
The Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda: A global perspective

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1. Introduction

The [Millennium Declaration](#) (MD) is the most important collective promise that world leaders have ever made to the world's most vulnerable people to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. The eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs), developed in 2002, and recognized by the General Assembly as the road map for implementing the Declaration included indicators on youth unemployment under MDG 8 on global partnerships for development; and on women's non-agricultural wage employment and promoting gender equality and empowering women under MDG 3. No general goal or target on full and productive employment for all existed before 2005.

The adoption of the Declaration took place at a time of growing concern and recurrent debate on the need to "ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for the entire world's people", for while it offered great opportunities, its benefits had been unevenly shared, and its costs unfairly distributed.

Against this background, in February 2002 the International Labour Organization (ILO) established the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (WCSDG), an independent body whose mandate was to move the debate forward through dialogue, and set the stage for action towards fair and inclusive globalization. The WCSDG focused its work on the impact of globalization on the life and work of people, their families, and their communities, and explored sustainable ways of combining economic, social and environmental objectives to make globalization work for all. The Commission examined the process of globalization through the eyes of ordinary people, drawing on extensive consultations with a broad range of actors in different parts of the world and some of the best available expertise on the many complex issues involved. The comprehensive analysis and set of recommendations it provided constitute the foundations for a common platform

for action, and the basis for future multi-stakeholder dialogue as an essential vehicle for cohesive and sustainable change. Moreover, it considerably increased the attention given to employment, which had been virtually absent from the initial goals.

At the [2005 World Summit of the United Nations General Assembly](#), the leaders of more than 150 countries made a commitment to implement a wide-ranging international agenda requiring global, regional and national action. In paragraph 47 of the Outcome Document, the Summit recognized decent work as an international development goal in its own right by declaring –

“We strongly support fair globalization and resolve to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our relevant national and international policies as well as our national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These measures should also encompass the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, as defined in International Labour Organization Convention No. 182, and forced labour. We also resolve to ensure full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work.”¹

This strong statement indicating that employment and decent work are not the automatic by-products of growth, but legitimate and fundamental goals in their own right, led to the inclusion of a new MDG Target (1.B): “achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people”.

This commitment to decent work was reaffirmed in July 2006 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which called on the UN system to support countries in their efforts to include the Decent Work Agenda in their development policies. In order to assist agencies of the United Nations system in this endeavour, the chief executives of those organizations asked the ILO to take the lead in developing a *Toolkit for mainstreaming employment and decent work*. The toolkit, introduced in April 2007, has been used successfully by a number of countries and UN country teams, as well as international organizations.²

Today, *decent work for all* has acquired a central place in international and national policy making. Over 70 countries³ have made decent work a national priority in their development agenda and some 14 international organisations have used the toolkit to determine how their policies and strategies in their substantive thematic areas relate to employment and decent work outcomes.

The recognition that decent work is a global goal of universal relevance stems from one simple consideration: decent work sums up the legitimate aspirations shared by men, women and young people worldwide in their working lives, aspirations to opportunities and income, to rights, to voice and recognition, to family stability and personal development, and to fairness and gender equality.

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005.

² Full information on the Toolkit and country application can be found at:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/pardev/relation/multilateral/toolkit.htm>

³ Full list of countries and application by region:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/countries/index.htm>

Since its first mention as a concept in 1999, decent work has evolved from an ILO goal into a universal objective, reaching a global level of acceptance. Today, more than ever before, the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) – giving people decent jobs – is relevant to all countries, developed, emerging and developing alike. The DWA focuses on four inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive objectives:

1. **Employment:** The main route out of poverty is through work and income.
2. **Rights:** Without the effective enforcement of fundamental rights at work people will not be empowered to escape from poverty.
3. **Social protection** social protection safeguards income and underpins the health of workers and their families.
4. **Dialogue:** The participation of employers' and workers' organizations in shaping national development policies – encompassing social and labour programmes into national strategies – helps ensure that they are appropriate and sustainable.

The Decent Work Agenda may take different shapes and be built around different priorities in order to tackle various levels of poverty and groups of people. But the promotion of rights, representation, employment and social protection is always at the core of successful policies to reduce poverty, as evidence from country experiences and research shows.

Five years after the 2005 World Summit, the Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit of September 2010 – [Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals](#) – reaffirmed the world leaders' commitment to the MDGs and set out a concrete action agenda for achieving them by 2015. Reflecting the global resonance of the DWA, the 2010 Summit Outcome Document referred to the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda and promotes the ILO response to the crisis – the [Global Jobs Pact](#) – as a relevant framework for recovery. Equally importantly, it recognized the ILO's international labour standards as part of the human rights-based accountability framework and stated that "employers' and workers' representatives are vital allies in achieving the MDGs".

While acknowledging the serious setbacks resulting from the world economic and financial crisis, the 2010 Outcome Document recognized that remarkable progress had been made and that the global poverty rate had fallen. Other significant progress is highlighted, notably on increasing school enrolment and improving health in many countries.

The 2011 *Report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the MDGs* and the recently launched [report of the MDG Gap Task Force](#)⁴ also suggest that the momentum of growth in the developing world remains strong enough to sustain the progress needed to reach the global poverty reduction target.

This positive global assessment, mainly driven by progress in East Asia and South Asia (China and India in particular), obscures vast differences between and within regions and countries. Most of Sub-Saharan Africa faces important challenges on almost every MDG, and country

⁴ http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/mdg_gap/index.shtml

experiences vary significantly. Global and regional averages should hence not overlook the sad reality evidenced in the national reports produced in 2010.

[The MDGs 2011 Progress Chart](#), which gives an overview of the status and progress by region, reveals very large deficits in decent work in 7 out of 9 developing regions, with only three regions (Eastern Asia, Southern Asia and Caucasus –Central Asia) expected to meet the target of full and productive employment by 2015. A large number of national progress reports denounce a chronic lack of progress in creating productive and decent jobs, together with stagnant farm productivity in many rural areas, increasing the number of the of working poor.⁵

In the current persisting economic and financial crisis, global unemployment and slow employment rates are likely to remain high in developed economies and even in emerging countries. In poor countries with no or limited fiscal space to adopt and implement anti-crisis stimulus packages, larger numbers of people are likely to fall into dire poverty. This trend is expected to worsen, as the signs of a rebound in global economic growth, observed towards the end of 2010, are receding and the global labour market is in many respects still lagging behind. In 2010 more than 205 million people, out of an estimated global labour force of 3.2 billion, were unemployed – a rise of more than 28 million since 2007. Approximately 1.2 billion women and men, representing almost 40 per cent of the world's labour force, did not earn enough to keep themselves and their families above the US\$2 a day poverty line in 2009. The global crisis has also spurred a record increase in youth unemployment, reaching its highest number ever – 80 million young people unemployed at the end of 2009 – with the global youth unemployment rate rising from 11.8 to 12.8 per cent between 2007 and 2009. The youth unemployment slightly declined to 78 million in 2010.⁶

To address the situation, progress in reducing vulnerable employment – work involving informal working arrangements, lack of adequate social protection, low pay and difficult working conditions should be accelerated as a matter of urgency.⁷

⁵ Employed persons who are part of a household in which each member is estimated to be below the threshold for extreme poverty, currently set at US\$1.25 a day.

⁶ [Global Employment Trends](#), ILO, Geneva, January 2011.

⁷ [Global Employment Trends for Youth](#), ILO, Geneva, August 2010.

2. Decent Work and the Millennium Development Goals

The ILO addresses the MDGs through its Decent Work Agenda, which has proven essential for promoting the achievement of all the MDGs. Failure to tackle one MDG jeopardizes the achievement of all of them:⁸

1. ***Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*** – The largest goal in scope of all the MDGs inevitably requires decent work. Hazardous conditions of work, precarious employment, unemployment, child labour, and forced labour occur at the expense of development. But decent work is not only essential to promote the eradication of extreme poverty. It is also crucial to achieving the other MDGs, as follows.
2. ***Achieve universal primary education*** – Parents with decent incomes contribute to achieving universal primary education, as they are able to send their children to school instead of child labour, while giving them greater chances of escaping poverty.
3. ***Promote gender equality and empowering women*** – Enabling women to participate in economic life on an equal footing with men and offering them greater access to employment and income underpins efforts to close the gender gap in education and to empower women. Gender inequality in general and in the labour market in particular still persists through occupational segregation, wage gaps, higher relative unemployment rates, and over-representation in the informal economy, inadequate social protection and economic insecurity. As regards women's standing in households, their employment can contribute to achieving the MDGs, particularly those on health and education.
4. ***Reduce child mortality*** – Despite remarkable progress across regions, child mortality remains intolerably high in poor countries and among the poorest families. Policies that improve the status of women, focus on working mothers, health care workers, combating child labour and extending social protection contribute to reducing child mortality.
5. ***Improve maternal health*** – The challenges of maternal morbidity and mortality can be efficiently addressed through maternity protection for all women workers during childbirth and breastfeeding, and by such measures as investment in human resources and basic infrastructure in the health field; extended access to health services and social security schemes; rights and decent working conditions for health workers; access for women workers to comprehensive HIV/AIDS services; and improved education, employment and status for girls and women.
6. ***Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases*** – The HIV pandemic and associated diseases are also a workplace issue, as workers are the largest group it affects. HIV/AIDS has the capacity to intensify poverty, slowing economic growth and reversing a number of development gains. The pandemic has an impact on the labour force, on enterprise efficiency and on the transfer of skills and experience. Recognizing that the workplace has a vital role to play in the wider struggle to limit the spread and

⁸ For a full examination of the relevance of the Decent Work Agenda to the MDGs, see [Decent Work and the MDGs](http://www.ilo.org/mdg) www.ilo.org/mdg.

effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and promoting HIV/AIDS prevention policies helps keep the most productive workers in the workforce.

7. ***Ensure environmental sustainability*** – The challenge of climate change adaptation offers huge potential for decent job creation and enterprise development in both developed and developing countries. For example, the appropriate use of labour-based approaches in extending infrastructure can contribute to employment creation and the attainment of environmental sustainability by providing access to safe drinking water and other facilities. Just transitions to a low-carbon economy are critical to sustainable economies.
8. ***Develop a global partnership for development*** – Forging dialogue and solidarity among partners, guaranteeing that all actors in society engage in promoting better living and working conditions, is essential to job creation. The development of a global partnership for development is a cornerstone of the necessary social dialogue that all actors in society should practise to promote better living and working conditions for all.

3. Lessons learned and evidence of the impact of decent work on poverty reduction

Experience over the past few decades, coupled with good examples of ways of addressing the financial and economic crisis, point to five critical lessons, which are essential to the identification of areas for priority action.

First, accomplishments abound on the road to 2015. In his 2011 progress report the UN Secretary General described some significant strides towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals: “the MDGs have helped to lift millions of people out of poverty, save lives and ensure that children attend school. They have reduced maternal deaths, expanded opportunities for women, increased access to clean water, and freed many people from deadly and debilitating disease.”

By 2015 the global poverty rate should fall below 15 per cent – well under the 23 per cent target – despite setbacks from recent economic, food and energy crises. Contributing factors for progress include continued economic growth in some developing countries and targeted efforts in critical MDG areas, as follows:

- Some of the poorest countries have made the greatest strides in education: Burundi, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tome and Principe, Togo and Tanzania have achieved or are nearing the goal of universal primary education.
- The number of deaths of children under the age of five declined from 12.4 million in 1990 to 8.1 million in 2009, which means nearly 12,000 fewer children die each day.
- Increased funding and intensive control efforts have cut deaths from malaria by 20 per cent worldwide – from nearly 985,000 in 2000 to 781,000 in 2009.
- New HIV infections have declined steadily: in 2009, some 2.6 million people were newly infected with HIV – a 21 per cent drop since 1997, when new infections peaked.
- The number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy for HIV or AIDS increased 13-fold from 2004 to 2009, thanks to increased funding and expanded programmes.

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- An estimated 1.1 billion people in urban areas, and 723 million people in rural areas, gained access to an improved drinking water source over the period 1990-2008.

Secondly, despite satisfactory results across regions and countries, entire regions and socio-economic groups are likely to miss the 2015 deadline. In middle-income countries, high levels of inequality will contribute to the persistence of poverty and the rise in the numbers of working poor.⁹ Even in regions that have made tremendous progress in reducing poverty such as Southeast Asia, challenges persist in areas such as health and environmental sustainability.¹⁰ Moreover, the effects of the global crises, climate change and national disasters further complicate the challenge of making steady progress.

Thirdly, decent work matters particularly in times of crisis. Previous crises have shown that there is generally a time-lag of three to six years between financial recovery and the recovery of employment to pre-crisis levels. Consequently, efforts should be geared towards a jobs-led recovery, especially since in most countries the reattainment of previous employment levels will not be sufficient to strengthen economies so as to achieve decent work for women and men.

Evidence shows that decent work is a powerful, tested rope that pulls people and societies out of crises and sets them on a sustainable development path. Decent and stable jobs offer crisis-affected people not only income, but also freedom, security, dignity, self-esteem, hope, and a stake in the reconciliation and reconstruction of their communities. Concern at the quality as well as the quantity of jobs emerged well before the crisis and was globally supported and recognized as a critical contributing factor to poverty reduction.

Studies conducted by the ILO and other organizations¹¹ have shown that countries where policymakers have made decent work central to national development and poverty reduction strategies, have better responded to the impact of crises and mitigated their effects on the economy. The right of the poor to organize, especially through freedom of association, is essential to ensure that their collective voice is heard in policy development and implementation, and incorporating the Decent Work Agenda into national planning has energized attempts to realise this right.

Moreover, the application of management tools that support the assessment and optimization of the effects of policies and programmes incorporating decent work has proven to be a positive step towards bridging policy gaps.

Fourthly, the MDGs can still be achieved by a large number of countries by 2015, and rapid gains are possible. Lessons learned over the past decade suggest that some ways of achieving the MDGs are known, as are the challenges faced by countries. Even in the poorest regions there have been pockets of success in quality employment generation and poverty reduction, especially through employment-intensive initiatives, small and medium

⁹ Employed persons who are part of a household in which each member is estimated to be below the threshold for extreme poverty, currently set at US\$1.25 a day.

¹⁰ Millennium Development Goals: [2011 Progress chart](#).

¹¹ See, for example, [A rapid impact assessment of the global economic crisis on Liberia](#), ILO, Geneva, 2009; and [Current global and national trends and challenges and their impact on education](#), Report of the Secretary-General, UN ECOSOC, 2011.

enterprise promotion, and conditional cash transfers. Such initiatives need to be more widely replicated and scaled up to cover larger parts of the population.¹²

Critical factors that constrain efforts to fully implement such measures include the lack of institutional capacity to systematically identify and address bottlenecks and constraints, the paucity of reliable data, the absence of a well functioning coordinating mechanism to align efforts to overcome the bottlenecks, the lack of policy coherence and the limited accountability of government agencies and development partners.

Finally, accelerating a job-rich recovery that would lay the foundation for better quality of growth in the future has to be supported by the implementation of coherent growth policies focused on the goals of quality jobs and social cohesion. This major challenge has brought the heads of all UN agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization to agree to mobilize for action around nine joint initiatives to tackle the crisis, accelerate recovery and pave the way for fairer and more sustainable globalization. These cover additional financing for the most vulnerable; food security; trade; the green economy initiative; the Global Jobs Pact initiative; a global social protection floor; humanitarian and social stability and security; technology and innovation; and monitoring and analysis. The CEB Joint Crisis Initiative translates the commitment of the United Nations system to policy and programme coherence into a comprehensive response to the challenge of sustainable development for all.

In order to accelerate progress towards the target date of 2015, the UN system – including the UN teams at country level – have shaped an MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) aimed at providing national stakeholders with a systematic approach to identify and analyse bottlenecks, generate appropriate diagnostics, and recommend focused action while providing a framework to mobilize resources for country-level acceleration initiatives. Some 24 countries are now at different stages of using the MAF with a focus on different MDGs, including decent work for all.

4. Current trends and priority actions

The damage done to employment by the financial and economic crisis has caused hardship for many working women and men, families and communities, and worsened poverty. It has threatened the achievement of the MDGs, weakened the middle classes, and exacerbated threats to social cohesion. Yet recovery will not be sustainable unless jobs are created and maintained. With 45 million young people entering the workforce annually, millions of new jobs need to be created between now and 2015 just to keep the same level of unemployment rate.

The current global socio-economic situation is proof that the model of largely jobless growth prevailing before the crisis must change, and that it is not sustainable to continue to overestimate the capacity of the market to self-regulate, to undervalue the role of government, to diminish the dignity of work or to neglect the environment. Behind the alarming unemployment rates are people's lives and their diminished capacity to support their families and live in dignity. Addressing the unfulfilled promises of this pattern of growth is now a matter of urgency as the encouraging signs of recovery that emerged

¹² UNDG, [Thematic report on MDG1](#), 2010 (prepared for the MDG Summit).

towards the end of 2010 are rapidly waning and giving way to deteriorating living conditions and social unrest in many parts of the world.

In order to promote strong, sustainable and balanced growth that puts quality jobs at the heart of the recovery, the ILO's Global Jobs Pact and the Social Protection Floor Initiative will play an important role in helping achieve growth with social justice based on sustainable development. These two initiatives are presented below.

Global Jobs Pact

In response to the global financial crisis, the ILO adopted in June 2009 a [Global Jobs Pact](#) to promote jobs and protect people. The Pact is a set of balanced and realistic policy measures that countries, with the support of regional and multilateral institutions, can adopt to ease the impact of the crisis and of pre-existing labour market problems, thus accelerating the recovery of employment. It calls on Member States to put decent work opportunities at the core of their crisis responses. It proposes job-centred policies for countries to adapt according to their national needs. Guided by the Decent Work Agenda and commitments made by ILO constituents in the [2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization](#), the Pact recalls that respecting fundamental principles and rights at work, strengthening social protection, promoting gender equality and encouraging voice, participation and social dialogue are critical to recovery and development. It proposes a portfolio of policies aimed at –

- generating employment,
- extending social protection,
- respecting labour standards,
- promoting social dialogue,
- shaping fair globalization.

In short, the Pact is about responding to both the people's agenda and the needs of the real economy, and is designed to reduce the time-lag between economic recovery and the recovery of decent work opportunities. It is a call for urgent worldwide action – national, regional and global.

Support for the Pact has been steadily growing since its adoption, with backing from global and regional organizations. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) also endorsed the Pact in a number of resolutions¹³ and has called upon member States to make full use of the Pact in post-crisis recovery plans. In 2010, The Council stressed that recovering from the world financial and economic crisis and giving effect to the policy options of the Global Jobs Pact required financing and capacity-building. Least developed, developing and transition countries lacking the fiscal space to adopt appropriate recovery policies required particular support. Donors, multilateral organizations and other development partners were invited to consider providing funding. The measures advocated by the Pact – labour-intensive investments in infrastructure, support to small and medium enterprises, job retention measures, skills and employment services, targeted public employment schemes,

¹³ E/2009/5: "[Recovering from the crisis: a Global Jobs Pact](#)";
E/2009/26, 2009: "[Promoting full employment and decent work for all](#)";
E/2010/64: "[Recovering from the crisis: a Global Jobs Pact](#)";
E/2011/L.21/Rev.1: "[Recovering from the crisis: a Global Jobs Pact](#)".

comprehensive social security provisions, wage policies and stronger collective bargaining institutions – have proven efficient in stemming the rise in unemployment. In addition to the ILO report “Recovering from the crisis: a Global Jobs Pact”, the Council reviewed the annual report of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and adopted resolution E/2010/L.13,¹⁴ which stresses the importance of strengthening health systems and improving coordinated health-care service delivery as they relate to the Millennium Development Goals.

At the [MDG Summit of 2010](#) world leaders resolved to promote the Global Jobs Pact as a general framework to promote a job-intensive recovery. Similarly, the G20 world leaders gathered in November 2009 in Pittsburgh, welcomed the Pact as an “an employment-oriented framework for future economic growth”.

The successful implementation of the Pact depends on national and international decisions, by governments, business, labour, parliaments, local authorities and civil society, as well as by donors and multilateral institutions.¹⁵ The Pact, with the tripartite global commitment it represents, offers a unique opportunity for countries and the multilateral system to apply its provisions, which are embedded in the Decent Work Agenda. In seeking support and advice from the ILO, constituents are encouraged to apply the elements of the Pact that respond best to each country’s needs and priorities.

Social Protection Floor

According to the ILO’s estimates, 75 per cent of the global population do not enjoy a set of social guarantees that allow them to deal with life’s risks adequately. Ensuring a social protection floor for these people is a priority. The current financial and economic crisis has had dramatic social, health, hunger and education effects. In these times of crisis, income transfers, notably social assistance and social security benefits paid to unemployed workers and other vulnerable recipients, have acted as social and economic stabilizers. Benefits and guaranteed access to services have not only prevented people from falling further into poverty, but have also limited the contraction of aggregate demand, thereby curtailing the potential depth of the recession.

There is hence a clear need for a social protection floor below which nobody should fall. The floor can be seen as a core obligation to ensure the realization of the minimum essential levels of rights embodied in human right treaties. The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF-I) led by the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, provides a holistic and coherent approach for national social protection systems as a key component of national development strategies. It seeks to support countries in identifying and closing crucial protection gaps through coherent and efficient measures that maximize the impact of scarce resources on the reduction of poverty and insecurity, in order to ensure “guaranteed access” to essential services and social transfers.

¹⁴ [The role of the United Nations system](#) in implementing the ministerial declaration on the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to global public health adopted at the high-level segment of the 2009 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, 2010.

¹⁵ ILO: [Global Jobs Pact Country Scans](#) (various);
2010: [G20 Country policy briefs and statistical updates](#);
2011: [G20 Country policy briefs](#).

The SPF-I promotes universal access to essential social transfers and services, based on two main elements that help realize these human rights –

- ensuring the availability, continuity, and geographical and financial access to essential services, such as water and sanitation, food and adequate nutrition, health, education, housing and other social services such as life and asset saving information;
- realizing access by ensuring a basic set of essential social transfers, in cash and in kind, to provide a minimum income and livelihood security for poor and vulnerable populations and to facilitate access to essential services. It includes social transfers (but also information, entitlements and policies) to children, people in active age groups with insufficient income, and older persons.

Taking note of the Social Protection Floor Initiative, the UN Economic and Social Council requested relevant entities of the United Nations system to support efforts by Member States to strengthen health systems in delivering equitable health outcomes.

There is strong evidence that social protection contributes to economic growth by raising labour productivity and enhancing social stability. Investing in a Social Protection Floor is investing in social justice and economic development. Ensuring an SPF for the entire world population represents a considerable challenge, but calculations by various UN agencies demonstrate that a basic floor of social transfers is globally affordable at virtually any stage of economic development, even if the funding is not yet available everywhere. Examples like the *Bolsa Familia* schemes in Brazil and the Benazir income support scheme in Pakistan show that substantial elements of social protection floors can be financed by about 0.3 to 0.4 per cent of GDP, while ILO estimates for Viet Nam indicate that a complete closure of the social protection floor coverage gaps in the country could cost as much as 2.6 per cent of GDP. 86 Tangible progress is being made with international partners following the idea of a universal social protection floor and the better integration of social and labour market policies with economic policy.

5. The future

While making the case for tangible and significant advances in many countries on each MDG, the UN Secretary General's report on the MDGs, 2011, draws attention to the fact that – “Progress tends to bypass those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are otherwise disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability or ethnicity. Disparities between urban and rural areas are also pronounced and daunting. Achieving the goals will require equitable and inclusive economic growth – growth that reaches everyone and that will enable all people, especially the poor and marginalized, to benefit from economic opportunities”.

To summarize, there is some reason to celebrate, but reaching all the goals by the 2015 deadline remains challenging because the world's poorest are being left behind. Economic growth has not enabled all people, especially the poor and marginalized, “to benefit from economic opportunities”. In particular, opportunities for full and productive employment remain slim in most countries, especially for women and young people, and the damage done to workers and enterprises, especially smaller enterprises and their employees, is huge.

Between now and 2015, the main focus of the international community will remain on accelerating MDG achievement. The widely supported Secretary-General's initiative on an MDG Integrated Implementation Framework (IIF) is expected to serve as an important accountability instrument on MDG commitments by all stakeholders.

An immediate challenge for the ILO will be to seize the opportunity represented by current levels of support for decent work and the clear recognition of the role of ILO constituents in poverty reduction, as expressed in the MDG Summit Outcome Document, in helping accelerate progress by 2015. This necessarily involves identifying appropriate ways of getting its constituents – particularly at country level – effectively involved in the implementation of the Action Plan adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010, which endorses the Global Jobs Pact. Another challenge is to meet constituents' urgent need for enhanced capacity, supported by stronger global partnerships for development. Improving the measurement of decent work indicators also remains a major obstacle to more targeted work.

While accelerating efforts to support countries in achieving the MDGs, the 2010 MDG Summit Outcome Document requested the UN to make recommendations for further steps to advance the UN development agenda beyond 2015. A number of points of convergence are emerging from the ongoing debate, as well as possible approaches. One major point of general agreement seems to be that the MDGs will still be relevant after 2015, because even if all the MDG targets are met by 2015, the present MDG agenda will still be relevant. For example, there would still be some way to go to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger after 2015. Another point of convergence is the continued relevance of the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility embedded in the MDG framework as a whole.

Nonetheless the MDG framework will need to be reshaped to address its shortcomings. While the framework has helped strengthen the global partnership for development under MDG 8, the 2011 MDG Gap Task Force report¹⁶ points to significant shortfalls in delivery on international commitments. Setting goals and targets at a global level inevitably leads to neglect for differences in initial conditions and capacities in different countries, and consequently to unfairly judging the efforts made by those at the bottom of the ladder. The MDG targets have also been considered too focused on quantity, with less attention to quality, and for insufficiently addressing inequalities in progress between different population groups. Finally, critical issues recognized in the Millennium Declaration such as human rights, governance, peace and security were not formally incorporated into the MDG framework.

Another weakness of the MDGs is the insufficient emphasis placed on environmental sustainability. In this area the ILO is actively engaged in the promotion of a just transition to a green economy. Green jobs can be created in all sectors and types of enterprises, in urban and rural areas, and in countries at all levels of economic development. The [ILO Green Jobs Programme](#) – part of the UN system-wide strategy for climate change and conducted in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme,(UNEP) the International trade unions Confederation (ITUC) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) – promotes socially fair labour market and business models aimed at reducing vulnerabilities

¹⁶ UNDG: [MDG Gap Task Force report, 2011](#).

to the negative environmental impact and leading to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable enterprises and economies. It operates globally and provides policy guidance through participation in international conferences, country assessment and policy advice on greening enterprises, direct technical assistance and capacity building to ILO constituents.¹⁷

In the few years left before 2015, various UN fora will allow Member States and other relevant stakeholders through structured debate to voice their own assessment of what is needed in the post-2015 development agenda. Such a process would have to provide room for inclusive, open and transparent discussions with multi-stakeholder participation. Using established mechanisms and processes at global, regional and national levels would help in ensuring that the debate benefits from the wide range of lessons learned and experiences of the broadest possible array of stakeholders and thus conferring it a strong development impact.

At the request of its Member States, the United Nations will hold a special event to follow-up on efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2013 during the General Assembly. This meeting will be an opportunity to move the debate through dialogue on the critical elements that should feature in the post-2015 development agenda.

6 Conclusion

The goal of *Decent Work for All* goes hand in hand with the internationally agreed development goals pledged by world leaders in the Millennium Declaration. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda, in a context of fair globalization, is essential to the achievement of these shared aims.

With only five years to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, reaching the target of full and productive employment and decent work for all remains a significant challenge that becomes even harder in the context of the current economic crisis. The crisis has slowed the decline in the proportion of working poor. In cases where a rise in employment has been observed, it has often taken the form of more vulnerable types of jobs, leading to additional pockets of poverty. Growing income inequality, much of it resulting from a diminishing share of wages in national income and increasing inequality within wage income, threatens social cohesion in many regions, recalling the impact of deficits in decent work on social justice, peace and security.

As the interdependence of the global economy has vastly extended the policy interdependence of countries, strong and sustainable economic growth in conditions of open and competitive markets has been identified as one of the best avenue to secure broad employment opportunities and rising living standards.

A consensus is building for coordinated efforts to prioritize employment growth because strong, steady growth in jobs and household incomes in many countries at the same time will buttress global demand and create still more jobs. Expansion of social protection, with consideration for its fiscal sustainability, has an important role to play in achieving further gains against poverty and supporting demand. Likewise, the transition towards green and

¹⁷ For more information, see <http://www.ilo.org/greenjobs>.

sustainable economies is an area where a greater coherence in policy making can facilitate growth by encouraging investment and the creation of green jobs.

An important step in achieving the decent work target is to seek to build a coherent policy framework around agreed priorities through dialogue at global, national and regional levels, and in respect of the principles embedded in international labour standards. The ILO's crisis response, which involved considerable dialogue with other international bodies and led to the adoption of the Global Jobs Pact, is one of the numerous examples that can be cited.

Addressing this imperative is likely to feature very prominently in the multi-stakeholder debate on the post-2015 development agenda, as it will help identify and close policy gaps.

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