

Forum: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
Issue: Eradicating poverty and hunger
Student Officer: Antoine Duranton

Introduction

“Between now and 2015, we must make sure that promises made become promises kept. The consequences of doing otherwise are profound: death, illness and despair, needless suffering, lost opportunities for millions upon millions of people.”

Secretary-general Ban Ki Moon, 22nd of September, 2010.

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2000. These goals aim to improve the general living conditions of humanity. The first goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. There are three sub-goals in it : to halve the proportion of people whose income is below \$1,25 a day, to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all and to halve the rate of people who suffer from hunger.

The current results and the achievements of the goals should be nuanced: even if the extreme poverty (below \$1,25 a day) has been highly reduced as well as the number of people suffering from hunger, some efforts still have to be made. Thus, there are still important restrictions for the employment for certain social categories, with a true impact on poverty. Furthermore, if the percentage of famished people is lower nowadays, the number is still the same, 850 millions, and considerable improvements can doubtlessly be achieved by the United Nations.

Definition of Key Terms

Extreme poverty : The term has been defined by the World Bank in 2005. People are considered as being in extreme poverty if they earn less than \$1 a day. Extreme poverty is not really an issue in developed countries, knowing that a massive majority of people in extreme poverty lives in the Developing Countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, poverty should be seen as a multidimensional problem with various forms and causes, as poor health, poor education, hard work, etc... The numbers given about the extreme poverty are therefore an indicator, unavoidable to compare areas and periods of time, but reduce poverty to the only economical aspect, forgetting the social aspect. It is however possible to refer to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), made by the United Nations Development Programm (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development initiative, which takes into consideration others factors, such as access to electricity, drinkable water, education, ... The informations given by this index are relevant and should be considered when looking at the definition of poverty.

Hunger : Hunger concerns people who don't have sufficient food to satisfy their minimum level of dietary energy consumption. If the term used in the definition of the MDGs mentions « hunger » explicitly, this term is closely linked to under-nutrition which describes a poor alimentation in nutrients, with no variety in the food products consumed. Hunger actively contributes to the catastrophic infant mortality rate in some countries.

Productive employment : A productive employment describes a work which is the source of general growth and leads directly to a global development. It needs to be beneficial to the

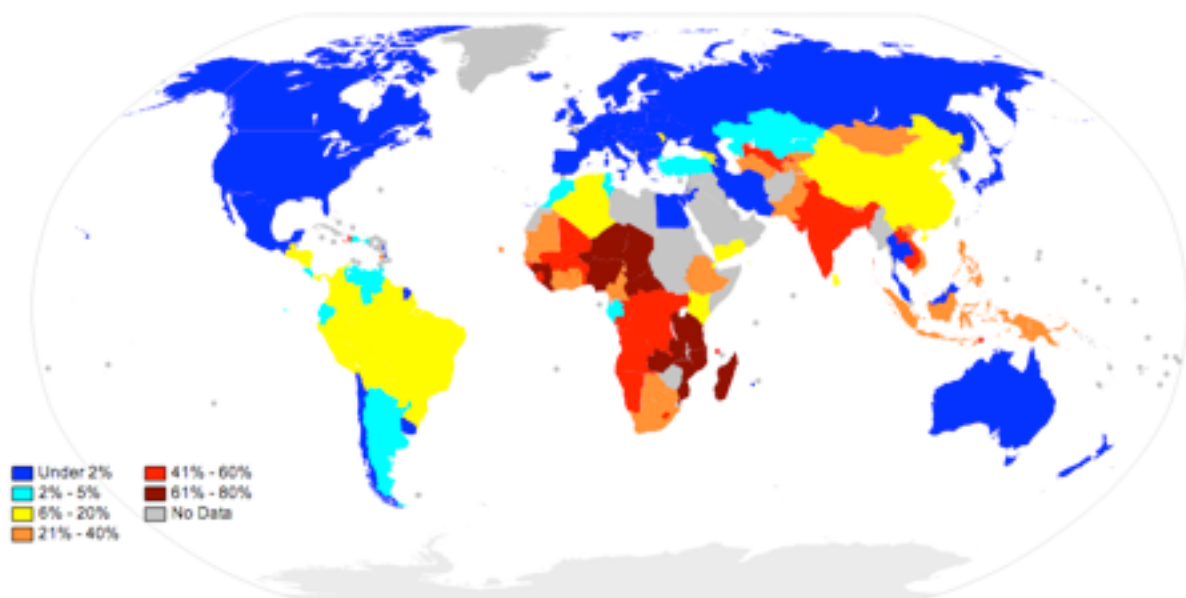
entire society and must enable the worker's personal development. A such employment is the key to a durable leaving from poverty.

Background information

The MDGs are one of the most important project of the United Nations. With such goals, the UN is willing to show the world its positive impacts on human living conditions and its capacity to make things change, despite the visible tensions between the member states. The influence of the UN is therefore at stake without forgetting the huge hopes for the populations concerned by the UN aid plans. The first goal, which is our issue, can be seen as the most important one. Indeed, behind the issue of poverty and hunger lies the more global and general issue of the development of the LEDCs and their delay compared with the wealthiest countries. The three sub-goals set by the UN have to be considered as closely linked and there's no doubt that if people can have a decent work, it will necessarily curb the rate of extreme poverty and hunger.

First sub-goal :

The UN data show that the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from 46% in 1990 to 27% in 2008. The biggest improvements have been seen in Asia, where extreme poverty is today at 17%, for 55%, 10 years ago. The first goal is therefore almost achieved even if the global crisis could set some people back to extreme poverty again. The efforts of the United Nations have been profitable to a large part of humanity. However the international community has to make sure the rates of extreme poverty continue to decrease. Moreover the UN has to reduce the huge inequalities between the regions : if extreme poverty has dropped in Asia, especially in China, the rate is still high in Africa, with a reduction of only 8% within 10 years. We can see in the following map, the enormous differences between the regions in the world :



The differences are clear between the northern countries and the southern countries, as Africa continues to have the highest rates in extreme poverty. The future efforts of the United Nations could thereby try to reduce the inequalities between the different parts of the world.

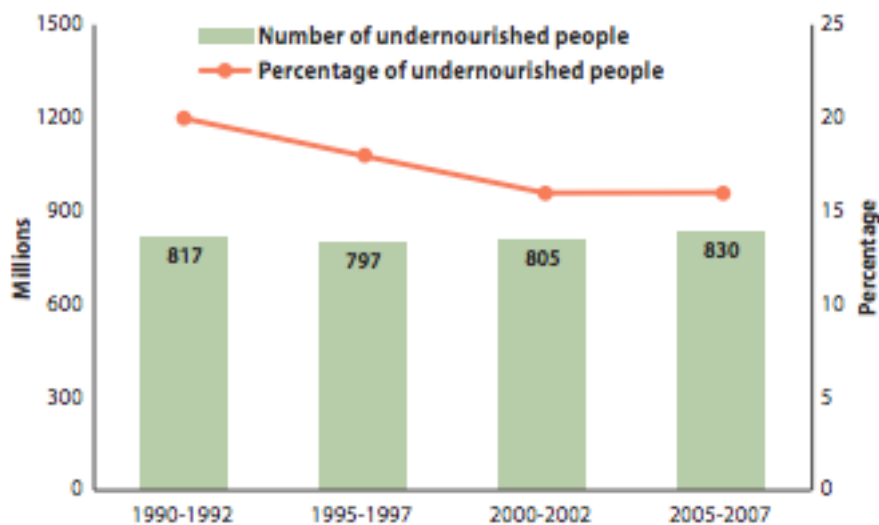
Second sub-goal :

The goal of giving a decent job to everyone in the world seems at first sight impossible to achieve. However the UN has worked hard to build, worldwide, sustainable sources of economical growth and sustainable jobs. Those efforts have faced serious difficulties since the financial crisis of 2008. The general unemployment rate has substantially risen, in parallel with the precarious employment rate. The role of the UN will not be to give massive financial aid and try to create as many jobs as possible in the short term but to try to progressively build independent forms of economic growth which will later create wealth by themselves. One of the major goals of the UN will also be to ensure to every social groups equal access to employment. Thus all restrictions to women and youth employment should be criticized by the UN. Moreover, the United Nations needs to pay special attention to those special groups, knowing that they are always the first ones hit by recessions and crisis : the people aged between 18 and 25 are the world social category which suffers from the highest unemployment rate (75 million are looking for a job)

The evolutions of the employment rates and their stability have to be closely watched by the UN, considering the fact that the access to a stable employment is the key to a long-term solution to the issue of poverty and can be the source of a sustainable growth, profitable on a national, regional and international level.

Third sub-goal :

The third target is closely linked to the other ones. The United Nations aims to halve the percentage of people suffering from hunger by 2015. Though the first years of the program showed positive results, the progress has been stagnating, particularly since the crisis of 2008. The official data of the UN confirm this subsidence as shown below:



The problem of hunger has clearly increased during the food riots in 2008 in Africa, when the prices of basic food products skyrocketed. The improvements to fight against hunger are too slow to achieve the MDG. Therefore the UN has to find efficient and sustainable ways to solve the problem and to give immediate help to the populations who suffer most from hunger.

Major countries and organizations involved

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) : founded in November 1965, it is an UN executive board, working with 177 states, which aims to promote development worldwide. One of its goals is to fight for « poverty reduction » by leading micro- and macroeconomic development plans. Its recurrent reports give precious information about the general evolution of poverty.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) : one of the most important UN organization whose purpose is to « help to build a world freed from hunger ». Its action consists in helping the Developing Countries to reach self-efficiency in food production and helping the populations hit by food crisis. Furthermore, its « codex alimentarius » gives possible solutions to those countries to develop a sustainable and productive agriculture. Nowadays this organization plays a major role in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

The World bank : the goal of the World Bank is to reduce poverty by promoting liberalism and international trade. Its various aids, such as low-interests loans or direct development aid programs, are under the condition of a « structural adjustment » (privatization programs, anti-corruption plans, devaluation of currencies, etc ...). If the role played by the World Bank is often criticized by southern countries, this institution allocates most of its funds to development and is a major actor for the achievement of the first goal of the MDGs.

Africa : the African continent is still nowadays the less developed continent in the world and concentrates the world's highest rates in extreme poverty and hunger. The United Nations have therefore to directly influence the sources of the various problems in Africa : corruption, wars, "failed states", ... However, it is important to notice that Africa is in its way toward development, confirmed by every social and economical indicator. It is consequently important to accompany Africa in its positive way, which only can free this continent of poverty and hunger, in the long term.

India : Between 40 and 60% of the Indian population lives in extreme poverty (between 500 and 700 millions) and the Indian rates, rather negative, have to be compared with the, rather positive, Chinese rates. Moreover, India is a time bomb for the extreme poverty : the Indian population is growing and India is still the country which has the most important number of poor people in the world. Therefore, India should be considered with attention when discussing this issue.

Timeline of events

Date	Event
2000	Establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
2002	Beginning of the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC)
2005	World Summit: Implementing measures for meeting the MDGs
2008	Achievement of the first sub-goal of the first goal of the MDGs
2010	Summit on the MDGs: Global action plan adopted

Relevant UN treaties

- Millennium Development Declaration (A/RES/55/2)
- General Assembly Resolution, World Summit Outcome, 2005 (A/RES/60/1)
- High Level Event on the MDGs, 2008, final report

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Development aid : the development aid is given by the Developed Countries to the Developing Countries and consists in donations, loans (with low interests) and debt cancellations. It is 0,7% of the GDP in theory, but it is mostly only 0,3% in practice. The development aid had an amount of \$125 billion in 2008, most of the time in debt cancellations. If the effectiveness of the development aid is clear and helps the Developing countries to have more means to lead development policies, it is though important to notice that the development aid can have perverse effects and fragile national institutions, raising dependence and corruption. Furthermore, critics have been made, considering the fact that the essential of the development aid goes to emerging countries, particularly China, which already have means to lead an efficient development policy by themselves. The development aid has accordingly to be modified to avoid perverse effects and to help the countries the most in difficulty.

United Nations Millennium Campaign : the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) has begun in 2002 and was signed by 189 states. Its purpose is to help the countries to achieve the MDGs and to encourage the cooperation of member states to solve together common problems. It aims also to develop worldwide the awareness of the societies about the achievement of the MDGs. The biggest event organized by the UNMC in that purpose is the « International Day against Poverty » which is every October 17th.

Possible solutions

Stable food prices : The variations of the food products prices are really dangerous for poor people in developed countries. If the prices rise to high, it can bring millions of people in hunger, explaining the hunger riots of 2008. If the prices drop to low, it can bankrupt hundreds of thousands of farmers. Therefore the prices have to be stabilized to avoid such terrible effects.

Prohibition of agricultural grants: In developed countries, governments support the agricultural sector with colossal grants. Although these help farmers in these countries, they have disastrous effects in Developing Countries. Thus, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union subsidizes agricultural products which compete in Developing countries with local products, bankrupting local farmers. These grants are therefore not only an infringement to the rules of the free trade but are also one of the factor of the poverty and the hunger of millions of farmer in developing countries. Consequently they have to be considered by the United Nations.

Social funds : It has been shown that the most efficient policies against poverty and hunger have to be conduct in a local scale to be really effective. That is why the United Nations should encourage the development of local social plans which could help the most deprived people and contribute to a better redistribution of the wealth. The example of Brazil is here particularly relevant : after decades of high rates of economical growth, it had become obvious that the only economical development couldn't solve by itself the problem of poverty. For this reason, the Brazilian government has launched in 2003 the « Bolsa Familia » program. « Bolsa Familia » is a social fund to help the poorest families in the country, it aims particularly to help the children of this families. This plan not only consists in giving money to live but also give enduring means to leave the poverty, mainly by schooling for this children. The strength of « Bolsa Familia » is its local management, knowing that every municipality in Brazil has its own « Bolsa Familia ».

Microfinance : Microfinance is another local way to solve the issue of extreme poverty and hunger around the world. Established for the first time in the 1970s, the microfinance consists in little loans (often only a few hundreds of dollars and never no more than a few thousands of dollars), with low interests. Microfinance permits the development of little local projects and has enabled the disappearance of loans with usurious interests. Studies have shown that microfinance has various positives impacts of the society : real and concrete

improvements of the living conditions and development of gender equality through the use by women of microfinance for personal projects.

The notions described above are only few projects for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger around the world. What is clear is that this issue can only be solved if countries fully cooperate, accepting compromises and renouncing to some economical and political interests to achieve this project. The role of the United Nations is primordial to implement this cooperation and ensure the effectiveness of the measures taken.

Bibliography

Website of the UNDP :

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home.html>

« Goal 1 : Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger » :

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>

Indicators of the MDGs :

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm>

Appendices

The Millennium Development Program :

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>