



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

23 September 2013

Excellency,

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly Resolution 65/1, paragraph 79, which requests the President of the General Assembly at its 68th session to organize a special event in 2013 to follow up on efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I am pleased to send a substantive background note prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chief Executives Board and the United Nations Task Team on the post-2015 Development Agenda. The note seeks to inform the Round Table discussions, which will focus on existing gaps and weaknesses of the MDGs, acceleration of implementation, and looking forward to the post-2015 development agenda. The note also proposes questions that could be addressed in relation to these issues.

With the 2015 target date of the MDGs fast approaching, accelerating progress is more urgent than ever to meet the commitments made by world leaders at the 2000 Millennium Summit, the 2005 World Summit and the 2010 MDG Summit.

In this regard, the Secretariat will compile a matrix of commitments and initiatives relating to the Special Event on the MDGs intended to facilitate global action and synergies to further accelerate progress to achieve the MDGs.

To assist in the preparation of the matrix, I wish to request that Permanent Missions to consider highlighting in their statements information on their most important commitments or initiatives for acceleration of progress towards achieving the MDGs.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Ashe".

John W. Ashe

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

Special Event of the President of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals

Background note for the high-level roundtables

This background note has been prepared to assist participants at the high-level roundtables. The guiding questions are presented with the purpose of inviting delegations to provide specific guidance, recommendations and insights on any of the three main themes that will be addressed in all the four high-level roundtables. The content of the note has been prepared by the UN System drawing from the Report of the Secretary-General entitled "*A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015*" which constitutes the central input for the Special Event.

1. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

Over the past decade, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) generated unprecedented global efforts to advance human development. Significant efforts to reduce poverty and hunger have been made globally and in many countries. These have resulted in impressive successes: the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 per day fell by more than half, from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010. Significant progress has also been made in extending access to improved sources of drinking water, protecting the ozone layer and improving the life of 200 million urban slum dwellers. Important gains have been made in reducing child deaths and in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis. Primary school enrolment increased significantly in all countries.

However, a closer examination reveals that progress across the MDGs is uneven and differs sharply between and within countries. 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty and 870 million people suffer from chronic hunger. As many as 165 million children are stunted, and several million still die each year from preventable causes. The MDG target to reduce maternal mortality remains one of the most off-track targets. Far too many people face serious deprivations in health and education. Progress has been hampered by large inequalities related to income, gender, ethnicity, disability, age and displacements. The root causes of discrimination and exclusion have not been adequately addressed.

Several of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and countries in or emerging from conflict, disaster or instability are lagging most behind in terms of MDG achievement. Only about 20 per cent of fragile and conflict affected countries have met the poverty target. The world's poorest are expected to be even more concentrated in countries affected by conflict and instability by 2030. Moreover, environmental degradation and the intensifying risks of climate change and natural disasters threaten to reverse achievements to date and undermine future gains. Biodiversity loss continues at a rapid rate and natural resources are being depleted or overexploited. Land degradation, desertification and ocean acidification continue at alarming rates. The poorest often suffer most from these trends as they are highly dependent on ecosystem services in their daily struggle to survive.

As the 2013 MDG Gap Task Force Report shows, progress towards the realization of MDG 8 (global partnership for development) has fallen short of expectations. The recent economic slowdown has hampered progress. Meeting commitments on Official Development Assistance remain critical to accelerating progress. Progress in improving market access for countries in Africa has also been slow, and "aid for trade" has not escaped the impact of reduced ODA. Despite significant debt relief for many countries, the debt-servicing burden of some low-income countries remains intolerably high.

Guiding questions

- How have the MDGs helped your country to promote a shared vision of development?
- Which national policies and programmes have achieved the best results in driving progress?
- What is your experience in managing an increasing demand for resources to improve MDGs achievement in a resource-constrained environment?

Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals

Accelerating progress towards the MDGs is essential for meeting the commitments made by world leaders at the 2000 Millennium Summit, the 2005 World Summit and the 2010 MDG Summit. In the 850 days remaining until 2015, special attention should be focussed on the most off track targets and the most off track countries, with a strong emphasis on reducing inequalities and reaching the poorest and most marginalized communities and groups. Such groups include people living in extreme poverty and hunger, women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, refugees, stateless and displaced populations, including those affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Economic growth has been a driving force behind poverty reduction and progress towards the MDGs, but economic growth alone is not enough. The creation of productive employment and decent work has been critical to poverty reduction. Targeted interventions to help the most vulnerable segments of society have also been critical. Expanding access to quality education, health care (including reproductive health), water, sanitation, inclusive financial services and modern information and communications technology have contributed to inclusive economic growth and progress towards the MDGs.

Accelerating MDG progress calls for a persistent focus on improving national policies for inclusive economic growth, decent work investment in people and the right to social protection. Ensuring an explicit and systematic focus on universal access to quality and affordable basic services - such as health and education- should take priority. Fostering the conditions for inclusive growth through improved mobilization of international and domestic resources, long term investment, adequate taxation and improved management of resources at national, regional and global levels will be essential to support the transformation required for inclusive and sustainable development. Much greater efforts will have to be placed on ensuring sustainable use of natural resources as well as on building the resilience of communities and nations to disaster risks, including in cities where the majority of the world's people live today.

ODA is essential, especially for low income countries and for catalytic interventions. Accelerating efforts to meet the UN target of 0.7 % of GNI as ODA by 2015, including 0.15% to 0.20% for least developed countries will be crucial. Strengthening the global partnership for development, as crystallized in MDG 8 and in the Aid for Trade initiative, and improving global policy coordination and coherence between development cooperation and non-aid policies, such as capacity development, trade, and technology transfer, will be key elements in providing the enabling domestic and international environment needed for continuous MDG progress. Equally important will be to find ways to use ODA creatively to generate domestic resources to ensure that MDGs are achieved and results are sustainable.

Accelerating MDG progress will require strengthened contributions from the private sector, civil society organizations, the scientific and academic community and philanthropic organizations. Multi-stakeholder partnerships have proven to be a particularly effective vehicle to bring their resources, knowledge and technical expertise behind countries' development efforts. They have helped to ensure national ownership and the strengthening of national institutions for good governance and the rule of law, transparency and accountability. Increased focus and support for innovation and the implementation of new and environmentally sound technologies could enhance the effectiveness of partnerships and accelerate progress towards the MDGs.

Guiding questions

- **What specific actions is your country planning to take in the remaining months to accelerate MDG progress?**
- **What is your country's experience in ensuring inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups? How can your experiences be replicated or scaled up?**
- **How can national, regional and global partnerships, including with the participation of the private sector, help accelerate equitable and inclusive progress towards the MDG goals and targets?**

3. Towards a post-2015 UN development agenda

The principles and values enshrined in the Millennium Declaration provide a solid foundation for the post-2015 development agenda. The fundamental values of freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, tolerance, respect for the environment and shared responsibility will continue to guide the search for sustainable development, peace and security and human rights. Existing agreements and the lessons learned from 15 years of MDG implementation will inform and frame the post-2015 development agenda.

In the Rio+20 outcome document entitled "*The Future we Want*" world leaders committed to make every effort to achieve the MDGs. They also launched a process to define sustainable development goals, coherent with and integrated into the post 2015 United Nations development agenda. Intensified efforts to reach the MDGs gives greater credibility to a post-2105 development agenda and places the world in a better position to eradicate poverty altogether, in all its dimensions.

The follow-up work to the Rio+20 Conference will contribute to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda through the contributions by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing.

The post-2015 UN development agenda will need to be ambitious to guide the structural transformation required to put the world on a sustainable pathway for human development across generations. By continuing the work undertaken with the MDGs, the new agenda will need to include eradicating poverty while addressing other pressing issues such as inequalities inclusive and sustainable growth and decent employment, rapid demographic changes, migration, urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change. The post-2015 agenda will also need to address the gaps identified in the Millennium Development Goals in relation to rule of law, human rights, effective governance and the link between development and peace. It will require universal commitments from all countries according to their own particular needs and capabilities. It will further need to be sufficiently clear in design with simple goals and targets to galvanize universal support and to facilitate advocacy.

The implementation of an ambitious agenda will require a strengthened global partnership for development and the scaling-up of new and innovative mechanisms for cooperation with multi-stakeholder participation while upholding existing commitments for international cooperation and financing for development. The post-2015 agenda will need to adopt rigorous and participatory monitoring and accountability mechanisms, based on robust statistics, to assess achievements and to ensure that all actors live up to their commitments. This will require investment in the capacity of development countries to collect data.

The post-2015 development agenda should be firmly founded on four building blocks: (i) a common vision for sustainable development for all based on inclusive and equitable economic growth and social development, as well as sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems; (ii) a set of concise, forward looking and integrated goals and targets to realize the priorities of the agenda; (iii) a global partnership for sustainable development to mobilize means of implementation; and (iv) a participatory monitoring framework for tracking progress and accountability mechanisms for all stakeholders at all levels (global, regional, national, sub-national).

The successful implementation of the post-2015 development agenda will hinge upon national ownership and support from all development stakeholders. It is therefore critical to ensure that work on a post-2015 development agenda remains truly open and inclusive. Ultimately, it is up to UN Member States to adopt a new universal development agenda, with accompanying goals to provide an adequate response to the world's quest for dignity, peace, prosperity, justice, sustainability and an end to poverty. The leadership of Heads of State and Government in this effort is critical.

Guiding questions

- **What are the key elements and principles that need to be firmly anchored in the post-2015 development agenda?**

- How should the “unfinished business” from the MDG agenda be integrated into the post-2015 agenda?
- How can we ensure that new and existing commitments and contributions are effectively monitored in the post-2015 development agenda and which accountability mechanisms, including for means of implementation, are needed given the different responsibilities and capabilities of governments and other key stakeholders?