
Puzzlement at banks' bail-out while aid commitments flounder | MDG blog

Yesterday, Oxford Professor Paul Collier [wrote in the New York Times](#) that the Millennium Development Goals were “devoid of strategy”. The meetings yesterday at the UN made a mockery of such claims. World technology leaders like Ericsson, media trendsetters like MTV, social campaigners like Oxfam, and dozens of leaders and community activists in poor countries told story after story of strategic breakthroughs: malaria coming under control, child survival soaring, mobile phones empowering village-based businesses and emergency medical response teams, food production tripling. The goals of ending poverty, hunger, and disease will succeed; the question is not if but when.

Ending extreme poverty is a complicated problem solving, with hundreds or thousands of hands on the jigsaw puzzle. Ingenuity abounds. It has to, since the name of the game is to make huge social and economic progress with extraordinarily limited resources. Many great solutions were discussed yesterday, such as Malawi's voucher programme to double food production, and UNICEF's mass distribution of anti-malaria bed nets. Governments in poor countries are showing guts, such as Rwanda's efforts, described yesterday by the Foreign Minister, to reduce population growth through the active, high-profile promotion of voluntary fertility reduction.

Not if but when. When the world loses time on scaling up the dramatic successes described yesterday, children die – roughly 9m per year. Young children lose vital nutrition, causing a lifetime of disabilities. Kids stay out of school, guaranteeing a lifetime of poverty. When solutions are taken quickly, infant mortality and malaria deaths plummet, as has occurred in Rwanda in the past three years.

Many countries were at the table yesterday, but some big ones were exceptionally quiet. The US, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and Canada, think that the MDGs are a spectator sport. Yes, the U.S. has stepped up its financing of disease control, but its overall aid level of 0.16 per cent of national income is the lowest of all rich countries (and compared with far more than 4 per cent of national income for the military). Why aren't successes being scaled up? Not for lack of solutions and strategy, but for lack of follow through by the rich countries that promised (and promised and promised) to help.

The UN meetings were abuzz that the US could find \$700 billion for a bailout of its corrupt and errant banks but couldn't find a small fraction of that for the world's poor and dying. It didn't make sense to the world community. The puzzlement was all the greater since the very banks being bailed out so generously had awarded themselves more than \$30 billion in bonuses early this year, roughly the world's entire aid budget for 800 million people in sub-Saharan Africa.

If there was one message from the UN gathering yesterday, it was No More Excuses. Clearly the strategies are in place and have been proved; successes at local and country scale abound; the money exists to end poverty; remarkable partnerships are in place, and the momentum is growing. Will the rich and powerful be part of the solution?