

4th may 2010, Latin America - On 26 April 2010, the Rio Group, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organized an interactive workshop to discuss challenges and opportunities for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region. The meeting was opened by Mr. Eduardo Galvez, Ambassador, Charge d'affaires of Chile, who also served as the workshop moderator.

The substantive discussion began with a presentation of a background document, prepared by UNDP, highlighting the reality of the MDGs in the LAC region. Delivered by Mr. Niky Fabiancic, Director a.i. of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the presentation emphasized the challenges ahead for the acceleration of the achievement of the MDGs.

Drawing on UNDP's background paper "Challenges and Opportunities for the MDGs in the LAC Region," Mr. Fabiancic warned that without a renewed commitment, many countries in the region will not meet numerous MDG targets, and this kind of failure may compromise future commitments to action. The reality of the MDGs in the LAC region, according to the background paper, is mixed and fluctuates – f.e. in the 1980s, poverty levels increased from 40% to 48%, in the 1990s there was some reduction, some hope, this century, good progress was made (2002 – 2008) from 44% to 33%, but despite the good news, in the last couple of years (as of 2009) there has been a reversal of the progress made, poverty levels have risen from 33% to 34% which translates into 9 million people becoming poor last year in the LAC region. In terms of other indicators and targets in the region:

- Levels of primary education are high, but many countries will not achieve the respective targets by 2015;
- Pertaining to hunger, progress has been made, but has been too slow and will not be met by 2015 at the current rate of development;
- 18 countries will reach MDG3 by 2015, 14 countries are on track on MDG4, only 5 countries are on track on MDG5, and only 4 countries are on track on MDG6;

While monitoring progress at the national level is important, Mr. Fabiancic emphasized the need to look beyond national targets and reach the youth, minorities, and indigenous groups, because initiatives implemented with local cooperation and involvement are more sustainable. Mr. Fabiancic stressed that if countries continue to progress at the same rate as today, most likely the outcome, in terms of MDG achievement, will be disappointing. In relation to the adverse effects of the various crises in the LAC region, it was noted that progress made is threatened and that the shocks are expected to leave long-term effects on the countries' most vulnerable populations. The UNDP document explained: "in time of growth, poverty diminishes at a much slower pace than it increases during times of crises."

Two central dimensions for MDG progress in the LAC region that were identified were vulnerability and inequality. For example, in the LAC region, which continues to be one of the

most unequal regions in the world, poverty levels are much higher for children and women than any other groups, and the rural-urban gap is a common challenge particularly in access to services. Such disparities must be addressed because high levels of inequality result in poor institutional arrangements, exacerbate market imperfections, and inhibit MDG progress. In addition, it was recognized that gender equality is a cornerstone for achieving the MDGs. As an example of good practices, rural production in El Salvador, and access of mobile operators in Peru were mentioned.

Mr. Fabianic further pointed attention to the issue of financing and commitment of resources to achieving the MDGs. He reminded that while donors are still far from reaching 0.7% commitment to ODA, domestic efforts and resources will be required to maintain sustainable progress and development. It is therefore crucial, as MDG8 clarifies, for the international community to recognize that achieving MDGs requires partnerships, especially for the least developed and landlocked countries – this also includes a commitment to open up markets to developing countries. Mr. Fabianic concluded his presentation by noting that the main challenge that we see today is to find a formula for increasing MDG progress – for that reason, UNDP has prepared an 'MDG acceleration framework' to intensify efforts, scale-up interventions and identify bottlenecks.

In stressing that inequality will eventually affect the kind of growth that the country will reach, Ambassador Galvez invited discussants - Mr. Gert Rosenthal, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Guatemala, Mr. Jorge Valero, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Venezuela, Mrs. Angella Brown, Minister Counsellor, Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica, and Mr. Guilherme Patriota, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Permanent Mission of Brazil - to share their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities for MDG achievement in the LAC region.

Ambassador Rosenthal began by noting that LAC is indeed a very heterogeneous region, but not so much in policies – rather, there are huge disparities in performance. Ambassador Rosenthal further pointed attention to the role of indigenous peoples, and voiced a concern about the proposed acceleration framework which he sees as potentially conveying perceptions of a magical formula and creating false hopes. Ambassador Rosenthal identified two fundamental issues of the acceleration framework. One, there is some sort of deception, and it can be negative because it forces us to put emphasis on short-term solutions (i.e. to achieve the MDGs by 2015). Second, the document talks very little about MDG8, about partnerships and cooperation which are required if we want to deal seriously with, for example, climate change.

Representing Venezuela, Ambassador Valero observed that the financial and economic crises have had a devastating impact, making it difficult to achieve the MDGs, and identified several obstacles to achieve the Goals:

- 1) Perverse dynamics of global capitalism;
- 2) Presence, in some cases, of immoral and inhumane foreign debt that uses-up raw material from the national treasury;

3) Lowering the price of raw products from developing countries

Ambassador Valero then described recent developments in Venezuela, noting that the country has reached and achieved development goals regarding extreme poverty (has gone down from 20% in 1998 to 7.4% in 2010), empowered women, expanded access to water, reversed the loss of environmental resources, and provided free treatment to HIV-infected patients. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Venezuela is at the forefront of overcoming poverty and inequality.

In addition, Ambassador Valero mentioned that Venezuela is a land free of illiteracy (declared by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), has maintained sovereignty and resisted neo-liberalism, and despite the recent crises, has not cut-down its social spending – to the contrary, a series of programs called Social Missions, 30 missions to attend to the needs of the population have been implemented, and about 50% of the national budget is allocated to social spending. Lastly, Ambassador Valero called for the support of regional cooperation, such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the necessity to challenge the perverse logic of global capitalism and prioritize South-south cooperation.

Mrs. Brown of Jamaica identified three basic needs that must be considered when looking to improve MDG progress:

- 1) build on existing MDG evidence;
- 2) secure national, local and global political commitment and resources;
- 3) provide a clear mandate to the UNDP and other development organs

Speaking of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Mrs. Brown described significant progress on achieving the MDGs, but also noted the challenges that the community faces including poverty alleviation, primary education, rising unemployment, and gender equity. The economies of the Caribbean region have been experiencing a sharp decline in tourism revenue and remittances from overseas, two key sectors for the geographically specific region, and have been challenged by the high levels of indebtedness which results from the necessity, lack of other options, to enter into borrowing relationships with international financial institutions.

Mrs. Brown emphasized the importance of improving development across sectors (agriculture, industry, infrastructure, etc.), and addressing the concerns of middle-income countries which are not able to access concessionary financing so much needed to make real progress and meet the MDGs. Turning to the question of opportunities for MDG achievement, Mrs. Brown stressed the importance of and need for:

- Political will and unity, particularly in developing countries implementing commitments
- a careful review of access of middle-income countries to resources

- development being kept at the core of the review process
- the Goals being more localized and sensitive to vulnerabilities

The last discussant to present his remarks was Minister Patriota of Brazil who began by applauding the emphasis on MDGs 1 and 2 as, in his view, they are the most important and a prerequisite for achieving other MDGs. Minister Patriota emphasized the centrality of focusing on social policies as key policies in attaining the MDGs, and called for them to be highlighted in all UN things and documents as those are the programs that make a real difference. In addition, according to Minister Patriota, the LAC region needs to become more self-reliant and less dependant on external flows. Because the region has an abundance of these commodities, the food and oil crises are particularly paradoxical and point attention to issues of policy-making and implementation, and not necessarily only resource shortage. What is the way forward? Minister Patriota emphasized, among other factors:

- the importance of clearly identifying and highlighting the policies that made some countries perform very well
- the need for regulation of finances, and asymmetric global governance
- the value of commending socially-oriented governments (democracy of inclusion), in particular of indigenous populations
- the centrality of and need for partnerships between local governments and the UN

After the floor was opened to further comments and remarks, representatives of numerous LAC region countries voiced their contributions and concerns:

- important to be conscious of the fact that the MDGs have told us what to do, but not how to do it - future documents should show us how real progress has been achieved
- many of our countries have experienced a reversal because of the crises
- we need capacity to collect taxes to have our own resources, need to fight tax evasion
- necessary to have accountability mechanisms
- local ownership of the MDGs is crucial, but is missing in many of our countries -without ownership we can achieve very little
- inequality is something that this group should pay a particular attention to, because it is undercutting our efforts and impact - how do we go forward in treating inequality?
- in context of self-reliance, how do we address global partnerships?
- Are we engendering false hope? Are we going to be able to achieve the goals that we have

set for ourselves without enlisting support of international actors?

- how do we measure progress? We need to have a better disaggregation of data
- we need to promote local ownership of the MDGs, through indigenizing them. That will also give us a more accurate picture of progress, reversals and gaps
- those who caused the problems should take responsibility immediately (climate change)
- impact of violence on achieving the MDGs (not only cost it has on security spending, but also the impact of violence on population's health, education, etc.)
- local ownership is crucial because political will is based in popular support, so if the population is not aware of and interested in the MDGs, it is not easy to assign funds to achieve the MDGs
- environmental challenges in the region - Often we don't have the necessary support to alleviate and mitigate the adverse affects of climate change
- internal resources mobilization - it is necessary, but it is also crucial to have international assistance. It is difficult to think that we will achieve the MDGs without quality international support.
- we need to coordinate and exchange information much more

Representative of ECLAC informed that an inter-agency report on MDG achievements is being prepared, and that before focusing on accelerating progress, it is desirable to take stock of the lessons needed to preserve the progress made thus far. In that respect, four points were emphasized:

- 1) sound macroeconomic management, countries had policy space to exercise their policies, so social expenditures did not diminish
- 2) inequality – need for targeted interventions (vulnerable groups require specific targeting at local and national level), because regional approaches often cover-up inequality at the local level
- 3) importance of policy coherence - any intervention to accelerate progress on one MDG will also affect progress on other MDGs (interdependence)
- 4) global partnerships for development - regional cooperation without exempting international and global support

Having heard and appreciated the various contributions and concerns, Mr. Fabiancic clarified that the acceleration framework, and the word acceleration itself, does not mean to signify a magic formula, but a new approach that is very much needed – because continuing at the current rate of progress, the MDGs will not be achieved. In addition, it is important to accelerate

with sustainability while addressing root problems and causes, not only symptoms. Mr. Fabiancic explained that creating a fiscal space, not only increasing taxes, has four dimensions:

- 1) Official Development Assistance;
- 2) capacity to mobilize domestic resources;
- 3) indebtedness - payment of debts takes away resources that can be utilized for MDG progress;
- 4) inefficiency of expenditures

To close his remarks, Mr. Fabiancic brainstormed that pertaining to questions of resources, one can perhaps think of a tax on brain-drain, patents, etc., and stated that because poverty punishes children and women greatly, other UN instruments should be invited to the table, f.e. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Ambassador Galvez concluded the workshop by summarizing commonly expressed positions that included the attainability of the MDGs, and the need to focus on the most vulnerable.

Source: [UN-NGLS](#)