

Goals? What Goals?

by Stefania Bianchi

Europeans to Hear More About the World's Millennium Development Goals

The European Union (EU) is quickly becoming the front-runner of development aid to regions in Africa and other developing countries. However, over three-quarters of EU citizens are unaware of development efforts being made on the part of the Union to Third World countries, according to a public opinion poll released by Eurobarometer.

In light of the low awareness of the EU's development agenda and the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, the EU Humanitarian Aid and Development Commission has employed a campaign to raise the level of awareness among the EU's 450 million citizens.

"European taxpayers have the right to know how their money is being spent, how we help the developing countries, how we are fighting against poverty and infectious diseases and what we are doing to promote good governance, democracy and fundamental rights," said Louis Michel, EU developmental commissioner in Brussels.

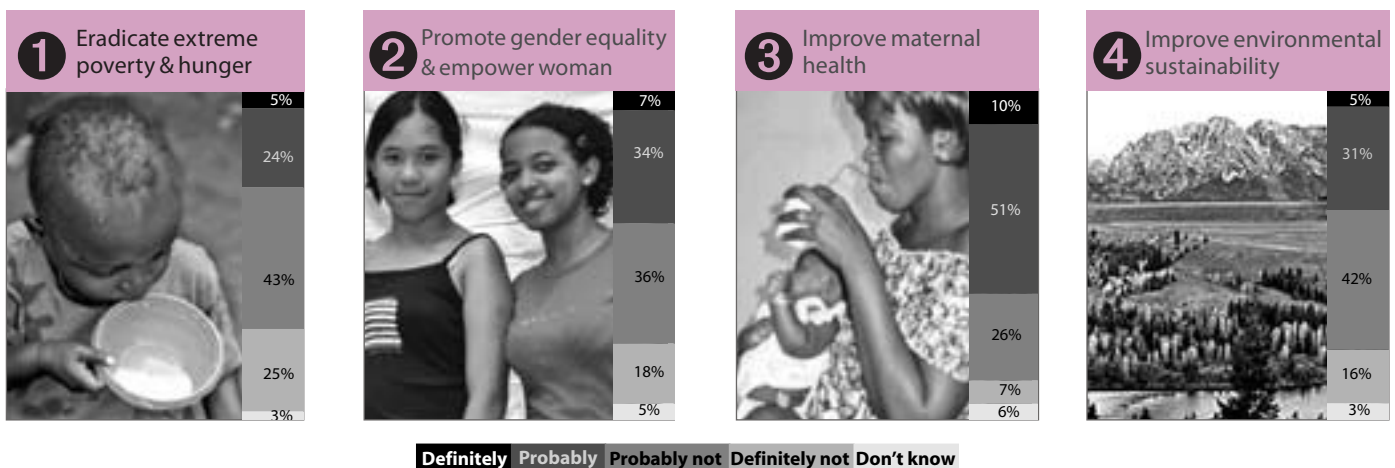
But till now that has not been the case.

According to a European Union public opinion poll, 88% of European citizens have never heard of the Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 by 189 world leaders aimed at reducing global poverty and hunger.

The eight primary objectives of the Millennium Goals, including reducing global poverty by half, is to increase the number of students receiving primary education, promote gender equality, reduce the number of child deaths by two-thirds, improve mortality rates by three quarters, combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, among others.

Each country, other than the new Member States, has agreed to contribute more than 0.7% of the gross national income by 2015 to meet the UN's target. New Member States have committed to contributing 0.33% of their GNI by the 2015 deadline.

By the year 2015, all 191 UN Member States have pledged to meet these goals. For each of the eight goals, respondents were asked how likely they thought the goal would be achieved by 2015.



The results showed that overall, Europeans believed that Europe could play a pivotal role in providing aid development, but that they were less optimistic that the Millennium Goals would be met by 2015, after being briefed on what the goals were by their interviewers.

In reducing extreme poverty and hunger, only 29% of Europeans felt that the EU would be successful in closing the gap in the number of impoverished people in the world. Only 5% felt absolutely confident that those goals would be met.

Europeans are less optimistic that the Millennium Goals will be met by 2015.

Although citizens were less than optimistic about reducing poverty, two in five citizens believed that universal primary education and promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women would be achieved. Only 7% said the EU would definitely achieve those goals.

In terms of reducing the number of women dying as a result of childbirth, child deaths and HIV/AIDS, Europeans were slightly more confident that these goals would be achieved, 61% said the number of women who die as a result of child birth would be reduced by three quarters, 54% said that the child mortality rate would be reduced by two-thirds and only 35% said that HIV/AIDS would “probably” be combatted by 2015.

Overall, results of the poll showed that 59% of EU citizens believed that by 2015 development aid to countries committed to reducing poverty would increase, another 41% said they were confident that by 2015 developing countries would have a fairer access to markets and a similar number believed that debt would be cancelled by the target date.

According to the Eurobarometer, respondents were generally more positive about achievement of the Millennium Goals when they believed that their government aids developing countries.

Since 1998, there has been an upturn over the importance of development aid among Europeans. On average, 62% of EU citizens believe that their national governments are providing developmental aid, while 59% believe that the EU is doing the same.

That is perhaps why the EU development commissioner, Louis Michel, has made it a priority to encourage Member States to increase their aid and re-evaluate their individual development policies.

Speaking in Prague, in his first visit to the new EU member state, Michel called on the Czech Republic and other new Member States to be more pro-active in achieving the Millennium Goals.

“Embracing an active cooperation policy upgrades the international profile of a country, opens new opportunities and helps to educate young generations in the respect of fundamental rights, solidarity and universalism,” he said.

The European Union is one of the largest donors of development aid. The EU and its Member States spend more than \$39 billion (30 billion euros) a year in public aid to developing countries. The EU has committed itself to raising the aid total to \$51 billion (39 billion euros) by 2006.

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For more information on Eurobarometer’s report, “Attitudes towards Development Aid,” see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm

