

3 THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT FROM WORDS TO ACTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted following the Millennium Assembly in September 2000. In 2002, Secretary General Kofi Annan asked me to direct the UN Millennium Project, which has identified practical ways to achieve the MDGs by 2015 in all countries affected by extreme poverty.

The UN Millennium Project, organized around ten task forces, brought together more than 250 development leaders from around the world, including scientists, academics, practitioners, and business and NGO leaders. Additionally, we had tremendous support from all the relevant UN agencies and special programs and funds by means of a UN expert group that engaged the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), and all the other agencies with tremendous expertise and a crucial role to play in poverty reduction. The project worked for nearly three years to complete its diagnosis and analysis, and it launched its reports on 17 January. Those reports address the many aspects of the MDGs: fighting hunger; fighting child and maternal mortality; fighting AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria; guaranteeing access to essential medicines; water and sanitation; the role of science and technology; and the challenges of slum dwellers.

The main report is titled *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. The two operative words are “investing” and “practical,” because they emphasize that the MDGs can still be achieved in any country in the world with extreme poverty. For the dozens of countries that are not on course to

achieve the MDGs, the difference comes down to investments in proven technologies and systems to address the challenges of extreme poverty. For example, to control child mortality, one needs clinics that can provide essential health services, safe drinking water and so forth. The UN Millennium Project has identified hundreds of specific investments in many categories. Unfortunately, these investments are simply not being made at scale right now in the poorest countries in the world.

We have made a diagnosis that illustrates several reasons for the lack of these investments. Many people think that corruption is the primary cause. Corruption plays a role in many countries, and in some it plays an egregious role. While it is clear that corruption interferes with development, claiming that corruption is the obstacle to development radically over-simplifies the situation in dozens of impoverished countries around the world. In many countries, the most important obstacle is extreme poverty itself. Even relatively well-governed, extremely poor countries cannot mobilize the resources needed to undertake the core investments necessary to escape from the poverty trap. Without breaking the poverty trap, good governance alone is insufficient. This is where the help of the rich world, long promised and chronically under-delivered, becomes so vital. To the extent that countries are trapped in poverty, meaning that they lack the domestic resources needed to make the investments to address the challenges of the MDGs, the rich world must honour its commitments and obligations to help provide the financing necessary to make those investments possible. These promises were first made over four decades ago.

In addition to poor governance and the poverty trap, there are two other categories that I think require attention. One concerns the pockets of poverty that exist in remote areas of otherwise reasonably well-functioning economies. This stems from the geographical isolation of far-removed areas that need regional development strategies to rise out of extreme poverty. Finally, there are policy issues that even relatively well-governed countries are neglecting to address. Specifically, these include issues such as safe childbirth. Hundreds of thousands of women die each year while in labour or from resulting complications. We found a pervasive neglect of this issue by governments around the world, even in middle-income countries, with dangerous shortfalls in emergency obstetrical care. This is not the product of bad governance, but rather of a lack of knowledge of specific steps that can be taken.

One core recommendation is that countries should prepare poverty reduction strategies—including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

(PRSPs) where appropriate—that are based on the MDGs. Instead of simply evoking the MDGs as general goals, the MDGs ought to be linked to actual investment programming and the medium-term expenditure framework. In turn, official development assistance must be linked to the medium-term expenditure framework to ensure that countries do not fail to achieve the MDGs simply because they lack financing. Another core recommendation is that rich countries follow through on their commitments made in Monterrey in 2002 and repeatedly in previous decades. Only much larger levels of official development assistance can let countries realize the MDGs. This also calls for a very different role of the IMF. Rather than advising cash-strapped countries not to invest in healthcare and clinics, roads, power, ports, and other forms of infrastructure, the IMF ought to help countries achieve a macroeconomic framework based on the MDGs. That requires a reversal of business-as-usual; instead of telling developing countries to do less, the IMF will need to tell donors to do more. A truly goal-based system would have the IMF championing the cause of each developing country as it seeks the promised official development assistance. In many cases, the IMF already calls for more aid, but it needs to be more forceful, more visible, and more upfront about the link between official development assistance and achieving the MDGs.

National launches of the UN Millennium Project report have now taken place in around eighty countries. It was warmly received by international leaders, the African Union (AU) countries, the Group of 77 (G-77) and the vast majority of the high-income countries as well. It received similar strong endorsements from UN agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, and others. What has won broad support is the concept of targeted, quantifiable diagnostics and investment programs linked to fiscal policies and development assistance. The Secretary General has clearly stated that the UN Millennium Project has provided a clear plan of action to achieve the MDGs.

So where are we now? We are looking for implementation and to move beyond words. That is the hardest part of the international system. We need all rich countries to commit to 0.7 percent of GNP in official development assistance on a timetable. While every country has already committed to the target, many countries, including Canada, Japan, and the United States, are not on a specific timetable to achieve it. Canada needs a timetable to reach 0.7 percent no later than 2015. It was a Canadian, Lester Pearson, whose “Partners in Development” report in 1969 put the 0.7 percent target before the General Assembly.

The United States gave the least official development assistance as a share of wealth of any rich country in 2003. If it continues on its current course, spending roughly half a trillion dollars on the military, and only sixteen billion dollars on development assistance, of which only a fraction goes to Africa, the MDGs will not be achieved, and the world will be rendered less secure.

The Secretary General was very clear in his call to action, and I think we need to get real results. Just recently, the Blair Commission for Africa found an absorptive capacity in Africa of tens of billions of dollars, and this mirrored the findings of the UN Millennium Project. The consensus of the world has grown clear: the time to act is now. Countries must be assured that their MDG-based strategies will be supported. A lack of donor financing must not be the barrier to development. Too frequently, countries put forward plans that are not financed. The donors can continue to short-change their partners in development, or they can follow through on their commitments.

The UN Millennium Project also called for a number of “Quick Wins,” as did the Secretary General. The Quick Wins are actions that can have an extremely beneficial effect on human well-being immediately. One of the most dramatic would be to get malaria under control in the next three years through the mass distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets and the mass distribution of effective combination therapies, the new medicines of choice for fighting malaria. We must combine the bed nets with the combination drugs and indoor residual spraying, as well as with community-based training of community health workers and proper diagnostics. This can be done quickly, and we could save more than one million children a year who die of malaria.

Another Quick Win will spur local food productivity and apply it towards school meals programs on a massive scale, using locally produced food rather than food aid coming from abroad. We believe the combination of higher inputs of water, fertilizer, and seed at the local level in Africa, combined with universal school meals in hunger hotspots, could change the face of rural farming and dramatically enable and encourage children to attend school. Adequate nutrition will improve performance at school, and increased food productivity will reduce the necessity of their staying at home to assist with farming. This is a Quick Win that ought to occur within three years.

We also called for the elimination of user fees for health and education, because we know the user fees are rationing services to the

poorest of the poor, keeping children out of schools, and families out of clinics. If donors made up the financing gap, this situation could be corrected quickly.

Donor countries have promised debt cancellation but failed to deliver it. One hundred percent debt cancellation for countries that require increased aid to meet the MDGs is vital.

The year 2005 is critical. We are approaching the Group of 8 (G-8) Summit in July and the important high-level summit at the UN in September. We desperately need action this year, and the United Nations must show that we can move from words to actions. There is no more opportune and urgent need to do that than in the area of fighting poverty, disease, and hunger. We have crafted a practical plan of action. I think it is clear what needs to be done. The role of Canada in this is clear—Canada must set a timetable to reach 0.7 percent and work with other countries to ensure that the MDGs are achieved on a global scale. I believe that the stakes are so high that this will be done, and that the people gathered today are committed to that effort. I look forward to Canada's great leadership in this endeavour.

