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# Plan to fight poverty released

## Report expected to set agenda for U.N. agencies

By CELIA DUGGER  
N.Y. TIMES NEWS SERVICE

UNITED NATIONS - An international team of experts sponsored by the United Nations on Monday proposed a detailed plan it says could halve extreme poverty by 2015.

The report says drastically reducing poverty in its many guises - hunger, illiteracy, disease - is "utterly affordable." To fulfill this goal, industrialized nations would need to roughly double aid to poor countries from a quarter to a half of 1 percent of their national incomes.

"We're talking about rich countries committing 50 cents out of every \$100 of income to help the poorest people in the world get a foothold on the ladder of development," said economist Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University professor appointed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to lead the project in 2002.

The report of the U.N. Millennium Project advocates reforms to ease trade barriers as well as a sweeping array of investments in health, education, rural development, road building, slum upgrading and scientific research, among others. The 74-page report is a synthesis of 3,000 pages of findings by 265 experts.

The project's blueprint is likely to shape the agenda for agencies of the United Nations over the coming decade and to influence other key development players. It won quick praise on Monday from the heads of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose chief economists were consulted.

But its approach was viewed by some critics as overreaching. And at least one of the economists involved in the project, Nancy Birdsall, who heads the Center for Global Development in Washington, said she worried that it puts too little emphasis on the need for poor countries to make deep political and social changes to reduce poverty.



The project's recommendations arrive at a time when momentum is building among rich nations to improve the lot of the world's poor, a trend influenced by post-Sept. 11 concerns that impoverished nations such as Afghanistan and Sudan can be incubators of terrorism and conflict.

Several donor nations have recently pledged to significantly increase aid to the poor in coming years. And a spate of reports and high-level meetings this year will draw further attention to the topic.

The worldwide outpouring of grief and aid since the tsunami in South Asia killed more than 150,000 people has stirred hope here that the same wellspring of empathy can be tapped for what Sachs called "the silent tsunami" of global poverty that kills more than 150,000 children every month from malaria alone.

The millennium project's agenda is the first in a series of initiatives this year intended to refocus attention on fulfilling promises to fight poverty that were made at the United Nations in 2000.

They unanimously agreed to institute universal primary education, promote sex equality and achieve sharp reductions in hunger, child and maternal mortality and the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day by 2015.

Britain, in particular, has recently seized the leadership on these issues. In July, it will play host to a meeting of leaders from industrialized countries that will spotlight global poverty, particularly in Africa. Prime Minister Tony Blair has appointed a commission on Africa which is to report this spring.

And Britain's finance chief, Gordon Brown, is campaigning for a "Marshall Plan" for Africa that includes debt relief and his own proposal to nearly double aid from rich nations.

Levels of aid to developing countries are likely to be high on the agenda this year. In 2002, many world leaders, including President Bush, supported a declaration promising to "make concrete efforts" toward a target of providing 0.7 percent of their national incomes for aid to developing countries.

Five countries have achieved that goal already. Britain, France, Finland and Spain have recently committed themselves to reach that level of aid on specific timetables. The U.S. government, which allocates less than 0.2 percent of its income for aid, has not made a

comparable pledge. The Bush administration has increased American aid by 50 percent, to 0.15 percent from 0.10 percent, still the smallest percentage among donor countries.

In September, world leaders will gather here to take stock of progress toward the anti-poverty goals they set in 2000. Annan said at a news conference on Monday that he hoped the September summit meeting would produce bold new strategies to meet the millennium goals.

The report, "Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals," says poor countries should stop tailoring their plans to combat poverty to the limited resources available and instead draw up comprehensive approaches, then figure the costs.

The project calls on poor countries to improve their own governance, uphold the rule of law and spend more of their own money to combat poverty. But economists on the millennium team estimate those resources will be inadequate and donors will need to make up the difference.

"We are not telling countries what to do," said Sachs, who emphasized that many African leaders he had met with were pressing for the solutions proposed in the report.

The report advocates that rich countries support a crash development program this year in at least a dozen poor, well-governed nations that donors are confident would use the money wisely. Ghana, Mozambique, Mali, Senegal and Tanzania are among those most often mentioned.

It also recommends pressing this year for 17 "quick wins," policies that it says would swiftly translate into millions of improved and saved lives.

Among them: mass distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets to combat malaria, a leading killer of children; elimination of fees for primary education to draw the poorest children to school; expansion of school meals programs to hungry areas; providing regular deworming medicines to schoolchildren in affected areas and expanded treatment of people with AIDS and tuberculosis.

The report bears the unmistakable stamp of Sachs, an economist identified in the 1980s with his advocacy of "shock therapy," or a quick application of market-oriented policies in troubled economies.

In recent years he has become known as a crusader for the idea that within a generation rich and poor countries

together can end the extreme poverty afflicting more than a billion people.

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