

Strides against poverty

By Ved Nanda *The Denver Post*

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Who could disagree with the goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, empowering women, reducing child mortality, and reducing HIV/ AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria?

These are some of the goals in the spotlight as more than 140 heads of state and government gathered to review the progress of these goals at the United Nations Summit on Development. And there is broad agreement that they must.

A decade ago, world leaders had set specific targets: halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and those living on less than \$1 per day (now \$1.25); achieve universal primary education; reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate of children under 5 and by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate. The baseline for these targets was 1990.

What has been achieved thus far? World Bank and U.N. reports show considerable progress, but sizeable gaps remain, as well. Trends show that the numbers of the world's desperately poor will be cut to 17 percent from 35 percent. Similar progress has been made on the hunger front.

In Vietnam, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 has fallen by two-thirds, and in Thailand, children's mortality has fallen to one-quarter. Even in Africa there is progress. For example, Ghana has cut hunger levels by 75 percent. In Ethiopia, the number of those living below \$1.25 per day has been cut from 60 percent to 16 percent, and the percentage of children in African schools has risen from 52 percent to 74 percent since 1990.

Infant mortality, which was 12 million in 1990, dropped to 8.1 million, and maternal mortality fell from 546,000 to 358,000 since 1990 — both falling well short of the goals set. The U.N. has announced that governments and private aid organizations will be spending more than \$40 billion toward meeting the targets.

The G-8 group had committed to spend 0.7 percent of GDP on overseas development assistance, but the actual aid given is 0.31 percent. The U.S. level is only 0.2 percent.

The 2008 global economic crisis considerably slowed progress. Nevertheless, according to a U.N. report, "the world is still on track to meet the poverty-reduction target." And the world leaders at the U.N. Summit have recommitted themselves to reaching these original goals, known as the Millennium Development Goals.

Addressing the summit, President Barack Obama unveiled a new U.S. global development policy, under which he placed aid in a pivotal role as a part of the U.S. national security strategy. In his words, "Aid alone is not development. Development is helping nations to actually develop — moving from poverty to prosperity." He especially named Tanzania as a country that promotes "good governance and democracy . . . and respect for human rights." His message was that donor countries should "move beyond the old, narrow debate over how much money we are spending, and instead . . . focus on results."

Success in reaching the Millennium Development Goals depends upon poor countries' giving priority to education, medical care, and empowerment of women. As Obama said, "Progress in even the poorest countries can advance the prosperity and security of people far beyond their borders, including . . . Americans."

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