

Opening Address

To the

**Advisory Panel Meeting on
Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific
&
Experts Group meeting of the UNSIAP – Regional MDG Initiative**

By

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Introduction

- I am happy to be participating in the First Meeting of the Advisory Panel for Phase II of UNDP-UNESCAP Project on 'Supporting the Achievement of the MDGs in Asia and the Pacific'
- We are indeed fortunate to have such a strong advisory panel for the project with senior government officials and distinguished members of civil society and academia from 11 countries of the region. In addition, we have here also the members of the expert group on statistics for the MDGs. I thank the members for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in the meeting.
- Let me also thank the staff members of UNESCAP for providing such excellent documentation for the meetings in the form of a concept paper and outline for the second Regional MDGR and the proposed outlines of the technical background papers. This has already enabled, I am told a very productive meeting of the steering committee on technical issues yesterday.
- At this point I am very pleased to welcome ADB as our partner in the regional initiative. When I met Mr. Chino, the President of ADB, recently in Manila, he was excited about joining this initiative and assured us that in the future ADB would like that its country assistance strategies and programs be MDG-driven. The 'triangular' partnership between UNESCAP, ADB and UNDP, with all the synergies that exist among us – the convening power of UNESCAP, ADB's strong resource and

programme capacity & UNDP's country coordination role - will truly provide a major impetus to the realization of MDGs in Asia and the Pacific.

Review of First MDG Report

Ladies and Gentlemen:

- The collaboration between UNESCAP and UNDP in the first phase during 2001 to 2003 was truly exemplary which led to the production of an excellent first regional MDGR titled 'Meeting the Challenges of Poverty Reduction'. This report has been widely appreciated and welcomed by many governments and various stakeholders. I salute the leadership of Mr. Kim Hak-Su, Executive Secretary of UNESCAP for having had the foresight to take on this task at a time when the campaign for the MDGs had not really got underway. Today, I am pleased to report that the cooperation between UNESCAP and UNDP is quoted globally as the 'best practice', I would also to acknowledge here the major contribution made by Mr. J.K. Robert England, the Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative of Thailand, in operationalizing this cooperation and involving the entire UN system in this process.
- The First Regional MDGR also came up with some important findings, as follows:
 - (i) The region is broadly on track in terms of meeting the target of halving income poverty by 2015 in goal 1, largely on the back of fast growth but not pro-poor growth;
 - (ii) However, while the region is doing well in income poverty reduction, it is not doing so well in the broader dimensions of human poverty as embodied in goals 2 to 7;

Also, there is considerable variation in performance among individual countries with LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in particular lagging behind;

There is no evidence of a stronger global partnership for development as envisaged in goal 8 with the trend during the 90s in Asia and the Pacific of declining ODA, and no significant improvement in market access or enhanced debt relief. Therefore the achievement of the countries in the region has been very much on their own.

- Of course, we all recognized that since this was the first regional MDGR, there were significant shortcomings including:
 - (i) Weak data base on the MDGs- only 12 out of the 58 countries had adequate information to monitor fully progress on the various MDG

targets and indicators. At the time, only a few countries had produced MDGRs. Today, we have 17 such reports and by the end of year, over 25;

- (ii) Lack of focus on the strategies and programs required to achieve other goals, besides reduction in income poverty;

Lack of adequate in-depth discussion on the scope and nature of pro-poor policies and institutional changes required for achieving the MDGs.

Also there was not enough dissemination and the report did not get the kind of publicity it ought to among the people of the region. Therefore we need a well defined communication strategy that must be implemented alongwith the report preparation process.

Removal of these inadequacies has, therefore, become the principal objective of successor regional MDGRs. As such, the prodoc for Phase II of the regional initiative states ' the project has the objective of promoting the adoption of policy options that support the achievement of the MDGs, facilitating the understanding of key strategies and options by providing a depository of regional experiences and lessons, which may be adopted by countries'.

Imperatives for the Second MDGR

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The imperatives for timely production of the Second MDGR have increased manifold since we finalized the prodoc for Phase II. This is because the Secretary General has decided that the next years' Annual UN GA Session will focus on Millennium Summit+5, review progress on achieving the MDGs and hopefully elicit renewed commitment from the international community to facilitate this process.
- The region of Asia and the Pacific has the largest global concentration of the world's poor. It is, therefore, vitally important that we provide a regional perspective on what is required to achieve the MDGs. This perspective can potentially be key input into the preparation of the SGs report.
- I am confident that given the immense knowledge on the region that resides in the three partner agencies – UNESCAP, ADB, and UNDP – and the other stakeholders, we can make a truly 'seminal' contribution to this process through the production of an outstanding second MDGR. We must, therefore, attach collectively the highest priority to producing the report on time and of the highest quality. I offer here the services of our country offices and our regional centers in Kathmandu and Bangkok to

assisting UNESCAP in preparing this report. I am sure that ADB will also provide all possible cooperation.

- We also need to take cognizance of the negative impact of external factors – Oil prices has just today crossed the US \$ 50 mark, there is the constant struggle between according priority between security concerns and development priorities and the stalled trade talks' impact on poverty – all have reemphasized the need to renew our attention on poverty reduction in the region.

Substantive comments on the concept paper

- Given the context within which the second regional MDGR is being prepared of Millennium Summit +5, I believe that the contents of the report will have to fall broadly within the framework of 'The Global Partnership for Development'. Therefore, the report will need to highlight, on the one hand, what the countries of the region need to do in terms of policies, institutional changes and poverty programs and, on the other hand, what support the region will require from the international community at regional and global levels in terms of changes in trade regime, enhanced ODA, technology transfer, debt relief, etc., in order to achieve the MDGs.
- The recommended focus in the concept paper on required institutional changes is, no doubt, of strategic importance. At one level, it will allay the concern that there are limits to the 'absorption capacity' for higher external resource flows in many countries, especially LDCs, and at an other level, such institutional changes will provide the enabling environment for resort to pro-poor policies that lead, in particular, to better prioritization and more efficient allocation and utilization of existing public resources for achievement of MDGs. It is important, however, that we focus on institutional changes that have a more or less direct bearing on the MDGs and which can be implemented in a realistic time frame.
- The proposed outline of the report perhaps does not appear to give adequate importance to the role of pro-poor policies, especially since the Asian experience highlights the absence of pro-poor growth. The regional center in Kathmandu of UNDP has done pioneering work during the last two years on the key elements of pro-poor growth and policies on the basis of in-depth country case studies. Already, 11 countries of the region have been studied in depth. Insights gained from this work can be made available to the authors of the report. The technical background paper on MDGs and PRS should focus on pro-poor policies.
- Given the objective of the report to focus on the nature of the global compact for MDGs, I believe that it will also be essential for the report to highlight the implications, in particular, of different changes in the trading regime resulting from the Doha Development Round and to indicate which changes are likely to be of the greatest benefit to the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Our expectations from the second MDGR are high given its potential relevance and usefulness, and the high standard set by the first Regional MDGR. We must pool all our resources to helping UNESCAP in preparing the report. The TBPs must be focused primarily on initially providing critical inputs to the report. In addition, reliance must be placed on existing reports and on-going processes to enrich the report. However, we must have full confidence in the ESCAP team in taking principal responsibility for preparation of the report. As partners we ask that we are consulted along with the rest of UN system and the advisory panel prior to external dissemination of findings, for example, in February 2005 or May 2005 as per the proposed time schedule.
- I would like to close by saying that we are very eager to hear comments of the members of the Advisory Panel on the proposed contents of the important report in the making and on the process leading to its finalization.

Thank you.