

**EASRICAN**

Experts Hail UN Action Plan to Combat Poverty

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A NEW action plan to combat poverty unveiled by the United Nations which focuses on investment in public infrastructure and other development projects has been welcomed by experts as a cost-effective blueprint for achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, the local office of the United Nations Development Programme has said.

"In the most comprehensive strategy ever put forward for combating global poverty, hunger and disease, a blue-ribbon team of 265 of the world's leading development experts today proposed a package of scores of specific cost-effective measures.

"These measures put together could cut extreme poverty in half and radically improve the lives of at least one billion people in poor developing countries by 2015," the UNDP said in a statement.

Recommendations of the UN Millennium Project, an independent advisory body to the UN Secretary-General, are laid out in the report "Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals".

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said the fight against extreme poverty should be the top priority of the world community and the UN system in 2005.

The UN Millennium Project's report was released as the Asian tsunami disaster focused global attention on the need, scale and effectiveness of aid to the world's poor.

"The project's plan addresses these legitimate concerns and shows that targeted investments in essential public services such as health, education and infrastructure make poor communities less vulnerable to such disasters and to the hardships of disease, hunger and environmental degradation," the UNDP said.

In the statement the UNDP added that the project report leads a year-long series of global initiatives aimed at making the goals a reality, including a report to UN member states from the Secretary-General in March, which will draw heavily on the project's recommendations.

"We need a firm commitment from rich and poor nations alike that policy reforms and the genuine efforts to eradicate poverty within developing nations will be met by promised trade and debt concessions and assistance from the developed countries," the report says.

The project experts conclude that the goals can be achieved with an investment of just one half of one percent of the incomes of the industrialised countries, well within the international aid targets wealthy countries have already promised to meet.

Expanded trade and private capital are seen as the key to sustained growth in all developing nations, but the poorest countries cannot take advantage of trade and investment opportunities without getting help in building essential public infrastructure and raising their skills through investments in education and job training.

The report argues that the challenges of growth and job creation on the one side and service delivery to poor communities on the other require a broad partnership involving the public sector, civil society and the private sector.

Inclusiveness is the key to success.