

# ENDING INEQUALITIES

– a cornerstone of the post-2015 development agenda

JMP



World Health Organization

unicef



Photo: WSSCC

## Moving on from the Millennium Development Goals

The MDGs were inspirational and have helped us achieve great things. But they had a major blind spot: they didn't address the need to reduce, and eventually eliminate inequalities. With their emphasis on global goals and targets they encouraged governments and development agencies to pursue "success stories" or "low hanging fruit", because that seemed to be the best way to achieve the targets and indicate progress.

As a result, the most disadvantaged groups missed out. In some cases the inequalities became even greater. Take access to safe drinking water and sanitation as an example. Substantial disparities exist, between rich and poor, between and within countries, and between those living in rural areas and those in formal urban settings. Over the past two decades, since the MDGs were established, these differences have become even greater, and the individuals missing out are often women, the elderly, or people with disabilities.

## Why is eliminating inequalities so important?

Making sure that all people have equal access to food, health, and education is not just a moral imperative – these are human rights. People have a legal right to demand them, and duty bearers must deliver.

Eliminating inequalities makes good economic and practical sense. Inequalities are a key cause

of conflict, hunger, insecurity and violence. They hamper economic growth and poverty reduction efforts and create polarized societies.

Experience from past decades has shown that equality is not an automatic outcome of conventional development practice. Benefits delivered to the better-off do not naturally "trickle down" to the most marginalized.

## How can the elimination of inequalities be incorporated into the post-2015 agenda?

Goals, targets and indicators must be framed in a way that explicitly focuses on the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups and individuals. Inequalities between these groups must be measured, and "success" must reflect the progress made in gradually eliminating the gaps.

Monitoring must go beyond income inequality. It must capture issues other than economic factors that can block people from access, including discriminatory laws, cumbersome administrative procedures, lack of access to information, social mores, prejudices and practices and cultural taboos.

We need to compare progress in reducing inequalities between a range of groups: poor and rich, women and men, rural and urban, those in informal and formal settlements. Essentially, between any disadvantaged group and the general population – and countries and populations themselves should identify what "disadvantaged" means for them through a broad, inclusive process.

*“The post-2015 development agenda must improve on the MDGs. The elimination of inequalities must be a cornerstone of the new framework. There should be a stand-alone goal that commits States to this ”*

Catarina de Albuquerque  
UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

“A world where some people get richer, and stronger, and safer, while others don’t is not the sort of world we want for our children. The post-2015 development goals are a chance for us to get this right. We must put the elimination of inequalities at the heart of our debate and we must sign up to measuring progress ”

Catarina de Albuquerque  
UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

This model, developed for WASH, can equally be applied to other global goals and targets – such as child and maternal health, access to primary school, improved nutrition.

Further, we need to pay attention to both universality – access for everyone – and the elimination of inequalities. While universality addresses the needs of all people, even the hardest to reach, it does not, by itself, guarantee equal access and it does not prioritize the disadvantaged. Setting a target for universal access by a certain date would continue to focus attention on aggregate outcomes, without setting incentives to reduce inequalities. Emphasizing equality underscores both the need to eliminate discrimination and to adopt special measures to address the needs of those who are currently unserved.

### Can we really measure reductions in inequality?

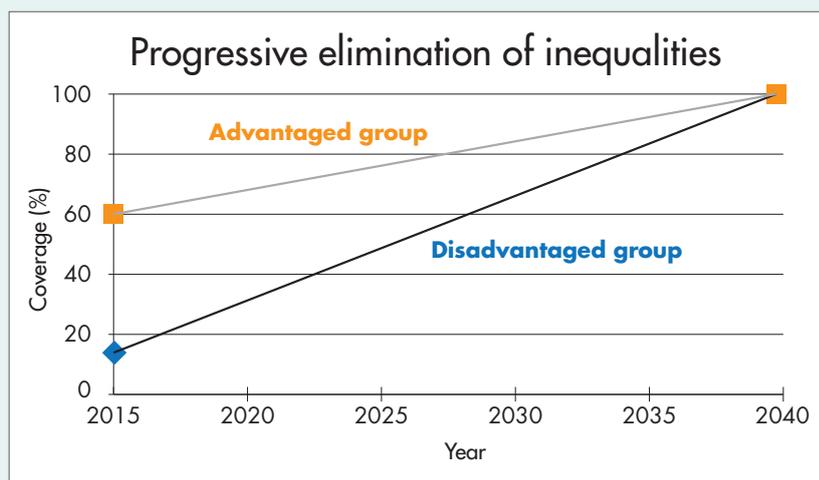
Yes! In the past, a reluctance to set targets that address the reduction in inequality may have

been linked to a concern that it was too difficult, or impossible, to measure progress. This is no longer the case.

Many proposals have been made about how to measure the reduction, and eventual elimination, of inequality. Again, the issue of water, sanitation and hygiene – WASH – provides a good example.

Over the last two years, extensive consultations have been conducted among WASH experts and specialists in monitoring and human rights. The consultation was led by the WHO – UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for water supply and sanitation (JMP). This technical consultation yielded detailed proposals for targets and indicators for WASH that are considered ambitious, but achievable. The progressive elimination in inequalities in access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities is measurable – it can be assessed in the following way (see box below):

### Proposal for measuring the elimination of inequalities



Data will be disaggregated by four population groups: rich and poor; urban and rural; slums and formal urban settlements; disadvantaged groups and the general population.

1. Determine the necessary rate of progress for both worst-off and better-off groups in order to meet each target.
2. Compare the percentage of the worst-off population that has access to the relevant service (e.g. basic sanitation) with the percentage of the better-off population, to establish the disparity.
3. If the progress of both the worst-off and better-off groups follows or exceeds the set rate of progress, and if the disparity between the two population groups narrows accordingly, the country is considered “on-track”.
4. In addition, a “traffic lights” approach will allow overall assessment of the progressive reduction of inequalities. So, green means “on-track”, yellow shows that there is some progress, but that it is insufficient, and red means “off-track”.