



## SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THEMATIC DEBATE ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS NEW YORK, 1-4 APRIL 2008

### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations General Assembly held a thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals at United Nations headquarters, New York on 1-4 April, 2008 on the theme “**Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.**”

The meeting consisted of an opening session, three panel discussions and a wrap-up session on 1 April, 2008, followed by a debate in the General Assembly from 2-4 April, 2008. The panels focused on the poverty and hunger, education and health MDGs where progress is urgently required and experience has shown that positive results can have a catalytic effect on the other goals.

### Keynote speakers

1. **The President of the General Assembly, Srgjan Kerim** emphasized that decisive action is required to speed up progress in Africa and other lagging regions. He noted that many leaders from governments, the private sector and civil society have responded positively to the call to translate commitments into concrete deliverables on the ground. The high level meetings on development planned for this year, including at Summit-level, offer a critical window of opportunity to sharpen the overall strategic focus for the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. This focus should recognize the nexus between financing for development, the MDGs, and the challenge posed by climate change. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals on time represents a fundamental test of the global partnership for development. It is a test of our collective political will to address what has been described as a ‘development emergency’. Although progress has been made towards attaining the goals, it is uneven and too slow. At the current pace, many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, will not

attain the goals by 2015. This year, 2008, must be a **year of action** to achieve the MDGs.

**2. Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon** emphasized that addressing the special needs of the poorest will be a central priority during his term. He noted that further progress towards achieving the MDGs is possible if strong government leadership is combined with sound policies that foster trade, productivity growth, private investment, agriculture and infrastructure development, environmental conservation, gender equality and women's rights. He noted that these efforts should be reinforced by adequate financial and technical support from the international community. Soaring food prices and slowing global growth are seriously undermining progress to achieve the MDGs. Substantial investment in agriculture and a more open trading system in agricultural commodities is urgently required. The Green Revolution in Africa could expand agricultural output and combat hunger. A high-level event on the MDGs on 25 September 2008 will energize and build consensus on these efforts by bringing together world leaders, the private sector, and civil society organizations.

**3. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen** of Finland urged European countries to address the development challenges by taking a more active global role in the areas of poverty eradication and climate change. He stressed that security, development and human rights constitute the foundations of a just society and pointed out that inequalities in income, asset ownership, opportunities for jobs, social services and benefits, political power, and access to information exist in many countries. Gender inequality, social exclusion, and high indebtedness are challenges that must also be addressed. He urged all nations to contribute to addressing the challenge of climate change so that its effects do not reverse human development. He noted that the world's poor are disproportionately affected, and said Finland has made climate change and environmental concerns a major focus of development policy. He said in conclusion that sustainable development requires national ownership, with international partners complementing national efforts.

**4.** The need for additional resources to speed up efforts to attain the MDGs was emphasized by **Foreign Affairs Minister Moctar Ouane** of Mali, who spoke on behalf of the President of Mali. There is a need to replicate successful efforts on a larger scale and to support countries to develop private sector entrepreneurship, reduce the debt burden, and make global trade fair and equitable. Mali's national strategic plan aimed at combating poverty includes projects that focus on agriculture, food security, education and health. The implementation of these strategies has allowed Mali to improve school attendance, reduce HIV/AIDS, and improve health. However, the international community should redouble efforts to fulfill commitments for increased aid and other forms of international assistance.

## RECOGNISING THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

### Poverty and Hunger

The poverty and hunger panel was moderated by **Dr. Kandeh Yumkella**, Director-General, UNIDO, and comprised the following panellists; **Dr. Paul Collier** of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University; **H.E. Henrietta H. Fore**, Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator; **Mr. Jayaseelan Naidoo**, Chairman, Development Bank of South Africa and Board Chairman, GAIN; **Dr. Eckhard Deutscher**, Chair of OECD/DAC; and **H.E Steven .O. Willoughby**, Chief Executive of NEPAD. Following comprehensive presentations from the panellists, there was an interactive discussion involving Member States, civil society organisations and special guests. The following are some of the views that were expressed:

5. The world now has the wealth, the expertise and the technology to lift millions of people out of poverty and give them the decent life they deserve, free from hunger, ignorance and poor health. In order to **move from rhetoric to action**, developed countries must urgently fulfil **ODA commitments**; the **external debt** of developing countries, particularly LDCs, must be cancelled; developed countries should provide duty-free and tariff-free **trade access** for developing countries, particularly for LDCs, including preferential access to **international credit**. The development needs of middle-income developing countries must also be addressed.

6. Strong **national leadership and ownership** of the development agenda, good governance, implementing national MDG strategies, investment in people, technology and expanding public-private partnerships are also critical for sustained development. Millennium Development Goals must be aligned with national development strategies. Improved governance and institutional capacity enhance aid allocation and effectiveness and overall development prospects.

7. The development of **agriculture** is critical. Strengthening the agricultural sector would promote private-sector growth as well as improve food security. Concrete measures including improving irrigation, strengthening agricultural extension services to assist farmers, improving seed technology as well as access to inputs, fertilizers, markets and storage, would contribute significantly to strengthening agriculture in poor countries.

8. The importance of investing in improved **infrastructure** cannot be over-emphasized. Without improved roads, seaports and airports, the poor countries cannot improve their development prospects or maximise the potential of increased commodity prices to achieve the MDGs.

9. **Commodity exporting** developing countries must harness revenues from the current commodity boom to increase investment in infrastructure, capacity development and economic diversification in order to ensure long-term economic growth and development.

10. The **peace dividend** in many countries emerging from conflict also offers an historic opportunity. The international community needs to be more actively engaged with countries emerging from conflict to ensure that they do not relapse into conflict, and instead build a solid foundation for sustained peace, security and development.

11. It was also noted that the slow-down of the global economy, soaring oil prices, rising food prices, conflict, weak policy frameworks and institutional capacity, and climate change are among the additional challenges that continue to impede progress in attaining the MDGs.

### **Education**

The education panel was moderated by **H.E. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury**, Foreign Adviser of Bangladesh, and comprised following panellists; **Mr. Nicholas Burnett**, Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO; **H.E. Geraldine Bitamazire**, Education Minister of Uganda; **Mr. Desmond Bermingham** of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Secretariat; **Dr. Ann Cotton**, Founder & Executive Director of CAMFED; and **Dr. Yuto Kitamura** of Nagoya University, Japan. Following the comprehensive panel presentations, there was an interactive discussion involving Member States, civil society organisations and special guests. The following are some of the views that were expressed:

12. There has been a sharp increase in the number of children starting **primary school** in the regions farthest from attaining universal primary education – in the case of Africa the increase was by 36 per cent between 1999 and 2005. Net enrolment rates also grew fastest in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia – from 57% to 70% and 81% to 90% respectively. However, as many as 72 million children of primary school age are still not enrolled in school and more than half of them are girls. Seven out of ten girls in this group live in sub-Saharan Africa or South and West Asia. While access to primary education has been enhanced, further acceleration is urgently needed to achieve **quality primary education** for all children, especially for girls and children in fragile states. Education in societies affected by conflict presents challenges that must be urgently addressed.

13. The MDG 3 target to eliminate gender disparity in **enrolment for primary and secondary education** by 2005 has been missed. Currently, 118 countries out of the 188 with data are on track or have already achieved gender parity at

the primary level. Significant challenges remain in other countries. These challenges must be addressed.

14. The impact of **HIV/AIDS** could add an additional US\$1 billion to the annual cost for achieving universal primary education (UPE). The education sector has been hit hard as teachers who die of the disease are not easily replaced, and girls often drop out of school to care for sick relatives.

15. A number of broad but **critical policy issues** must be addressed, including; training, retaining and motivating school teachers; effective teaching and learning strategies; improving the quality of education, including improving learning time, access to materials and textbooks, and creating a healthy and safe learning environment; addressing high primary school dropout rates.

16. Universal primary education must be connected with **wider educational opportunities**. In this context, the provision of early childhood care and education, quality secondary education, youth and adult literacy were among some of the opportunities that would also support the overall MDG agenda. School curricula must be more closely aligned to national development priorities.

17. **Higher education** spending supported by external aid is therefore needed to make a difference for millions of children. 34 countries have joined the Fast Track Initiative launched in 2002 as a new way to mobilize aid for education.

18. There was support for the call for an **increase of 10 per cent in ODA** per annum for basic education by 2010 to meet the recognised financing gap. It was also proposed that a replenishment campaign be established for the FTI Catalytic Fund in order to increase levels of predictable financing for basic education to 2015.

### **Health**

The health panel was moderated by **Dr. Anarfi Asamoah-Baah**, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organisation, and comprised following panellists; **Dr. Thoraya A. Obaid**, Executive Director of UNFPA; **Dr. Innocent Nyaruhirira**, Executive Chairman of King Faisal Hospital and former Health Minister of Rwanda; **Dr. Jim Yong Kim** of the Harvard Medical School and Co-Founder, Partners in Health; **Dr. Julian Lob-Levyt**, Executive Secretary of the GAVI Alliance; and **Mr. Dean R. Hirsch**, President of World Vision International. Following the comprehensive panel presentations, there was an interactive discussion involving Member States, civil society organisations and special guests. The following are some of the views that were expressed:

19. The **health-related MDGs** are central to meeting all the MDGs. Poverty and hunger are major determinants of health. Education and the empowerment of women significantly contribute to the improvement of maternal health and a decrease in child mortality. Investment in better health, including reproductive health, not only saves lives but also makes smart economics.

20. Many countries are off track to achieve MDG 5 to **improve maternal health**. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for half of all maternal deaths and south Asia accounts for one-third. Maternal mortality can be reduced in low-income settings by increasing access to skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care and family planning.

21. Progress on all health-related MDGs, including **infant mortality**, and on key infectious diseases, such as **tuberculosis** continues to be slowest in countries with high prevalence of **HIV** and those affected by conflict. Overall, there has been a decline in the incidence of HIV infection in some countries which has been attributed to behavioural change, the growing impact of preventive interventions and active involvement of the international community.

22. Many **challenges remain**, however, including the growing **feminization of HIV** and the incidence of **multi-drug-resistant TB** resulting from HIV infection. The TB response is not fully scaled-up. Communities and civil society are not sufficiently mobilised, there is inadequate support for research into new drugs, and weak national health systems compromise care. The upcoming high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS on 10-11 June, 2008 is expected to focus on some of these challenges, including universal access to treatment by 2010.

23. **Malaria** impedes socio-economic development and disproportionately affects the poor. Very simple and inexpensive interventions have been successful in reducing malaria. The use of insecticide-treated bed nets to prevent the disease is increasing. However, malaria is still a major killer of children under five years of age in Africa. Recent initiatives by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to redress the low coverage of effective interventions have achieved remarkable results. There is need for these and other efforts to be more effectively resourced from both national and international sources.

24. Success in addressing the health goals depends on **building strong national healthcare systems**, including strong basic science and diagnostic tools. Leadership from national governments in prioritizing health and developing effective national plans to combat disease is critical. NGOs and foundations play an important role in addressing public health challenges.

25. Governments should explore further **innovative finance** for health to scale up health programmes, particularly in rural areas following the successful IFFim and UNITAID initiatives. This would require greatly increasing investment in health systems; implementing policies to increase and retain health workers, particularly aimed at addressing migration; increasing the predictability of aid at the country level and honouring commitments made so that many of the resource gaps in the sector could be filled.

## **GETTING BACK ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE THE MDGS BY 2015**

### **Role of the international community**

26. The General Assembly established the MDGs in 2000 and therefore has a critical leadership role to play in mobilizing global support, monitoring and evaluating progress to achieve them. However, **concerted and coordinated action** by the international community and national institutions is required in order to achieve the goals globally. Financial, human and technical resources for development must be adequate and predictable if the MDGs are to be attained.

27. The **high-level General Assembly meeting on Africa's development needs** on 22 September 2008, and the **high-level event on MDGs** on 25 September 2008, provide critical opportunities to rally global support, announce concrete new initiatives, or provide detailed timetables for the implementation of existing commitments.

28. The Secretary-General's **MDG Africa Steering Group** is providing strategic direction and leadership by identifying specific national financing gaps to mobilise international support for the implementation of the goals.

29. Closer **partnership** between traditional and emerging donors, as well as, civil society and the private sector, is also important. The private sector, in particular, should be encouraged to have a greater involvement in achieving the MDGs both directly, through their core business models, and indirectly, by supporting new or existing MDG initiatives.

### **Getting back on track**

30. During the Thematic Debate several specific proposals and policy recommendations received widespread support among Member States, including, that:

- The **General Assembly** should hold a meeting each year until 2015 to take stock of global implementation and to hold all partners to account for the implementation of their commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;
- Donor governments should honour commitments to increase aid and achieve the UN **0.7% of ODA/GNI target**, and also improve the quality and effectiveness of aid in line with the Paris Declaration;
- The **international aid architecture** is constrained by too much fragmentation which undermines the impact of aid. For its efforts to be more effective, the international community needs to work together in closer partnership to reduce transaction costs and increase **predictability** over the long term.
- **National ownership** and policy space are vital requirements allowing developing countries to follow their own development path and take full responsibility for their own development. Fundamental **reform of the international architecture** is necessary to give developing countries greater voice and participation in the global policy and decision making process.
- Prudent and effective **management of revenues**, in particular from the recent commodity boom, would ensure that greater domestic resources are available for development.
- **Good governance** and **fiscal transparency** contribute significantly to investor confidence and improve overall development prospects.
- The expedited conclusion of the **Doha Development Round** of international trade negotiations is essential for economic growth in poor countries and overall attainment of the MDGs. Improved or **preferential market access**, in addition to **Aid-for-Trade**, would further contribute to the attainment of the goals and lift millions out of poverty.
- Further efforts are necessary to expand existing **debt relief** initiatives so that more countries are eligible for irrevocable debt relief. An increase in the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the transfer of technology are important to helping countries meet the MDGs.
- Increased investment in **infrastructure** is necessary to sustain economic growth and development, in particular investment in roads, seaports, airports and telecommunications to enable greater trade and communication in underdeveloped economies.

- The **food crisis** will undermine all our efforts unless there is greater **investment in the agricultural sector** - irrigation, agricultural extension services to assist farmers, improving seed and other technologies, fertilizers, markets and storage – that would promote private-sector growth, as well as improve food security.
- **Climate change** is already undermining the achievement of the MDGs, particularly, in the poorest countries and in those at greatest risk from its effects. Development must be environmentally responsible and sustainable.
- Continued support for **NEPAD** is critical, including through the Office of the Special Advisor for Africa and UNDP.
- **Education** is the foundation for lasting development and an additional investment of US\$10 billion of ODA is required to meet the goal of providing basic education for all by 2010. The issue of training and retaining school teachers must be addressed, as well as the overall quality of education. School curricula should be closely aligned to national development priorities.
- Investment in **basic healthcare** and services not only saves lives but is also smart economics. According to a UNFPA study every dollar invested in family planning can save up to 31 dollars in government spending on education, food, health, housing and water and sewage. Very simple and inexpensive interventions, for example, have proved successful in dramatically reducing malaria. Maternal mortality can be reduced in low-income settings by increased access to skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care and family planning.
- Long-term and sustainable progress in achieving the health goals will depend on **building strong national healthcare systems**. This includes human resource capacity building and developing or up-grading healthcare infrastructure. Governments and non-governmental partners have important roles to play in this regard, as well as in developing sound healthcare policies, including prevention programmes.
- The **International Health Partnership** initiative, involving donors, developing countries, civil society, the IFIs and UN agencies, to scale up investment and support for the health MDGs, is an excellent model. However, increased and more predictable ODA for the health sector would further enable governments in poor countries to invest in health systems over the long-term. An additional US\$5.5 billion is required annually to achieve MDG 4 and 5 by 2015.

- A strengthened, coherent and adequately resourced **UN gender architecture** would provide renewed leadership on gender equality and women's empowerment issues. This could mobilise global support on this issue that would have a significant impact on accelerating progress across all MDGs.
- **Partnerships with civil society and the private sector** are essential to accelerate progress. The private sector should be more actively engaged, including by providing affordable goods and services to the poorest 'bottom billion'. Large foundations should be encouraged to champion specific MDGs to produce concrete results.
- Foundations, civil society and targeted bilateral and multilateral initiatives **championing specific MDGs**, such as the health goals, gender equality and women's empowerment have contributed significantly to the progress achieved so far, and are therefore essential to accelerate progress.

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