

Informal Interactive Hearings of the General Assembly with Non-Governmental Organizations,
Civil Society organizations and the Private Sector

Session One: Building a better tomorrow: local actions, national strategies and global structures
(Monday, 14 June)

This session opened, seeking to gain input from NGOs, CSOs and members of the private sector on their contribution towards the attainment of the MDGs. This also served as a forum where members of these organizations could air their concerns on issues affecting them, as well as contribute some ideas to the outcome document draft, which will be presented to heads of state during the September summit.

Farah Kabir, Action Aid, was first to speak. She narrowed her focus to MDG 1, which is concerned with the eradication of poverty and hunger. Hunger she noted, is not an accident or an immutable law of nature, but a consequence of social, political and economic factors that conspire to make vulnerable and exclude a huge number of people. Women are particularly vulnerable since their rights are precarious and often not backed by law. She revealed that women farmers produce 60-80% of produce in most developing nations and are the main producers of staple crops. Ironically, they make up majority of hungry and the feminization of poverty makes women doubly vulnerably.

Ms. Kabir mentioned that the number of hungry people is steadily increasing: 1 billion people are hungry i.e. 1/6th of the world population; 1/3 of children worldwide grow up chronically malnourished and hunger plays a contributing factor in about a half of all child deaths. Should this persist, more than 1.5 billion people will be undernourished in 2015, and this increase in hunger viciously erodes progress toward MDG 1.

Ms. Kabir Small scale farming must be central to hunger rescue strategies. Over a half of hungry people in the world are small subsistence farmers living on plots of 2 hectares or less. Yet governments and donors systematically ignore small farmers, especially women small farmers. Investing in women is key to halving hunger. However, in some countries, less than 1% of budgets for agriculture is targeted at women and some donors indicate that as little as 10% of their funds go to agriculture. Aid and national budget for agric need to increase sharply. Aid to agriculture should focus on staple crops and should promote local production for local use. Policy conditionality must be dropped and aid must be united. Especially in Africa, budgets need to increase, while technology as well as the methods of implementation is key. Governments must reject quick fixes for the 2nd green revolution based on Genetically Modified (GM) crops among others. In fact, a 4 year UN review published by 400 experts in 2010 yielded a vote of no confidence in GM crops, stating that the only sustainable future farming model is to scale up low input organic farming methods.

Ms. Kabir pressed, that holistic food packages are needed, not merely an investment in agriculture. A comprehensive response to food security must be built ensuring people have access to good quality and nutritious food. Protection for lives and vulnerable livelihood must be done using social programs if we are to try to solve malnutrition and hunger. She recommended the institution of a right to good in law, requiring all governments to establish a universal social

minimum, ensuring that no one faces chronic hunger due to a lack of income. Protecting the earning power of the most vulnerable (women) is of utmost importance, and there is a need for the scaling up of mitigation, adaptation, financing and technology in response to climate change. She further suggested, that governments adopt a smallholder rescue package in their quest to achieve MDG 1, involving a massive increase of global spending on food security by at least the UN recommended 40 billion minimum per year. Developing countries need to put MDG 1 rescue plans built upon pre-existing agricultural and food security plans, increase social protection and basic social services while donor commitments should be honored.

Next, David Winjobi, Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), remarked that there still remains a lot of poverty because some governments do not do enough. He added that achieving MDG One would be a cost-cutting measure since it would lead to the achievement of the other goals, due to its interlinks with them.

He also mentioned that in some African countries, such as Nigeria, resources are being wasted and leaking into private pockets. This has been a major obstacle to the advancement of progress in many such countries. He continued saying several African heads of state are yet to appreciate the connection between human rights and the MDGs. Until they do so, they will continue to relegate matters related to the MDGs to positions of less priority.

Mr. Winjobi proposed a few recommendations. First, thinking globally and acting locally i.e. using all resources within reach to ensure the MDGs are achieved. He gave many examples including the use of SMS to monitor government implementation of MDGs. Second; African leaders must refrain from lip service by stopping corruption and building accountability mechanisms. Leaders need to galvanize political will to achieve the MDGs, fight corruption, and to seal the unnecessary leakages of resources into private pockets at the nation's expense.

He suggested that African leaders be more committed to the achievement of MDG 1 and harped on the importance of devising public and private partnership strategies to ensure a collective effort between development partners and avoid a lop-sided, unsustainable effort.

He also alluded to the role that rich countries have to play, especially in redeeming their pledges to developing countries and delivering the urgently needed funds to promised nations to keep them on track for the MDGs.

Finally, Mr. Winjobi mentioned, that it was crucial that women be included in the dialogue. As the backbone of many societies, it is imperative that their perspective be taken into consideration to make the effort at the MDGs more worthwhile and successful. (link to faith communities)

Ms Neha Sood, Youth Coalition, continued first citing a few statistics. She remarked, that young people are sexual beings and have related problems. These sexual and reproductive health issues need to be tackled, since young people lose a lot of productive time due to them. She asserted, that the MDGs couldn't be achieved until we accept the sexual nature of the youth and deal with arising issues accordingly.

In this light, sexual education needs to be included in national curricula, and a comprehensive sexual education at that since 'abstinence-only' programs have been unsuccessful and teen pregnancy is on the rise (about 16,000 adolescent girls worldwide give birth). She remarked that education must be both of good quality, non-discriminatory and rights-based. Health systems must be strengthened to cater to the health needs of all people. She emphasized the urgent action

needed to meet MDG 5 and requested that this be reflected in paragraph 47 of the outcome document.

Additionally, HIV/AIDS is a significant health concern with young people between the ages of 15 and 24 accounting for half of all new infections worldwide. Maternal mortality remains high and is highest where AIDS rates are high as well. (Connection to faith communities)

Finally, the outcome document should reflect that the MDGs put the millennium declaration into operation. Seeing them as one, could improve the attitude towards the MDGs and the progress so far. She concluded saying an inclusion of a youth analysis and perspective in the outcome document would be an effective move to viewing the youth as members of the global partnership outlined in MDG 8.

Marie Gad, from Business Europe, remarked that the potential for business in achieving the MDGs has not been fully developed. While supporting article 15 of the outcome document, she stressed the importance of regional integration and aid for trade to remove existing technical and other barriers to achieving free trade and in the long run, the MDGs.

She said, that the private sector must move beyond corporate social responsibility. If development can be made the 'business of business', it would greatly reduce the financial burden on donors. The private sector, however, requires a huge change of mindset. Business people have not realized the plethora of business opportunities in poor/developing countries. This is a major means through which the business community contributes to development. Ms Gad pointed out that financing should also target some innovative business ideas, which create business opportunities that simultaneously, contribute to the achievement of the MDGs.

Finally, she added that growing the number of female entrepreneurs and managers has a powerful multiplier effect. She continued that reducing public policy contact for businesswomen improves their chances of success, and hence supports the boosting multiplier effect of their economic activities.

Following the presentations, respondents from the floor spoke.

Denis Godlevsky, International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, declared corruption and transparency are not problems limited to African countries. Every country facing these must use civil society to focus on creating anti-corruption mechanisms to combat these problems. He also mentioned that we have failed to achieve target 6b - only 33% of people who need HIV treatment have access to the drugs, and some who have access are under threat of insufficient access to them from bottle necks in distribution. He suggested that local warehouses could be created to circumvent the supply/transportation problem. He also mentioned that cuts to HIV funding and other social services are threatening the progress made in some of these health needs. The real challenge to meeting these goals, fighting these diseases, is more a lack of political will than a lack of funding.

Emmanuel Korbia Edudzie, Youth Empowerment Strategy, stated that young people are both a target for development programming and actors as well. We have not done very well in

regarding them in this second perspective. We must begin to create sufficient opportunities within which they can play out their roles as actors in MDG monitoring for the pace, depth and scope of MDG localization depends on how well youth resources are nurtured and deployed.

Mesfin Loha, World Vision, added that there was a need to expand the role of international health partnerships through the use of global and country processes for aligned and integrated coordination practices. He also noted that a significant amount of resources, for which efficient and effective use need to be undertaken, are required for the success of MDGs 4 and 5. Finally, he reiterated the lack of time between now and the deadline in 2015, and the need to shorten the time between promises and delivery.

Depali Sood, for Plan International, stressed the importance of gender equality and women/children's rights, and the importance of using these as overarching principal strategies to achieving all the MDGs. She mentioned, that a key solution lies in the education of the girl child, especially adolescent girls, and a practical education at that. She stressed the importance of the place of the girl child in discussions, for girls typically fall through the cracks, getting lumped with children and women. There's a need to define what these things mean for them and how to tackle the problems girls face.

The representative from Nigeria expressed concern for a gap between NGOs, CSOs and government in collaboration on the implementation of the MDGs.

Nurgul Djanaeva, Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan, raised a few questions. First, is the political recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's rights practically realized? Unfortunately, however, she asserted it is not. Many of such committees remain pledges to causes on paper only since many countries have not committed financial resources to the achievement of these goals. She also noted that there's a dearth of national support and financing. Only women-centered NGOs show some momentum in trying to achieve these. However, they do not have enough funding and women's and gender issues still have very little place or no place at all in state budgets and other similar documents. Concluding, she reasserted, that women's groups should be seen as development actors in their own rights, in the monitoring, designing plans of actions, and measuring the women's perspectives in the development effort.

Silvina Vatnick, Centro para la Estabilidad Financiera, commented on paragraph 50, MDG 8. She noted, that there should be more specific reference to stronger institutions together with a balance of power across executive legislative and judiciary within governments. Furthermore, she stressed the role of the private sector and civil society in development, which is currently unclear and not forceful enough in paragraph 50. This, she noted, would provide a more effective interface between national and international stakeholders with respect to the MDGs. Macro compliance has not been as sufficient condition to achieve financial stability. More focus at the micro level adoption of policies to achieve the MDGs. Should provide a basis for the financing of the MDGs

Eric Friedman, Physicians for Human Rights, observed that countries will not achieve the health MDGs without taking up aggressive measures to solve the global health worker shortage The

right to health approach must be the basis for achieving the health MDGs. He gave some recommendations:

1. Countries should comprehensively assess their health systems to determine the extent to which they encourage right to health.
2. Health systems should be accountable to communities, and health efforts should strive to be non-discriminatory.
3. Innovative financial funding and other similar measures should be used to raise money for health funds etc.