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## ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

*Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people*

### MDGs and human rights

Often acclaimed as the most significant initiative to tackle poverty and ensure progress in human development, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) do not live up to the ambitions of the Millennium Declaration on which they are based and do not reflect the full spectrum of States' obligations. They do not relate to human rights law or set up redress mechanisms for abuses in order to ensure accountability. Nor do they address structural inequalities or include the participation of all stakeholders. The human rights framework provides guarantees, guidance and clear responsibilities.

The Right to Education Project believes that if the MDGs remain disconnected from legislation, monitoring and accountability, there will be no chance for unveiling discrimination, inequalities and violations and for claiming rights in order to achieve a proper human development worthy of its name. There is an urgent need to make the MDGs 'right'.

### The right to education

Education is included in all major international human rights treaties.<sup>1</sup> All countries in the world have signed onto one, if not more, of these documents, thus accepting to bear duties in realising education as a right. In practical terms, this means recognising that education is not merely a policy goal but consists of entitlements, obligations and freedoms. According to UN documents and interpretation, these are reflected in 4 key elements (4As): Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability.<sup>2</sup>

**Availability:** human, material and budgetary resources should be sufficient and adequate to ensure education for all. Individuals should also be free to choose or found schools in accordance with their religious and moral convictions and with minimum standards set by the State.

**Accessibility:** education systems should not discriminate on any ground and positive steps should be taken to reach the most marginalised. It includes physical and economic accessibility.

**Acceptability:** the content of education and teaching methods should be relevant, culturally appropriate and of quality. The human rights of all those involved should be upheld in education.

**Adaptability:** education should be flexible so to respond to the needs and abilities of students, meet the best interests of the child, and adapt to different contexts.

### MDG1 and Target 1.B

#### *What is there*

MDG1 recognises that extreme poverty has a detrimental impact on all aspects of human development and needs to be eradicated to ensure a life in dignity (the premise of all human rights).

Target 1.B acknowledges the need to eliminate discriminatory or exploitative forms of work.

#### *What is missing*

By focusing mainly on economic deprivation, MDG1 does not recognise a broader interpretation of poverty that encompasses social and educational deprivation. Nor does it highlight the crucial issue of economic accessibility of education for the poorest. This is especially relevant in the light of the complete silence on free primary education in MDG2.

Target 1.B misses the fundamental link between the minimum age of employment and the end of compulsory education. It also lacks consideration of the need for an education that is adaptable and relevant to the interests of students so to facilitate the transition from school to work and their full development.

<sup>1</sup> For a list of these treaties, what they entail and how to use them, visit [www.right-to-education.org](http://www.right-to-education.org)

<sup>2</sup> Tomaševski K., 1999, *Preliminary Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education*, paragraphs 42-74; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999, *General Comment No. 13*, paragraph 6.

### What this means

According to the UN, education is “the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty”.<sup>3</sup> A limited interpretation of poverty and education in MDG1 and MDG2 undermines both goals. When parents do not have the basic means to a dignified life, children are sent to work or help with household chores, instead of being in school. This, in turn, perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty and limits possibilities for decent work and future employability. The lack of correspondence between the minimum age for employment and the end of compulsory education is also a concern: free and compulsory education of good quality secured until the minimum age for entry into employment is a critical factor in the struggle against economic deprivation and exploitation, while child labour is a key obstacle to the implementation of compulsory education strategies.

Some examples of wrong focus/violations:

- The MDGs’ focus on extreme poverty in developing countries neglects persistent poverty in developed and middle-income countries where there may be cases of poorer quality of education for the most marginalized areas and groups.
- Aiming to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all without paying attention to secondary education, technical and vocational training, and adult literacy programmes - where women and young people suffer more pronounced disparities and inequalities - overlooks the obligation to ensure that they acquire knowledge and skills useful for job prospects and directed to the development of their full potential.

### What we recommend

The MDGs have already brought about tremendous improvements. Notwithstanding progress, much remains to be done in order to achieve the 2015 aspirations in full respect of the human dignity and rights of the world’s population. The Right to Education Project recommends including the following aspects in future strategies for the achievement of MDG1 and Target 1.B. This would not only reconfirm education as a powerful tool for human emancipation and advancement, but also enhance results and facilitate the task of States to fulfil legal commitments they have agreed to undertake.

- Include additional indicators of poverty such as access to free primary education (and/or reinforce this link in MDG2) and availability of progressively free secondary and higher education for more decent work opportunities.
- Ensure that education is available and accessible to all without discrimination on any ground: identify the poorest groups in society and the barriers they face to access education (fees, indirect and hidden costs, distance from school, lack of infrastructures and/or educational facilities, etc.) and prioritize attention and funding for those groups and the elimination of those barriers.
- Align the minimum age for employment with the end of compulsory education in legislation and practice.
- Ensure that education at all levels, especially secondary education, technical and vocational training, and adult literacy programmes, is relevant and useful for employability.
- Regularly monitor both the quantity and quality of education for the poorest groups in society, using rights-based indicators that are fully disaggregated by prohibited grounds of discrimination.

For more information, please visit [www.right-to-education.org](http://www.right-to-education.org)

<sup>3</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999, *General Comment No. 13*, paragraph 1.