



AICESIS

International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions

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International Association of Economic and Social Councils
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ECOSOC theme for 2008
*“Implementation of internationally agreed
goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development”*

**General debate for the High-Level Segment
(ECOSOC Chamber)
2 July 2008**

It is a good thing that the theme adopted for the 2008 report to the high-level segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council be devoted to the implementation of internationally approved objectives and commitments concerning sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a concept which appeared on the international scene barely twenty or so years ago. An initial definition of it was given by the United Nations General Assembly in late 1987: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It is this attention devoted to generations to come which led to a growing awareness of the need to protect the environment and natural resources. It is clear that this awareness has become a broadly established part of public opinion in a number of regions in the world. But the concept of sustainable development is not limited to protecting the environment. It also includes preserving a social balance, the ability to master and regulate how current generations live together, and bringing together both men and women based on a joint project. Working from that, the three pillars of sustainable development are economic growth, social development and protecting the environment.

These three pillars are inseparable. In-depth reflection concerning sustainable development therefore involves reflecting about the interdependencies between these three dimensions.

Economic growth involves the implementation of development strategies that, above and beyond macro-economic policies, integrate three domains: sustainable agricultural development in the face of the threats of desertification and soil degradation which respects biodiversity and the management of natural resources; industrial development, with appropriate use of energy as well as strict management of pollution; and, lastly, the development of economic infrastructures relating to transport, telecommunications and energy.

Social development involves having macro-economic policies integrating the need for equity and social integration and means that a priority effort must be made regarding fighting poverty, acting in the same spirit which inspired the definition of the millennium goals.

Lastly, protecting the environment, which includes the by now familiar issues of protecting the atmosphere, the campaign against climate change, the struggle against desertification, management of natural disasters, and protecting biodiversity, must also be expressed in the macro-economic policies of various countries.

However, the main original feature of the approach adopted by the United Nations is that these three dimensions of sustainable development form part of a real global partnership for development which is sought under the framework of internationally-approved commitments. As soon as there is linkage between the economic, social and environmental dimensions, there will also be a link between the apparently separate objectives of growth, income redistribution, respect for human rights and international labour standards, access to education and training, access to physical and technological infrastructures and financial services, respect for the diversity of cultures, and safeguarding a sustainable environment.

At the heart of the objectives adopted within the framework of the United Nations is the Millennium Declaration adopted in September 2000, in which 189 States committed themselves to a series of eight objectives for fighting poverty which are measurable and are accompanied by specific calendars for the period between now and 2015. What is mainly

involved is eradicating famine and extreme poverty, the generalized provision of primary education, promoting equality between men and women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, fighting AIDS, malaria and other pandemics, ensuring environmental sustainability and, to this end, developing a global partnership for development.

To date, unfortunately, the assessment of the implementation of these objectives has been alarming. Even though a few signs of improvement have been observed in the field of fighting poverty, access to drinking water and education, over a billion people still live in a state of total destitution and the situation is even worsening in certain regions of Africa and Asia. Eleven million children die every year for want of access to healthcare. One in four people are still drinking dirty water, nearly 120 million children have no access to primary school, and nearly 600 million women are illiterate. This shows the urgent need to take action.

In this respect, the latest development aid figures for 2007 published in April 2008 by the OECD provided a particularly worrying diagnosis. The development aid figures for 2007 are a very long way off the objectives set. The countries that are the biggest aid donors, including member States of the European Union, the United States, Canada and Japan, have not managed to live up to their financial commitments. The current level of public development aid, which is less than 0.25% of GDP (0.38% for European Union countries) still remains well below the objective of 0.7% of GDP agreed to long ago for rich countries, and which was restated at the Monterrey conference in 2002. Consequently, there is an urgent need to mobilize new financial resources if we wish to avoid seeing the millennium goals for 2015 becoming just a pious wish.

The IAESCSI, which I have been the President of for some months now, and which brings together sixty or so Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions from all over the world, has devoted several of its recent works to ways of improving the situation in these fields. In 2007, the working theme adopted in Beijing related specifically to ways of intensifying international co-operation and promoting shared development with a view to building a more harmonious world. In 2008 and 2009, the works organized under the Brazilian Presidency will, more specifically, relate to equitable development and environmental responsibility. But, more generally speaking, the IAESCSI has assigned itself the mission of promoting millennium objectives in relation to all the actors of civil society, particularly in the education and training sectors, and among educational leaders and trainers in non-governmental organizations.

With a view to this, we hold that all countries, including the most developed ones, are jointly concerned by the need to protect the global public assets that are health, education, sustainable development and security in international relations, which are threatened for everyone by major economic and social imbalances. The increasing gap between rich and poor countries adversely affects not just the poor countries, but all countries. Thus, increased illegal migration flows towards rich countries are a consequence of extreme poverty and of a lack of opportunities for a large part of the world's population, especially in Africa. Conflicts, insecurity and epidemics certainly affect poor countries, but they have a boomerang effect on rich countries. This is the ransom involved in a globalized world.

Over the last few years, there has been an increasing number of declarations and initiatives in favour of a strong commitment by the international community. Just to mention a few examples, there was the international conference on development held in Monterrey in March 2002 to work towards a real partnership between rich and poor countries, the New York declaration of September 2004 concerning innovative sources of development financing, and the Geneva declaration of 2004 concerning the fight against hunger and poverty. The time has

now come to go from a formal consensus to making concrete improvements and to transform the commitments reiterated at various international meetings (but which largely remain incantations) into acts.

Firstly, this involves acting on the international community's moral obligation to provide itself with the actual means of achieving the objective of 0.7% of GDP. But as it is necessary to be realistic and be aware of the fact that efforts towards this will be difficult to take, it must be stated straight away that other complementary resources fully devoted to dealing with major poverty should also be established.

The IAESCSI has supported, and continues to actively support, the ideas that have been developed over the last few years with a view to establishing additional aid alongside public development aid in the form of innovative financing that is durable in terms of its volume and payment of it, and which would show particular solidarity towards those populations that are hardest hit by extreme poverty. This is the case with two proposals which have already started to be implemented. What is involved is firstly a tax on air tickets established in July 2006 at France's instigation, and which is starting to bring in considerable resources, and secondly the International Finance Facility (IFF), a British initiative based on providing guaranteed loans under commitments by donor countries which span several years. In both cases, it is desirable for the number of participating countries to increase rapidly.

Other ideas were raised which are worth studying, such as the plan to create a global lottery by the World Food Programme, the profits from which would go to international aid, or even more complex ideas, such as taxing financial transactions or arms sales.

Above and beyond increasing the amount of aid, faced with the great poverty which continues to be rife in various places around the world, it is necessary for the international community to mobilize itself in order to increase the consistency and efficiency of its interventions. During the initial stage, and faced with a situation of urgency, we need to take strong action quickly, giving priority to three fields: public health, education, and fighting hunger.

The need to fight hunger is even more pressing given the recent price rises for agricultural raw materials, the consequences of which primarily affect the poorest countries: over one billion people in Africa, Latin America and South Asia suffer from acute malnutrition. They can scarcely get even one or two meals providing an intake of several hundred calories a day. Establishing food security undoubtedly entails the resurrection of traditional food production in developing countries and supporting small-scale family agriculture. In the health sector, the two priorities are the battle against major pandemics and the fight against maternal and child mortality. As for education, it is a major issue, because only access to education enables discrimination and inequalities to be reduced, particularly those that impact on women.

We can see that turning back poverty is firstly based on a regular increase in the amount of aid provided by donors and greater effectiveness in terms of their interventions. But it also depends on progress made in the way that the countries receiving this aid integrate it into their development strategies.

To help beneficiary countries fully appropriate their development, a contractual relationship should be built by drawing up partnership contracts between donor countries and beneficiary countries, with the objectives to be achieved, the avenues to take, and the methods for monitoring their execution and assessing their results being defined by common agreement and based on shared assessments.

The leaders of civil society represented in the institutions constituting the IAESCSI are certainly aware of the difficulties posing obstacles to the good governance of States, in light of the handicaps which a good many developing countries are confronted with: institutional instability, which is sometimes aggravated by the existence of internal or cross-border conflicts, the weak capabilities of administrative authorities, and the dangers of corruption which bleeds off major parts of the GDP of certain States. Nevertheless, the promotion of good governance is crucial for the countries concerned, particularly the poorest ones. This means that there must be an honest State with a technically competent administration, financial procedures ensuring transparency in terms of the allocation and use of funds, public services that make progress in terms of quality, and solid legal institutions. It has in fact been proven that countries which have improved their governance experience greater economic growth and achieve more encouraging results in terms of reducing poverty.

With a view to this, joint bipartite assessment of the impact of the programmes conducted is of major importance because it enables lessons to be drawn, good practices to be compared in relation to the concerted actions taken, and because, in legitimising aid, it contributes to reinforcing trust and the feeling of a greater sense of mutual responsibility. Acceptance by the civil societies of developed countries of the financial transfers required is subject to the precondition of the transparency of the actions taken, and the visibility of the results, and only these are likely to convince them of the validity of the sums allocated to the aid.

But above and beyond the good governance of States, for a long time now, the IAESCSI has held that it is largely based on the involvement and initiatives of their civil societies that the development of poor countries may find effective support. When civil societies are organized and have achieved a certain degree of independence in relation to political powers that are often imperfect, they constitute an effective lever for achieving the objectives of good governance and improving avenues for development. Indeed, they enable the input of contributions from bodies as diverse as professional and trade union organizations, associations (where women play an increasingly more substantial role), and NGOs, which are often very active. They thus act as the catalyst for involving actors out in the field, reinforcing local democratic debate, and better control of powers when faced with the temptations of waste and corruption.

In this respect, special attention must be devoted to the role of enterprises which, through the foundations that they have created, may lead to specific projects, particularly in the areas of training or health. In light of the role that they play in globalization, the responsibility of enterprises should not be underestimated. A certain number of them recently opted to adopt ethical and socially responsible behaviour which may act in support of the sustainable development approach: it is essential for an increasing number of enterprises to adopt this orientation and persevere with it.

This shows just how worthwhile the work of reflecting and making proposals carried out by the IAESCSI is; this association represents organizations from civil society, enterprises, trade unions, associations, and NGOs from the North and the South in terms of all their diversity and specific features. The IAESCSI offers an incomparable framework for jointly debating questions relating to sustainable development so that a better understanding of the solutions recommended may be achieved. By outlining a few of the most important elements in the joint reflection we have undertaken, it is this message of lucidity, determination and hope that I wanted to present today to this high-level session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council on behalf of the IAESCSI and the civil society it represents.