



How Vehicles Are Driving Global Development

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE MDGs

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AS WE REFLECT back on the last decade where international development has focused itself around the achievement of what were designed to be comprehensive, far reaching, yet specific development goals as embodied in the MDGs, much has changed in the global economy that impacts these goals and the ability of the international community to achieve them. In addition, the 10 years we have had working on the MDGs have helped to identify potential gaps in the 8 points that, while the goals are as valid today as when first drafted, identify other areas that should have been addressed that would have positively supported the ability of nations to be successful. This is particularly true when it comes to the means by which organisations achieve the MDGs. While partnerships are reflected in MDG 8, nowhere else are the operational issues or mechanisms to achieve the MDGs addressed. This is particularly important when it comes to transport in international development. Transport, in this context defined as cars, trucks, motorcycles and other wheeled vehicles, has a marked impact on the MDGs.

Transport is arguably the single most significant tool utilised by humanitarian agencies, governments and businesses to move the people, goods, and resources that drive both the global economy and international development. Goods cannot reach end users without some kind of wheeled transport, as humanitarian agencies are unable to reach the communities most in need without using some kind of vehicles to move staff and resources there. In this first instance then vehicles are a tool to achieve the MDGs.

Much is also said for the need for more efficient and effective humanitarian activity. Organisations are continuously asked to improve their use of resources, and streamline their operations to better deliver larger quantities of aid on increasingly smaller funds. For many agencies, the single largest line item on budgets can be attributed to vehicle acquisition and operations. This means that vehicles play a significant role in the resources available for organisations to achieve the MDGs.

With so many vehicles being operated in low and middle income countries as part of industry, government and humanitarian



activities to achieve the MDGs, on road infrastructure that is often subpar, safety becomes an ever present concern. Road traffic accidents continue to kill more than 1 million people each year, and if unchecked, they are expected to become the 3rd leading contributor to the global problem of disease and injury by 2020. Most of these deaths are in low and middle income countries, where entire extended family networks are impacted by the loss of primary bread winners through preventable accidents. Transport then becomes a contributor to increased poverty as individuals already in need of development support are further plunged into economic hardship through the significant public health risk that unsafe transport plays.

The environmental impact of transport is another significant challenge posed by vehicles, particularly in low and middle income countries which leads them to again play upon the ability of the MDGs to be achieved. WHO has stated that only 15% of the largest cities in low and middle income countries have what is considered acceptable air quality, while transport has been said to cause more than 25% of the total energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions around the world that lead to this poor air quality. Based on these statistics alone, transport poses a clear risk to the environment, yet is not addressed as part of environmental umbrella of MDG 7.

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

A threat to the environment and safety that affects global health, impacting organisations ability to deliver aid to the largest group of beneficiaries, a huge impact on bottom lines increasing the operational costs of development organisations which translates into less directed to beneficiaries, and yet transport is never mentioned within the framework of the MDGs. If MDG1 (end poverty and hunger) is to be achieved, more sustainable industry is necessary in low and middle income countries. This increased industry requires a larger number of vehicles to fuel it, while the larger number of vehicles means that already poor safety and environmental issues linked to them will be multiplied by their increased volume. Poor safety and negative environmental impacts means MDGs 4, 5 and 7 that deal with health and the environment will be challenged. At the same time, families already struggling financially will have increased problems as more deaths of primary income earners occur due to the health implications of accidents and environmental concerns. So then the global problems worsen, aid agencies and governments need to do more, to do more they require more vehicles, and more money then gets directed to operational costs instead of directly to those in need.

The MDGs lay out a plan, a set of goals, but they did not address the means by which to achieve them. This can only be described as a missed opportunity.

FILLING THE GAP

As we look towards the next 5 years, and the 2015 deadline to achieve the 8 MDGs, the international community has an opportunity to, with the advantage of hindsight, set additional parameters to ensure we don't reach the end and find ourselves

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facing unexpected shortcomings. We already face a new global economy, increased urbanisation that affects the needs of low and middle income populations, growing food crises and security issues, new global health pandemics, growing social and economic gaps, demographic shifts, and many more new challenges that will affect our ability to deliver the MDG goals as originally laid out. While revising the MDGs as such is unlikely, one means by which we can fill the gaps we have recognised within them is asking the donor community

which stands behind business, governments and humanitarian agencies and guides and funds development activities, to require transport issues be addressed within their grant structures.

With the support of the donor community, organisations' managers would need to create safety programmes, train staff on appropriate vehicle safety and take responsibility for road safety; put mechanisms in place to ensure that the vehicles they are utilising leave the least possible environmental traces behind; that the way in which vehicles are purchased and used within project structures is efficient and low cost – perhaps encouraging pooling or leasing of an organisations vehicle assets instead of purchasing per project, thereby resetting the balance and again making transport an enabler and not detractor of development goals. Donors can also support those organisations that exist that help with these changes, creating a multiplier effect of supporting a single organisation that then goes out to assist other organisations improve transport operations. Without donor recognition of transports impact, and willingness to address their role within transport issues and how they impact the MDGs, it will be very difficult for the necessary changes to take place. But as donors are most concerned with ensuring the maximum portion of their investments reach the beneficiaries there is a natural catalyst for their uptake of this issue.

The MDGs set the international community on a path towards righting the most significant social, economic and health imbalances across the globe. Nowhere within their focus, however, are the mechanisms that enable those goals to be achieved outside of partnerships, thereby creating a significant gap. If these mechanisms, like transport, were addressed, they would have encouraged organisations operating in the international arena to improve their efficiency and ensure the means to reach the end goals become equally important for the role they play underpinning and impacting all 8 goals as they are laid out today. Achieving any of the MDGS inefficiently, or by creating peripheral negative impacts on economies, communities, the environment and individuals is equal to negating the progress towards the goals overall. By recognising this, and with the help of the donor community to catalyse new change, we can progress towards the 2015 deadline, however, assured that we have maximised our ability to achieve the MDGs. ●

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