

UN urges rapid action on poverty

A major UN report on world poverty has urged a vast increase in development aid to the world's poorest countries.

The Millennium Development Goals report says developed nations could do much more to prevent poverty, hunger and disease around the world.

Correspondents say targets to halve poverty by 2015 are way off track.

Disease, war and incompetence combined with a lack of will in the developed world have already made them virtually meaningless, they say.

Trade rules need to be changed and infrastructure developed in poorer countries to allow them to compete, the report adds.

It also calls for financing of workable poverty-reduction schemes put forward by the poorest nations themselves.

Malaria

Written by former Harvard economist Dr Jeffrey Sachs, the report calls for much higher spending on development.

AID RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast-track status recommended

Mali
Burkina Faso
Ethopia
Ghana
Mauritania
Yemen

Not to receive aid

Belarus
Burma
North Korea
Zimbabwe

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who received the report from Dr Sachs, said the goals of the project were not utopian but "eminently achievable".

"Many countries are making real progress in achieving them but other are not moving fast enough," he said.

BBC developing world correspondent David Loyn says the report is an attempt to engage real change in the UN to go along with grandiose declarations.

"The system is not working right now, let's be clear," Dr Sachs said.

"The overwhelmingly reality on our planet is that impoverished people get sick and die for lack of access to basic practical means that could help keep them alive and do more than that - help them achieve livelihoods and escape from poverty."

Dr Sachs singled out malaria, which kills as many people as in the whole Indian Ocean wave disaster every month and could be easily remedied by such measures as the provision of mosquito nets.

"Every month, 150,000 children in Africa, if not more, are dying from the silent tsunami of malaria, a largely preventable and utterly treatable disease," he said.

Targets

Dr Sachs added that the resources needed were well within the means of the world's richest nations.

But only five nations - Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden - have met self-imposed targets of providing 0.7% of GNP for development assistance.

The report will recommend that some well-governed poor countries should be fast-tracked for aid, whereas others with poor human rights records should get no large-scale aid.

However, the tying of aid to a list of demands over how well countries are run has been highly controversial.

Middle-income countries with pockets of extreme poverty, such as China, Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico and South Africa, should eliminate those pockets, the report adds.

Much of this thinking will be welcome in the UK, our correspondent says, with international development and Africa in particular so much to the fore of Prime Minister Tony Blair's thinking as Britain leads the G8 group of industrialised nations.

But Dr Sachs' solutions are not as radical as some observers would like, he adds.

For example, the report falls short of demanding something which he himself has separately called for - for African countries to take the debt issue into their own hands and stop paying interest on bad debts.

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