

CASE STUDY: ADVANCING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

PROBLEM

Prior to proactively adopting the MDGs, World Bank staff held widespread skepticism about utilizing the MDGs as operational guidance. Some saw the MDGs as an artificial, “one-size-fits-all” political mandate, while others had credible concerns about their achievability, associated reputational risks, and potential to dilute the Bank’s traditional emphasis on macroeconomics and infrastructure. There were also concerns about the relevance of the MDGs for Middle-Income Countries, many of whom had met or exceeded the country-level goals but had significant remaining pockets of disparities to overcome. By 2001, the MDGs were emerging as a growing global consensus and GivingWorks was called upon to help the Bank develop its overall MDG strategy.

APPROACH & RESULTS

GivingWorks played a catalytic role in helping to clarify, position, and embed the MDGs into the Bank’s operations. Our engagement began with designing and facilitating a cross-functional working group of senior staff to consider this question in a deliberate fashion. Building on a robust analytical foundation, the group reached consensus on their recommendations within two months. The recommendations were then presented and adopted at the annual strategy retreat of the World Bank Group management. GivingWorks was then hired to help the Bank integrate MDG considerations into their client work. We developed diagnostic and planning templates and helped some regional and sector teams in reorienting their workplans in light of the MDGs. GivingWorks also produced a top-line country-level assessment of the prospects and impediments to achieving the MDGs for the lowest income countries (members of IDA) served by the Bank.

Later, at the 2002 Human Development Forum, GivingWorks introduced the concept of “*MDG Plus*” to help middle-income countries meaningfully and productively participate in the MDGs. We argued that the MDGs needed to be treated as a dynamic and not a static framework, and the initial goals should be regarded as “a floor and not a ceiling.” After reviewing our proposed MDG Plus framework, Thailand’s National Economic and Social Development Board engaged GivingWorks as its lead international consultant for the country’s Cabinet-commissioned MDG report. Working with counterparts in Bangkok, GivingWorks helped frame the analysis, advised on the selection of priorities and indicators, revised drafts, and vetted the report to ensure that it represented global best practices.

This rich collaborative process between the Thai Government, the UN and the World Bank further strengthened the country’s knowledge base and stimulated new working partnerships among key government agencies, academia, and the international community. Launching the MDG report, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan commended Thailand “for setting ambitious MDG-Plus targets well beyond those agreed internationally.”