

Rich nations urged to fund antipoverty effort

The Boston Globe

Study says millions of lives could be saved

By Edith M. Lederer, Associated Press | January 18, 2005

UNITED NATIONS -- In the coming decade, more than 500 million people can escape poverty and tens of millions can avoid certain death if the United States, Japan, and other rich countries keep their promises to vastly increase development aid, a UN-sponsored report said yesterday.

The report spells out the investments needed to meet the UN goals adopted by world leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000 to tackle poverty, hunger, and disease, mainly in African and Asian countries where 1 billion people live on \$1 a day or less.

About 1.8 billion more live on \$2 a day.

"The system is not working right now -- let's be clear," said Jeffrey Sachs, head of the UN effort against poverty and lead author of the report. "There's a tremendous imbalance of focus on the issues of war and peace, and less on the dying and suffering of the poor who have no voice.

"The overwhelming 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."

As an example, he said, providing nets to cover beds and keep out mosquitoes in impoverished African and Asian countries could save more than 1 million children this year who otherwise will die from malaria.

An estimated 150,000 children in Africa die each month from malaria, he said.

"We have the world's eyes focused on the tsunami of the Indian Ocean, but the world continues to overlook the silent tsunamis of deaths from malaria, which take every month the number of people that died in the Asian tragedy," said Sachs, who heads the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Sachs presented the report yesterday to Secretary General Kofi Annan, who appointed him in 2002 to head the Millennium Project and develop a plan to meet the millennium development goals by 2015.

The 3,000-page report, "Investing in Development," said the poorest countries lack resources to meet the goals. The goals include halving the number of people living on \$1 a day, achieving universal primary education, reducing child and maternal mortality, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria, and halving the number of people without access to clean water and basic sanitation.

An independent team of 265 of the world's leading development specialists compiled the report.

Calling it "a major intellectual achievement," Annan said the report will be an important contribution to the debate on how countries that have fallen behind can meet the "eminently achievable" goals.

Annan intends to use the report to help prepare his recommendations for world leaders attending a follow-up summit in September. Annan expressed hope that the summit will produce "bold and far-reaching decisions."

The resources needed to meet the goals are definitely within the means of the world's richest nations and their combined \$30 trillion economy, with \$12 trillion in the United States alone, Sachs said.

In 1970, the world's nations agreed to provide 0.7 percent of their gross national income for development assistance. Only five countries have met or surpassed the target -- Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

Six have made commitments to reach the target by 2015 -- Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Spain, and Britain. The report urged all developed countries to set similar timetables.

The United States, while it is the largest contributor of development aid in the world, spends about 0.15 percent of GDP -- or \$25 billion -- on such aid, although President Bush has increased the amount.

As a percentage of GDP, the US amount is the lowest among 22 industrialized nations, the study found. The United States would have to contribute \$80 billion to reach a target of 0.7 percent.

"The required doubling of annual official development assistance to \$135 billion in 2006, rising to \$195 billion by 2015, pales beside the wealth of high-income countries -- and the world's military budget of \$900 billion a year," the report said.

It recommended that the international community designate a significant number of well-governed, low-income countries for "fast-track status" to receive the massive increase in development aid this year. The report suggests Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, and Yemen.

Poorly governed, poverty-stricken countries such as Belarus, Burma, North Korea, and Zimbabwe should not get large-scale aid because they are accused of wide-ranging human rights abuses, the report said. ■

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