



# ARC HLE Updates

**ARC Update on the General Assembly High-Level Event on Africa's Development Needs**  
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## **ARC HLE UPDATE: SECOND MEETING OF THE MDG AFRICA STEERING GROUP: 10 MARCH 2008**

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the MDG Africa Steering Group and associated Working Group in September 2007 in an effort to mobilize the full resources of the UN system and its partners to achieve the MDGs in Africa.

The second meeting of the MDGs Africa Steering Group was held at UN Headquarters in New York on 10 March 2008. The meeting reviewed a first set of draft recommendations from the MDG Africa Working Group, and proposed that African Governments work, with support from the international community, to:

- launch an African Green Revolution to accelerate economic growth and combat hunger;
- implement comprehensive school feeding programmes using locally produced food and ensuring coverage of micronutrients;
- achieve the Education for All Goals by 2015, including gender parity at all levels, and implementing the Action Plan for the Second Decade on Education;
- control infectious diseases;
- ensure access to emergency obstetric care for all women by 2015;
- provide family planning services for all by 2015;
- meet the water supply and sanitation MDG targets;
- make critical infrastructure investments in power, transportation, water and sanitation to raise productivity, ensure low-cost service delivery, and integrate Africa into the global economy; and
- implement the Marrakesh Action Plan for Statistics.

Immediately following the meeting, a briefing was held for media and other observers. The briefing involved high-level members of the Steering Group.

*This ARC Update provides a summary of the media briefing on the outcomes of the Steering Group's meeting.*

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MDGS AFRICA STEERING GROUP**

The MDGs Africa Steering Group is an initiative of the UN Secretary-General, who has made the MDGs one of his major priorities for 2008. The Secretary-General first convened the MDG Africa Steering Group on 14 September 2007, in an effort to mobilize the leaders of the UN system and major multilateral and intergovernmental organizations in support of reaching the MDGs in Africa. The objective of the Steering Group is to bring together the international development community to accelerate progress towards the MDGs in Africa. The Steering Group is tasked with identifying strategic ways in which the international community can better support national governments to implement existing MDG programmes. It is also charged with proposing new mechanisms where necessary. The Steering Group, which will meet at least twice a year, is chaired by the UN Secretary-General and includes the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, President of the World Bank, President of the Islamic Development Bank, President of the African Development Bank, Chair of the African Union Commission, President of the European Commission, and Chair of the UN Development Group.

The Steering Group is supported by the MDG Africa Working Group, composed of representatives of the UN system and other major multilateral organizations, which is chaired by the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Asha-Rose Migiros. The Working Group will reach out to African governments, prepare action plans for achieving the objectives of the Steering Group, mobilize and coordinate the efforts of the institutions represented, and prepare periodic progress reports. The UN Development Programme provides operational and technical support to both Groups.

At its first meeting held on 14 September 2007 at UN headquarters in New York, the Steering Group adopted a Joint Statement in which members resolved to address three central challenges in meeting the MDGs in Africa, namely to: identify effective mechanisms for implementing commitments in the areas of health, education, agriculture and food security, infrastructure, and statistical systems; improve

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aid predictability; and strengthen joint efforts at the country level in support of the MDGs. They agreed, starting in a subset of African countries, to launch an intensive collaboration to support governments in preparing and implementing strategies that are ambitious enough to achieve the MDGs. Following consultations with the African Union Commission, World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, initial work will start in ten countries (Benin, Central African Republic, Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia) with a view to extending this work to other countries as soon as possible.

The Working Group convened for their first session on 20 September 2007, at UN headquarters in New York, to launch their operational work. The Working Group has since identified a set of key recommendations and initiatives that, if implemented, would support African countries in achieving the MDGs. At its second meeting held on 30 November 2007 at UN headquarters in New York, the Working Group considered modalities through which it would support African governments' efforts to identify priority projects and programmes that could be financed if official development assistance were increased to the levels promised at Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005.

At the tenth African Union Summit, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 25 January to 2 February 2008, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted a decision on the MDGs (Assembly/AU/Dec.180 (X)) in which the Assembly commended and supported the establishment of the MDGs Africa Steering Group. The Assembly also welcomed the initiative of the UN Secretary-General and other partners to hold meetings on the MDGs in September 2008 to find ways to reinforce the partnership between developed and developing countries.

### **REPORT OF THE MEDIA BRIEFING ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE MDG AFRICA STEERING GROUP**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened the briefing, highlighting the "unprecedented" collaboration and involvement in the group. He stressed the tremendous gains possible for Africa if international commitments can be translated into action. He also outlined examples of progress on some MDGs in particular African countries, such as achievements in Malawi on child mortality, in Senegal on water and sanitation goals, and in Tanzania on primary education. He stressed that the challenge now was to replicate and expand on these successes. He explained that the Steering Group had reviewed recommendations for future action, and had approved a plan for Africa to work towards a "Green Revolution" to achieve the MDGs across a range of issues and sectors, including economic growth, hunger and malnutrition, education, gender

parity, water and sanitation, and infectious diseases. He stressed rising food prices and agricultural productivity in Africa as key issues, urged progress in the Doha round of trade talks, and said African countries needed to mobilize domestic resources and receive the necessary support from development partners. He announced that a high-level meeting on the MDGs would bring together world leaders, civil society and the private sector at UN headquarters on 25 September 2008, to "translate commitments into action."

Responding to a question about sub-Saharan Africa being the most "off-track" region to date in terms of the MDGs, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the need to replicate the examples of specific country successes, and emphasized maternal mortality as a major issue.

With regards to food prices and the issue of market access and subsidies, several members of the Steering Group highlighted the need to raise agricultural productivity in Africa. Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, stressed that the Least Developed Countries already have unlimited access to European markets, noted the issue of quality standards as an area of concern, and outlined EU action to support developing countries. World Bank President Robert Zoellick highlighted the need for more action on hunger and malnutrition, especially given its impact on other MDGs. On subsidies, he said that this was an ideal time to address this, given high food prices. He outlined the World Bank's efforts to support agricultural productivity in Africa.

Regarding a question on security and instability in Africa, Alpha Oumar Konaré, Chair of the African Union Commission, underscored Africa's responsibility for what is happening and said the continent must acquire the means to act in a timely way, and not simply wait for help to come from outside. He urged respect for the rule of law. Louis Michel urged that the UN's Darfur peacekeeping force deploy fully to meet its mission of stabilization in the region.

On China's investment in the region, Alpha Oumar Konaré, said China can be a major partner, adding that no outside group should be allowed to exploit Africa, as has sometimes been the case with investors in the past. He insisted that a new sort of partnership is needed that encourages Africa's development and is consistent with democratic values.

On UN spending in Africa and the large sums spent on contracts for large EU and US companies' services, Konaré stressed the UN's positive cooperative role, but said that it was "scandalous" that large sums were going into potentially avoidable disasters such as Darfur when so much was needed for development goals, and that Africa had a role to play in resolving such issues. Participants also discussed replicating the "self-help spirit" of the Republic of Korea in local communities in Africa.

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