BAMTARÉ in 2015
or the true story of the Millennium Development Goals in a small town somewhere in Africa
Is poverty a fatality?

Poor "as a church mouse" is a well-known expression, reminding us that poverty has a very long history. Closer to us, our grand-parents can tell stories about collecting money for missionaries, or evoke the terrible conditions of the working class, in the beginning of the last century, "sacrificed" in order to build our prosperity...

Poverty remains, since 1940 (Harry Truman, US president, on the state of the world) the undefeated public enemy of all international institutions. Poverty has changed shape, target and means of actions, but, ceaselessly, like a weapon of mass destruction striking blindly, it spreads devastation again and again

At the same time, it is a paradox. Most specialists say that we now have at our disposal the wealth, the tools and the technology needed to ban it swiftly for ever. Poverty is, largely, a man-made invention, and it’s up to us (Humanity) to relegate it to the Museum of barbarism. Humanity can achieve this goal.

There are too many poor on earth. It is estimated that one person out of six around the world lives nowadays in extreme poverty. Translated in plain words, this means that, worldwide, one person out of six lives with less than 1 dollar a day (about 84 eurocents). In Belgium, GDP per capita is 77.6 dollars a day (about 65.2 euros).

Poverty is also the looking glass of a world full of inequalities. Everywhere, you’ll find misery and opulence side by side. The world is in a sorry state and it’s deeply unfair. It’s worth thinking about. Poverty is not a fatality. It’s something we should think about and... act upon. The United Nations has done that in 2000, launching a global program aiming to reduce poverty drastically worldwide.

Belgium (along with this folder) wishes to contribute to this ambitious goal. It will be a success, naturally. How so? That’s what we’re going to see now, by examining how things are going in Bamtaré, a small town in Africa.
If you wish to see how life is going on in Bamtaré, you can, for starters, collect data about the country, look up good folders and maybe also peruse the dictionary.

Bamtaré is in Africa and that's where we'll start. Not long ago, Africa was often called the “black continent”. That will make it easier for us. Instead of drawing a map full of rivers, streams, mountains, cities and roads, we’ll paint it, quite simply, in black. Rivers and forests look nice and colourful on a map, of course, but they tend to muddle the overall picture. So, to begin with, let’s make Africa black. What you’ll get, is something like this...

Bamtaré is there somewhere, on the left. That won't help you very much to find it but, on the other hand, it's a very practical location. You see, Bamtaré actually doesn’t exist. Bamtaré represents a “standard” town, made up, so to say, from existing African towns.

In the “Poular” language (one of the major tongues spoken in West Africa) Bamtaré means “development”. Bamtaré is the development town.

In 2015, there are some 15,000 inhabitants in Bamtaré, a town whose shape looks, seen from above, like a cross. There’s an explanation to that. A long time ago, Bamtaré was but two big roads crossing each other, an intersection, a crossroad. The traders and the peasants, travelling there, used this meeting place to talk with each other and to trade. A little later, houses sprung up from the ground and started to spread. That's how Bamtaré came to be. These days, it's a small city, looking a bit like Mons or Brugge (they were born much the same way).

There are two advantages to a black map. First, you don't have to locate things with precision. Second, it describes pretty accurately the history of Africa. Had we used a white map, we would have had a problem because of the many borders. The map would then look like some kind of bizarre grid. Something like this...

Such representations can be misleading. You might think that all those borders have been drawn by the people of Africa. Not so. They were drawn during the colonisation of Africa. That happened a long time ago, of course, but it's always useful to keep in mind things that happened long before us, because this grid-like map exerts great bearing on present-day development in Africa. Take languages, for instance. French, English and Portuguese are still very much in use in Africa because of its history, when it was colonised by France, Britain, Portugal and even Belgium.
This situation has good sides and bad sides for the development of Africa. It can be a disadvantage because children must learn at least two languages if they want to “succeed” in life. In Bamtaré, for instance, the first language is Poular followed by French. But it’s also an advantage because, while learning two languages, children get to be more open-minded towards the outside world.

For people dealing with education in Africa, it can sometimes be hard to find the “right” solution. During the independence era, many countries chose to support the teaching of the nationals dialects. A few years later, though, many countries decided to revert to the colonial language, while others remained hesitant and, instead, chose to reintroduce the national language on an experimental basis in primary school. When you come to think about it, it’s only natural. The language spoken in the family, after all, is easier for the pupils and, in the classroom, it gives them the impression of being "at home".

The escape-road from poverty, leads through the school-door
an empty stomach. And basic needs depend on employment and education. Work and education are intricately linked. Citizens of developed countries, like Belgium, have learned how to become wealthy by going to school. And it is no coincidence that social progress, here, has its roots, in the beginning of the industrialisation, in the work done by the printers' unions, which at the time represented the best educated workers.

The central school of Bamtaré (since 2005, one of many others) looks a bit like our illustration.

When visiting the school in 2015, one can see it has changed a lot. It remains, of course, a ground-floor brick building encompassing a football field, a playground and small market place where the children sometimes buy snacks. The outward appearance hasn't changed. But everything else, yes. Pupils don't have to search for faggots in order to compensate the very small salary paid to the teacher. The pupils' parents are no longer asked to help with the furniture of the school. And meals are now free. The free meals idea is important. Very poor families that didn't send their children to school before, now do so.

Thanks to international solidarity, of which the United Nations program and the Belgian development assistance are a part, the local authorities of Bamtaré have reached their goal: universal primary education for all.

This is a gigantic achievement. One figure will suffice to prove it. In the education literature, you will come across the term “school expectancy”. It's used to measure the average number of years spent in school by children of a given country.

In the Bamtaré region, in 2005, “school expectancy” was about 6 years. That may be viewed as a very good result, since it corresponds to the primary school cycle. But you have to remember that this is only the average result, and that it includes the children that went to high-school and, some of them, to university. And of course also all those that "dropped out" early. In other words, an average of six years does not mean, by a long shot, that most children in Bamtaré finished their primary school in 2005. That year, in Belgium, for instance, “school expectancy” was 16 years! An enormous gap.

Today, in 2015, the children of Bamtaré all finish primary school. Free meals were an important incentive, but not the only one.

Little by little, other measures have contributed to fill the class room. Take for instance the lending of bicycle to the pupils. In old times (2005), they had to walk by foot a long distance, often many kilometres.

Another important factor here were the alphabetisation drives directed to adults. In the past, many children, especially girls, left school because their parents could neither read nor write. Naturally, these parents were thinking that education is useless and that it's more profitable to keep the children at home, to help with all the domestic chores. This was especially the case with girls, who had to give a hand in the household, fetch water at the well and look after the very young. All those things now belong to the past. Parents now understand that school is good for children (they know, too, that it would have been nice for themselves to learn so many things). Another important factor is the develop-
ment of cooperatives. Among others things, this development has allowed women to work less hard at home. The measures aiming to boost the quality of education were of course also decisive. Thanks to the better wages (and the political will of local authorities and international solidarity), the social standing of teachers has improved a lot. For schoolboys and schoolgirls (and their parents), this has opened up new vistas. “When I grow up, I want to become a teacher” is a remark often heard in Bamtaré.

In the central school of Bamtaré writing cases are still in use but, by the third year, it’s replaced by ink and quill. There’s no reason to change good tools, especially when they are ecological and helpful to master a nice handwriting. You don’t fight poverty with gadgets. Along these lines, something new has happened in 2015, though: the pupils now get to loan (no charges) their school books. And, by the sixth year, they learn to use a small portable computer (open source software, crank-operated recharge of batteries and so on, the result of a global private-public partnership) given later to all pupils entering secondary school. Most do, in Bamtaré.

To go to the health centre - our next stop - is easy. You don’t have to leave the school building. It’s right there, at the main entrance...

**Parallel to the school path, overcoming poverty must also take the road to health education**

The health centre is run by Mouna. She’s a refugee. In 2015, sad to say, there are still many exiled and stateless persons in the world. She’s had the chance to train as a nurse and, then, improve her medical knowledge, enough so to become a “barefoot doctor”.

That’s their nickname in the South, they’ve learned their job by practicing it, they are close to the people and they are always available. Everyone in Bamtaré likes Mona, and the same goes for Anneke and François, her assistants. They are easily recognisable with their white uniforms, signalling that their first task is to reassure people and remind them that, mostly, there is a solution for every problem. With their white uniforms, they look like "peace soldiers".

As we’ve already said, Mouna works at the health centre and the health centre is located at the entrance of the school : the first room on the left. The windows face the street and you can’t miss them, with all the children’s drawings and the symbols of the red cross and of the red crescent.

It’s not a coincidence that the health centre has been set up in the school. Education and health are intimately linked. To feel good in the mind, you have to feel good, also, in the body. We might add that the very idea of having the “house of learning” and the “house of health” at the same place has a very positive effect.
Parents get acquainted with the health centre, instead of being intimidated, and people going there discover that education is neither boring nor "stupid". The results are striking. Hardly no one catches diseases like enteritis in Bamtaré (an illness that was very common in Europe at the beginning of the industrialisation: you actually "catch" it when you starve...). You can die of starvation and you can die of lack of hygiene, when there's no clean drinking water for example. Starvation, in Bamtaré, has been almost totally eradicated thanks to employment and also to the development of the water points, enabling the inhabitants to get clean “blue gold”. The health centre has played a major role in communicating the essential rules concerning hygiene.

Hygiene is of course a very important factor. Bamtaré has at its disposal a hospital built with the help of the Belgian cooperation, meeting the needs of the population.

Around 2000, everyone knew the terrible figure: every 3 seconds, somewhere in the world, a child dies. The situation wasn’t better for the mothers. At that time, some 8 million women were suffering each year during their pregnancy or childbirth from difficult complications threatening seriously their health.

The figures are frightening, they are also scandalous. First because most international institutions agree on the fact that child mortality is a major indicator of inequality regarding survival. And secondly, because everyone already knew by then how to fight this terrible curse.

The same thing could be said about AIDS. In Bamtaré, the number of persons contaminated is on the decrease, and this is mainly due to the education work done by the little team at the health centre and its network of volunteers. That is not the whole picture. AIDS eradication was also a consequence of economic development, something that, among others, enabled young girls not to “chose” prostitution: the traditional road to survival, formerly, for many of them.

At that time, newspapers were full of stories about very young and poor women “working” along the highway or “borrowed” to a wealthier uncle to be his servant and sexual slave. Around 2005, 70 million people were dying annually of AIDS. 70% of them were living on the African continent. AIDS was the main cause of the decrease of the life expectancy.

Progress in health, in Bamtaré, has mainly been the result of simple inexpensive actions, like “oral rehydration” or impregnated mosquito nets. In other words, one could say that most results come from education. In the health centre, you'll notice a big board with the famous saying of Pasteur: “germs are not dangerous, it’s their environment that count”.

The “school of health” is a “school of life”.

We won’t leave the school straightaway. The revolution in Bamtaré consists not only of a health centre. If you turn around, a few steps to the right, you’ll see the bookshop. Education and health are vital, and so is culture.
When you can read and can find the books that go with this little “miracle”, you’re already a long way out of poverty

The bookshop that has been set up in the school of Bamtaré is not an ordinary one. It is run by Mamadou Aliou, and neither is he ordinary. He is an Agronomy graduate and, for a while, he worked as taxi driver in Brussels, before deciding to return home in order to work for his fellow countrymen. His life is rather “acrobatic”. At dawn, he sells his family’s farm products at the market. During the day, he’s at the bookshop. And in the evening, he often travels around the nearby farms to give advice and a helping hand.

The bookshop is “special” for many other reasons. For one thing, there’s the way people talk about it. Sometimes, they say: “I’ll go to school to get a book”. At other times, they say: “I’m going to the bookshop to talk with Mouna” or “After school, I won’t come back directly, Mum, because I will read some books”. It’s a strange bookshop and, in a way, it’s a funny one. You can find books there, but also reviews and newspapers. You can either buy or lend them. Judging from all the activities going on in the bookshop, you could even call it an arts centre.

There is a corner, in the bookshop, where you can surf on the web, free of course. There is also a corner with a copier for persons wishing to photocopy items from newspapers or - why not? - tales of everyday life. There is even a meeting place, used in the evening by the sewing club. The club is lead by Anneke and Mouna, and frequented mainly, but not only, by women. They gather to sew and to talk. For instance about problematic parents that still won’t let their daughters study, work or “find their own way in life”. There is also a place where you can have a cup of coffee or tea, and have a chat about politics, football or the last harvest. You can do many different things in this bookshop, apart from finding a book, of course. A “funny” bookshop and library all in one, indeed.

But when you come to think about it, it’s only natural. If so many things happen there, it’s because very many people have joined forces to “set it up”. The school was crucial in this process. The teachers, you see, had this notion that the bookshop could also serve as a library and multimedia centre. A network of the “north-south” publishers financed the electrical equipment.
if you want to sell books, people must be able to see them, preferably in well illuminated rooms. Backed by local authorities, the community associations of Bamtaré also played a part and, now, they have at their disposal a lecture and meeting room, and some displays for their posters and bulletins. If you wish to be a bit more "scientific" about it, you could say that the bookshop is a “PPP” (a Private Public Partnership). Ah yes, one last word about Mamadou Aliou. The bookshop, being located where it is, has made his life much easier. It’s just in front of the market place. All he has to do, is cross the main street. Let's do that...

**The main street out of poverty leads right to the market place and, from there, to economic development**

In the Third World, when people hear of human rights and other such goals, the reaction is often: “That's all very nice but, when you are starving, you think a lot more about food.” International institutions have very fine-tuned instruments to measure accurately the levels of welfare reached by different countries around the world. Parameters include school life expectancy, life expectancy, gender equality and average income. When you look at those figures, it's no coincidence that the countries with highest scores are also those that show top economic
performance. It is, in other words, much better to live in a rich country, on all counts: education, health, living standards and so on.

This is also the reason why the market place in Bamtaré is of such big importance. It's a showcase of economic development, it's the clearest sign that Bamtaré doesn't belong to the world of poverty any longer.

The market place, in African towns, is the window showing the economic life. Here's where you can buy and sell products. Here is where farmers, traders and craftsmen meet, all contributing to the prosperity of the community.

The things that will first strike you when you enter the market place in Bamtaré, is the quality of the equipment. It's clean, modern and built with local materials and know-how.

Then you will most certainly be surprised by the variety of the products on sale. This is due to the rapid expansion of the farming cooperatives that, thanks to international cooperation, have been managed to integrate new technology. Solar energy, wind energy, state of the art silos, composting systems, rational use of the soils, preventive medicine, recycling and, last but not least, light mechanisation of production in order to have a surplus for exports. The network of cooperatives of Bamtaré has not been created by magic in just eight days.

NGOs (non governmental organisations) have been most important and local organisations too. In a sense, the cooperatives and the schools are the best things that have happened to Bamtaré.

The network of schools is the gateway to become a teacher for many inhabitants. Same thing with the cooperatives: a chance to get a decent job.

The development of the cooperatives is largely due to its specialisation in the fair trade sector. The land does not only feed the people of Bamtaré. It has become a factory blossoming with jobs and opportunities to get a good salary close to home with possibilities of further training. Farm products need to be transported, transformed, packaged, stored, and finally sold. Thanks to all those secondary activities, Bamtaré has become a town “on the move”.

It's something you notice right away. At the market place, one of the teachers is sitting on an empty orange crate with the mechanic (two streets further down you'll find the bicycle repair workshop). At the moment, he's talking about the next cultural meeting that Mamadou Aliou is preparing. The subject chosen for the debate is: Why do so many girls chose the profession of bus driver?

The teacher feels a bit uneasy about this issue. Not so, with the mechanic: a lot of girls in Europe drive trucks, he says, adding that girls are more studious and ambitious than boys. The mechanic already knows what he is going to say during the evening debate. He's going to table the following proposal: that Bamtaré should send an “explorer” (with a degree in anthropology) to Europe in order to check how they’ve solved the problem there.

At the market place, in 2015, people in Bamtaré are talking about unimportant and trivial matters. Of course, everyone knows the importance of eradicating diseases, ignorance and inequalities.

But that has been done already, to a very large extent.

Nowadays hardly no one is fretting about future troubles.
How Bamtaré became the symbol of the United Nations Program, of international solidarity and of the cooperation between the people of the world and from Belgium, of course...

We are about to leave Bamtaré, now. There's one thing to add, though.

It's about the surroundings of Bamtaré. What surrounds Bamtaré is the world. Nobody lives in isolation. Something happening in Washington will have an impact on what happens in, say, Beijing, Nairobi, Buenos Aires, Mons, Brugge or Bamtaré.

One can of course question the choice of Bamtaré. What's so special there? Why not, instead, focus on our own city. In Mons, probably, many people would prefer to learn more about how life goes on in Mons. Same thing with the people of Brugge. But then again, Bamtaré is special. In 2015, the people there have hit the number one target, also known as the “Millennium Development Goals”

Some people, of course, will say: what's that? “Millennium Development Goals”, you say? Never heard of it!

A few words about it, then. The Millennium Development Goals – MDGs, for short – are probably the most unbelievable project ever conceived by humanity. It aims at fighting poverty everywhere in the world, no less. That's what makes Bamtaré so special. There, the MDGs have been achieved.

Humanity, of course, is a big word. It would be more correct to say: the United Nations (UN), an organisation which has come closest to establish a world parliament with a seat for every nation, however small. It's the UN that have launched, in 2000, the MDG project with its eight goals to be achieved by the year 2015.

Bamtaré has not achieved the MDGs all alone. Bamtaré is not isolated from the rest of the world. The progress made there is largely due, also, to the UN and its member countries. Belgium, for instance...
The Millennium Development Goal didn't originate in FantasyLand...

The program decided upon by the UN in 2000 must normally be completed in fifteen years. Its main purpose, in a nutshell, is to change the world in a more livable place for all.

To understand this, you have to go back to the Second World War. When it was finished, most people shared the same feeling: never again. That hope was instrumental in the creation of the United Nations, in 1946: an organisation for peace and good relationship between nations. It is also during this time that countries of the third world began to obtain their independence. Same feeling here: no nation should impose its will on another nation or take possession of it – never again!

This led people in major international organisations to be aware (and disturbed) by the huge inequalities existing between nations. That gave birth to the idea that poor countries are in fact suffering from underdevelopment.

These strands of thinking brought about new agencies to deal with this. One can mention, here, the UNDP (United Nations Development Program, 1965) or the "Group of 77" (all the poor countries) which, in 1974, promoted the notion of a New International Economic Order.

For many reasons, all those initiatives failed. Poor countries remained poor and, for some of them, poorer than before. Inequalities between nations have not decreased. Many countries have plunged into deep misery.

This is the background of the Millennium Development Goals. It's not the first program to fight poverty, naturally. There's one big difference, though. MDGs try to solve things at grassroots level in a pragmatic way. That wasn't probably a bad idea. In Bamtaré, it worked.

But, before taking a closer look at those eight millennium goals, let's take a glance at the "conversion table". It shows how the places we've visited in Bamtaré connect with the MDGs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The places</th>
<th>Achieved in 2015</th>
<th>MDG</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Universal primary schooling</td>
<td>N°2</td>
<td>Free school meals&lt;br&gt;Free schooling&lt;br&gt;Bikes made available&lt;br&gt;Teachers' standard raised</td>
<td>Parent illiteracy&lt;br&gt;Schools too far from home&lt;br&gt;School costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Gender equality and empowerment of women</td>
<td>N°3</td>
<td>Teachers' standard raised&lt;br&gt;Increased household savings</td>
<td>Prejudice&lt;br&gt;Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health centre</td>
<td>Reduction of child mortality</td>
<td>N°4</td>
<td>Hygiene&lt;br&gt;Skilled personnel&lt;br&gt;Vaccination&lt;br&gt;Mosquito nets</td>
<td>Facteurs culturels&lt;br&gt;Coût des soins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health centre</td>
<td>Improvement of maternal health</td>
<td>N°5</td>
<td>Hygiene&lt;br&gt;Infrastructure</td>
<td>Cultural factors&lt;br&gt;Cost of healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health centre</td>
<td>Recession of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</td>
<td>N°6</td>
<td>Hygiene&lt;br&gt;Mosquito nets</td>
<td>Cultural factors&lt;br&gt;Cost of healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market place and cooperatives</td>
<td>Sustainable development</td>
<td>N°1+7</td>
<td>Access to drinking water&lt;br&gt;Elimination of slums&lt;br&gt;Parsimonious management of natural resources</td>
<td>Soil erosion&lt;br&gt;Insufficient rainfall&lt;br&gt;Deforestation&lt;br&gt;Parcelling of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshop, Market place and cooperatives</td>
<td>Partnership for development</td>
<td>N°2+8</td>
<td>Free access culture&lt;br&gt;Jobs created for the youth&lt;br&gt;Access to essential medication&lt;br&gt;Significant debt reduction&lt;br&gt;Openings for trade</td>
<td>Ignorance and prejudice&lt;br&gt;Poverty&lt;br&gt;Technical knowledge not shared&lt;br&gt;Indebtedness&lt;br&gt;Taxation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By 2015, Bamtaré has gone largely further than this objective. Nobody lives in deep poverty any more. Ideally, this should be the case everywhere in the world. The Millennium Goal aims only, more modestly, to go halfway.

Modestly? That’s open to debate. As it is, today, almost one billion people live with less than one dollar a day worldwide (that’s approximately 84 eurocents), which is the measure generally accepted to define deep poverty.

Fighting poverty, in poor countries, generally means one thing: support agriculture. It’s the one sector that feeds most people in the South, brings revenues to the State and guarantees “food security”. That’s an essential notion. It means that a country must be able to guarantee, itself, without help from others, its own population’s basic needs. Among those, to eat is of course number one. The agriculture, needless to say, is central to MDG 1.

There are many other ways to define deep poverty:

- Hunger kills one human being every 3 seconds.
- More that one child in four (150 million in all) in the South are underweight – in plain English: weakened by lack of food.
- More than 800 million people go every night to sleep feeling hungry, one third of them are children.

In 2004, Belgium allocated 6% of its contribution* to goal 1 of Millennium Program. It’s more than that in a sense, actually, because all MDGs aim to eradicate poverty.

Supporting agriculture implies that you support farmers. There’s a good example from India. Some 8,000 poor lowest-caste women in the state of Bangalore got together to farm the land using traditional systems of planting various crops simultaneously in order to enhance their
natural pest-resistance qualities. In ten years time, the yields increased by 50 to 300% and this small community has managed to become self-reliant.

The Bukavu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo tells another story. There, with the help of a Belgian NGO, it’s "micro-credits" that have fostered wonders. All by themselves, some 380 women have set up nine soap production units, four knitting projects, thirteen laundries and thirty-two chicken farms. Self-reliance is no text-book invention but, at the grassroot level, a way to make your living every day and be proud of it.

This MDG has been especially dear to the people of Bamtaré. It's only natural. Emancipation, and thus education, is the starting point of all endeavours to fight poverty.

It's no small matter. The overall picture is, today:
- 115 million children do not get basic education
- one child out of two does not, in sub-Saharan Africa, complete primary education
- most of these are girls.

When you build a school, you change its social environment completely. A UNICEF project, in Sierra Leone, made sure to involve the whole community. It recruited local unskilled labour, made use of locally sourced building materials and consulted the population on design and even issues such as time-tables.
Belgium supports many similar projects. In Mali, for instance, a technical advisor is liaising with local authorities and the population.

Basic education is fine but the real challenge is to make sure children have a chance to remain in school when they’ve finished the primary cycle. In Bamtaré, for instance, one of the problems that had to be solved, was the distance between the schools and their pupils. Every so often, a child had to emigrate to the nearest city (if the family was lucky enough to have a parent there) in order to attend a secondary school.

That’s but one problem. Very often, because of very poor economic conditions, parents do not have much of a choice. In order to survive, they rely on their children – especially the girls – for all the daily chores. In Bamtaré, such living conditions have become "ancient history". Here, they’ve made it.

In 2004, Belgium allocated nearly 3\% of its contribution* to goal 2 of Millennium Program (on a total of 16\% for all levels of education).

* See footnote page 24
It's the same story again.
Schooling is essential.
Also for gender equality.

Gender equality and women empowerment are very much a matter of schooling:

☛ The victims of illiteracy number, in 2005, some 800 million people. Two thirds of these are women.

Schooling is the starting point.
The workplace comes second:

☛ Out of the 550 million working poor in the world, 60% are women.

Women's central role in all development policies can be illustrated by example taken from UNICEF. Women that own a small vegetable plot in the state of Kerala (India) usually have children that are better fed, in better health and more educated.
The equation is simple. You need the vegetable plot, of course. But also its small-scale farmers, women, the "founding mothers" of agriculture. This MDG is deemed very important in Belgium.

Reaching equality between schoolboys and schoolgirls, between male teachers and female teachers is no small achievement. It’s hard work.

One good example of the ways to go forward is the schooling aid program developed by Belgium in Cambodia. Priority here is given to the recruitment of female teachers, among others with a view to fight prejudice and stereotypes. For the same reason, 60% of the school grants are earmarked for schoolgirls. Then there are the small details that really make a difference in the daily life of schoolgirls: the installation, for instance, of separate water closets. This may look trivial, but when you wish to change the world, small is beautiful.

Gender equality is achieved through policies of this sort. Big sums of money are not essential. What you need is political will, good ideas and the involvement of all.

Belgium has earmarked more than a fifth (22%) of its Millennium Program budget* to goal 3 (in 2004).

* See footnote page 24
This goal tackles a permanent scandal. All societies are against violence directed against their weakest members. Their capacity to protect the weak is often, rightly, used to measure their degree of civilisation. With MDG 4, we go a step further. What we have here is absolute violence - murder - directed against children. To make things worse, poverty plays the part of the assassin and, against this foe, societies are defenceless.

A great many of these premature deaths could have been prevented. To name but a few cheap examples of simple treatments: oral rehydration, vaccination campaigns and impregnated mosquito nets. According to many specialists, child mortality of under-fives could be reduced by 63% if the prevention methods known today were applied.

The project developed by the Belgian Cooperation in the Dosso Department (Niger) is a case in point. It demonstrates that a good performing program of international solidarity often rests on multiple coordinated efforts.
In a sense, this health development project was successful because it was three-pronged.
First, there's the program to renovate and extend the infrastructure, among others in order to make it easier for people to get there.
Second, there's the drinking water adduction program: diseases often spread through stagnant, dirty water.
And, third, there's the job creation program for women, in order to increase their living standards. Health, sad to say, is something you have to pay for. People that have a job, and the revenues thereof, can care for their health themselves – and their basic needs.

Belgium allocates around 3% of its Millennium Program budget* to this goal. Very little, at first sight. One has to keep in mind, though, that child mortality is inextricably linked to maternal health, i.e. to goals 5 and 6, and thus to the aid budgeted under those headings.

* See footnote page 24
Poverty kills children. It also kills mothers, and both mostly, because death is very much linked to childbirth.

If you listen to Mouna, at the Bamтарé Medical Centre, she'll tell you that these tragedies generally have five causes, all easily averted by preventive measures: haemorrhage, infection, unsafe abortion, high blood pressure and obstructed labour.

Blood-banks and skilled personnel in sufficient number are of course also important, as well as health education campaigns.

In Bangladesh, for instance, nine cities cooperate in a project in which political leaders, teachers, imams, social workers and sweepers all participate in ward health committees. On equal footing, of course.

Belgian Cooperation is among others present in the Makueni region (Kenya) where, in close contact with the local authorities, a project aimed at young girls aged fifteen to nineteen is being developed.

Belgium has targeted this goal at 0.87% of its Millennium Program budget*. But, as already mentioned, this MDG is very much linked to the previous and the next ones.

![Diagram showing maternal mortality related to pregnancy and childbirth by region in 2000, per 100,000 live births. Source: WHO, UNICEF, and UNFPA - 2003.](image)

The "angle of death" operates in full view. There's absolutely no hush up.

- Every minute a woman somewhere dies in pregnancy or childbirth. This totals 1,400 deaths each day.
- Every year 50 million women suffer from a serious pregnancy-related illness.
- Annually, 3 million babies die within their first week of life.
- 68,000 women a year die as a result of unsafe abortions.

Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters

Maternal mortality related to pregnancy and childbirth: estimations by region in 2000, per 100,000 live births


GOAL 5

Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters

Maternal mortality related to pregnancy and childbirth: estimations by region in 2000, per 100,000 live births


GOAL 5

Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters

Maternal mortality related to pregnancy and childbirth: estimations by region in 2000, per 100,000 live births

In this region, one out of two pregnancies concerns women that are not twenty years old. At this young age, woman are more fragile and run a much higher risk of dying in childbirth. It follows that, in order to act preventively, you have to monitor women of this age class closely.

Among these three major weapons of mass destruction, it’s hard to say which one is the deadliest. Tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS have contaminated more than 40 million people in 2004, killing 3 million of them.

These diseases kill indiscriminately but, also, "unequally". Countries of the South are the major victims:

- Two-thirds of people with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Around 15 million children in the developing world had lost one or both parents to AIDS by 2003.
- Malaria kills one child every 60 seconds in Africa, and between 1 and 3 million persons annually.
- Tuberculosis, often in combination with AIDS, kills 2 million people every year, and eighteen times more by 2020 if nothing is done to halt the disease...

* See footnote page 24
Apart from prevention campaigns, the main challenge here is to guarantee access to the drugs needed, that are free of charge for patients and at reasonable cost for the health authorities. The World Health Organisation recently called for the creation of a "humanitarian corridor" so that low-cost generic drugs could be handed out to the persons in need.

AIDS is far from an "individual" disease. It leads to social isolation and exclusion, undermining the very structure of local economies in the developing world. AIDS also destabilises the social fabric indirectly. In 1999, AIDS caused 85% of mortality among teachers in the Central African Republic – and provoked the closure of 100 schools.

The main weapons against HIV/AIDS bear the name of prevention and education. That’s how Bamtaré managed to eradicate AIDS. By crushing ignorance, using reason and common sense. No disease is supernatural. Mostly, they can be avoided.
In Belgian, you won't meet this tiny fly. And even if you did, you wouldn't notice it. It's a very tiny fly. It or, rather: she, because it's the female mosquito that carries and transmits the disease, malaria. She has a very cute name: anopheles.

She wreaks havoc. Especially in Africa where 90% of the malaria cases are registered. Victims are mostly women and children (one dies of malaria every 30 second) and, worldwide, there are some 500 million people affected. It entails also economic disaster: it is estimated that it robs the African GDP of some 12 billion dollars; a quarter of this would be enough to treat malaria.

Little anopheles is in no way responsible. She lives in swampy tropical regions. She strikes night-time. One sting only and you've got it. You won't feel anything before a few days but, by then, you'll have high fever, vomiting fits and a feeling of great weakness. When it enters your body, the parasite heads first to the liver, attacking blood cells and, finally, blocking the blood system, especially in the brain. It's a very nasty disease.

But, as we've said, the mosquito is not the primary cause. It only transports the parasite and then, only when it's been infected itself, by (stinging) humans. It's a very vicious circle, in other words.

In poor regions, malaria is a permanent catastrophe. The disease "gobbles up" 30% of all public spending, and accounts for 30 to 50% of all hospitalisation. A human drama and development drama.

Remedies exist, but they are not without risks. Clean up swamps and evacuate stale water reservoirs are good ways to fight malaria, and the same goes for well ventilated houses. Quinine and related drugs are essential, and do not cost much – even though the mosquito is becoming drug-resistant to most remedial drugs. Protection with impregnated mosquito nets is the latest trendy idea, but it can sometimes do more harm than good: persons that have not, as a child, been infected may later, for lack of development of their immune system, get more dangerous forms of malaria. Finally, of course, there's the vaccination option, probably the most promising method to fight it.

Malaria has nothing to do with mythical plagues: the "copyright" belongs to a small innocent mosquito...
The notion of “sustainable environment” may seem pretty fuzzy and, to say the least, unfocused when speaking of goals. It’s partly true. MDG 7 mixes a lot of different things. For instance improve the life of slump-dwellers, halve the population without improved drinking water or reverse loss of forests. At first sight, it looks chaotic. The coherence, though, is there: planet Earth must remain a livable place. For all. That’s what MDG 7 is about.

When there’s no water, there’s no life. Earth is livable thanks to its wealth in water. The same goes for Bamtaré and the same goes for the (arachidian bassin) of Senegal where the Agriculture Department, in cooperation with Belgium, has set up a program aiming at providing drinkable water to the 260,000 people living in the region.

For lack of enough rainfall, this region has slowly been dragged down in poverty. No water means no farmers, no crops, no cattle, no development: people flee to the cities. The well extension program implemented here was based on broad collaborations. The University of Dakar, firstly, in order to develop low-cost technology to purify the water and eliminate its fluor content (in excess, fluor is bad for the teeth and the bones). Then the local people, organised within the Association of Well Users: they set collectively the price of water and take care of the money collected, for the maintenance and repair of the wells. This, in a sense, is a lesson – of economic democracy – that the South gives to the North.

The balance sheet, here, is not very encouraging:

- Every year, since the nineties, forest area loss is equivalent to the size of Portugal.
- Worldwide, one person out of five has no access to drinking water.
Belgium has much to learn from Bamtaré and other rural communities in the South. They often set an example.

**Belgium’s Millennium Program budget** for this MDG was 14% in 2004.

---

**GOAL 8**

**Foster global partnership for development**

Same as with the previous MDG, one might get the impression that this goal is very unfocused. It’s only natural. This goal aims to lift up the economies of poor countries and in order to do that, you need a combination of very diverse policies, such as...

First, expand public development assistance.

Second, reduce poor countries’ debt, that paralyses all initiative.

Third, open up markets to their exports, make drugs cheap and available, and facilitate technology transfer, especially in the IT areas (Internet).

Fourth, job creation for young people –

---

*See footnote page 24*
Distribution of transfers to developing countries
Receipts and payments of foreign exchange for developing countries, average 2002-2003, in billions of US dollars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Bar Width</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official Aid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private charitable donations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private workers' remittances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign direct investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other private sector flows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remitted profits from foreign direct investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest on long term debt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Least developed and other low-income countries
Middle-income countries

Source: MDG Report 2005, UN

Everyone knows that the economy has become globalised. This “globalisation”, however, is very unequal.

- Africa only accounts for 1% of world trade
- The redistribution of wealth, paradoxically, flows more from the South than the other way round. It’s aid upside-down...
- Between 1980 and 2003, sub-Saharan African debt has been multiplied by 4 and increased from 45 to 175 billion dollars (from 38 to 148 billion euros).
- Brain drain, in India, robs this country of one third (30 million) of its educated population.

and ensuring that good governance and public security are implemented.

One way to support local economies is to promote fair trade, i.e. pay a more fair price for the goods produced in the South. Coffee, for instance. There are 25 million small coffee producers in the world. They have to oversell their coffee at a price that doesn’t even cover production costs, because of world commodity market dictums among others. There is a way to counter this, though. A better work organisation, production modernisation in order to have yields of better quality and, first of all, making use of the fair trade system. This kind of project, thanks to a 4.5 million euros Belgian support, has helped 3,500 families in Ecuador to become self-reliant. Social and economic progress are often achieved this way, through small-scale initiatives. That’s exactly how Bamtaré finally made it.

* According to the Belgian Cooperation’s “First progress report”, Belgium devoted 57.3% of its Official Development Assistance to the MDGs. The remaining aid has been allocated to sectors which, even though they promote development, do not concern directly the MDGs (transport, industry) or undetermined sectors (budgetary assistance) or awareness-raising and administration.
The 8th Millennium Goal encompasses three essential priorities: development assistance, trade and debt alleviation. Good reading on the last matter is the report that, commissioned by the Secretary General of the UN, 250 researchers wrote under the direction of the American economist Jeffrey Sachs. Consider for instance the following statement:

“Dozens of heavily indebted poor and middle-income countries are forced by creditor governments to spend large parts of their limited tax receipts on debt service, undermining their ability to finance investments in human capital and infrastructure. In a pointless and debilitating churning of resources, the creditors provide development assistance with one hand and then withdraw it in debt servicing with the other.”

Point blank...

What does the Sachs Report recommend? Among other things, this: “Debt sustainability should be redefined as the level of debt consistent with achieving the Millennium Development Goals, arriving in 2015 without a new debt overhang. For many heavily indebted poor countries this will require 100 percent debt cancellation.”

Right to the point, again.

According to Sachs, obviously, “donor countries should fulfill the commitment to 0.7 percent of Gross National Product in Official Development Assistance by 2015.” World-wide, we’re still far from that goal. At the UN Monterrey summit, in 2002, developed countries pledged to increase substantially development assistance but made no commitment to reach the 0.7 percent of GNP demanded since the seventies by third world countries. Average European assistance stands at 0.36 percent (2004) while – noteworthy – Belgium has pledged to reach 0.7 percent by 2010.

In Belgium, this pledge has been enshrined in a law in 2002. In 2004, the level reached was 0.41%. Thanks to a yearly increase of 0.05%, the 0.7 percent goal should be achieved by 2010.
Belgium and the Millennium Development Goals

Through its international development cooperation, Belgium backs up and contributes actively to the accomplishment of the MDGs. The Belgian Official Development Assistance (ODA) is based upon the Law on Development Cooperation, dated May the 5th, 1999 and aims at sustainable human development. It focuses on poverty reduction and it is based on a partnership between the beneficiaries and the donor countries. This twin-engined dimension of human development and poverty reduction fits with the underlying vision of the Millennium Declaration, as adopted in September 2000.

Despite its little size, Belgium is a very important actor in the field of cooperation on the international stage. In 2004, the country spent 1.2 billion euros in ODA, that is 0.41 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With this, Belgium takes the sixth place in the world regarding ODA per capita and the eleventh place in absolute value. One can mention here that the Belgian government has promised to increase its ODA to 0.7 percent of its GDP by 2010.

The sums allocated to ODA are essential but do not guarantee the quality and efficiency of cooperation. Equally important are the modalities of management and implementation. It should be stressed that the Belgian development cooperation is carried out with the help of various actors and can take different forms. Its main actor is the DGCD, (acronym for "Direction Générale de la Coopération au Développement" - General Direction for Development Cooperation), which is a part of the FPS (Acronym for Federal Public Service) of Foreign Affairs, Foreign trade and Development Cooperation. The DGCD elaborates programs for development cooperation and administers, directly or indirectly, about 60 percent of the ODA. The remaining part (40 %) is divided between the others departments of Foreign affairs, Foreign trade, Development Cooperation and other federal departments (mainly Finance), the "Ducroire" (an agency that insures commercial risks in foreign countries) and authorities at regional and local levels.

Governmental development cooperation (i.e. direct bilateral cooperation, country to country) through projects is prepared and financed by the DGCD and carried out by the CTB (acronym for Coopération Technique Belge, - Belgian Technical Cooperation), very often in partnership with the authorities of the beneficiary country. This kind of cooperation, totalling in 2004 some 136 million euros, has been focused since November 2003 on a limited number of 18 "partner" countries, ten of them belonging to the LDC (Least Developed Countries).

A large part of this direct bilateral assistance is especially allocated to the Great Lakes area in Central Africa and, more precisely, to Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). The concentration of assistance to achieve more efficiency, can also be seen at the level of the priority sectors of intervention, five in all, which are very much related to the MDGs : basic health care, including reproductive health care, (MDG 4,5 and 6) education and training (MDG 2), agriculture and food safety (MDG 1), basic infrastructure, conflict prevention and peace keeping (including the improvement of management in the public and private sector. Gender equality and empowerment of women (MDG 3), environmental sustainability (MDG 7) and respect of children’s rights (MDG 2,4) can, for their part, be considered as transversal themes. All these themes must be handled in a systematic and permanent way in all strategic development programs and activities. It is also important to emphasize that, in order to implement its direct bilateral assistance, Belgium plays presently an important part in the debate within the international community of donor countries concerning new modalities of cooperation aiming at rationalising procedures and adapting assistance to the beneficiary country’s national policies.
The Belgian development cooperation does not only consist of cooperation between states. There is also the non-governmental cooperation (also called indirect assistance) through various programs, that are co-financed by the DGCD. These programs are prepared and put in practice by the "indirect" actors of cooperation stemming from civil society. First and foremost, we should mention the non governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the development sector, but also universities, scientific institutes and other non governmental partners such as “l’Association pour la Promotion de l’Éducation et de la Formation à l’étranger” (APFE “Association for the promotion of education and training abroad”) or the “Vlaamse Vereniging voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Technische Bijstand” (VVOB “Flemish Association for Cooperation and Technical Assistance”).

In 2004, non governmental cooperation spent about 179 million euros. More than half of this amount was used by the NGOs for financing their development programs. (activities in the South as well as educational programs aiming at the Belgian population).

About one third of the Belgian Official Development Assistance (ODA) is channelled through some thirty multilateral institutions (thus explaining the term multilateral cooperation⁹, completing the actions undertaken at the bilateral level:

- Organisations linked to the United Nations (UNICEF, WHO, FAO, UNDP, UNAIDS…)
- International financial institutions (World Bank and Regional Development Banks)
- The International Committee of the Red Cross, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Belgium also contributes to the programs of the EU (through the European Development Fund and other programs launched by the European Commission). Between 30 % and 45 % of the ODA (Official Development Aid) is channelled through these multilateral and European institutions (500 million euros in 2004).

There are also others forms of cooperation that reinforce these three pillars through special programs.

**The Belgian Survival Fund**

The Belgian Survival Fund finances long-term programs in African countries where people suffer from a chronic food deficit. These programs aim at reinforcing the chances of survival for persons threatened by starvation, malnutrition and exclusion. The Belgian Survival Fund is an initiative taken by the Belgian Parliament in 1983. It consists of a partnership between the DGCD, various Belgian NGOs, international agencies, numerous local organisations and authorities. The Survival Fund is financed by the Belgium National Lottery.

**Humanitarian aid**

deals with

- prevention of disasters
- emergency assistance following a disaster
- assistance for short-term rehabilitation after wars or human catastrophes
- short and long-term food aid, including recovery of agriculture after a crisis

**Assistance to community development**

This assistance mainly tries to support democratisation procedures, national reconciliation processes and consolidation of the rule of law. This assistance also aims at rebuilding civil society and tries to prevent violence.

Acting partners involved in humanitarian aid and community development can be Belgian NGOs, international organisations and the CTB (Belgian Technical Cooperation), as well as local NGOs.

**Support to the private sector through the “Société belge d’investissement pour les Pays en Développement” (BIO - Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries)**

BIO was created in 2001 in order to promote the development of the private sector, mainly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), through participations and granting of long-term loans at market conditions.

---

6. Reproductive health care aims at the general physical, mental and social welfare of the human being with regard to the reproductive system and its operation.
7. Includes equipment, permanent facilities used to provide services (education, public health, transports, water, …). These facilities aim to improve the living standards in rural environments as well as in urban slums. The Belgian Cooperation does not include facilities with a religious purpose (churches, temples, mosque). The same goes for private leisure facilities and commercial facilities (tourism, pubs, …).
8. Conflict prevention refers to efforts made on a long-term basis. Reducing obvious tensions and avoiding the outbreak of tensions or violent conflicts are short-term goals. Peace-keeping is put in practice by the installation of political, social-economic and cultural institutions. These institutions will enable to apprehend the main causes of the conflicts. At the same time, they set the preconditions for peace and lasting stability.
9. Multilateral cooperation refers to programs or projects financed by the Belgian State, but carried out by an international organisation. It includes Belgian contributions to international organisations for their development programs or projects.
The Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

Goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration are to be found in the inset to this brochure, connected with the progress report indicators.

The Millennium Development Goals and targets come from the Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries, including 147 heads of State and Government, in September 2000


The goals and targets are interrelated and should be seen as a whole. They represent a partnership between the developed countries and the developing countries “to create an environment – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty”.

Further readings...

Basic documents, international reports...

United Nations Millennium Declaration, September 2000
http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm


The end of poverty: economic possibilities for our time
Jeffrey D. Sachs; Barnes & Noble, New York, 2005.


Investing in development: a practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals
UN Millennium Project, Jeffrey Sachs, director; UNDP, New York, 2005; 418 p.
(Report to the Secretary-General of the UN)

Global monitoring report 2005: Millennium Development Goals, from Consensus to Momentum;


...and Belgian documents


Websites

(United Nations) - Millennium Development Goals “2015 Keep the promise”.
Official website of the UN on the Millennium Development Goals
www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
(United Nations) - Database on the Millennium indicators
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp
(Belgium) - DGDC Millennium Campaign 2000-2015 http://www.dgcd.be
(Belgium) - CIDSE 2005 Campaign: “Keep our Word - Make Poverty History” http://www.cidse.org/
(UK) - ELDIS - Gateway to development information http://www.eldis.org/cf/search/index.cfm
BAMTARÉ in 2015
or the true story of the
Millennium Development Goals
in a small town
somewhere in Africa

FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade & Development Cooperation
http://www.diplomatie.be
rue des Petits Carmes 15, 1000 Bruxelles

DGDC Directorate General for Development Cooperation
http://www.dgcd.be
February 2006