

Information note:

The right to development – Framework for achieving the MDGs

For the millions of people around the world who live in abject poverty, the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development offers hope. Indeed, the aspiration to make the right to development a reality for all is the foundation for the quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the internationally agreed global development goals.

The Declaration on the Right to Development enshrines this right as an “inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.” Governments that build their development strategies around this right are more likely to be successful in reaching the MDGs and in realizing the vision of the United Nations Charter for a more equal and just world.

The eight MDGs – to reduce poverty, hunger and disease and promote gender equality, education, environmental sustainability and global partnerships – are interrelated and to achieve them requires a partnership between developed and developing countries. This is articulated in Goal number 8 which asserts the collective responsibility for international cooperation and assistance to achieve all the MDGs.

The right to development can strengthen this global partnership to help achieve the MDGs. It requires the international community to create an enabling global environment free of structural impediments where developing countries have opportunities for international economic activities. The right to development incorporates the principle of international cooperation along with the principles of transparency, equality, participation, accountability and non-discrimination. These principles should be followed at both the national and international levels.

The right to development adds value to efforts to realize the MDGs because it provides an integrated, holistic and cohesive framework for achieving just and equitable development for all people. It encompasses both the civil and political as well as the economic, social and cultural dimensions of human rights and addresses both the national and international dimensions of development. Using the right to development framework, States acting both individually and collectively have the responsibility to create an environment conducive to development when formulating, adopting and implementing policies and programmes.

Achieving socially just and equitable development for all

States are primarily responsible for the realization of the right to development and the attainment of the MDGs within each country. But given our world's increasing globalization and interdependence, as well as the global challenges and crises we face, national development efforts must be supported by the international community through collaborative efforts and arrangements based on global solidarity, shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

The year 2011 will mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development by the United Nations. This anniversary presents an opportunity to focus on realizing the vision of the Millennium Declaration to make this right a reality for all. By using its constitutive principles as a guide for development and governance, including in the areas of aid, trade and debt relief, States will have a better chance of attaining the MDGs. Our focus must be on the poor and most vulnerable people in all countries, in particular in developing countries.

To attain the MDGs and realize the right to development, our global partnership for development must recognize the interdependence of States and all other stakeholders; the interrelation of rights and responsibilities; the linkage between national and international levels of governance and development; the indivisibility of all human rights; and above all, the value of human dignity, the basis of all human rights.

Strengthening the global partnership for development

Realising the right to development is a priority for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This priority has been established by United Nations Member States in General Assembly resolutions. These resolutions require the High Commissioner's Office (OHCHR) to undertake activities aimed at strengthening the global partnership between Member States, development agencies and international development, financial and trade institutions in the quest for development for all people. They also mandate the High Commissioner to promote and protect the right to development at the international, regional and national levels, with the support of relevant bodies of the United Nations.

Activities of the High Commissioner's Office aim at promoting and protecting the realization of the right to development through advocacy, networking, technical advice and the establishment of partnerships. A significant aspect is to promote awareness about the content and importance of the right to development, including through increased engagement, research, advocacy and informational and educational activities. Identifying obstacles to the implementation of the right to development at the international, regional and national levels is another important feature of OHCHR activities: it is evident that policy coherence across institutions, enhanced coordination and collective action are essential to realizing the right to development, and can similarly advance progress on the MDGs.