

## **Civil Society Statement on Delivering the Millennium Development Goals**

**Prepared for the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting  
18 – 20 September 2005**

### **Preamble**

1. We, representatives of civil society organisations from across the Commonwealth, participated in an electronic consultation from 12 to 21 July 2005 to share views and analyses on requirements for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Commonwealth. Our deliberations have been informed by our work and advocacy on the MDGs, as well as the Commonwealth Foundation report, *Breaking with Business as Usual: Perspectives from Civil Society in the Commonwealth on the Millennium Development Goals*, to which many of us have contributed.
2. We recognise the commitment of the Commonwealth to people-centred, sustainable development and the elimination of poverty as well as its 'collective commitment and determination' to attain the MDGs. We reaffirm the importance of the March 2002 Monterrey Consensus and its implementation to global sustainable development, and the MDGs in particular, and acknowledge the efforts of the Commonwealth to deliver on these agreements.
3. But with only ten years remaining until the target date for achieving the MDGs, there is urgent need to scale up action and efforts for their attainment. While some countries have made progress in reducing poverty, others have regressed or made no change. Many Commonwealth countries face policy formulation and implementation challenges to their efforts to achieve the MDGs, and many of these countries need development partners to improve, harmonise and align their support behind national strategies and to do so with substantial increases in official development assistance (ODA).
4. There has been varied progress towards the MDGs in Commonwealth States. Although a few countries are already implementing MDG Plus targets, others are unlikely to meet the Goals. Within countries, progress across the Goals has been uneven and national averages mask sub-national variations and persistent core inequalities in the distribution of assets. To make up for lost ground, all countries must fully engage in the process of achieving the MDGs through country-owned development strategies based on good governance, partnerships, sound policies and effective institutions. We call on the Commonwealth, and Commonwealth Finance Ministers in particular, to respond to the call of the UN Secretary-General 'to break with business as usual' and immediately adopt the requisite policies and practice in order to achieve the Goals.

### **Key Concerns**

5. A number of issues and concerns related to implementation of the MDGs must be squarely addressed:

### **Imbalances in the achievement of the MDGs**

6. There is a high level of interdependence between the eight goals and their targets that cannot be ignored, as failure to make progress in one area will jeopardise gains in

another. Yet many countries have failed to reflect this adequately in their strategies. Governments must consolidate past gains while increasing efforts in weaker performing areas and demonstrate the political will to do this.

7. In most policy frameworks for meeting the Goals, the special needs of certain marginal groups, such as slum dwellers, indigenous peoples and the aged, continue to be overlooked and neglected. The lack of a gender perspective weakens all actions towards the Goals. Such neglect is to the peril of the entire MDG endeavour.
8. The HIV/AIDS pandemic needs continued vigilance as much in sub-Saharan Africa as in other regions where the disease is beginning to take hold. HIV/AIDS has to be addressed not just as a public health concern, but also as a development issue because of its human resource and capacity implications for affected countries' long-term development prospects. The cost of failure to meet Goal 6 is high. More resources need to be directed to awareness and treatment.
9. The drive to achieve the MDGs should not become a pretext for bypassing due process or abdicating governments' duty and responsibility to ensure access to public services, such as water, sanitation, electricity, education and health care. The provision of quality, affordable essential public services is integral to achieving the MDGs and eradicating poverty. As highlighted in our 2003 statement to the CFMM, the critical link between access to services and poverty eradication underscores the need for democratic and participatory approaches in all aspects of service delivery.

#### **Constraints to national planning and implementation**

10. The agenda for the MDGs cannot be divorced from national development strategies and the Goals need to be mainstreamed in planning and resource allocation. The MDGs can only be delivered through a combination of appropriate policies and programmes and adequate and suitable financing.
11. The power relationship between rich and poor nations, directed and orchestrated by the international financial institutions (IFIs) continues to undermine and manipulate key aspects of national ownership of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which are essential for stakeholder consensus and commitment to poverty reduction. Some of the conditionalities imposed by the IFIs work counter to the MDGs; it is, therefore, necessary to address systemic issues such as reform and democratisation of IFIs and international decision making processes as part of the overall strategy for attaining the MDGs.
12. Lack of accurate and regular information about implementation of the MDGs hinders planning as well as participation in implementation by stakeholders. In the absence of effective monitoring systems, it is impossible to capture progress and systematically measure the contributions of stakeholders, particularly those at grassroots level.
13. In order to bring about sustained economic growth and development, there needs to be a balance between current spending and investment in the social and productive sectors, with special attention to agriculture. Investment is needed for long-term strategies to prepare developing country economies, and agricultural sectors in particular, to compete effectively in liberalised markets.

### **Forging a global partnership for development**

14. Responsibility for achieving the goals lies with the entire international community. The recent new pledges and key proposals agreed at the July 2005 G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, as well as the commitment of the United Kingdom to be an ally of developing countries, and Africa in particular, are positive steps towards this global partnership. But more is needed as the gap between pledges made at Monterrey and in other fora and progress on Goal 8 as at 2005 demonstrates. It is disappointing to note efforts by some developed countries to undermine the Gleneagles Summit commitments with the imposition of unnecessary conditionalities on debt relief.
15. Several donor countries have not lived up to their ODA commitments; and the priorities of donors rather than recipients continue to drive the agenda. It is imperative that the MDGs sit at the heart of the entire aid and development system, which itself should be situated within the framework of a rights based approach to development.
16. Current proposals for debt cancellation need to go deeper and wider to include all countries with unsustainable levels of debt in need of relief. We reiterate the views of civil society colleagues at the 7<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth HIPC Ministerial Meeting, Maputo, Mozambique, 15 -16 March 2005 that debt cancellation should complement and not be a substitute for aid.
17. While ODA is an essential requirement for poverty reduction in developing countries, its impact is often reduced by donor countries' trade and investment policies. The lack of an equitable global trading and financial system continues to hamper progress on the MDGs. Debt relief and cancellation are inadequate on their own and need to be accompanied by corresponding measures to address trade imbalances; if developing countries do not benefit equitably from trade regimes and protocols and if these do not have development and poverty reduction at their centre, achieving the MDGs may remain a challenge. The World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) Doha Round negotiations must accommodate the need for poor and vulnerable countries 'to undertake trade liberalisation in ways that minimise transition costs and negative impacts on the poor' as stated by Commonwealth Heads of Government in their 2003 Aso Rock Statement on Multilateral Trade.

### **Involving all stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the MDGs**

18. The Millennium Declaration calls for strong partnerships with the private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs) in pursuit of development and poverty eradication. To be effective partners, CSOs need to be formally recognised and supported by national governments, intergovernmental agencies and the IFIs as partners in the push to achieve the MDGs.
19. Indeed, CSOs have long been working in the areas targeted by the MDGs and have been increasing their engagement within the framework of the Goals; our work in this regard merits support and strengthening in the drive to scale up efforts towards meeting the Goals. CSOs' contributions to service delivery has been particularly effective in some areas because of strong links to the grassroots, particularly the poor and marginal communities that governments are often unable to reach directly and civil society advocacy has been instrumental in shaping development policy and practice.

20. It is important for governments to work with CSOs to create an environment that enables people's participation, through, among other things: providing information and accurate data and allowing access to such information; creating and formalising institutional arrangements for participation; providing resources; and supporting civil society capacity building in the areas of policy research and analysis.

### **Recommendations**

21. Against the backdrop of the above, we urge ***Finance Ministers of all Commonwealth countries*** to:

- a. use the Commonwealth as a platform to monitor and implement Goal 8 by:
  - i. extending the Commonwealth Plan of Action on the Monterrey Consensus, with a special focus on Goal 8, to include measuring and monitoring progress of the G8 2005 Gleneagles Summit and Monterrey commitments
  - ii. advocating and developing proposals for reform of the international financial institutions (IFIs), with a view to ensuring space for national development strategies and countering the strictures of conditionalities and policy supervision
  - iii. rejecting the calls for changing the terms of the debt relief and ensuring that relief is additional rather than substituted for the other forms of aid;
- b. support and encourage:
  - i. the full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and other related international instruments, including the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015, in order to achieve the MDGs through the promotion of gender equality with the provision of funding for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres
  - ii. the entrenchment of right to information laws, thus enabling civil society to access key data on progress towards the MDGs; in this connection, Ministers' attention is drawn to the Framework for Action on Maximising Civil Society's Contribution to Development and Democracy launched by the Commonwealth Foundation in 2004;
- c. release annual data on social indicators related to the achievement of the MDGs and submit progress reports on implementation of all Commonwealth commitments, including the MDGs, to biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings.

22. We call on ***Finance Ministers of developing Commonwealth countries*** to:

- a. develop and fund a set of clear and coherent Social Accountability strategies, such as Community Based Performance Monitoring systems, for better public service provision through community participation;

- b. create a policy, implementation and monitoring framework and environment for the MDGs that systematically promotes and enables civil society participation;
- c. support building the capacity of CSOs to engage effectively with public expenditure monitoring;
- d. develop structures for national buy-in to the MDGs by all stakeholders, in particular local entrepreneurs and the private sector;
- e. affirm article 28 of the Edinburgh Action Plan of the 2003 Commonwealth Education Ministers' Meeting 2003 which recognises that many countries regard education as a public good and articulates concern that the inclusion of education under the WTO and GATS as a service could lead to its commodification;
- f. mainstream the MDGs in national budgets and invest in long-term strategies to prepare national economies, and agricultural sectors in particular, to face global markets.

23. We call on ***Finance Ministers of OECD countries of the Commonwealth*** to:

- a. provide global leadership in financing for development and ODA commitments and further accelerate and timetable, where needed, their commitment to provide 0.7% of gross national income as ODA;
- b. address issues related to the low quality of bi-lateral aid when providing support for the MDGs, including: lack of predictability of flows; emphasis on technical assistance and emergency relief, rather than investment, long-term capacity and institutional support; tying of aid to donor country contractors; lack of donor coordination and the overriding influence of geopolitical concerns in establishing funding priorities;
- c. invest in long-term developing country-led strategies and provide more grant funding to prepare developing country economies, and agricultural sectors in particular to face global markets, with specific targets such as increasing investment in sustainable agriculture by two percentage points annually for the next 5 years;
- d. ensure that the MDGs are integrated into the WTO agenda and are used as a benchmark to measure the impacts of trade policies.

24. We call on the ***agencies of the Commonwealth*** to:

- a. support national government capacity to mainstream the MDGs in national budgeting processes;
- b. support policy research and analysis on lessons learned and good practice across the Commonwealth on poverty eradication, governance and economic reform, including civil society-based initiatives in governance reform and sustainable livelihood collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

25. We thank the Ministers for taking the time to consider our recommendations. We acknowledge and appreciate the space provided by the Commonwealth for civil society organisations to participate in such meetings.
26. The MDGs are also our core business. We commit to playing our role as partners in their implementation through:
  - a. raising awareness of the Goals and contributing to stakeholder buy-in;
  - b. participating in the design, delivery and monitoring of national strategies.
27. As the Commonwealth community focuses on MDG implementation priorities for the 2005 – 2015 period, we hope to continue to engage in dialogue with Ministers and further our collaboration and partnership.