

Halfway to the deadline for meeting the UN's Millennium Development Goals, the EU stands accused of promoting its own interests instead of eradicating poverty. **Judith Crosbie** reports

SATURDAY (7 July) marks the mid-way point for the United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals, an eight-point plan to address the needs of the world's poorest people between 2000 and 2015. But various reports published leading up to Saturday show that the targets to meet these goals are not being met.

A UN report brands maternal health "a regional and global scandal" while saying that efforts to get children out of hunger have been "excruciatingly slow". Today 63% of people in Africa lack access to basic sanitation, which is "down only barely from 68% in 1990 and far off the target of cutting this proportion in half by 2015".

Two other reports highlight the failings of the EU in certain sectors. A report by Alliance 2015, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) umbrella group, points out that "targets to allocate 20% of all EU aid to basic health and education will not be met". Another report by Action for Global Health, another NGO umbrella group, states that "health is currently rarely a focal area in European Commission country programmes".

NGOs believe the way the European Commission spends its money, particularly in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, is a major part of the problem.

The Commission gives a large portion of its European Development Fund (EDF) directly to these governments - as general budgetary support. Following discussions with the Commission, the governments can decide what to spend the money on. Of the current EDF budget, worth €22 billion, about €6bn will be being paid directly to ACP governments.

NGOs are fearful that this money will not be used to target problem areas, such as health and education. "We are not against general budgetary support but the Commission has to justify that this instrument contributes to the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs)," said Mirjam van Reisen, author of the Alliance 2015 report.

Van Reisen complained that while the Commission funds specific projects in Asian and Latin American countries, for the ACP countries there is a greater reliance on direct aid to governments. One theory is that such direct payments are being used as a tool to encourage ACP governments to sign the economic partnership agreements (EPAs), the trade and development deals currently under discussion between the EU and ACP states. Some ACP states are against these agreements, fearing that they will expose their vulnerable economies to global competition and reduce the revenue that they receive through trade tariffs.

"What should not happen is that aid is used to pressurise countries into accepting the EPAs," said Van Reisen.

She highlighted transport as one major area where the Commission was planning to fund specific programmes in Africa, rather than on health or education which would be more in line with MDGs. "No one is saying money shouldn't be spent on transport but why is the amount so high and outside the general budgetary support?"

Van Reisen said that the allocation of some €3bn for a "governance instrument" which rewards ACP governments for meeting targets related to how they manage their countries was another example of the Commission directing funds away from meeting the MDG goals. "There is nothing in there that promotes governance, instead it's all about EU interests - migration, counter-terrorism, trade liberalisation," she said.

The Commission claims that the governance instrument allows states to get extra money for plans to combat corruption and for meeting basic education and health needs. "We realise governance is key, it's



A young boy sits amid garbage on a street in the shanty-town of Pamplona in Lima, Peru. For many of the world's poor, sifting through rubbish heaps for food and items to sell is their only way of surviving/REUTERS

## Failing the poor

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- Alliance 2015

as simple as that. It's an incentive to meet a credible and ambitious plan," said an EU official.

The Commission also argues that direct payments to ACP states rather than targeted support of projects allows governments to decide where money can best be spent and ensures that it is in line with attempts to

make aid more effective.

Latin America and Asia generally do not get this kind of payment because the Commission wants to target certain sectors in these regions, for example the drugs trade in central Asia. The Commission disputes the fact that direct money is being paid to ACP governments to get them to sign up to the EPAs. One diplomat suggested that NGOs were unhappy about the direct payments because it meant less money being channelled to their projects on the ground. "What is Europe's interest in Africa is that there's growth and that there's a state which has ownership of its own destiny," said the EU official.

The Commission insists that it does spend money on health and education and that other donors, such as individual European states, are also heavily involved in

these sectors. It says that in order to strengthen regional integration and trade, a proper road network is vital. "You need infrastructure if you want to have growth," said the EU official.

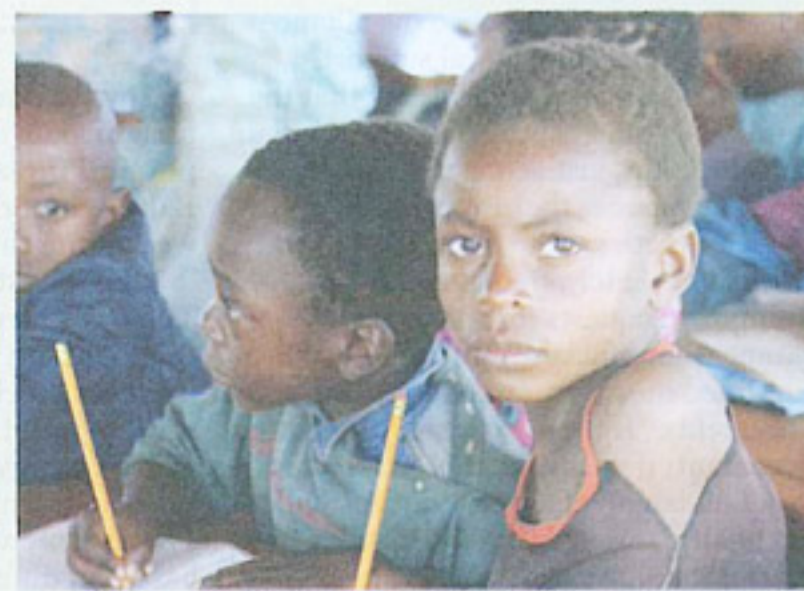
The MDGs remain alive, according to the Commission. "I think we need to keep on believing in them. The whole added value of the MDGs is that they focus minds and give that boost of optimism that we can believe. I can't say now that

we will be able to make it because there will need to be a tremendous effort," said the EU official.

But the UN has warned that the rich nations which signed up to the eight goals seven years ago must meet them. "The world wants no new promises," the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon wrote this week. "It is imperative that all stakeholders meet, in their entirety, the commitments already made."

### The Millennium Development Goals

- Eradicate poverty and extreme hunger (reduce by half the number of people suffering from hunger)
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality (by two-thirds of those under five)
- Improve maternal health (reduce by 75% maternal mortality rate)
- Combat malaria, HIV/Aids and other diseases (halt and begin to reverse their spread)
- Ensure environmental sustainability (reduce by half those without basic sanitation and access to safe drinking water)
- Develop a global partnership for development



Billions of people still lack sufficient access to healthcare, sanitation and education despite promises from rich countries to do more to help the world's poor/REUTERS.ECHO