

QUO VADIS MDGs?

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Voices of the South on Globalization is a monthly newsletter intended to inspire a meaningful North-South Dialogue by raising awareness for global interdependences and by offering a forum for voices from the South in the globalization debate. Each edition presents short analyses or commentaries from a Southern perspective on one particular issue of the globalization process.

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Neither Pity nor Charity

With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend a summit in New York on 20-22 September 2010 to accelerate progress towards the MDGs.

Coming amid mixed progress and new crises that threaten the global effort to halve extreme poverty, "the summit will be a crucially important opportunity to redouble our efforts to meet the Goals," he said, referring to the targets adopted at the UN Millennium Summit of 2000, aimed at slashing poverty, hunger, disease, maternal and child deaths and other ills by a 2015 deadline. "Our world possesses the knowledge and the resources to achieve the MDGs," the Secretary-General stated in his report to the UN General Assembly on 12 February 2010 in preparation for the September summit. "Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve the MDGs."

The MDGs are the highest profile articulation of the internationally agreed development goals associated with the UN development agenda, representing the culmination of numerous important UN summits held during the previous decade, including summits on sustainable development, education, children, food, women, population and social development.

They are the world's quantified, time-bound targets for addressing extreme poverty, hunger and disease, and for promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. They are also an expression of basic human rights: the rights of everyone to good health, education and shelter. The eighth Goal, to build a global partnership for development, includes commitments in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, trade and access to technologies.

The Secretary-General's report says that during the past decade, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have led to unprecedented commitments and partnerships reaffirmed in successive summits and meetings, including the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development at Monterrey, Mexico, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the 2005 World Summit in New York.

During this same period, the public and their Governments have also had to contend with new unanticipated challenges. Some have been specific to countries or regions, while others have been global, such as the food and economic crises of the last three years. "Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. With five years to go to the target date of 2015, the prospect of falling short of achieving the Goals because of a lack of commitment is very real. This would be an unacceptable failure from both the moral and the practical standpoint. If we fail, the dangers in the world -- instability, violence, epidemic diseases, environmental degradation, runaway population growth -- will all be multiplied," warns the report.

It adds: "Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains feasible with adequate commitment, policies, resources and effort. The Millennium Declaration represents the most important collective promise ever made to the world's most vulnerable people. This promise is not based on pity or charity, but on solidarity, justice and the recognition that we are increasingly dependent on one another for our shared prosperity and security." ☑

Not Much Reason to Rejoice

When heads of government and state meet at the UN in New York from September 20-22 to review progress, assess obstacles and gaps, and agree on concrete strategies and actions to meet the eight MDGs by 2015, they will not have much reason to rejoice.

Giving an overview of The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, released on 15 June 2010, Sha Zukang, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, says: "Though progress has been made, it is uneven. And without a major push forward, many of the MDG targets are likely to be missed in most regions. Old and new challenges threaten to further slow progress in some areas or even undo successes achieved so far."

The significance of Sha's assessment lies in the fact that he heads the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which is responsible for the follow-up to the major United Nations Summits and Conferences and services the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council as well as the vast majority of its functional commissions and expert bodies. He also convenes the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Secretariat's network for joint planning and initiatives on development.

Sha, a Chinese career diplomat, refers to specific aspects MDGs without mincing words. The most severe impact of climate change, he points out, is being felt by vulnerable populations who have contributed least to the problem. The risk of death or disability and economic loss due to natural disasters is increasing globally and is concentrated in poorer countries.

Sha refers to an often ignored aspect, saying that armed conflict remains a major threat to human security and to hard-won MDG gains. Large populations of refugees remain in camps with limited opportunities to improve their lives. In 2009, 42 million people had been displaced by conflict or persecution, four fifths of them in developing countries.

The number of people who are undernourished has continued to grow, while slow progress in reducing the prevalence of hunger stalled -- or even reversed itself -- in some regions between 2000-2002 and 2005-2007.

About one in four children under the age of five are underweight, mainly due to lack of food and quality food, inadequate water, sanitation and health services, and poor care and feeding practices.

An estimated 1.4 billion people were still living in extreme poverty in 2005. Moreover, the effects of the global financial crisis are likely to persist: poverty rates will be slightly higher in 2015 and even beyond, to 2020, than they would have been had the world economy grown steadily at its pre-crisis pace.

"Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the MDGs and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease. But progress has been sluggish on all fronts -- from education to access to political decision-making," the UN Under-Secretary-General warns.

Because achieving the MDGs will also require increased attention to those most vulnerable, policies and interventions will be needed to eliminate the persistent or even increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor, between those living in rural or remote areas or in slums versus better-off urban populations, and those disadvantaged by geographic location, sex, age, disability or ethnicity:

Other points in Sha's incisive overview of the report, which should draw the focus of the civil society and media, are:

- In all developing regions, children in rural areas are more likely to be underweight than urban children. In Latin America and the Caribbean and parts of Asia, this disparity increased between 1990 and 2008.

- The gap between the richest and the poorest households remains enormous. In Southern Asia, 60 per cent of children in the poorest areas are underweight compared to 25 per cent of children in the richest households.

- In developing regions overall, girls in the poorest 20 per cent of households are 3.5 times more likely to be out of school than girls in the richest households and four times more likely to be out of school than boys from the richest households.

- Even in countries close to achieving universal primary education, children with disabilities are the majority of those excluded.

- Maternal health is one of the areas in which the gap between rich and poor is most conspicuous. While almost all births are attended by skilled health personnel in the developed countries, less than half of women receive such care when giving birth in parts of the developing world.

- Disparities in access to care during pregnancy are also striking, with women in the richest households 1.7 times more likely to visit a skilled health worker at least once before birth than the poorest women.

- Lack of education is another major obstacle to accessing tools that could improve people's lives. For instance, poverty and unequal access to schooling perpetuate high adolescent birth rates, jeopardizing the health of girls and diminishing their opportunities for social and economic advancement.

- Contraceptive use is four times higher among women with a secondary education than among those with no education. For women in the poorest households and among those with no education, negligible progress was seen over the last decade.

- Only about half of the developing world's population are using improved sanitation, and addressing this inequality will have a major impact on several of the MDGs. Disparities between rural and urban areas remain daunting, with only 40 per cent of rural populations covered. And while 77 per cent of the population in the richest 20 per cent of households use improved sanitation facilities, the share is only 16 per cent of those in the poorest households.

However looking beyond as things look like today, he sets an eye on 2015, adding a positive note: "The Millennium Development Goals are still attainable. The critical question today is how to transform the pace of change from what we have seen over the last decade into dramatically faster progress."

"The experience of these last ten years offers ample evidence of what works and has provided tools that can help us achieve the MDGs by 2015," he adds. With this in view, the MDG summit in September should be an opportunity for world leaders to translate the evidence -- collected by the representatives of international organization -- into a concrete agenda for action. - IDN-InDepthNews ☑

Global Partnership Not yet in Sight

A 'global partnership for development', which is the eighth goal of the Millennium Declaration 2000, appears far from attainable five years ahead of the target date, according to a UN report.

An important plank of the global partnership is official development assistance (ODA), which remains well below the United Nations (UN) target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for most 'donors'. In 2009, the only countries to reach or exceed the target were Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

The largest givers by volume in 2009 were the United States, followed by France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan.

2010 is a milestone for European Union members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2005, DAC-EU member states agreed to reach a collective total of 0.56 per cent of GNI in net ODA in 2010, with a minimum country target of 0.51 per cent.

The UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 finds that some countries will achieve or even surpass that goal: Sweden, with the world's highest ODA as a percentage of GNI (1.01 per cent), is followed by Luxembourg (1 per cent), Denmark (0.83 per cent), the Netherlands (0.8 per cent), Belgium (0.7 per cent), the United Kingdom (0.6 per cent), Finland (0.56 per cent), Ireland (0.52 per cent) and Spain (0.51 per cent).

But others are unlikely to reach the target: ODA as a percentage of GNI is estimated at between 0.44 and 0.48 per cent for France, 0.40 for Germany, 0.37 for Austria, 0.34 for Portugal, 0.21 for Greece, and 0.20 for Italy.

This year is also special for DAC-EU ODA givers because it represents the midpoint between their 2005 commitments and the 2015 target date for meeting the 0.7 per cent GNI target.

Aid concentrates increasingly on the poorest countries, with the least developed countries (LDCs) receiving about a third of donors' total aid flows. In 2007-2008, out of an average total of \$71.6 billion of bilateral ODA that was allocated for specific purposes, \$15.2 billion focused on achievement of MDG 3 (third Millennium Development Goal) -- the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

AFRICA SHORT-CHANGED

In 2009, net disbursements of ODA amounted to \$119.6 billion, or 0.31 per cent of the combined national income of developed countries. In real terms, this is a slight increase (of 0.7 per cent) compared to 2008 even though, measured in current U.S. dollars, ODA fell by over 2 per cent -- from \$122.3 billion in 2008, says the UN report.

If debt relief is excluded, the increase in ODA in real terms from 2008 to 2009 was 6.8 per cent. If humanitarian aid is also excluded, bilateral aid rose by 8.5 per cent in real terms, as aid

givers continued to scale up their core development projects and programmes. Most of the increase was in new lending (20.6 per cent), but grants also rose (by 4.6 per cent, excluding debt relief). At the Gleneagles Group of Eight (G-8) Summit and the UN World Summit in 2005, donors committed to increasing their aid.

Many of these pledges were made in terms of a share of gross national income (GNI). Based on expectations of future GNI, these pledges, combined with other commitments, would have lifted total ODA from \$80 billion in 2004 to \$130 billion in 2010 (at constant 2004 prices).

However, the slowdown in economic growth since 2008 has reduced the previously expected level of GNI in the developed countries and the dollar value of the commitments for 2010 to around \$126 billion (at constant 2004 prices).

"Moreover, the economic slowdown has put pressure on government budgets in the developed countries. While the majority of the initial commitments remain in force, some large donors have reduced or postponed the pledges they made for 2010. On the basis of current 2010 budget proposals and the lower GNI forecasts, according to the UN, total ODA for 2010 is projected to be \$108 billion (at 2004 prices).

The shortfall in aid affects Africa in particular. At the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, G-8 members projected that their commitments, combined with those of other donors, would double ODA to Africa by 2010.

Preliminary data for 2009 show that bilateral ODA to Africa as a whole rose by 3 per cent in real terms. For sub-Saharan Africa, bilateral aid increased by 5.1 per cent in real terms over 2008. "It is estimated that Africa will receive only about \$11 billion out of the \$25 billion increase envisaged at Gleneagles, due mainly to the underperformance of some European donors who earmark large shares of their aid to Africa," says the UN report.

This report shows how much progress has been made since the Millennium Declaration ten years ago. Perhaps most important, it shows that the Goals are achievable when nationally owned development strategies, policies and programmes are supported by international development partners. At the same time, it is clear that improvements in the lives of the poor have been unacceptably slow, and some hard-won gains are being eroded by the climate, food and economic crises.

In view of this, when heads of government and state meet at the United Nations in New York from September 20-22 to review progress, assess obstacles and gaps, and agree on concrete strategies and actions to meet the eight MDGs by 2015, they will not have much reason to rejoice. - InDepthNews ☑

They Break Taboos But Don't Go the Whole Hog

A huge funding gap threatens to torpedo efforts by the international community to cope with critical global development and environmental challenges. At least \$324 billion will be required each year between 2012 and 2017 -- a reason pressing enough for a Committee of Experts to break taboos and explore innovative financing sources, well ahead of the MDG Summit 2010.

But the search for novel funding sources is proving a herculean task because, having broken the taboos, the experts are reluctant to go the whole hog, not the least because they are far from immune to external pressures. As a result, the resources needed to meet existing commitments and to contain economic and social instability appear to embrace the realm of utopia.

The Committee's report, web posted mid-July, will be considered by the international Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development, which was created in 2006 at a ministerial conference arranged by President Jacques Chirac of France and President Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Congo Republic. Presently Japan heads the Group that now has 60 members.

The Committee of Experts was convened on October 22, 2009 in Paris by the Taskforce on International Financial Transactions and Development. The Taskforce has its roots in the New York Declaration on Action Against Hunger and Poverty on September 20, 2004, initiated by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, and in recommendations of the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development that complements the work of the Taskforce on innovative financing for health systems.

The Committee points out that combining the funds needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the official development Assistance (ODA) target of 0.7 per cent of GNI (gross national income), and environmental crisis targets, the resource gap is in the range of \$324-336 billion per year between 2012 and 2017 (\$156 billion for climate change, \$168-180 billion for ODA).

Compounding the challenge, developed country governments are now struggling with vast fiscal consolidations as a result of the financial crisis and global downturn it precipitated. By 2009, the IMF estimated the net direct cost to advanced economies of the support to the financial sector at \$862 billion or 2.7 per cent of GDP (gross domestic product).

In November 2009, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicted unprecedented post-war levels of government budget deficits and public debt for the coming decade. Total OECD government budget deficits and public debt are forecast to exceed 7.6 and 103 per cent of GDP respectively by 2011, compared with 1.3 and 73 per cent in 2007.

Based on UN estimates and its own projection for the ODA gap, the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD has estimated the resource gap in financing development and climate change at \$324 billion per year for the 2011-2015 period.

Against this backdrop of a quantifiable crisis of public funding in general, and for global public goods in particular, 'innovative financing' has been receiving even more widespread interest as a source of predictable, sustainable and additional finance. This was clearly recognized by world leaders in the 2008 Doha Declaration on Financing for ☺

Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus achieved at a UN conference in 2002.

The Committee of Experts' report points out that innovative financing mechanisms have demonstrated their potential for securing additional resources for distribution to low-income countries. The success of the air ticket solidarity levy as well as the governing body of revenue (UNITAID, International Drug Purchase Facility), they say, have shown that it is possible to meet long-term needs through non-traditional financing mechanisms.

CONFUSION

The Committee counts the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm) and the Advance Market Commitment pilot project (AMC) among innovative sources. AMC is however not a resource mobilization instrument but a disbursement tool. Its inclusion among financing mechanisms reflects the confusion that prevailed in the Committee.

When considering issues of governance, the Committee sees in UNITAID a good example. The composition of its board however is anything but worth emulating, according to knowledgeable sources.

UNITAID was launched in 2006 with the aim to scale up access to treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis for the poorest people in developing countries by lowering the price of quality drugs and diagnostics and accelerating the pace at which they are made available. This relied on stable and predictable financial source generated by the air-ticket solidarity levy.

Several countries have already introduced the air-ticket solidarity levy with a progressive scale based on destination and class. Apart from Chile, France and South Korea, it is the French "dependencies" such as Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mauritius and Niger. They allocate all or a share of the revenues to a drug purchasing facility (UNITAID) aimed at combating the major pandemic diseases affecting the developing world. Others, like Brazil contribute by budget contribution based on air travel.

CURRENCY TRANSACTION LEVY

Assessing different financing options, the report says that a global Currency Transaction Levy (CTL) is the most appropriate financing mechanism for global public goods. The report reviews the complex legal and technical issues that surround the implementation of a Currency Transaction Levy at the point of settlement, and concludes that the implementation of a global CTL is "technically and legally feasible".

"To further strengthen trends towards increased central settlement of foreign exchange transactions, we support the proposal for regulators to apply an additional capital adequacy requirement for counterparties, for those transactions that are not settled through an approved settlement arrangement, ☺

They Break Taboos (Continued from page 4)

and as a consequence, represent increased risk to the financial system. "As the impact of such additional capital requirement would exceed the cost of the small CTL proposed, it would discourage evasion of the CTL, even though its main aim would be prudential," says the Committee comprising of nine experts from Brazil, Europe, Japan and the U.S.

The Committee adds: "Such a strong and systemic device would frustrate, if not eliminate, geographical tax avoidance in an efficient way, comparable to the stamp duty on UK -- issued share transactions. It could be legally re-enforced by the UK technique of non-enforceability on non-taxed contracts."

However, the clarity of the report ends there. The experts do not reveal which central settlement arrangement they have in mind. They refer, for example, to the CLS (Continuous-Linked Settlement) Bank in London.

Continuous Linked Settlement is a process by which a number of the world's largest banks manage settlement of foreign exchange amongst themselves (and their customers and other third-parties). The process is managed by CLS Group Holdings AG and its subsidiary companies and include a settlement bank regulated by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Yet, the report tells us little about how it might be possible to authorize, even mandate CLS to collect the Currency Transaction Levy.

Statements such as the following do not make the reader wiser -- at least not the uninitiated, non-specialist reader (and many politicians would perhaps fall into this category): "The legal monopolies held by the Central banks of the currencies exclusively issued by those Central Banks, offer a unique international legal opportunity to combine tax techniques with the international legal dimension of the currency trade -- the national currencies being the exclusive legal tender within each of the participating jurisdictions."

Explaining one of the Committee's proposals, Inge Kaul, member of the Expert Group, tells IDN: "Our report is not a final word on the feasibility and desirability of a CTL. It is a further step. We identified a possible approach that needs systematic, in-depth follow-up studies. The report should perhaps not have said 'the global CTL is feasible'. More correct would have been to say 'it could be feasible, provided the following hurdles are being overcome'."

HURDLES

First, the countries with major markets would need to agree to include, for example, in Basle III a stipulation that banks that avoid central currency exchanges would need to have higher capital requirements because they face higher counterparty risk. But while such a stipulation would create an incentive for banks to use a platform like CLS, it would not yet give a levy.

Therefore, the second point to clarify would be how to mandate, authorize or even compel CLS and other potentially arising central currency exchange places to impose the proposed levy.

A third issue to clarify -- with all countries, as Kaul emphasizes -- would be the use of the money. The report also proposes to this end, the creation of a Global Solidarity Fund, whose board -- of representative composition -- should receive and supervise the disbursement of the levy proceeds."

"Care must be taken that the levy proceeds are not crowding out current ODA resources and undermining unfulfilled ODA commitments. The global public -- more or less all of us -- contribute to the CTL," argues Kaul. Because "it is important to note that the proposed CTL is NOT a tax; it is de facto a user fee," adds Kaul who is Adjunct professor at Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, Germany.

"CTL would be paid by all those who are the main beneficiaries of a more stable, less crisis-prone globalization process. These are many, including foreign investors, foreign travellers, foreign traders and all of us, who buy and consume imported goods," she states.

Kaul was Director at the UNDP's Office of Development Studies in New York (1995-2005) and director, UNDP Human Development Report Office (1989-1994).

"Of course, those who are more deeply involved -- and with huge sums of money -- would pay more. Those, who would buy some textiles from Bangladesh or a TV set from South Korea or nails produced in China would pay but a minuscule amount, while, at the same time, being able to enjoy these imported -- and pricewise, usually very competitive -- goods," Kaul tells IDN.

All who are involved in globalisation and would benefit from a less crisis-ridden globalisation process are also somehow linked to currency exchanges. Therefore the Committee believes that finance is the most appropriate sector in which to impose such a user fee. However, the report dithers also on "what precisely is the CTL". Is it a user fee, as Kaul suggests? Or is it to be a global solidarity fee, as the report says in various places, a means to redistribute global wealth? Perhaps the proposed CTL can be seen in both these ways; or maybe, this would be another point the Experts' Committee would clarify in any follow-up studies that might be undertaken.

A clarification of the nature of the levy and its purpose(s) would however be important in order to determine the "right" composition of the board of the proposed Solidarity Fund. Not surprisingly, the report does not offer much clarity on this point either besides noting that the governance of both the levy raising authority and the fund would uphold principles of accountability, representation and transparency.

How then to move forward? Two steps would be important, says Kaul: "First, our group has made a step forward by pointing to new issues and raising new questions. They now need careful further study. Just think of how much research has been done to develop other new financial instruments! Our expert group met only a few times; had very little money for background studies -- but was supposed to come up with financial innovation for the global common good. So, let's be fair: if we invest a lot into private-finance R&D, let's also invest into financial innovation for the global public good. "Second, we could already now begin to explain to our politicians that no country alone could collect a user fee of the global CTL type proposed in the report. This requires international cooperation: **CONTINUED ON PAGE 6** ➡"

Eminent Personalities Galvanize Support

The United Nations is leaving no stone unturned to galvanize action toward achieving by 2015 the global anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In run-up to a gathering of heads of government and state at the UN in September 2010, Secretary-General has set up an advocacy Group of eminent persons. A "real collection of superheroes in defeating poverty" has been chosen to serve on the Group, co-chaired by Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

The "superheroes" include two Nobel Peace Prize laureates – the Bangladeshi pioneer of microcredit Muhammad Yunus and the Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai – as well as former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet and businessmen and philanthropists Bill Gates and Ted Turner.

Also participating are Jeffrey Sachs, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the MDGs, and Ray Chambers, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Malaria.

Qatar's First Lady, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser, and the former Mozambican First Lady Graça Machel have also been named as advocates, along with former General Assembly president Jan Eliasson and Philippe Douste-Blazy, the UN Special Adviser on innovative financing for development.

The other members are: Stine Bosse, the chief executive of TrygVesta Group and the chairman of Børnefonden (the Children's Fund); Dho Young-Shin, the chairman of the UN World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Sustainable Tourism for Eliminating Poverty Foundation; Julio Frenk, the former Mexican health minister and the Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health; Akin Adesina, the Vice-President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa; and Hiromasa Yonekura, the chairman of the Japan Business Federation.

Distinguished personalities from China, India and the United Kingdom "will also join the group soon", Ban said in an announcement on June 23, 2010.

Speaking to the 'UN News Centre', Chambers said that "it's a privilege to join such an accomplished group of leaders who have the experience and ambition to ensure that all MDGs remain on track at this critical juncture".

He added that "from our experience with malaria, we know that achieving the MDGs is within sight, and by coordinating our efforts and sharing best practices, we will maximize the likelihood that all eight Goals will be met by 2015."

The MDGs, which include targets for slashing poverty, boosting school enrolment rates, improving maternal health and increasing access to clean water and decent sanitation, were devised at the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000.

The latest UN assessment report on efforts to reach the Goals shows that there has been mixed progress in the developing world. Extreme poverty is falling rapidly but maternal health and sanitation are lagging and there are still large gaps between rich and poor, men and women, and urban and rural communities.

In another move toward achieving the MDG targets, meeting at a United Nations forum, leaders from the private sector, civil society and the creative world have underscored the critical role played by broadband networks in spurring global development. In what is being described as "private gathering" in Geneva, the Broadband Commission for Digital Development

conferred on July 11, 2010 on how to deploy the networks worldwide to accelerate progress towards the MDGs with a 2015 deadline.

Chaired by Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Carlos Slim Helú, Mexican businessman and one the world's wealthiest people, the body will deliver its conclusions to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on September 19, 2010 at an official side event of the high-level gathering on the MDGs in New York.

Serving as the joint vice chairs of the 30-member Commission are Hamadou Touré, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"The global deployment of broadband networks will be as powerful a transformational force for the 21st century as the progressive installation of electricity networks was in the first decades of the 20th century," Touré said.

"Just as connection to the power grid is now seen as a basic element of social and economic empowerment, so ubiquitous connectivity to broadband networks will be vital to the ongoing development of every nation worldwide," he added.

Bokova stated that the latest information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created new opportunities to create, preserve, disseminate and use information.

"We aim to go further, towards the construction of inclusive knowledge societies in which people can transform information into knowledge and understanding that empowers them to improve their livelihoods and contribute to their social and economic development," she said in a message to the July 11 meeting.

Other members of the Commission include Richard Branson, Founder and Chairman of the Virgin Group; Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General; and Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Managing Director of Grameen Bank. Also during the soccer World Cup in South Africa, world's biggest sporting event, community festivals, television shows, posters, electronic games, multimedia campaigns and even a new song, the Millennium Development Goals were under the spotlight. ☑

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"We, the global public, have the right to expect from our leaders global concern in our enlightened self-interest. Most politicians have grown up in an era in which a primary goal was still the creation and delineation of nation states. They have learned to be preoccupied with pure national interests. Moreover, many donor country politicians are worried about ongoing power shifts. This stymies their willingness to think beyond national borders and to innovate.

"But in order to break out of the current spiral of global crises, we need more 'new type' of policymakers -- policymakers who recognize that international cooperation is today, under conditions of openness and interdependence, oft the best way to promoting and securing national interests," says Kaul, an eloquent member of the Committee. – Ramesh Jaura ☑