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on Achieving the MDGs:
innovative responses to meet the social and economic challenges

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“I declared 2010 to be the year of development. We need to focus attention and accelerate the process to achieve, to realize, the goals of the MDGs by the target year, 2015.” by Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations.

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the expression of the strong commitment to universal development and poverty reduction made in September 2000 by the International Community in the UN Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Declaration set 2015 as the target date for achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which established quantitative benchmarks to halve extreme poverty in all forms. As the date approaches, less than five years away, the world finds itself mired in economic crisis that is unprecedented in its severity and global dimensions. Progress towards the goals is now threatened by sluggish or even negative economic growth, diminished resources, fewer trade opportunities for developing countries, and possible reductions in aid flows from donor nations. At the same time, the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly apparent, with a potentially devastating impact on countries rich and poor. As such, more than ever, the commitment to building the global partnership embodied in the Millennium Declaration must guide the collective actions of the international community.

Progress and Challenges towards achieving the MDGs

Regarding progress towards MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty in the developing regions accounted for slightly more than a quarter of the developing world’s population in 2005, compared to almost half in 1990. Prior to the economic crisis and higher food prices, the number of people in developing regions living in extreme poverty- on less than \$1.25 a day (2005 prices) – fell from 1.8 billion in 1990 to 1.4 billion in 2005. During the period between 1997 and 2005, Sub-Saharan Africa has reduced extreme poverty only marginally, although, with population growth, there has been an actual increase of 27 million people living in extreme poverty in that region.

The global financial and economic crisis, and high prices for food and energy, has provided an additional challenge to maintaining this pace of progress against poverty. Although the overall poverty rates in the developing world were expected to fall in 2009, the number of people living in extreme poverty was expected to increase by 55 to 90 million, partly due to the crisis. Climate change is also expected to have a negative effect on food production in many developing countries. Natural disasters, political turmoil and conflicts have compounded these effects for millions of vulnerable people and families.

With respect to progress towards MDG 2 (achieve universal primary education), the number of children of primary-school age who are out of school has declined markedly in recent years. Still, 72 million children worldwide were denied the right to education in 2007. Almost half of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly half of the children currently out of school have never had any contact with formal education. Unequal opportunities resulting from biases based on gender, ethnicity, income, language or disabilities represent major obstacles to universal education.

Regarding MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women), progress has been made, but inequalities due to gender continue to be seen. However, the target of eliminating gender

disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 was missed. Ensuring that the opportunity is not lost again in 2015, will require renewed urgency and commitment. Access to financial resources, unequal power relations, discrimination and stigma, gender stereotypes and violence all contribute to impede women's progress towards several MDGs. The MDGs should be important instruments to focus on girls and women, since they often shoulder the greatest burdens of extreme poverty, hunger and disease. Critical actions are needed to focus on overarching priorities for gender equality, including challenges to women's political representation, legal rights and the intolerable ongoing epidemic of violence against women and girls. A gender-equal environment for MDG realization needs to be established everywhere.

Substantial progress has been made towards MDG 4 (reducing child mortality). Progress has been attributed to a combination of improved routine immunization coverage and the provision of a second opportunity for immunization. Efforts need to be sustained and where necessary, strengthened, if progress is to continue. The rate of decline increased for the period 2000-2008, compared with the 1990s (the average annual rate of decline for 2000-2008 was 2.3 per cent, compared to 1.4 per cent for 1990-2000). This is still grossly insufficient to reach MDG 4 by 2015.

Regarding MDG 5 (improving maternal health), the world will fall well short of the target related to maternal mortality at the present rate of progress. The data suggest that to reach the target, the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) would have had to be reduced by an average 5.5 per cent per year between 1990 and 2015. The current average rate of reduction is less than 1 per cent per year. The highest mortality ratios are found in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It should be noted that measuring maternal mortality is challenging at best. Reliability of currently available data sources varies, and accurate monitoring of progress will depend, in the medium to long term, on better systems of surveillance and registration.

Regarding efforts to combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6), global HIV prevalence appears to have stabilized at 33.4 million in 2008, comprising 31.3 million adults and 2.1 million children under the age of 15. Two thirds of the 33 million people living with HIV in 2008 were in Sub-Saharan Africa, most of them female. Antiretroviral (ARV) regimens for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) are now reaching nearly half of HIV-positive pregnant women globally. Aid-related interventions require enhancing health systems and linking them with communities. The education sector is a crucial avenue for HIV prevention.

Malaria is still a significant threat to nearly half of the world's population-3.3 billion people living in 109 countries are at risk of contracting the disease. About 90 per cent of all malaria deaths occur in Sub-Saharan Africa, mostly among children under five. In addition, it is a major cause of anemia, low birth weight, premature birth, infant mortality and maternal deaths. Substantial increases were registered in coverage of key interventions, notably insecticide-treated mosquito nets, rising from 2 per cent in 2000 to 20 per cent in 2006.

Tuberculosis prevalence, which is the number of TB cases per 100,000 people, has also fallen globally. However, the targets of halving the 1990 prevalence and death rates by 2015, established by the Stop TB partnership, are unlikely to be met, largely due to the still rising prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

On ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), the world is on track to achieving the MDG drinking water target. Currently, 87 per cent of the world's population uses drinking water from improved sources. However, improved drinking water coverage in Sub-Saharan Africa is still considerably lower than in other regions, even if an additional 207 million Africans are now using safe sources of drinking water.

Sanitation coverage, however, is far from satisfactory. The world is not on track to meeting the MDG sanitation target. There is need to greatly accelerate progress in sanitation, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Protected areas are the cornerstone of efforts to conserve the world's species and ecosystems as well as a key component in climate change mitigation. However, only 12 per cent of the planet was under some form of protection by 2008. Moreover, even where they exist, protected areas can be poorly managed and face continued assault from pollution and climate change, irresponsible tourism, infrastructure development and increasing demands for land and water resources.

Deforestation continues at an alarming rate of about 13 million hectares per year globally. This is partially counterbalanced by forest planting, landscape restoration and the natural expansion of forests, which have significantly reduced the net loss of forest area. Reducing deforestation and forest degradation helps mitigate climate change.

In 1990, almost half the urban populations in developing regions were living in slums. By 2005, that population had been reduced to 36 per cent. The lives of slum dwellers have improved in almost all regions. Despite some advances, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of slums. Improvements in the lives of slum dwellers in most Sub-Saharan African countries will therefore require large multi-sectoral investments.

Further progress has been made towards fulfilling the promises embodied in MDG 8. However, the global partnership for development has suffered significant setbacks, mostly arising from the recent state of the world economy. In the countdown to 2015, urgent responses are needed to bridge the existing implementation gaps to make good on the promises made to achieve the MDGs. Although official development assistance (ODA) reached its highest level ever in 2008, there remain large delivery goals in meeting existing commitments. The 2010 Gleneagles target is approximately \$154 billion in present values; additional flows of \$17 billion a year would be required to achieve this target. Future flows of ODA to poor countries are at risk at a time when they need to be increased both to protect hard-won progress towards the MDGs and to counter the effects of the global economic and financial crisis.

Conclusion

The MDGs require both pro-poor economic growth and public service scale-up. Although there has been notable progress towards the MDGs at the global level and in most countries, reaching the most marginalized individuals and families will continue to be a challenge and requires specific focus and strategies. Many MDGs will require attention in countries and societies acutely affected by chronic emergencies, climate change and long-standing conflicts. The upcoming high-level plenary meeting of the sixty-fifth General Assembly in September 2010 will be a significant opportunity to galvanize commitment, rally support and spur collective action in order to reach the MDGs by 2015.