

ROUNDTABLE ON BUILDING STATE CAPACITY TO MEET THE MDGs: GOVERNANCE, INSTITUTIONS, HUMAN RESOURCES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

5 April 2005, ECOSOC Chamber

- Chair:** **H.E. Mr. Munir Akram (Pakistan), President of ECOSOC**
- Welcome Address:** Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant-Secretary-General for Economic Development, DESA
- Lead Discussant:** The Honourable Jocelyne Bourgon, Ambassador Canadian Permanent Mission to the OECD and Member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Participants:** Dr. Rachid Benmokhtar Benabdellah, President of Al Akhawayn University, Morocco and Member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister for Public Service and Administration, South Africa and Member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Mr. Hafiz Pasha, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, UNDP Asia and the Pacific
- Ms. Patricia Sto. Tomas, Minister of Labor and Employment, Philippines and Member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant-Secretary-General for Economic Development, DESA

Summary

The Roundtable on *Building State Capacity to Meet the MDGs* was organized by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of UNDESA for the ECOSOC 2005 High-Level Segment on “Achieving the internationally agreed developing goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities.” The Roundtable took the advantage of the presence of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration which was holding its Fourth Session in New York. The Roundtable specifically focused on the following five areas:

- MDGs and national/local governance
- MDGs and international governance
- MDGs and human rights
- MDGs and institutions and institutional Capacity with a focus on NEPAD
- MDGs and human resources capacity

Key elements and messages from the discussion included the following:

➤ MDGs and national and local governance

The neglect or underestimation of governance and institutions, in particular, can undermine policy reforms and progress for the Millennium Development Goals. Both the Millennium Declaration and the Annual Reviews of the UN Secretary General on the MDGs underpinned the importance of governance and of institutions in securing steady and sustainable progress to agreed international commitments and objectives. To some speakers separating policies from the institutional and governmental context is not only impractical but may also lead developing countries to experience poor outcomes because of such an arbitrary division.

Political commitment and will is the first step before the consideration of technical and administrative matters. In this light, the unequal distribution of power and increased inequalities, particularly at the national level, were factors impacting adversely on good governance and on securing shared socio-economic objectives. It was pointed out that trust and partnerships must characterize not only national processes but international relations. A panellist pointed out that while emphasis is placed on the national authorities in rooting out corruption, there is reluctance to agree on repatriation of wealth that was siphoned off abroad through corruption. This appears as double standards for the ethical principles underpinning the combating of malfeasance to be equally applicable at the national and international levels. Further, Official Development Assistance, ODA, is not totally free of conditionalities, and often is subjected to the bureaucratic procedures of the various donors. Thus, while transparency and accountability for ODA is justly sought, this should be applied to all partners.

➤ MDGs and international governance

Reference was made to international governance and the contracting effects of structural adjustment and of the economic liberalization of the last 25 years. This was contrasted with the period of relatively high growth and greater equality that were sustained for the first 25 years subsequent to the Second World War. Though structural adjustment has been formally supplanted by Poverty Reduction Strategy for the Bretton Woods Institutions, the macro economic policy stance has not materially changed. Targeting inflation has generally had an adverse effect on economic expansion for developing countries while the secular worsening of the terms of trade has continued. The impact of economic liberalization seems to have also reduced the policy space for the national governments while the openness of their economies has meant greater volatility and uncertainty in economic performance. The increase in income inequalities, coupled with the decrease in policy space and the concentration of foreign direct investment primarily in mineral extraction and resource exploitation, does not portend well for many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

➤ MDGs and institutions and institutional capacity with focus on NEPAD

In the case of Africa, which was explicitly recognised as meriting a special case in the Millennium Declaration, it is increasingly appreciated that for policy purpose, one size does not fit all. It is found that the diverse traditional practices of communities are compatible with the principles of inclusiveness and participation, and therefore, offer the opportunities of cooperation with institution-building processes of good governance. Further, and taking into cognizance various cultural nuances, it is important to keep in mind that while measuring governance progress, the donor indices may not always reveal the real picture nor would they be helpful in securing progress. In this regard, mention was made of the recent initiatives taken by the Africa Union to review progress through a peer review mechanism.

➤ MDGs and human resources capacity

The intertwined importance of capacity building and that of human resource development were emphasized by several speakers. Clearly, human resource development, particularly those that pertain to planning and implementation, should not be confined to the public sector alone. Many NGOs and the private sector currently partner with government in the provision of public services. In this, there is a two way process, on the one hand, to equip government to deal with partners, including the private sector and NGOs; and on the other, to upgrade the capacities of civil society in dialoguing with government. Several speakers also stressed the importance of monitoring the progress of health and education of the population.

The importance of human resource development was also reaffirmed in the discussion, which together with human rights, were powerful antidotes to inequity, extremism and intolerance. While it was recognized that “one size does not fit all” this did not obviate the need to learn from each other, to search and be aware of the various options available, and to strengthen the discussions and analysis of the challenges ahead.

➤ MDGs and human rights

There was a large measure of congruence that human rights were not purely objectives of the MDGs but are means or adjuncts by which MDGs can be solidly secured. Thus, concurrently, human rights, including economic and social rights, are fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration. Increasingly it is appreciated that these developmental rights also serve as the conduits for securing the eight Millennium Development Goals. In a graphic sense, human rights determine both the height, including such attributes as good governance, stability and security, as well as the base of the development pyramid.

➤ Prerequisites for strong and effective government

Subsequent speakers focused on the elements or prerequisites for strong and effective government. Four elements were singled out for special consideration:

- Efficient and effective public administration that includes an enabling regulatory framework for investment and the private sector. This, complemented by a tax

administration that adheres to equity principles and is corruption-resistant, will enable an increase of the tax to GDP ratio;

- An equitable decision-making process – inclusive, pro-poor, sensitive to civil society, and accountable;
- A transparent and accountable development management system and one that can allocate resources without bias in favour of special interest or prone to malfeasance; and
- Encouragement of decentralization linked to the demands and wishes at community level. Devolution of power not only reduces transaction costs in the provision of services but ensures responsiveness and greater participation. However, there are certain standards and norms intrinsic to national goals and objectives that may not be amenable to decentralization.

➤ Models of good governance

Several speakers were keen to build on what has been learned from the past experiences of governance and development. Though these lessons were perhaps simple or obvious, they were nonetheless worth underscoring. In particular, that there was no single model of good governance, and that diversity in practices should be acknowledged; that contemporary issues and concerns did not respect the departmental or functional divide of administrative structures and that new and innovative ways of response were required; that respect for culture and the specificities of the enabling environment was not an ill-afford luxury but the sine qua non for sustainability and acceptance of policy reforms; and that overall, there was an appreciation of the power of ideas and institutional capacities for effecting change which was not always amenable to financial resources.

➤ Other issues

In the various exchanges that followed, several issues were discussed including: the encouragement of national demands for improving governance; the practical implications of human rights principles; the importance of focusing on agreed outcomes regarding human rights and partnerships; the differing interpretations and distinction between good governance and democracy; and maintaining the same ethos of independence and commitment whether national, regional or international concerns that were raised in the various human development reports.