

Informal Summary

**Second Committee
64th General Assembly**

**Panel discussion on
“Achieving the MDGs by 2015: Preparing for the 2010 UN MDG Summit”
United Nations Headquarters, New York, 12 October 2009**

- Chair: **H.E. Mr. Park In-kook**, Chairperson of the Second Committee
- Keynote address: **Professor Jeffrey Sachs**, Director, The Earth Institute and Professor of Health Policy and Management, Columbia University
- Panellists: **Professor Esther Duflo**, Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty Alleviation and Development Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Founder/Director of Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)
- Mr. Olav Kjørven**, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Bureau for Development Policy (UNDP)
- Mr. Patrick Hayford**, Director of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Professor of Health Policy and Management at Columbia University, stated that the MDGs are the most serious attempt that the world has ever made to alleviate poverty, and that failing to achieve them would have a grave consequence in tackling even greater emerging challenges. In order to attain the MDGs by the 2015 target date, the international community must work together and fulfil its MDG-related commitments.

Prof. Sachs emphasized that there is not a single goal that could not be achieved, as demonstrated through the tremendous successes of the Millennium Village Project, and described the strong positive inter-linkages among the eight MDGs.

Prof. Sachs emphasized that financing is the most crucial obstacle for achieving the MDGs by 2015. He stated that developing countries have done their share by formulating national scientifically proven plans for attaining the MDGs, but these plans have not been implemented due to a lack of finance. He called upon developed countries to meet their ODA commitments, and showcased the Gleneagles commitment to double aid for Africa, which is supposed to be applied by 2010, but lacks any concrete action plan. He therefore stressed the need for a holistic and integrated approach, which foresees systematic funding for all MDGs, and the need to address the issue of mutual accountability in the next G20 Summit, to be hosted by Canada.

To conclude, Prof. Sachs stressed the importance of the next 11 months leading up to the 2010 UN MDG Summit by saying that “this is the last chance for the world to get it right”. He also warned the international community that the current focus on climate change should not distract attention from the importance of the MDGs. He therefore urged that nations follow the proposal of the US President Barack Obama, made at the general debate of the United Nations General Assembly in September, to come to the Summit next year with an agreed, concrete action plan. The President said that the United States will look beyond the MDGs to end the extreme poverty and that the MDGs represented only a half-way benchmark to eradicating poverty.

Prof. Esther Duflo, Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty Alleviation and Development Economics at MIT, and Director of the Jameel Poverty Action Lab, urged the international community to focus resources on anti-poverty strategies, which are practical and cost effective and based on rigorous evidence. She focused on seven highly effective anti-poverty programmes to achieve the MDGs. These programmes, which she referred to as “best buys” are:

- 1) *School-based mass deworming*: Poor health conditions are one of the causes which prevent children from attending school. For example, in Africa, 400 million children are infected with intestinal worms. School-based mass deworming has proven to increase school attendance by 1/6 of a school year with a cost of only \$ 0.50 child per year.
- 2) *Remedial education*: Even though primary school enrolment is rising, providing basic learning to children remains a major challenge. Poor children often lack school preparedness and quickly fall behind. Focusing on remedial education to develop basic skills to increase literacy has had effective results with a minimal cost of \$2.25 per child per year.
- 3) *Free bednets to tackle Malaria*: According to Prof. Duflo’s evidence, charging for bednets excludes the poor and does not promote usage – coverage drops by 75 percent with a small user fee. Giving out free bednets is, therefore, very effective strategy since \$200 to \$300 can be saved per child life saved with a cost of only \$5 per insecticide treated net (ITN).
- 4) *Quotas for women*: Gender equality is a major challenge to achieve the MDGs as women are highly under-represented in political structures. Boosting women’s political participation through adopting quotas assists in advocating for women’s priorities, such as access to clean water. This strategy is free of charge.
- 5) *Sugar Daddies*: According to UNAIDS, four million people are newly infected with HIV each year. The youth are the “window of hope” in the fight against HIV/AIDS, but many programs targeted at youth have had disappointing results. However, education programmes that inform young women about the relative risk of HIV transmission from older men versus younger men have reduced teen pregnancies with older men by 65 percent with only \$1 per student.
- 6) *Incentives to immunize*: Vaccines are highly cost effective and provided for free in many countries. Small incentives can dramatically increase uptake and, by encouraging many

more families to attend immunization clinics, incentives can reduce the cost per child immunized.

- 7) *Smart agricultural subsidies*: Simple agriculture technology has a large potential to dramatically increase income. Subsidies, which are implemented at the right time, can trigger big changes in fostering agriculture at a low cost.

To conclude, Prof. Duflo highlighted that these “best buys” constitute effective, simple, and scalable programs, with the potential for large effects, if integrated into national policy and development programs. To meet the MDGs, the international community should therefore focus resources on strategies that are backed by rigorous evidence and are cost-effective.

Mr. Olav Kjørven, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the Bureau for Development Policy at UNDP, noted the great interest that the 2010 UN MDG Summit and review process has generated and urged the international community to make it a turning-point in the MDG process. He highlighted the tremendous successes of Member States in making progress towards the MDG targets, demonstrating that the MDGs are not just aspirational, but in fact achievable.

Mr. Kjørven indicated that despite these impressive gains, most low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, remain off-track in almost all the Goals, and several middle-income countries lag in specific goals, including gender equality. Escalating inequalities mean that, even where progress towards the MDGs seems on track, there are glaring discrepancies, in particular because the poorest women and men are excluded from the benefits of economic growth.

Mr. Kjørven reminded all participants that the multiple crises threaten slowdown or reversal of key MDG targets. He therefore urged the international community to take the following four steps in lead-up to the UN MDG 2010 Summit: (1) Develop a deeper understanding of what works and what doesn't, using the large and growing body of evidence from local and national efforts; (2) Rapidly invest in programs that actually work and for which demonstrable scaling-up successes can be achieved; (3) Galvanize a renewed coalition of diverse actors committed to working together to overcome key constraints to MDG progress; and (4) Build urgency and consensus for ensuring that countries hit by the multiple crises can sustain progress and avoid MDG reversals.

Leading up to the 2010 UN MDG Summit, the UN will be working closely with its partners to coordinate a 12 month series of global, regional and country initiatives and build the analytical and actionable case for accelerating progress on the MDGs. Mr. Kjørven explained that the UN is working on an approach to scaling up support for member states by through what is being called a “MDG Acceleration Framework”, which would combine capacity and governance assessments with more traditional techniques to identify constraints, focus solutions and target investments. For the first time, the whole range of tools which the UN has on hand will be applied in the 90 countries undertaking UN Development Assistance Frameworks in the next three years. The MDG Acceleration Framework would bring the UN system together behind a core package of services that support countries' efforts to overcome binding constraints and expand programmes that work.

In conclusion, Mr. Kjørven appealed to UN member states to stop “business as usual” break through old habits, and work as a coalition in order to mobilize huge efforts and political will to achieve the MDGs by the 2015 target date.

Mr. Patrick Hayford, Director of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, observed that the MDGs are the expression of a renewed global consensus and partnership in international development cooperation. The MDGs have also given the international community clear targets and benchmarks to be met. Since the Millennium Summit, the MDGs have been vigorously promoted and publicized by global civil society, and many developing countries have placed attainment of the MDGs at the centre of their development agenda.

Mr. Hayford stressed that it is still possible for Africa to achieve the MDGs if African countries continue to implement and scale-up best practices, and if the resources outlined in the report of the Secretary-General’s MDGs Africa Steering Group are mobilized. He pointed out that the 2010 UN MDG Summit will be a convenient opportunity to review the progress made, but also warned of the possibility that the Summit would take place under a climate of severe economic stress in which countries would find it difficult to recommit to the meeting of MDGs.

Mr. Hayford also pointed out some specific details regarding preparations for the 2010 UN MDG Summit. He stressed that the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequent agreements have provided a clear roadmap for mutual accountability which needs particular emphasis within the preparations. He also noted that the 2010 UN MDG Summit should involve a broad range of national and international stakeholders, including parliamentarians, trade unions, student groups, women’s organizations, the faith-based community, charities and the media, all of whose efforts should also be supported by the UN. Furthermore, he pointed out that attention should be paid to new and emerging challenges and opportunities, in particular, climate change, peace and security issues, south-south partnerships, and restructuring of global economic governance. He therefore urged the Summit to include a review of the current peace processes, and the impact of the international peace initiatives upon the attainment of the MDGs.

In conclusion, Mr. Hayford stated that mobilization of the additional resources needed to help implement the MDGs will require a special effort of political will on all sides. Developing countries will need to scale up successful processes and initiatives, and developed countries will need to act decisively in meeting their aid commitments.

Interactive Dialogue

Delegations reiterated their commitment to convening a UN Summit on the MDGs in 2010, focused on scaling-up efforts to attain the MDGs. They all agreed that the Summit will provide a crucial opportunity to establish a new strategic partnership to fund MDGs and thus helping the most vulnerable countries. Delegations also expressed their concern that multiple global crises could slow or even reverse the progress towards the MDGs.

Some delegations expressed their concern regarding the substance of the 2010 UN MDG Summit, and urged that the framework and scope of the Summit be defined soon. They emphasized the importance of identifying concrete policy priorities for 2010 Summit, including resource mobilization, mutual accountability, and south-south cooperation; and cross-cutting development issues, such as peace and security, good governance, food security and agricultural development, climate change, and gender equality. The specific challenges of middle-income countries and Africa were also highlighted.

Furthermore, the possibility of enlarging the MDG framework with additional goals was presented. The scope of a possible post-2015 development strategy was also voiced, but the concern was raised by some delegates and panellists that working on a post-2015 strategy might divert the focus away from the 2015 MDG target date.

Several delegations from developing countries urged developed countries to fulfil their financial commitments to assist developing countries with achieving the MDGs by 2015, despite the current economic and financial crisis. Some delegations, however, responded that the recurrent call for funds constitutes only “one side of the coin”, and that equal emphasis should be given to an analytical approach that identifies successful strategies and best practices that might be scaled-up and replicated.

Many delegations, in addition to the panellists, emphasized that the 2010 UN MDG Summit should focus on concrete and tangible measures to achieve the MDGs by 2015, and urged for the adoption of a globally-agreed action plan.

In his response to questions raised, **Prof. Sachs** highlighted that targeted, funded, quantified, audited projects, which are based on proven mechanisms, do work. He therefore recommended the use of multi-donor funds to support country plans that are scientifically vetted, documented, transparent and accountable. He continued by highlighting the successes of the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, and urging that the Fund be transformed into a Global Fund for Health that would be able to tackle broad health issues. He furthermore urged that the developed countries should increase their ODA from the world average of 0.3 per cent to a committed 0.7 per cent, which would make an additional 150 billion dollars available for developing countries.

On the question of “MDG *plus*”, **Prof. Sachs** acknowledged the importance of including relevant additional goals to the MDG framework. He added that the specific challenges of middle income countries should also be addressed in the upcoming Summit. In regard to post-2015 strategies, he mentioned the importance of envisioning the end of poverty by 2025. In order to achieve sustainability, he identified four key points. First is agriculture. He pointed out that food security and food availability are crucial for sustainability. Second is infrastructure. He emphasized that there is no development where there is no electricity and roads. Third is human capital: the skills, the knowledge and education. Finally, the fertility reduction and stabilization of population is crucial. He concluded by urging for the adoption of a globally agreed action plan at next year’s Summit to achieve the MDGs by 2015, and proposed to form Working Groups with members of the delegations around particular themes. He characterized this effort as not negotiation, but as global problem solving and suggested that the Working Groups would brainstorm on the globally agreed

plan. He ensured that he will make all the information available for this problem-solving effort.

Prof. Duflo stressed that the international community does not only need to scale up what has worked, but also to scale down what has not worked. She furthermore urged for concrete action. The 2010 MDG Summit should therefore avoid broad generalities, which lack content. If funds are provided, they have to be used for specific projects which are cost effective and proven to work.

Mr. Kjørven called for a breakthrough approach for 2015, in which UN member states should prove their ability to do “business as unusual”. Mr. Kjørven emphasized that the gender-related MDGs, like maternal health, constitute the goals, in which the international community falls the most behind. He furthermore stressed that health systems need to be reformed. Progress should not only be attained in specific MDG-related areas, but should be measured by capacity building for the whole system.

Mr. Hayford highlighted the importance of the 2010 MDG Summit to scale up efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015. He stressed that the target date cannot be missed. In regard to Africa, he reiterated that the MDGs are achievable given that better financial support is provided. To conclude, he urged the international community to work closely together and to fully engage all stakeholders both in developed and developing countries.

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