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Could this be our breakthrough?

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Today a world that has opened its heart to the victims of South Asia's Boxing Day tsunamis, will be challenged to make smart, sustainable generosity a permanent part of globalization.

At noon, Secretary-General Kofi Annan will unveil a report entitled *Investing in Development* at United Nations headquarters. It is a practical, affordable plan to cut world poverty by half in the next decade. It represents three years' work by 250 economists, scientists, development experts and policymakers.

Project leader Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University calls it humanity's best hope of turning a troubled world around. Annan sees 2005 as the "breakthrough" year.

The Secretary-General could not have foreseen, when he commissioned the report in 2002, that it would be released in the wake of a devastating natural disaster. Sachs and his colleagues certainly did not plan for such a grim backdrop.

But the aftermath of a global catastrophe may be an ideal time to talk about saving millions — not thousands — of lives; tackling the inequities that make the poor so vulnerable to convulsions of nature; and coming to grips with the killers — hunger, disease, lack of potable water — that dwarf any undersea earthquake.

In the past three weeks, international donors have dug deep into their pockets and their psyches and found that short-term relief is not enough. They want bigger answers.

World leaders thought they had them in 2000.

In their first flush of millennial optimism, they pledged, "we will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty."

They set eight goals to be achieved by 2015:

- ★To halve the number of people living on less than \$1 a day.
- ★To make primary education available to every child.
- ★To reduce child mortality by two-thirds.
- ★To cut maternal mortality by three-quarters.
- ★To promote gender equality.
- ★To reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria.
- ★To halt the loss of environmental resources.
- ★And to create a global partnership for development.

But most promptly forgot their good intentions. Rich countries increased their foreign aid modestly, if at all. (Canada's overseas development assistance inched up to 0.29 per cent of its gross domestic product from 0.25 per cent.) Terrorism displaced poverty on the West's list of urgent problems. Africa's misery increased. Violence, famine and environmental degradation continued apace.

To get things back on track, Annan launched the Millennium Project. He set up 10 international task forces to come up with concrete, innovative proposals to achieve the agreed-on goals.

Although the report is embargoed till 12 p.m. (when it will be available at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org>), Sachs has made little secret of its main themes.

It will call on wealthy nations such as Canada to increase their foreign aid immediately and rapidly to ensure that they reach their target of 0.7 per cent of GDP by 2015. It will set a benchmark of 0.44 per cent of GDP for 2006.

It will urge donor countries to deliver "a much higher quality of aid." That means investing in what has been proven to work — clinics,

schools, wells, generators, malaria bed-nets and anti-retroviral medicines — not underwriting projects designed to benefit contractors back home. It means offering stable, predictable funding, not on-again, off-again rescue missions. It means converting loans to grants. And it means fast-tracking aid to low-income countries with credible poverty reduction strategies and corruption-free governments.

It will identify "quick wins" — steps that can be taken now to produce dramatic short-term gains. They range from providing impoverished African farmers with soil nutrients to eliminating user fees for basic health services in developing countries.

And it will show how 21st century science can be harnessed to catapult struggling countries over development hurdles.

Some who have seen the report describe it as visionary. Others fear that it — like so many previous blueprints to fight poverty — will be dismissed as a utopian tract.

Its fate is up to world leaders. Their citizens made a massive effort to help the victims of last month's tsunami disaster. They raised the bar on global giving. They acted in the face of overwhelming need.

But the best tribute to those lost in the waves would be to make the Millennium Project a lasting success.

Carol Goar's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

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