

Remarks by Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator
On the occasion of a Public Dialogue hosted by
the United Nations Association of Canada
“The Global Recession and the Implications for Achieving the MDGs”
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I am delighted to be in Canada as UNDP Administrator at the invitation of the Canadian Government.

It is also a great pleasure for me to be in this beautiful National Arts Centre. Throughout my nine years as New Zealand’s Prime Minister, I was also the Minister of Arts, Culture, and Heritage, so this setting makes me feel very much at home. I also believe that creative people have a significant role to play in a nation’s development.

My thanks go to the UN Association of Canada for convening this evening’s event. This association has played an important role since the UN was founded in engaging the Canadian public with the mission of the UN.

This is a mission in which Canada plays a very critical role. Your nation has long been known for its strong support of multilateralism.

This is not my first visit to Canada, but it is my first since taking on my new role as head of the UN’s largest development agency.

Canada is also a strong and longstanding supporter of UNDP. As our eighth largest contributor, Canada is a critical ally in providing us with a predictable funding base so that we can plan ahead effectively and deliver development results where they matter most.

Canada is also a consistently strong presence on UNDP’s governing body in New York.

The timing of my visit here, prior to the discussions at the upcoming General Assembly meetings in New York and the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh, provides a good opportunity to focus on some of the development challenges our world faces, and how we can best move ahead in overcoming them.

The world faces an intertwined set of challenges impacting on development, from the effects of the economic recession to climate change and recent experiences of high food and fuel prices. The declaration of the swine flu pandemic this year adds to these challenges.

These are all problems without borders, and are of concern to us all.

Getting the right policies and responses in place in a way which co-ordinates a diverse set of actors to address them involves – as I understand hockey fans would say - some very careful “stickhandling”.

At this time the world needs more than ever a reinvigorated multilateral system which can help deliver improved living standards for the poorest and most vulnerable people and nations.

We all benefit if developing countries have vibrant economies, are well governed and peaceful, have educated and healthy populations, and can support the fight against climate change by pursuing low carbon routes to development.

I came to my current position from a background of fighting for social and economic justice, and with a strong commitment to sustainable development; the peaceful resolution of conflict; political and social inclusion; and reconciliation.

Nine years ago I was one of the heads of government who travelled to the United Nations General Assembly in New York and signed the Millennium Declaration. That document enshrined the Millennium Development Goals as the international community’s collective commitment to create a better tomorrow for billions of people.

The opportunity now to make a contribution to MDG achievement through the UN’s development system is what motivated me to seek the position of UNDP Administrator.

I appreciate that meeting the MDGs will require strong partnerships; enough dedicated resources; unwavering political leadership; and a long-term strategy to ensure that how we develop and grow is sustainable in every sense.

According to the latest UN report on the MDGs, there has been progress made.

The global target of reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015 seems likely to be achieved.

The world is also getting closer to meeting the universal primary education target, although too slowly to meet the 2015 deadline.

The latest figures on child mortality released by UNICEF estimate that the number of child deaths in 2008 declined to 8.8 million from 12.5 million in 1990, the base line year for the MDGs. However, it is still unacceptable that so many children die before their fifth birthday, and the global rate of improvement is still insufficient to reach this MDG.

But, other sobering challenges also remain.

No country in sub-Saharan Africa is on course to achieve all the MDGs.

Four years after the target date which was set for reaching gender parity in education, it has yet to be achieved.

Alas, the goal towards which there has been least progress so far is that which seeks to improve maternal health. This bears striking witness to the low priority all too often given to meeting the particular needs of women, and their sexual and reproductive health needs.

The major risk now is that the global recession could stall or reverse that progress which has been made towards the MDGs.

In 2007, just before the global food crisis hit, the number of chronically hungry people in developing countries stood at around 850 million. FAO believes that number will exceed one billion this year.

If children are pulled out of school because of the effects of the crisis on their families and their countries' budgets, they may never get a second chance in education.

If children have poor nutrition because of the crisis, the long term effects on their cognitive skills and productive potential are serious.

Profound economic crisis in vulnerable countries then may extend into a humanitarian crisis, and at worst precipitate instability and conflict. The consequences may take years or even decades to remedy, ultimately at a much greater cost to the international community than timely support right now.

Massive counter-cyclical bailouts have been needed, and provided, to shore up some of the richest economies on the planet during the international recession.

Those least responsible for the economic crisis, however, stand to be hit by a double blow : bearing the heaviest burden of the recession's effects, and also being the least able to respond.

With many developing countries facing reduced domestic revenue streams this year, their governments need support to maintain budgets for basic services like health and education –which are so critical to meeting the MDGs.

UNDP is helping countries to analyze the impacts of the recession on their people and advising on policy responses, including on approaches to social protection. We are also assisting with resource mobilization. And we work together with other multilateral agencies, including the International Financial Institutions which have made considerable efforts to offer timely responses to countries in need.

More effective disbursement of Official Development Assistance is also important for reaching our internationally agreed development goals.

Canada's recent decision to untie fully its ODA by 2012-2013 is an outstanding one, and its decision in April 2008 to untie its food aid also set an excellent example to other donors. These are the types of good donor policies where Canada has long been a leader.

At this time above all times, it will also greatly assist MDG achievement if donor pledges on ODA materialize.

That is why UNDP will continue to call on the G8 to fulfill its Gleneagles ODA commitments, including a doubling of ODA to Africa by 2010 over 2004 levels. These pledges were recently reaffirmed yet again in Italy, but still remain far short of delivery – for Africa in particular.

I commend the Canadian Government for its achievements and commitments to increase ODA levels, and for already meeting its G8 commitment to double its aid to Africa.

Canada, next in line for the G8 Presidency, is well placed to lead others on this issue.

UNDP and the IMF have been working closely with African countries and other partners to develop "Gleneagles Scenarios" on the development results which could be obtained with ODA scaled up to the levels pledged by the G8. We will

soon begin a process of seeking resource mobilization around these country specific scenarios.

Last Thursday and Friday I attended the G20 Sherpa meeting in Washington. In just over two weeks I will accompany the Secretary-General to the G-20 meeting at Pittsburgh.

It is important for us to continue to advocate there for meeting the needs of the poorest countries.

Decisive action by key actors has seen the international financial system stabilize, and there are some signs of recovery. The IMF projects that there will be global economic growth of 2.5 per cent in 2010, although their projections still suggest a contraction of 1.4 per cent in 2009.

Many developing countries remain in crisis. The IMF's growth projections for 2009 for the developing world were revised downward slightly in July from April, except for parts of Asia.

Keeping the promises from the G20's London meeting on financing for the most vulnerable will also be crucial so that the International Financial Institutions have the capacity to meet the needs of these countries.

In addition, the availability of fiscal space is an important tool in dealing with economic shocks, and needs to be available to the least developed countries too.

Utilized soundly, more support at this time would allow governments of poor countries to preserve their budgets for basic services during the recession, and to maintain traction towards the MDGs.

I am well aware that ODA and concessional lending are not panaceas. Development also depends on good governance; on making the right investments in people, institutions and infrastructure; and on fostering economic growth, trade, and investment.

What ODA can do is help build and strengthen the local capacities and systems which facilitate the achievement of development which is sustainable and lifts living standards on a more equitable basis.

At UNDP, capacity building and development are at the core of what we do. We aim to help develop those policies and their implementation which will have system-wide impact, and are aligned with national development strategies.

In ninety countries worldwide, for instance, UNDP looks to strengthen the capacity of governments to manage and co-ordinate the ODA they receive so that it gets good results.

Progress on the MDGs will be reviewed next year when the General Assembly meets in September. It is important not to let the MDGs simply become another promise the international community has made, but has not kept.

That is why we in UNDP, both as a leading development agency and through our leadership and co-ordination of other agencies in the UN development system, must work to galvanize support for the MDGs globally as a central focus for development strategies.

This effort needs to be focused, strategic and co-ordinated, as progress towards each MDG is linked to progress on others. This makes it all the more important that all parts of the UN development system work together to support each other's mandates.

Raising the status of women must be hardwired into all our interventions. Fundamentally, development cannot be achieved if fifty per cent of the population is excluded from the opportunities it brings.

Empowering women is not only one of the eight MDGs in its own right, but is also essential to the achievement of all the other goals. I know that Canada attaches great importance to gender equity in development.

Many of UNDP's programmes now reflect gender dimensions. CIDA undertook a recent independent assessment of our gender equality work, and gave it a strong performance score.

Special attention is now needed on linking our work on poverty reduction and the MDGs with that on environment and sustainable development.

This has led me to prioritise UNDP's support to developing countries on climate change, low carbon growth and adaptation issues, and on the ongoing negotiations for a new climate agreement. UNDP also has a role in supporting developing countries to build their capacity to access carbon finance, now and in the future.

Addressing climate change, generating sustainable economic growth, and advancing towards the MDGs can, and should, go hand-in-hand.

By some estimates, forty per cent of development investment from ODA and concessional lending is sensitive to climate risk. Resilience and adaptation to that risk must be built into development strategies, otherwise precious investments in development could be undercut.

We also know that ongoing climate variability and change affect the poorest and most vulnerable people the hardest.

Climate change clearly presents great challenges. Yet, finding solutions to the problems also presents opportunities for developing countries.

The new climate change deal can be a development deal, delivering real resources for investments in adaptation and for providing the know-how and technology to make a low carbon route to development possible. This will form a major part of the financing available for development in the future.

We also need to increase access to energy; promote more sustainable production and consumption processes; and direct climate financing towards adaptation and affordable low carbon growth plans.

Peace and stability are also pre-requisites for sustainable development.

My first visit as Administrator was to Africa, where I went to Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia. I was able to see for myself the work of the UNDP and UN country teams, and of major UN missions, in complex environments.

In countries emerging from disaster and conflict, UNDP's early recovery programming helps bridge humanitarian responses to longer-term development work and sustainable peace.

It is essential that the work we do in nations which have experienced traumatic conflict helps bring a peace dividend and lays foundations for longer term economic and social recovery and stability. Our interventions on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants; on livelihood generation; and on combating sexual and gender-based violence all have a critical role to play.

So does our work on promoting better and more accountable governance, whether that be in strengthening the justice sector, contributing to making human rights institutions more effective, assisting the development of local and regional governance, or supporting the functioning of electoral and legislative systems.

A good example of our peacebuilding efforts is in Haiti. There, with crucial support from Canada, UNDP has helped develop the electoral system; promoted the rule of law, including through strengthening police, prison and judicial systems; and is setting up a system to help the government co-ordinate and manage its aid.

In Afghanistan, a country of great importance to Canada, and again with Canadian assistance, UNDP helps to strengthen local government and public administration; and undertakes many livelihood programmes, including working through communities and employing local labour to develop infrastructure such as schools and clinics.

It is to be hoped that Canada will continue its generous support for UNDP's important peacebuilding and development efforts worldwide, including in these two countries.

No single actor can achieve the MDGs, or promote sustainable development, or tackle the global problems we face.

Many actors need to work in partnership- the multilateral system, donors, NGOs, and the private sector - and developing countries themselves by giving MDG achievement and sustainable development a central role in their development strategies.

I am committed to a close working relationship and an ongoing dialogue with Canada about the best ways to achieve internationally agreed development goals.

Even in a time of recession we can and we must continue to make progress towards meeting the MDGs. The cost of not doing so is far greater than the cost of action.

There is much we can accomplish together through close co-operation.

I count on Canada's continued strong support and advocacy for development, and for the work of the multilateral system in general.

Thank you.