Millennium development goals need more emphasis on human rights

The MDGs are in danger of diverting attention from the mechanisms that produce underdevelopment.
That framework should be designed through a participatory process involving civil society. It should define which actions ought to be taken, by whom, within what timeframe, and with what resources. The intended beneficiaries of these actions should be defined as rights holders.

Accountability mechanisms should be established, allowing victims to hold governments responsible for their failure to take action. This removes the stigma of charity, and it is empowering for victims. Instead of being helped because they have unsatisfied needs, they are granted remedies because their rights are being violated.

The framework also should include a non-discrimination requirement, ensuring that we focus our attention on the most vulnerable groups – not just the well-connected, the literate, and the favorites of the regime, and not just groups for which quick wins can be achieved.

Because participation should be ensured in the process, the people whom we seek to support will co-design and co-improve the systems that are meant to serve them. They become actors rather than passive recipients of aid, and aid is more effective as a result.

All democratic revolutions begin with human rights. The MDG summit is missing an opportunity to begin this much-needed revolution in our understanding of economic development as well.

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