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POVERTY CAN BE SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASED BY 2015 REPORT FOUR MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

GENEVA, 26 June -- World poverty can be significantly decreased by 2015 if developing and industrialized countries implement their commitments to attack the root causes of poverty, according to a new report released today.



United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched the report, "A Better World for All", in Geneva on the opening day of the United Nations General Assembly special session on social development, where finding strategies to fight poverty is a priority. Also on 26 June, Sally Shelton-Colby, Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, presented the report at the OECD 2000 Forum in Paris.



The report urges developing and industrialized countries to work to foster sustainable growth that favours the poor and provide more resources for health, education, gender equality, and environmentally sustainable development worldwide.

Co-authored by the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the OECD, the report marks the first time these four international organizations have jointly assessed progress towards poverty reduction goals and outlined a common vision for the way forward.

The report focuses on seven interrelated development goals, set during world conferences in the 1990s, which, if achieved in the next 15 years, will improve the lives of millions of people. The seven goals are: halving the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day; enrolling all children in primary school; empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in education; reducing infant and child mortality rates; reducing maternal mortality ratios; promoting access to reproductive health services; and promoting environmentally sustainable development.

While there has been progress in meeting the goals, much more needs to be done. Not only is progress important on each goal individually, says the report, but they must be met collectively to truly combat the many causes of poverty. Success on one or two goals will not produce a sufficient impact.

"During the 1990s, United Nations world conferences set major goals for economic and social development", said United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "All countries, developed and developing alike, signed on to this agenda, often at the highest political level. Since then, people have been asking whether the world has made good on these commitments. What has worked? What did not, and why? And what can we do better?"

"This report provides some answers", the United Nations Secretary-General added. "It is the product of unprecedented collaboration among four major multilateral organizations. And it responds to a specific request from the G-8 countries that such a report be prepared -- to help monitor progress in the reduction of poverty worldwide, and to guide them in their partnership with developing countries. The result is a common understanding -- a score card and policy road map with which to measure progress in banishing extreme poverty from our world and in achieving the targets set by the world conferences of the past decade."

Analysis in the report shows some startling points:

-- As growth increased in the mid-1990s, the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day fell rapidly in Asia, but little or not at all in Africa. Income inequality remains a barrier to progress in Latin America;

-- More than 100 million children will not be in school in 2015, if current trends prevail;

-- The gender gap in primary and secondary enrolment is narrowing, but not fast enough to reach the goal of eliminating gender disparities in schools by 2005;

-- For every country that has decreased infant and under-five child mortality rates fast enough to reach the goals, 10 lagged behind and another one moved backwards, often because of HIV/AIDS;

-- Skilled care during pregnancy and delivery can do much to avoid many of the half million maternal deaths each year;

-- During the 1990s, the use of contraception increased in all regions, but Africa lagged behind;

-- By 1997, fewer than half the countries in the world had strategies for environmental sustainability.

The major obstacles to success, according to the report, are inadequate policies, human rights abuses, conflicts, natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, inequities in income, education and access to health care, as well as unequal opportunities between men and women. It also notes that developing countries' efforts to improve conditions for their citizens are seriously hampered by a lack of access to global markets, the debt burden, a decline in development assistance, and inconsistencies in donor policies.

There is no single solution to achieving the goals. The report finds that greater commitment from both developing and developed countries, as well as stronger voices and more choices for the poor, can make a difference. Economic growth is part of the solution, but not a guarantee in itself. Also important is more investment in basic social services which can produce greater pay-offs in terms of development, as well as ensuring that the benefits of economic progress reach the poorest people. Openness to trade, technology and knowledge, and the capacity to use it can also stimulate progress for the poorest.

The highly visual report, which will serve as a joint United Nations, World Bank, IMF, and OECD contribution to the G-8 meeting in Okinawa on 22 July, is intended to stimulate support for greater action by the government representatives from some 190 States attending the United Nations General Assembly special session on social development, as well as to raise awareness among the general public.

"A Better World for All" is currently available in English, French and Spanish. An electronic copy will be available on the Web sites of the four organizations, as well as on www.paris21.org/betterworld.

For further information, please contact: United Nations Department of Public Information.

In Geneva: Dan Shepard, Myriam Dessables or Sophie Zaouche, tel: (41) (22) 917-2326, fax: (41)(22) 917-0030; e-mail: shepard@un.org, dessables@un.org, szaouche@unog.ch.

In New York: Tim Wall, tel: (212) 963-5851, fax: (212) 963-1186, e-mail: walt@un.org.

United Nations Development Group: Arjan van Houwelingen, tel: (212) 906-6580, fax: (212) 906-3609, e-mail: arjan.van.houwelingen@undp.org.

World Bank: Phil Hay, tel: (202) 473-1796, e-mail: phay@worldbank.org.

International Monetary Fund: Media Relations Division, tel: (202) 623-7100, e-mail: media@imf.org.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: Helen Fisher, tel: (33-1) 45 24 80 97, e-mail: Helen.Fisher@oecd.org.