through eight “time-bound and measurable” goals to combat “poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.”3 In September 2000, world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit committed to achieving these fundamental, cross-cutting goals by 2015. These goals specifically focus on women and children within the world’s most vulnerable populations and include detailed targets to measure progress. They require governments to unite on issues of poverty, water scarcity, climate change, global health access and education, not only on local and national levels, but also across oceans and political boundaries.
In Focus: Food Security

According to the United Nations, “the demand for food globally is projected to double by 2030 and an estimated 20% of this increase is due to population growth. Today the highest rates of population growth are occurring in the world’s poorest nations, many of which face the challenge of meeting current food needs.” The poorest nations are also “predominately agricultural economies and societies.” In fact, “75% of the 1.1 billion people living on less than $1 a day live in rural areas.” Despite producing food staples such as rice, many agricultural communities are trapped in poverty due to several factors, including harmful trade practices. In the world’s poorest countries, imports of agricultural products have exceeded agricultural exports. This trend perpetuates debt and restricts increased access to foreign markets. In order to reverse negative trends and achieve the MDGs, governments must recognize the role of agriculture in the fight against hunger and poverty, as well as population growth’s impact on future food security.

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Around 1 billion people live on less than $1 a day, and 800 million people do not have enough food to meet basic nutritional needs. MDG 1 seeks to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day as well as the proportion of people suffering from hunger. Poverty and hunger create a vicious cycle of malnutrition and illness, reduced income, and lack of access to health care, education, clean water and sanitation.
**Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

Education is a fundamental human right and a necessary element to break the poverty cycle. Increased educational levels correlate to higher standards of living and more effective health services. In recognition of this connection, *MDG 2 strives to ensure a full course of primary schooling (beginning with grade 1) for all boys and girls.* Yet despite efforts to increase enrollment, an estimated 72 million primary school age children were not in school as of 2005; 57% of which were girls.

**Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

Women are the cornerstone of families and indispensable to economic and social development. Despite an undeniable contribution, women earn only “10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property, while producing half of the world's food and contributing two-thirds of the world's working hours.”* Empowered women can become advocates for education and healthcare services and contribute to household income. Education is a crucial step towards closing the gender gap, yet girls compose the majority of children not in school. To address this inequity, *MDG 3 seeks to eliminate gender disparity at all educational levels by 2015.*

**Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality**

Most causes of child mortality – including diarrhea, malaria and neonatal infection – are preventable and tied to improved healthcare, clean water and adequate sanitation services. Despite a decline worldwide in infant and child mortality rates since 2000, 10.1 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2005.¹⁰ High child mortality persists throughout Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where survival rates are often tied to a family's socio-economic status. Despite this grim reality, a mother's education level can be a powerful force for childhood survival. It has been proven that children are twice as likely to survive if their mother has at least a secondary level education. In support of a healthy, more productive future for children around the world, *MDG 4 strives to reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate.*
Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health

Maternal health influences all eight goals, particularly child mortality and HIV/AIDS. Contrary to their critical role in development, one woman dies every minute from preventable, pregnancy-related conditions, in the absence of family planning and prenatal services. In Sub-Saharan Africa the “lifetime risk of dying during pregnancy is 1 in 16, versus 1 in 3,800 in the developed world.” It is projected that, “preventing unplanned pregnancies alone could avert around one quarter of maternal deaths.” This could help achieve MDG 5 of reducing by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio. Given women’s important role within the family and society, advancing women’s and girls’ access to quality health care, including reproductive health services and family planning, is crucial to alleviating poverty and advancing sustainable development.

In Focus: Reproductive Health Services

The Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if population and reproductive health trends are not addressed. Increasing access to family planning services is essential to eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, combating diseases, environmental sustainability, reducing child mortality and increasing access to education. Greater access to these services can also alleviate pressure on natural resources by slowing population growth. Today, many women and families desire fewer children, but lack of services, information and poverty act as barriers. Gaps in reproductive health “account for almost one-fifth of worldwide burden of illness and death and one-third of illness and death among women of reproductive age.” Enabling women to choose the number and timing of their children not only supports MDG 5, but also helps pave the way towards a more equitable future.
**Goal 6:**
**Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases**

Incidence of diseases is inherently linked to reduced economic productivity and societal imbalance. People suffering from HIV/AIDS, malaria or other diseases are especially vulnerable to malnutrition and extreme poverty. For this reason, **MDG 6 centers on the halt and reversal of the spread of major diseases.** AIDS has had devastating effects on Sub-Saharan Africa, especially impacting adults in their productive years. Approximately 39.5 million people worldwide were living with HIV by the end of 2006, the majority of which were in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa also suffers the most malaria deaths, sadly for lack of simple, affordable solutions such as bed nets in rural areas. On a global scale, the number of people living with HIV decreased by 16% from 2006 to 2007, to 33.2 million. Although international assistance has poured in to help combat HIV/AIDS, an increased focus on prevention, including access to family planning services and contraceptives, is needed if we are to succeed in the long-term battle against this epidemic.

**Goal 7:**
**Ensure Environmental Sustainability**

The pursuit of sustainable development and healthy communities requires a delicate balance. Developed countries have created a model of over-consumption, depleting finite resources and influencing environmental and human health on a global scale. The world’s poor often live in rural areas that rely heavily on natural resources. Because of this dependency, rural communities are most susceptible to environmental degradation and related social and economic impacts. Minimal resources and decreased access to land can lead to political and social struggles. **MDG 7 strives to address instability through the incorporation of sustainable development principals into country policies and increasing access to drinking water and sanitation services.** Effective water governance, sustainable land management, and biodiversity conservation all promote sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Increased access to reliable freshwater sources, arable land, and healthy ecosystems, creates limitless benefits: strengthened capacity of government and civil society, the improvement of community health, the empowerment of women and girls, and beyond.
Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Achievement of the MDGs is only possible through a sustained commitment among all nations, whether through increased aid or the reallocation of resources and prioritization of budgets towards development initiatives. Poor countries must work hard to achieve a more sustainable future, but in accordance with MDG 8, rich countries must match this dedication through debt relief, the elimination of agricultural subsidies, import quotas and other barriers to development, increased access to life-saving drugs, and increased employment opportunities for youth. Only through a dedicated partnership, uniting rich and poor, developed and developing countries, can the global community meet these goals and create a peaceful, more secure world.
Within these eight, interdependent goals, environmental sustainability (specifically water), is vital to the achievement of each scenario. From empowering women and girls, to increased food security and household income – sustainable development depends on water supply and sanitation services. Presently, “at least 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water, and 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation” – an alarming statistic that impacts health and economic development. Water-borne diseases and inadequate drinking water supply are responsible for thousands of preventable childhood deaths each day. Water as a resource is fundamental not only to our daily lives, but also to agricultural development and educational opportunities. Given its universal reach, governments and global decision-making bodies must incorporate MDG 7 into action plans to address the broader goals. As poor water supply affects people the world over, we must devise integrated, community-level solutions targeting water management, the installation of sanitation infrastructure and reconciling water access imbalances.

In Focus: Climate Change
Populations in developing countries are heavily dependent on natural resources. They are most vulnerable to climate change, yet least responsible for emissions and least able to adapt to climate impacts such as rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and decreasing agricultural productivity. Climate change also poses grave threats to human health through increased incidence of droughts, hurricanes and floods that will jeopardize scarce fresh-water resources, increase the spread of air-borne diseases, and force migration among vulnerable populations. Thus, developed nations must assist the poorest countries in adapting to climate change. One such example is a tree-planting initiative between the Green Belt Movement, a women’s civil society organization, based in Kenya, that advocates for human rights and supports good governance and peaceful democratic change through the protection of the environment, and the World Bank’s Community Development Carbon Fund Project. Since November 2006, these partners have employed women’s groups to plant thousands of trees to reforest two mountain areas in Kenya. This project has multiple benefits: providing rural women with economic independence, capturing 350,000 tons of carbon dioxide, supporting regular rainfall and restoring soil lost to erosion. Aiding nations to adapt to new and increased environmental pressures must become an urgent funding and leadership priority for the United States.
Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals

Reviewing progress towards the Millennium Development Goals at the July 2007 mid-way point, an uneven record is evident from region to region. While great strides have been made in reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty and increasing enrollment in schools across the developing world, regional progress varies greatly. Deficiencies in health services, water access, employment opportunities for young people, and gender equality still present roadblocks to advancement. Despite major achievements across parts of Asia, persistent problems still plague the region, and Sub-Saharan Africa falls short of several goals. Efforts must intensify, specifically on the part of the U.S., if the goals are to be reached by 2015. The U.S. is notorious for its “tied aid” (requiring aid recipients to buy U.S. goods), and for picking recipients based on foreign policy goals rather than need. In addition, the U.S. has never officially adopted the 0.7% international benchmark of giving, agreed upon by 22 of the world’s richest countries at the United Nations General Assembly in 1970. The U.S. currently spends 0.22% of its budget on non-military foreign assistance. On average, most Americans think that the U.S. spends 15%–30% on development assistance.

The time for the United States to address these complex global challenges is now. Promoting the MDGs in their entirety would create ripple effects across the planet that would not only foster healthy communities, but also restore the role of the U.S. as a world leader promoting universal justice and human rights.

What You Can Do

By uniting our voices in support of the Millennium Development Goals, we can build a movement of citizens that will stand up and demand a better tomorrow.

• **Encourage your decision-makers** to support sustainable development initiatives that help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

• **Get more involved** with Sierra Club’s Global Population and Environment Program. Find out how at [www.sierraclub.org/population](http://www.sierraclub.org/population)

• **Make the connections** among population, consumption, and access to clean water. Learn more at [www.sierraclub.org/population/factsheets/water.asp](http://www.sierraclub.org/population/factsheets/water.asp)

• **Read more about the Millennium Campaign’s** efforts to achieve the MDGs and learn what you can do to further universal equitable development. Find out how at [www.endpoverty2015.org](http://www.endpoverty2015.org)
Footnotes


7 Ibid. 1


Production Credits
Cover-Tibetan students by Karl Grobl/FHI; Earth from Space courtesy NASA Apollo 17; page 4 - mother and child by Jennifer Swan; page 6-boy carrying water by Ian Berry/Magnum. All other photos by various artists of iStockPhoto.com.

Project Managing Editors: Ani Zamgocjan, and Sarah Fairchild, Sierra Club
Layout and Design: Serendipity Design - Cincinnati, OH.
The mission of Sierra Club’s Global Population and Environment Program is to protect the global environment, preserve natural resources for future generations, and foster healthy communities by advancing sustainable development solutions.