

Roundup

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
Serving the UN system and NGO community for 28 years

NGOs Assess the Millennium Development Goals

The recently launched *Human Development Report 2003* says that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are an "idea whose time has come" and that they are propelling governments, aid agencies and civil society organizations everywhere to reorient their work.

The "idea," endorsed by 189 Heads of State and Government at the 2000 Millennium Summit, is that all countries would commit themselves to reaching specific and measurable targets by 2015, such as reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day, ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling, and halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water (see *NGLS Roundup 98*).

The *Human Development Report* elevates this "idea" into the Millennium Development Compact, which it says represents the higher level of political commitment between the North and South that is needed to reach the goals and turn back the unprecedented backslide in human development indices recorded for some of the world's poorest nations.

Over the past couple of years, as the concept of the MDGs has emerged, NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been learning about the goals and evaluating whether or not they offer new possibilities for holding their governments to account on commitments and whether a new North-South understanding that is pro-development could emerge in areas such as trade, debt and investment. Some NGOs have been involved in national level consultations in preparing MDG Country Reports and are trying to ensure this annual exercise reflects the views of NGOs and somehow translates into policy recommendations; others are exploring how this relates to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

These and other issues are addressed by the four NGO representatives below: Roberto Bissio, Social Watch (Uruguay); Martin Khor, Third World Network (Malaysia); Neville Gabriel, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (South Africa); and John Foster, North-South Institute (Canada). NGLS offers these views to stimulate a greater discussion about the MDGs, their significance at the national and international levels, and their relevance for the work of NGOs. [Excerpts from these papers have been reproduced with the permission of the authors and the United Nations Development Programme-UNDP.]

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE MDGs — ROBERTO BISSIO

CSOs pose five basic questions about the MDGs: Why should the public mobilize behind them when so many

earlier UN goals remain unfulfilled? Do the MDGs apply to everyone in the global street? Do the Goals concern only aid? What trade-offs took place in reaching the "Monterrey Consensus" and how fair are they? Do the MDGs represent a new global bargain or the old-style impositions?

Skepticism

The public is skeptical. So many goals have not been met in the past; why should it be different this time? This is not a question that can be answered at this stage and pessimists and optimists can debate endlessly whether the glass is partly empty or partly full. It is a fact, however, that unless current trends substantially change, the Goals will not be met. That fact could be either an excuse for cynicism or a motivation to do better. The year 2002 stands exactly halfway between the base year of 1990, taken as reference for the indicators that measure achievement of the MDGs and the target year of 2015. In a report called *Halfway there?*, ActionAid states that "At current rates of progress the poorest regions are set to fail to meet the targets. Latin America is making steady progress, but not fast enough, and improvements in South Asia are uneven. However, it is sub-Saharan Africa that poses the biggest challenge, where some of the key target indicators are actually getting worse."

Does it apply to me?

During the second World Social Forum, in January 2002, UNDP officials met in Porto Alegre with civil society anti-poverty campaigners from all over the world to discuss ways in which the message of the Millennium Declaration could reach the very people that the MDGs are intended to benefit.

As a Brazilian NGO activist commented, "If we go to a poor community with the message that poverty will be reduced by half, the immediate reaction will be 'Which half am I in?'" A few months later, former metalworker Luis Ignacio da Silva, universally known as "Lula," won the Brazilian Presidency after a campaign that emphasized "Zero Hunger" as the goal of his government.

It is easy to understand that extreme poverty (frequently defined as the inability to meet basic food requirements) cannot be eradicated instantly, and that any process to eradicate it will be cumulative and gradual, where the number of people under the poverty line will be reduced by half, two-thirds, three-quarters, etc. But in terms of mobilizing support, the Millennium Declaration commitment "to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty" can be inspirational, while the technical formulation of "halving the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day, by 2015" is not.

In order to capture the hearts and minds of public opinion, and even those of committed campaigners, the MDGs still need to be translated from technical jargon into formulas

that, true to their actual meaning, can be readily understood by men and women in the streets.

Is it just about aid?

Both the US and the EU announced during the International Conference on Financing for Development (ICFFD, see *NGLS Roundup 97*) unilateral decisions to gradually increase their development aid, promising an additional US\$12 billion within a few years. While clearly falling short of the established benchmark of 0.7% of gross national product, this promise would reverse for the first time in many years the decreasing trend of aid. As such, it was highlighted as a major achievement, even when no substantial progress was made on the other issues of the agenda.

The enthusiasm of the officials from development cooperation ministries in the rich countries and international development agencies about the "success" of FfD contrasted sharply with the mood of the NGOs. Civil society groups dissociated themselves from the so-called "Monterrey Consensus," which they characterized as a "Washington consensus in a sombrero." While no spokesperson in the NGO community criticized the MDGs or the increase in official development assistance *per se*, the antagonistic perceptions about the results in Monterrey created a feeling that MDGs were only about aid and ultimately did not address the concerns of middle-income developing countries or transition countries, or poor and vulnerable groups in the developed world.

Is the trade-off fair?

There is a trade-off between lowering the benchmarks and targets of previous UN conferences and achieving unanimous acceptance of the MDGs by the world leaders. Diplomacy is always about trade-offs; the issue always being that at the end everybody wins something, even if not every aspiration of all participants has been met.

In the case of the MDGs, it is important to confront the trade-off between the need to focus on the poorest of the poor and the need to widen the constituencies to support a campaign or action plan, without which the political will to actually implement the resolutions will be lacking. The World Summit for Social Development in 1995 had attempted to address that dilemma by structuring its agenda around three issues (poverty, unemployment and social integration) that would address concerns of, respectively, developing countries, developed countries and the public at large everywhere.

Is it a new bargain or the old-style impositions?

If the MDGs are to become the reference for a new "Global Compact for Growth and Development," whose terms are still to be defined, a balance needs to be found between the obligations of developed and developing countries. The targets mentioned with measurable precision and a date in the Millennium Declaration all refer to what needs to be achieved in the poorest countries, not what needs to be done in order to achieve desired goals. Significantly, the "to do" list of the richest countries (*e.g.*, debt relief, market access, more aid) is not linked in the document to any specific date or performance indicator.

Can the MDGs be an effective rallying point to stimulate civil society participation? The answer is, as with most things in life, "it depends." For international groups, the MDGs can provide an excellent base, both in terms of providing a standard to evaluate implementation, as well as to stimulate analysis (and campaigning!) on the different obstacles that hinder the achievement of the Goals.

Where do we go and how do we get there?

At the national level, a local "translation" of the MDGs into national realities is needed. Since the MDGs have been

formulated in a way that emphasizes the situation of the least developed countries as a priority, the first impression in middle-income and transition countries tends to be "This does not apply to us." In developed countries, only groups directly concerned with aid or solidarity with the poorest countries immediately identified with the MDGs, and in the poorest countries themselves, the civil society organizations wonder what is the difference or the added value of an MDG approach when compared to the PRSP process. In all of these cases, civil society could become involved in the national process of "internalization" of the MDGs, setting national goals, defining national poverty lines and strategies towards poverty eradication. It could also become highly engaged in the necessary process of creating the national (or even local) indicators and accountability mechanisms.

To link the MDGs with a particular set of policy prescriptions would be the wrong approach, no matter which policies are prescribed, precisely because there is no single "correct" policy for all societies and circumstances. At the same time, the Goals can be a source of legitimacy for the countries to pursue the policies of their choice.

Concerning the international insolvency framework, Ann Pettifor, Director of the Centre for International Finance and Governance of the New Economic Foundation, has said that it should be overseen by the United Nations instead of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Such a framework would allow countries to deal with unpayable sovereign debts in a manner similar to that of firms facing bankruptcy. The IMF, where the creditors have a majority, would cease being the only arbiter, perhaps becoming one in a tribunal, in which the debtor country would choose the second member and those two would agree on a neutral third, under UN supervision.

What should the criteria be for such a tribunal to decide how much of the debt is sustainable and has to be paid, and which portion of the country's income should go to other priorities? The answer promising the best chance for consensus and equity is clear: the MDGs. Only after making sure that the essential services required to meet the MDGs are delivered would debt be serviced. This is similar to provision already in place in the USA for indebted municipalities.

In the same vein, a developing country should be able to demand "special and differential treatment" in meeting the obligations contracted under trade and investment agreements. The MDGs could be the objective standard in the discussion over the establishment of State monopolies, tariff protection for local production, subsidies aimed at specific social sectors, or control over the international flows of capitals.

Mechanisms like those suggested above would help reestablish balance and start building the "Development Compact," a set of negotiated mutual commitments between developed and developing countries, without which the MDGs cannot be achieved.

In such a perspective, the vibrant mobilization of civil society around a strategy that is inspirational and viable is an asset that may be too difficult to measure, but essential for real changes.

**MAINSTREAMING DEVELOPMENT IN TRADE AND FINANCE:
A KEY TO GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP — MARTIN KHOR**

Goal 8 of the MDGs, Develop a global partnership for development, is critical to the overall scheme of the Millennium Declaration, as it is the only goal devoted

entirely to international relations. Successful development efforts require appropriate policies at both domestic and international levels. International factors have become proportionately more important in recent years as a result of the globalization process. Developing countries have generally become more integrated in the world economy and thus their development prospects and performance are more dependent on global economic structures and trends.

More importantly, many policies that used to be made solely or primarily at the national level are now very significantly influenced or shaped at international fora and by international institutions. This applies especially to those developing countries that depend on the international financial institutions for loans and debt restructuring and have to abide by loan conditionalities. However, it also applies to most developing countries that are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), as they are obliged to align or realign national laws and policies to be in line with the WTO's legally binding agreements. Thus, the "external economic environment" (comprising global economic structures and trends and the policies determined or influenced by international agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank, WTO, the UN and developed-country groupings such as the Group of Eight, OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] and bilateral aid agencies) has tremendous impact on a typical developing country.

In the context of the MDGs, the extent to which a developing country is able to make progress on many of the goals (especially Goal 1 on eradicating poverty and hunger, but also Goals 4, 5 and 6 relating to health and Goal 7 on environmental sustainability) depends not only on domestic policy choices, but also on how "friendly" or "hostile" the external economic environment is to that country. Four examples illustrate this point:

- n The continuous fall in prices of export commodities has caused tremendous income and foreign exchange losses to many developing countries and is a major cause of persistent or increased poverty at the local and community levels.
- n The financial instability and sharp currency fluctuations caused by large inflows and outflows of external funds have led many developing countries (including those considered the most successful among them) into financial and economic crises, with dramatic and sudden increases in poverty rates.
- n Many developing countries have suffered declines in or threats to their industrial jobs and farmers' livelihoods as a result of inappropriate import liberalization policies, partly or mainly due to external policy influences resulting from loan conditionalities or multilateral trade rules.
- n Cutbacks in social sector expenditures arising from structural adjustment programmes, as well as the introduction of the "user-should-pay" principle, have been identified as a significant factor in the deterioration of the wellbeing of vulnerable and poor groups in several developing countries.

These examples, as well as the continuation of the debt crisis in many countries, show that attempts to improve domestic policies, however exemplary, are insufficient if developing countries are to attain the MDGs. Thus the importance of developing a "global partnership for development" to underpin or at least to accompany the other efforts for attaining all the other goals.

In the effort to meet the MDG targets, "getting policies right" is also of crucial importance. If economic and social structures are inequitable and if policies (either for preserving the status quo or for reform) are inappropriate, then the mere expansion of funds and programmes in a

country would not be enough—and may indeed increase the problems. This applies to structures and policies at both national and international levels. Efforts to attain Goal 8 for developing global partnership should therefore focus, as a priority, on getting international economic structures, policies and rules right.

Integrating Developing Countries Into The World Economy

The dominant approach of the past two decades, favoured by the "Washington Consensus," is that full, rapid and comprehensive integration of developing countries into the global economy is both beneficial and essential for their development. The dominance of this paradigm is now rapidly eroding, due to the empirical record of developing countries that have followed (or attempted to follow) the policies of rapid liberalization.

The emerging paradigm calls for developing countries to take a pragmatic approach to globalization and liberalization and to be selective and deliberate in choosing how and when and in which sectors and to what extent, to integrate their domestic economy with the global economy, in the areas of finance, trade and investment. This approach recognizes that interaction with the global economy can benefit (and potentially be of significant benefit) to a developing country. However, the terms of interaction are crucial if the potential benefits are to be realized and if costs and damage is to be avoided. Too rapid a rate of integration, or integration in the wrong areas and in the wrong way, can be harmful rather than helpful. For example, too great a dependence on commodity exports and an increase in export volume when there is a global oversupply of a particular commodity can be detrimental. Excessive financial liberalization (for example, in allowing local institutions to freely borrow from abroad in foreign currency) can lead to a debt repayment crisis if the right regulations and conditions are not in place.

This change in paradigm and approach should firstly be considered at the national level, when governments choose their development strategy. However, it must be recognized that most developing countries do not have the "luxury" or space to choose their approach on economic integration, because of the determining influence of loan and aid conditionalities, or because of the rules they had agreed to in WTO. Thus, Millennium Development Goal 8 assumes central importance. In developing a global partnership for development, there is an underlying need for an understanding that developing countries should have the right to take an appropriate and pragmatic approach towards selectively integrating their domestic economy with the world economy.

Trade, Development and Reform Of The Multilateral Trading System

Ideally, trade and trade policy should serve the needs of development within a country's overall policy framework. There is thus the need to "mainstream development concerns in trade and trade policy." In practice, development needs are often compromised when a developing country participates in an inappropriate way in international trade (for example, by being too dependent on export commodities whose prices are on a trend decline) or when domestic policies and laws are amended in line with the country's obligations to meet the rules of the WTO or to meet loan conditionalities (and where aspects of the rules or policy conditionalities are unfavourable to the country's development interests).

"Mainstreaming trade in development," which is a recent slogan in international agencies, can inadvertently have adverse effects, if the policies underlying trade (or if the international trade rules) are inappropriate and damaging

to development needs. In considering the policy approach for Goal 8, a distinction between "mainstreaming development in trade" and "mainstreaming trade in development" should be carefully kept in mind.

The Need for Global Financial Reform

In working towards Goal 8, a major element is the reform of the global financial architecture. This reform is embedded within the first Target accompanying Goal 8: "Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system." A note under the Target says that this "includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, both nationally and internationally."

International Actions

In order that a global financial system can be developed as part of a "global partnership for development," two categories of measures are required at international level in the interests of developing countries.

The first set of proposals involves the need to avoid new policies or agreements that would "lock in," oblige or pressurize the developing countries to adopt policies that further financial liberalization. Each developing country should be enabled to decide on its own, without pressure, the degree, rate and type of financial liberalization it should undertake. The second set of proposals relates to international policies and measures that are required in order to develop a stable and development-oriented global financial system, [which would include] the development of measures and guidelines to assist developing countries to prevent or avoid future debt and financial crises. These should also include measures that regulate and control the type and extent of foreign loans that the public and private sectors are allowed to obtain, along with regulations to prevent speculation and manipulation in the stock market and the currency markets.

National Actions

In the absence of such international measures as outlined above, developing countries may have no choice but to institute domestic measures to protect themselves from conditions that can lead to financial crisis and debt-repayment problems.

Conclusion

In the context of the MDGs, Goal 8 does not have a detailed enough Target to capture the manifold objectives and actions that are needed in the area of global finance, including the problem of debt, capital flows and a healthy system of financing for development. Therefore, more detailed Targets in this field should be developed, as well as more and better indicators. Most important, however, is the need to flesh out in more detail and greater accuracy the various measures, policies and frameworks required to make the financial system a key component to a "global partnership for development" rather than the problem it now is.

TOWARDS A CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE ON REFRAMING POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA — NEVILLE GABRIEL

Especially since the mid-1990s, Southern African civil society organizations have consistently campaigned against poverty and for policy and governance transformation towards defined social development objectives. The MDGs correspond directly with the objectives of civil society organizations that have been active in social and economic justice advocacy work in the region. However, Southern African civil society organizations have either ignored or been slow in taking up the MDG framework in their research, service provision, community organization, and advocacy work. This has happened because of a lack of information and,

in some cases, because the MDGs have been seen as a global multilateral government concern in which civil society organizations have not had a stake. Meanwhile, there is increasing coordinated research, education, and advocacy work beginning to happen among Southern African civil society organizations in regard to the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Union. Linking the MDGs and civil society concerns about the poverty reduction strategy of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), powerful possibilities exist to integrate the MDGs into existing civil society campaigns and processes in the region towards more effective strategies and alliances.

Possibilities for CSO Engagement with the MDGs

The MDGs as Benchmarks

Recent examples of effective global CSO campaigns for social and economic justice such as the Jubilee debt cancellation campaign were built on clear benchmarks for marking progress. Target-driven goals, even though limited, enhance focus, determination, and planning. They also provide measures for assessing the effectiveness of policy reforms. Levels of debt cancellation, for example, could (and should) be measured in terms of their efficacy towards costed MDG achievement plans. Similarly, budgeting processes could be held accountable to the MDG targets.

The MDGs provide a ready-made and widely supported framework of social development benchmarks that can be effectively used as an advocacy tool by Southern African civil society organizations to monitor and expand social development programmes in the region.

Indeed, the MDGs as benchmarks can serve as a basis for CSOs themselves to find common national and regional ground for more cohesive CSO networks.

Reframing PRSPs and NEPAD

Going further, the MDGs provide a method not only to measure but also to analyze, evaluate, and transform macro-economic development frameworks. Holding up the MDGs as clear objectives to which policymakers already have an implicit commitment, PRSP and NEPAD processes in the region can be reframed towards more focused and time-bound objectives that necessitate macro-framework changes. This will enhance upward policy coherence based on local experience and needs rather than limiting local programmes according to predetermined macro-strategies.

National macro-economic policies, for example, could be assessed according to their ability to deliver on the MDGs rather than the stalemate that often results from perceptions that policy critiques arise out of ideological differences.

The Limits of Poverty Discourse

There are, however, social development risks associated with target-driven goals that CSOs in the region must be attentive to. Given the maintenance of macro-economic austerity, the focus on targets could have a distorting impact on national development planning. Poverty discourse such as the MDG framework highlights particularly the delivery of basic needs, particularly primary health care, and primary education. Increases in investment in these areas must come out of budgets limited by macro-economic ceilings, and thus at the expense of other budget items such as secondary and tertiary education. CSO engagement with the MDG framework should pay particular attention to such distortions to ensure that trade-offs between MDG and other development objectives do not create new cycles of poverty.

Integrating the MDGs into Existing CSO Campaigns

Some CSOs in Southern Africa are already engaged in research, policy development, and advocacy work that accords well with the MDG framework. Other than participation in PRSP processes in Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania, much of this work is in the area of development financing. However, there are also some highly developed regional human rights programmes and increasing work on regional and global trade justice issues. Two examples of how the MDGs could be integrated into CSO engagement in ongoing policy development and advocacy work are provided here.

The People's Budget and BIG Campaign

The Basic Income Grant (BIG) campaign grew out of the People's Budget process. The BIG campaign proposes that a 100 Rand universal grant be provided to all those living in South Africa as a development grant to break the cycle of poverty in which the poor are caught. BIG researchers estimate that the provision of a basic income grant would reduce South Africa's poverty gap by 74%, lifting 6.3 million people above the poverty line.

The BIG campaign falls entirely in the MDG framework. However, there has been no reference to the MDGs in any BIG research or campaigning activities. This is largely due to the low levels of awareness about the MDGs among CSOs in Southern Africa, but also due to the gap that exists between CSOs operating at the national level and multilateral institutions such as UNDP, at least in South Africa.

Increased communication about the MDGs with the CSOs active in the BIG campaign can result in the integration of the MDG framework into the BIG campaign and provide a major public awareness drive on the MDGs in South Africa.

CSO Coalitions in PRSP Processes

Even though some CSOs that participated in PRSP processes in Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique are aware of the MDGs, they did not see the MDGs as directly relevant to their interests in the PRSP process. However, while bemoaning the macro-economic constraints on PRSPs, they all welcomed PRSP decisions that went beyond the constraints of a typical structural adjustment framework, such as ring-fencing of social development expenditure allocations and the provision of free primary education. A Southern African CSO adoption of and focus on the MDGs can provide a useful methodological base from which to ensure upward policy coherence in PRSP processes. It has the potential, if used effectively by CSOs, to reframe PRSP processes.

The same CSOs raise concerns about the monitoring and evaluation of PRSP implementation, for which the MDG framework could be an ideal mechanism.

Similarly, MDG integration can happen with other CSO campaigns both nationally and regionally in Southern Africa. The establishment of the SADC [Southern African Development Community] NGO Council at the end of 2002 comprising national NGO coalitions from all SADC countries, for example, provides a unique opportunity for introducing the MDGs to CSOs throughout the region.

The need emerges for a targeted communication strategy on the MDGs amongst CSOs in Southern Africa. Linking the MDGs and civil society concerns about current poverty reduction strategies, powerful possibilities exist to integrate the MDGs into existing civil society campaigns and processes in the region towards more effective partnerships and social delivery.

Recommendations

- n Conduct more research in the region on the relationship between a people-centred goal-driven framework such as the MDGs and macro-economic

- policy in the region;
- n Place a greater focus on the MDGs in the context of NEPAD policy development through an engagement with the NEPAD secretariat;
- n That UNDP facilitate the convening of a Southern African CSO MDG network through existing CSO campaigns.

THE MILLENNIUM DECLARATION: MOBILIZING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS — JOHN W. FOSTER

On October 1, 2002 the Secretary-General of the UN warned that "the world was falling short in meeting the objectives agreed by global leaders two years ago in the Millennium Declaration." Trends were "decidedly mixed" and while some advances had taken place on specific MDGs, the broader objectives of the Declaration—including human rights, democracy, good governance, conflict resolution and Africa's special needs—showed insufficient progress.

The importance of engaging partners in the campaign for implementation, and the role of civil society organizations among them have been noted by the Secretary-General and others concerned with mobilizing support for the Declaration and the Goals.

The Secretary-General's overview is sustained by a survey of CSO responses to the Declaration and the Goals undertaken in mid-2002, almost two years after the General Assembly endorsed them. Undertaken by the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) in cooperation with The North-South Institute (Ottawa, Canada), the survey indicates a positive engagement with the Declaration and Goals by many groups in diverse places and with a great variety of initiatives. It also indicates that simple knowledge of the Declaration and Goals may not have permeated deeply enough in civil society. Further, it suggests that there is significant skepticism about the commitment of governments to implementation and about whether the changes in policy necessary to accomplish the vision of the Declaration will in fact be taken by the Multilateral Economic Institutions (MEIs—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the UN itself.

The Survey

The open-ended questions in our survey elicited a myriad of responses regarding the Declaration and Goals, extensive and diverse instances of practical initiatives and a significant if not overwhelming sense of engagement. The fundamental view of the Millennium Declaration and the Goals was overwhelmingly positive, if qualified in a number of ways.

About half the groups responding came from 20 OECD countries. The other half was from 44 developing and least developed countries, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. Two-thirds of the respondents were in English, almost 20% in Spanish and 15% in French. Three-quarters of the groups reported an annual budget of less than US\$500,000, with almost 40% having less than US\$50,000 per year. Almost three-quarters reported less than 20 employees. Groups with less than 20 volunteers were 44.5% of respondents, but almost 50% had between 20 and 500 volunteers. Slightly more than 4% of the groups had mail-out circulation of more than 100,000 people, 10% more than 10,000 and 40% between 1,000 and 10,000.

The responding groups tended to be national, sub-national and local, rather than head-offices of large international agencies or movements. The most predominant strategies of work included capacity building and training, advocacy, research and development project management. Many noted work with women and the

economically disadvantaged.

Participation in international forums dealing with key development issues was confirmed by a significant minority, with more than 40% indicating participation in the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, 20% attending the 2002 Monterrey Financing for Development Conference, almost as many reporting participation in the 1995 Copenhagen WSSD [World Summit on Social Development] and more than 27% having participated in the Beijing Women's Conference.

Information and Engagement

Given the relatively high level of international engagement of the responding groups, it was a bit of a shock to discover that almost one-third of the responding groups stated that they were not familiar with the UN Millennium Declaration and Goals.

Of those familiar with the Declaration and Goals, roughly one-third indicated that "our organization has a good knowledge of the MD and MDGs and has already incorporated them into our work."

More encouraging was the response by almost 50% that they had initiated some activity in direct response to the Declaration. More than 56% reported initiatives aimed at implementation of specific MDGs.

We asked in what ways the Declaration and Goals might be useful to CSOs in advancing their work. Advocacy and multi-stakeholder dialogues were cited as the activities in which they might be most useful. Project development, research initiatives and media relations were also cited.

Conclusions

As indicated above, the results of the 2002 survey are indicative, not conclusive. They are an initial test, and the findings are a mine of samples of the sorts of CSO activities and initiatives currently under way. They provide hypotheses for testing and tracing through upcoming annual soundings.

The Declaration and Goals do provide an organizing framework for a significant number of initiatives, and there is some evidence of organizations, even quite major NGO aid agencies, reviewing and prioritizing their plans in light of the Goals.

In institutional terms, the terms of funders and planners, while two years have elapsed since the endorsement by the General Assembly, it is still "early days" in many organizations in terms of the internalizing the Goals, and the movement from vision through planning to inception of new initiatives.

There remain many organizations and networks that have either little or no knowledge of the Declaration and Goals or a glancing experience with them. A great deal depends not only on UN information and network activity, but on governments' taking on and publicizing the Declaration and Goals and on civil society networks themselves. The survey does indicate, however, that many smaller or local CSOs have

already taken on the Declaration and are contributing to the Goals.

An ongoing engagement of the UN, the MEIs and civil society organizations regarding the shortcomings and ambiguities of the Declaration and Goals and regarding policy change is required. A number of CSOs are monitoring governments in the light of their commitments and their promises. Mutual accountability was a concept much touted at the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference and elsewhere during 2002, but it will quickly ring hollow if the calls for improvement in governance in developing countries are not matched with commitments to change regressive policies and inadequate funds on the part of donor governments.

The survey and report were initiated out of the conviction that the Millennium Declaration and Goals will not be accomplished truly without the effective and global involvement of civil society organizations at all levels. They were developed as a contribution, through information, to the success of the effort, but also as a recognition of CSO investment and engagement.

Contacts

Human Development Report Office (HDRO), 304 E. 45th Street, 12th Floor, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/906 3661, fax +1-212/906 3677, e-mail <hdro@undp.org>, website (www.undp.org/hdro).

Roberto Bissio, Coordinator, Social Watch, Juan D. Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay, telephone +598-2/4196192, fax +598-2/4119222, e-mail <socwatch@socialwatch.org>, website (www.socwatch.org.uy).

Martin Khor, Director, Third World Network, 121-S, Jalan Utama, 10450, Penang, Malaysia, telephone +60-42266728, fax +60-4/2264505, e-mail <twnet@po.jaring.my>, website (www.twinside.org.sg).

Neville Gabriel, Coordinator, Justice and Peace Department, Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference, PO Box 941, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa, telephone +12-323/6458, fax +12-326/6218, e-mail <sacbcclib@wn.apc.org>, website (www.sacbc.org.za).

John Foster, Principal Researcher, North-South Institute (NSI), 55 Murray Street, Suite 200, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5M3, Canada, telephone +1-613/2413535, fax +1-613/2417435, e-mail <jfoster@nsi-ins.ca>, website (www.nsi-ins.ca).

This edition of NGLS Roundup was prepared by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). The NGLS Roundup is produced for NGOs and others interested in the institutions, policies and activities of the UN system and is not an official record. For more information or additional copies write to: NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, fax +41-22/917 0432, e-mail <npls@unctad.org> or NGLS, Room DC1-1106, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <npls@un.org>. The text of this NGLS Roundup and other NGLS publications are also available online (website: www.unsystem.org/npls).

Printed on recycled paper