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NEWS

To end poverty 'science needs massive funding boost'

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Eliminating global poverty, disease and hunger are "utterly affordable" but need concerted action from rich nations, including a massive increase in funding for scientific research addressing the needs of the world's poor.

These are among the findings of a comprehensive report by the UN Millennium Project that was presented to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan yesterday (17 January). The report calls on international donors specifically to support scientific research on health, agriculture, natural resource, energy and climate change.

As reported by SciDev.Net in September 2004, it says that this level of investment should reach US\$7 billion by 2015 (see [Ending poverty 'requires US\\$70 billion in research aid'](#)). This is a significant increase; in 2002, official development aid for research totalled US\$1 billion (see table).

"The long-term driving force of modern economic growth has been science-based technological advance," says the report, entitled *Investing in Development*. "One of the reasons for Latin America's slow economic growth, in contrast with fast-growing Asian economies, is that there has been little concerted effort at enhancing the region's technological and scientific capacities."

Reflecting this, the report recommends that developing countries boost scientific education and link universities to the private sector to help convert knowledge into goods and services. It says developing country governments need scientific advisors to guide policies relating to science and technology.

Highlighting the potential for science to increase crop yields and lead to vaccines and medicines against disease such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, the report states that: "The international science community — led by national research laboratories, universities, and national academies of science — must play a critical role in developing the global public goods to overcome these constraints. It must bring to bear its tremendous research capabilities to help solve the tough problems facing developing countries — particularly in the tropics."

"Until now, we did not have a concrete plan for achieving the Millennium Development Goals," said Jeffrey D. Sachs, the economist who directed the three-year UN Millennium Project, in a press release. Sachs added that the goals could still be met if the plan is enacted right now.

"We are in a position to end extreme poverty within our generation," Sachs said. "Not just cutting poverty in half — if we want to eliminate extreme poverty, we can do that by 2025."

Investing in Development was compiled from recommendations generated by ten 'task forces' made up of a total of 265 scientists, economists, and other development experts, and edited by Sachs, who is based at the Earth Institute at the University of Columbia in New York, United States.

Their remit was to identify cost-effective ways to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The goals include combating malaria and HIV/AIDS, reducing infant mortality, and eradicating extreme hunger and poverty.

Implementing the full range of recommendations would cost just one-half of one per cent of the incomes of rich countries — a figure well within international aid targets already agreed by industrialised nations.

Nonetheless, meeting the goals will still require a substantial increase in funding both from developing countries themselves and in overseas aid. The latter, says the report, will need to increase by US\$48 billion from existing commitments to US\$135 billion in 2006, and continue rising to reach US\$195 billion by 2015.

Achieving the goals, says the report, will require a major overhaul of the international development system, which it sees as unfocused and inefficient. Just 30 cents of every US\$1 of international aid reaches investment programmes in developing countries targeting poverty, hunger and disease, it says.

Another recommendation is that rich and poor nations immediately undertake 'quick win' actions that can save millions of lives for little cost. Such actions include providing free solar power generators for schools and hospitals, antiretroviral AIDS drugs, and US\$5 bed nets to reduce the impact of malaria.

The report urges poor countries to adopt "bold" development policies, which should be in place by 2006.

Mark Malloch Brown, Kofi Annan's incoming chief of staff and chairman of the United Nations Development Group described the task forces' work as "the biggest intellectual contribution to the development debate from the UN system in at least 20 years".

Malloch Brown added that by reducing global poverty, threats to global security might also be addressed.

Breakdown of funding for global research (2003 US\$ billions)

	2002	2006	2010	2015
Public health	0.3	2	4	4
Agriculture and natural resource management	0.4	1	1	1

Low-cost and sustainable energy technologies	0.1	1	1	1
Adaptation to long term climate change in developing countries	0.1	1	1	1
Total	1.0	5	7	7

[Link to the report *Investing in Development*](#) (in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian)

SciDev.Net: <http://www.scidev.net/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=readnews&itemid=1857&language=1>

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