

UN plan targets 500 million poor

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Tens of millions of lives could be saved by just a small increase in foreign aid, a UN report says.

The number of people living on less than \$US1 a day could be cut by half in less than a decade if wealthy nations fulfilled their pledges to increase foreign aid.

A United Nations report says the result of this would be tens of millions of lives saved, with women and children to benefit most. Moreover, the UN says its plan is "utterly affordable".

"The practical solutions exist," the report says. "All that is needed is action."

To lift 500 million people out of dire poverty, developed nations, including Australia, would need to double their spending on foreign aid.

"Australia's aid program is clearly not sufficient," the lead author of the report, Columbia University professor Jeffery Sachs, said yesterday.

"To be very clear, according to the most recent data, which is a year old, Australia spends about 25 cents out of every \$100 of income on aid."

Professor Sachs said Australia should aim to spend 50 cents from every \$100 on foreign aid, as should Japan, Germany and Italy, which spend half as much.

The US, the largest donor in the world, would also need to increase its aid from \$US25 billion (\$A33 billion) to \$US80 billion a year to meet the target.

But the report does not place the burden of eradicating poverty entirely on developed nations. Poor countries also need to do more to help their own citizens.

Professor Sachs said nations ruled by dictators and denied basic human rights needed to be reformed.

His 76-page report summarises more than 3000 pages of findings by a team of 265 scholars and researchers. It is the first of a series of initiatives designed to focus the world's attention on poverty.

It comes five years after the world leaders agreed to the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which aimed to erase poverty, get girls into schools and give more people access to safe water.

There has been progress: between 1990 and 2002 the number of people in extreme poverty declined by an estimated 130 million. But some countries, particularly in Africa, are going backwards.

The report, released yesterday, says a billion - or one in six - of the world's people live on less than \$US1 a day. Another 2.7 billion live on less than \$US2.

Professor Sachs said developed nations should make it a priority to "help the poorest people in the world get a foothold on the ladder of development".

He noted that only 30 cents of each aid dollar actually reached the poor, diseased and hungry. He said developed countries should increase foreign aid from 0.25 per cent of gross national product to 0.54 per cent by 2015. Only Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg meet that goal.

The report said developed countries should also open their markets to developing countries. But poor nations should not rely only on hand-outs and trade.

Professor Sachs said leaders of poor nations needed to protect their people from violence and bring "honesty and transparency" to government.

"Too many countries fail to achieve these basic standards, sometimes due to authoritarian rulers who use violence and corruption to hold on to power," his report says. It says there is "little case for large scale aid"

for such countries as Burma, North Korea and Zimbabwe, whose political leaders are not committed to improving human rights.

The report also recommends 17 "quick win" policies that it says could swiftly translate into millions of saved lives.

In launching the report, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "The goals are not utopian. They are eminently achievable."

The report, *Investing in Development*, will be presented to the Group of Eight nations meeting in Britain in July and to world leaders at the UN General Assembly in September.

PUTTING THE MONEY TO WORK

The UN wants to cut poverty in half in poor countries by:

DISTRIBUTING free malaria bed-nets and anti-malaria medication to all children in regions where malaria is a problem.

ELIMINATING fees for primary schools and for essential health care.

GETTING anti-retroviral AIDS treatment to 3 million AIDS patients in developing countries.

PROVIDING school meals to all children in "hunger hot spots" by using locally produced food.

REPLENISHING soil nutrients by providing free chemical fertilisers to small landholders in developing countries.

ENCOURAGING rich nations to open markets to developing country exports through the Doha round of global trade talks, to be completed by 2006.

PRESSING international donors to support scientific research - \$7 billion a year is needed by 2015. Research would deal with needs of the poor in health, agriculture, natural resources energy and climate change.

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