

**Sub-regional Workshop on Aligning Policies and Strategies to Achieve  
the Millennium Development Goals in South Asia  
4-6 November 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal**

Opening Remarks by  
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

This is the first of a series of sub-regional workshops that are being organized under a new phase of activities of a regional partnership comprising UNESCAP, UNDP, ADBI and ourselves to help countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals. I would like to begin by thanking our hosts, the Government of Nepal for their support in organizing this event in this beautiful city of Kathmandu and extend my warm welcome to you all to this very important and timely event.

This workshop is timely for two reasons. First, much remains still to be done to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the Asia and Pacific region. The remaining time till 2015 is very short and we have little time to lose. Second, the world, including Asia and the Pacific, is suffering from one of the worst global economic crises since the Great Depression of the 1930s. This has lent greater urgency to our efforts to achieve the MDGs.

The region and South Asia have made considerable progress on many fronts towards achieving the MDGs. South Asian countries, for example, have taken major strides to ensure all girls and boys of school going age attend primary school. Old health scourges such as tuberculosis have been contained and successes achieved against HIV/AIDS and emerging health threats. Many countries in South Asia are providing clean drinking water to larger numbers of their citizens even in remote rural regions. In these many areas the MDGs are likely to be achieved. However even before the crisis, South Asia was considered unlikely to achieve the MDGs in areas such as poverty, nutrition, maternal and child health and sanitation.

The crisis has made the task of achieving the MDGs now much harder in the region as well as in South Asia. The economic crisis came on top of the existing food and fuel crises of 2007-2008. Faced with these many threats, Asian economies are slowing down. Some are experiencing negative growth and rising unemployment. The social impact of the slowdown is likely to be quite severe, trapping 30 million more people in poverty in South Asia by 2010. In addition, the crisis is likely to lead to around 180,000 more deaths of infants and children in South Asia, more than 5000 mothers dying at childbirth and more than 3 million more people going hungry.

Nevertheless, I am confident that South Asia can and will overcome the crisis, and through stronger efforts and the close cooperation of its development partners, achieve the MDGs. Its rebound from the slowdown is expected to be strong. It also has, as this workshop will demonstrate, many successes in individual countries which can be replicated and scaled up.

While I look forward to the outcomes of this workshop I would like to highlight a few crucial issues you may like to consider further. First, the need for regional cooperation cannot be

over-emphasized and we appreciate very much the efforts of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in this regard. This includes efforts to promote intra-regional trade and investments including trade and investments within South Asia where the potential for growth is immense. Not only is this likely to promote South Asian growth, it will also help build resilience to future trade and investment related shocks coming from outside the region. Cooperation on issues relating to climate change is a priority as South Asia is likely to be very adversely affected by it. Regional cooperation needs to be strengthened related to achieving the MDGs. This includes areas this workshop is focusing on such as nutrition and food security, health, and water and sanitation. I am pleased to advise that regional integration is a key development agenda in ADB's long term strategy and we stand ready to extend our support in this regard.

Secondly, prioritizing support for achieving the MDGs is an essential feature of inclusive growth which all countries in this sub-region are attempting to foster. However, major disparities remain both across countries and population subgroups within countries in basic MDG related outcomes. Such disparities prevent large groups of population from participating in development and can cause conflict and eventually erode growth. Progress on the MDGs, on the other hand, would strengthen basic human development and help spur inclusive growth. The reasons preventing greater participatory growth involve complex social, economic and institutional factors that we may need to discuss in this workshop.

Third, achieving the MDGs must be a collective effort by all development partners as the magnitude of effort and resources required is beyond the capacity of governments alone to provide. The role of civil society, the private sector and external development partners, are equally important. ADB on its part is supporting developing countries achieve the MDGs through several ways. Our infrastructure projects support growth and thereby help reduce poverty and generate employment. They also help provide better access to basic health and education services and bring much needed clean water and sanitation to rural and urban areas. We are providing considerable assistance in education and striving to promote gender equality and empowerment in all our operations. We provide concessional assistance to the least developed economies including several in South Asia. Ways of improving synergies in the efforts of all development partners is, however, essential and is an area that also needs discussion.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the crucial role that exchanges of good practices, information and knowledge can play towards helping achieve the MDGs. Given the urgency of the issue, more research, in-depth analysis, intensive and focused discussions and strong advocacy are necessary. These require interaction between experts, policy-makers and other country stakeholders which this workshop hopes to foster.

I thank all my colleagues in our regional partnership who have worked hard to stage this important and timely event and wish you all very successful deliberations.

Thank you!