

**PREPARATORY MEETING FOR 2005 ECOSOC
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
16-17 March 2005**

“Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities”

ROUNDTABLE 6: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Chair: H.E. Mr. Agim Nesho, Vice-President of ECOSOC

Lead Organizers: UNEP and UN-HABITAT¹

Moderator: Ms. Axumite Gebre-Egziabher, Director, UN-HABITAT New York Office

Closing summary: Mr. Werner Obermeyer, Chief, Inter-Agency Affairs, UNEP, New York Office

BACKGROUND NOTE

“Quite simply, Environmental Sustainability is the foundation upon which achieving all the other Millennium Development Goals must be built”²

(I) Linkages between environment and the other internationally agreed development goals

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders agreed to a set of time bound and measurable goals for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women, which were later consolidated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the realm of ‘Protecting our Common Environment’, heads of state and government resolved to adopt a new ethic of conservation and stewardship. As such, one of the MDGs is “Ensuring Environmental Sustainability”, which includes the integration of the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reversal of the loss of environmental resources, reduction by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, and achieving significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.

The MDGs were in many cases not only reaffirmed but enhanced in the outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and accompanying Declaration, which made significant advances in such areas as fisheries, oceans, benefit-sharing on biological resources, consumption and production patterns, and sanitation. WSSD’s Plan of Implementation stipulated that “Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development”.

This acknowledgment of environmental sustainability as a necessary condition for achievement of the internationally agreed development goals was underscored in the recently released report of the Millennium Project, entitled “Investing in Development: A Practical Guide to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals”. It was prepared under the leadership of the Adviser to the Secretary-General, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, as an input to the Summit-level meeting of the General Assembly on the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration in September 2005. The project maintains that without a healthy and secure environment many of the other goals will be tough to achieve and underlines the vital link between environment and defeating poverty. It makes a series of key recommendations on how to

¹ Other collaborators include UNDP, UNFIP, UNIDO, UNITAR, OHRLLS and the Millennium Project.

² Millennium Task Force on Environmental Sustainability Report, ‘Environment and Human Well-Being: A Practical Strategy’.

reverse the loss of forests and plant and animal species and restore healthy land, air and water in order to meet the MDGs and the JPOI.

The link between poverty and environment was also pinpointed in report of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, entitled ‘A More Secured World: A Shared Responsibility’, which will also serve as an input to the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration. In defining the case for collective security the Panel states that, “poverty, infectious disease, environmental degradation and war feed one another in a deadly cycle”. In outlining the threats that the international community faces the report notes that, “rarely are environmental concerns factored into security, development or humanitarian strategies” and that, “International institutions and States have not organized themselves to address the problems of development in a coherent, integrated way, and instead continue to treat poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation as stand-alone threats”.

The report also notes that environmental degradation has enhanced the destructive potential of natural disasters and in some cases hastened their occurrence and that if climate change produces more acute flooding, heat waves, droughts and storms, this pace may accelerate and have adverse impacts on small island developing states, which are particularly vulnerable. The Panel goes on to recommend that in order to address problems of climate change, States should provide incentives for the further development of renewable energy sources and begin to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies, especially for fossil fuel use and development.

As the international community approaches the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration, it is increasingly evident that we depend on healthy ecosystems such as watersheds and aquifers, forests, soils and atmosphere as the basis for many economic goods and services. Concrete measures are urgently required to sustainably manage this resource base if the international agreed development goals are to be met and the vicious circle of poverty, disease, environmental degradation and insecurity is to be broken. The following box cites examples of linkages which illustrate why ensuring environmental sustainability is so important for the other themes covered by the internationally agreed development goals.

| Goal | Links to the environment |
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| 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | Poor people’s livelihoods and food security often depend on ecosystem goods and services. Poor people tend to have insecure rights to environmental resources and inadequate access to markets, decision-making and environmental information – limiting their capacity to protect the environment and improve livelihoods and wellbeing. Lack of access to energy services also limits productive opportunities, especially in rural areas. |
| 2. Achieve universal primary education | Time spent collecting water and fuel wood reduces time available for schooling. In addition, the lack of energy, water and sanitation services in rural areas discourages qualified teachers from working in poor villages. |
| 3. Promote gender equality and empower women | Women and girls are especially burdened by water and fuel collection, reducing their time and opportunities for education, literacy and income-generating activities. Women often have unequal rights and insecure access to land and other natural resources, limiting their opportunities and ability to access other productive assets. |
| 4. Reduce child mortality | Diseases (such as diarrhea) tied to unclean water and inadequate sanitation and respiratory infections related to pollution are among the leading killers of children under five. Lack of fuel for boiling water also contributes to preventable waterborne diseases. |

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| 5. Improve maternal health | Inhaling polluted indoor air and carrying heavy loads of water and fuel wood hurt women's health and can make them less fit to bear children, with greater risks of complications during pregnancy. And lack of energy for illumination and refrigeration, as well as inadequate sanitation, undermine health care, especially in rural areas. |
| 6. Combat major diseases | Up to 20% of the disease burden in developing countries may be due to environmental risk factors (as with malaria and parasitic infections). Preventative measures to reduce such hazards are as important as treatment – and often most cost-effective. New biodiversity-derived medicines hold promise for fighting major diseases. |
| 8. Develop a global partnership for development | Many global environmental problems – climate change, loss of species diversity, and depletion of global fisheries – can be solved only through partnership between rich and poor countries. In addition, predatory investments in natural resources can greatly increase pressure to over exploit environmental assets in developing countries. |

(II) Linkages between urban poverty, slums and the other internationally agreed development goals

In the year 2007, and for the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population will live in urban areas. According to the latest projections of the United Nations³, between 2000 and 2030 the world's population will register an overall increase of 2.06 billion, an increase of the urban population of 2.08 billion, and a decrease of the rural population of 20 million. The shift of low- and middle-income countries' population from rural to urban suggests that increasing numbers of the world's poor will be city dwellers. The severity of urban poverty is documented by the fact that so many urban dwellers suffer from one or more of the basic physical and social deficiencies captured by the definition of "slum dwelling": lack of clean water and adequate sanitation, lack of sufficient living space and overcrowding, makeshift shelter construction, insecure tenure and exposure to demolition and eviction.

It is against this backdrop that the United Nations Millennium Declaration recognizes the dire circumstances of the world's urban poor, articulating Member States' commitment to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, confirming the awareness raised by the Istanbul summit in 1996. The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II) adopted the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda and recognized that more holistic, inclusive and participatory policies and strategies and actions are required to make the world's cities and communities safe, healthy and equitable. Later, the WSSD Johannesburg Declaration placed *adequate shelter* alongside other priority areas – water, sanitation, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity.

However official statistics tend to systematically underreport urban poverty due to lack of cost-of-living adjustments in income poverty estimates, lack of disaggregation within urban areas, and inadequate definitions of access to water supply and sanitation, adequate shelter, or other infrastructure variables. Hardly any city or town can consider itself immune from the problem of consistent – and persistent – percentages of their citizens living in conditions of deprivation that, in the North as well as in the South, include worse environmental conditions, higher rates of crime and unemployment, lower educational attainment, higher morbidity and mortality, and isolation and exclusion from social integration and economic opportunity. This confirms indeed that if the urban context of poverty is not directly addressed, it will be impossible to achieve the MDGs.

³ United Nations Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: the 2003 Revision*.

The following table provides examples of linkages between the target on slums and other millennium targets and goals confirming the need to address them in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

| Goal | Impact in and links to the Slums |
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| 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | Granting secure tenure to slum dwellers allows them to invest in their own housing and economic opportunities. |
| 2. Achieve universal primary education | Inclusive policies, including adequate public transport, allow slum children to attend school. |

(III) Themes for consideration by the Roundtable: challenges and opportunities

The Roundtable will provide for a dialogue on the importance of ensuring environmental sustainability, and implementing the commitments made by the international community in this field, as a foundation for achieving the other internationally agreed development goals. Special emphasis will be given to the issues before the upcoming session of the ECOSOC's Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-13), namely water, sanitation and human settlements. CSD is expected to take decisions on practical measures to expedite implementation. Taking into account the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his report on Implementation of the Millennium Declaration (expected to be released on 15 March), participants are invited to address the following challenges and opportunities:

Environmental Sustainability:

- ³ The need to address the lack of understanding of the links between environmental sustainability and other international development goals, including the need to: (i) exploit synergies between goals and targets linked to the Millennium Declaration and those contained in the JPOI, (ii) define investments in improved environmental management and their contribution to poverty reduction; and (iii) increase focus on calculating and highlighting the negative development impacts of environmentally unsustainable activities in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs).
- ³ The need at the country-level to ensure the fuller integration of environmental sustainability into activities designed to achieve the international agreed development goals, particularly by strengthening country capacity to integrate priority environmental management concerns into MDG-based poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). Starting from internationally agreed time-bound objectives, countries will need to consider national strategies that include: protecting biodiversity, sustainable ecosystem management approaches, integrated water resources management, strategies to combat land degradation, control of air pollution, solid waste management, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improved energy access and efficiency. The final report of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which will be released later this month, can also inform the choice of such objectives.
- ³ The need for developing countries to receive assistance to: (i) elaborate and implement coherent water resources development and management plans that integrate land, water and ecosystem considerations; and (ii) increase access to water supply and improved sanitation, which serves several interrelated health, socio-economic and environmental objectives. Increased participation of stakeholder communities and increased investments are required in the rural sector as part of countries' MDG-based poverty reduction strategies. The entrepreneurial capacities and resources of the private sector need to be captured in partnerships with Government to provide the necessary investments and technical expertise to meet internationally agreed development goals.

Urban poverty and slums

- ³ The need to recognize the urban context is critical to meeting all the MDGs: If the urban context of poverty is not directly addressed, it will be impossible to achieve the MDGs. Slum upgrading, in the context of overall development strategies of housing and provision of basic infrastructure and services, should constitute an essential component of national plans, towns and city development strategies, and PRSPs. To redress the problem of exclusion, urban civil society in general and the poor in particular must be engaged in city development strategies and slum upgrading activities as active agents, not as passive beneficiaries. Their *right to the city* must be recognized and protected. Promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment should be an integral part of urban poverty reduction strategies and programmes. For sustainable urban development, government at all levels must be empowered to act decisively and responsively to the needs of their citizens. This requires

technical assistance and capacity building supported by the international community. It is imperative to mobilize the involvement of cities themselves and of their national, regional, and global associations

- ³ The need to update the slums target: The urban challenge dictates a much broader and ambitious approach than the improvement of a small portion of the world's estimated slum dwellers summarized in Target 11. This means both addressing MDGs in present situations, as well as creating the conditions for better living environments for the citizens of tomorrow (*by 2020, improving substantially the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, while providing adequate alternatives to new slum formation*). Without radical policy changes, the world slum population may increase by 400 million over the next 15 years. The absence of national and local action plans for slum upgrading constitutes a major problem which should be urgently addressed by concerned Governments with appropriate international support.
- ³ The need to ensure security of tenure: Secure tenure is essential to slum upgrading to effectively address problems of urban poverty and should be based on a pro-poor land policy that emphasises a range of affordable options including non-formal titles. Forced evictions that are contrary to the law should be particularly combated. The forced demolition of urban slums has never reduced poverty, it creates poverty. Forced evictions have never reduced slums; they simply move slum formation elsewhere.
- ³ The need for developing countries to receive assistance to fund their slum upgrading and urban development programmes: The total cost of improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers has been estimated by Task Force 8 at \$67 billion, i.e. an average of \$670 per person. The cost of decent settlements for the estimated 400 million new poor that will add to the urban population during 2005-2020 is estimated to be in the order of \$300 billion. Successful models have demonstrated that, when appropriately supported by local and central governments, local residents can provide about 80 per cent of the required resources. This would leave 20 per cent to be provided by *international aid, i.e. roughly US\$5 billion a year*. The challenge, first to national and local governments, and to the international community through Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds is clear: Will they put the reduction of urban poverty among their priorities? Can they match the slum dwellers' investment?