

BACKGROUND NOTE

Roundtable 5: Addressing the Special Needs of the Most Vulnerable

The most vulnerable countries and people risk being left behind in achieving the MDGs. Addressing the special needs of vulnerable communities and people will help protect their basic human rights and ensure that they benefit from progress made in attaining the MDGs. Special assistance is required to help the most vulnerable countries achieve more progress.

Vulnerable communities and peoples include those who are traditionally disadvantaged, marginalized or excluded based on geography, gender, age, disability, ethnicity and other vulnerabilities.¹ They are disproportionately among the poorest and are often victims of violence, exploitation, trafficking, discrimination and other abuses. Vulnerable countries include the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), some small island developing States (SIDS), countries emerging from conflict and those that are vulnerable to the recurrence of armed violence or to natural hazards

1. What more should be done to address the special needs of the poorest countries?

The exports of LDCs are still highly concentrated and remain exposed to the high volatility of international commodity markets and other external economic shocks. Official Development Assistance (ODA) to LDCs has not yet reached the target of between 0.15 and 0.20 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) and has neglected productive sectors. Addressing the needs of the poorest countries involves:

- The speedy implementation of duty-free, quota-free access pledges for LDC exports which were agreed to at the WTO Ministerial Review in Hong Kong in 2005. Additional measures by donors to expand and implement the Enhanced Integrated Framework for LDCs to enhance their productive and export capacity, including the technical capacity necessary to meet the complex rules of origin.
- Priority attention to agricultural development and support to small farmers to improve access to seeds and fertilizers and to introduce more stress-resistant agricultural varieties.
- For landlocked LDCs, which have more difficulty in forging trade links with world markets because they depend on transit countries, access to transport networks, better infrastructure and trade facilitation are key for development.
- International community support for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

2. What should be done to better identify and address the special needs of the most vulnerable countries, communities and people?

The most vulnerable countries, particularly some of the SIDS, are highly susceptible to external shocks. While some countries have made notable progress towards meeting the MDGs, those gains have often been undermined by the adverse impacts of natural disasters, climate change and the recent food, fuel and global economic and financial crises. Additional support from the international community is necessary to improve vulnerable countries' ability to face such challenges. This could include strengthening their capacity to identify risks, to assess vulnerabilities and sources of resilience, particularly by improving national data and information systems and fostering monitoring and evaluation to inform policy-making.

The most vulnerable communities and peoples not only lack opportunities and resources to participate in decision-making processes but also are often invisible in national statistics and are therefore ignored by policy-makers. While access to social services has been expanding in many countries, the coverage remains uneven and often excludes the most vulnerable. Addressing the needs of vulnerable communities and people involves:

- Strengthening national capacity to identify the most vulnerable in order to address their needs and protect their rights. Establishing a social protection floor and increasing access to education and decent work.
- Implementing effective measures to combat all forms of discrimination and social exclusion.

3. What can be done to break the cycle of poverty, political and economic exclusion and civil violence?

The intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion, armed violence, civil or criminal conflict, and the resulting breakdown of the rule of law, justice and security are major challenges to achieving the MDGs. Because marginalized groups suffer from multiple vulnerabilities, addressing the structural causes of chronic poverty and social exclusion in a holistic manner is important. This can be done by:

- Addressing the root causes of poverty, all forms of discrimination and exclusion, violence, civil or criminal conflict, especially because they are often inter-related.
- Removing existing social, economic and legal barriers to meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable.
- Strengthening the institutions that promote justice, monitor the fulfilment of human rights and mitigate conflicts, crime and violence, and promoting citizen's participation. Increasing access of the most vulnerable people to information and to the justice system.

4. What is the developmental potential of humanitarian, disaster relief and peacebuilding efforts?

The risk of natural and human-made disasters, which is higher in many middle- and low-income countries, can lead to social tensions, armed violence, civil unrest, polarisation and social disintegration. Reducing that risk and increasing societal resilience to potential hazards or sudden shocks can prevent backsliding in the achievement of the MDGs and accelerate progress.

- Post-conflict or disaster relief interventions that are inclusive and participatory, that address the specific needs of vulnerable communities and peoples, promote transparency and give voice and representation to underrepresented communities, will promote social inclusion and equitable outcomes.
- Risk reduction strategies that build resilience and improve the capacity of communities to face hazards or that promote the reduction of violence and conflict management can empower vulnerable communities and enhance outcomes.
- Developing an early warning system, pursuing early economic recovery after disasters or conflicts, supporting the development of democratic institutions, strengthening institutions of governance and re-engaging countries in the global architecture without undermining national ownership of development strategies are all measures that can contribute to reduce vulnerabilities and lay a sound foundation for development

5. How can we ensure that new and existing commitments, by all stakeholders, are adequately monitored and met?

The challenge is to design and implement effective policies and institutional mechanisms to:

- Honour the accountability mechanism between developed and developing countries (as agreed in the 2003 Monterrey Consensus and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action) and between Governments and their citizens regarding MDG commitments.
- Involve all relevant stakeholders in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. This increases transparency, accountability and enhances the sense of ownership.