

**Sub-regional Workshop on Aligning Policies and Strategies to Achieve
the Millennium Development Goals in South Asia
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Opening Remarks by
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Your Excellency Yuba Raj Kathiwada Colleagues from ADB, UNDP as well as those from the UN family and SAARC.

It gives me great pleasure in welcoming you on behalf of ESCAP to the workshop on MDG achievement in South Asia. We are gathered here today to take stock of progress made in some critical health and sanitation-related MDGs, exchange information on policies and programmes implemented by the participating countries, and to learn from best practice examples.

Allow me to thank the government of Nepal, the SAARC Secretariat, and ADBI for enabling this workshop to take place and the assistance rendered to all of us.

As you are aware, we are part of the regional efforts in reaching MDGs in this sub-region and beyond. The presence today of senior policy makers from the participating countries, experts and professionals, and representatives from ADB, ADBI and the UN family is a testimony to the urgent need to move forward with our collective responsibility to realize the MDGs by 2015.

We will learn more about that in the next few days, we have an unfinished agenda. We are meeting at a time when well over 900 million people in our region continue to live below the global poverty line of \$1.25 a day. Many of the same people go to bed hungry. Millions are malnourished, and many mothers continue to die during child birth. Close to one million children do not survive their 5th birthday. One in every six persons lacks access to safe and sustainable water supplies, worsening their health conditions.

Many of the poor do not have the energy or the voice to articulate their rights to a better life. The economic crisis which followed the food and fuel crisis has reminded the world that there are threats to development and the achievement of the MDGs is not a one-off exercise and has to be sustained, possibly beyond 2015. More worrying still is that once the global economy begins to recover, the same pressures that drove up food and fuel prices in 2007 and 2008 are likely to return. These hazards pose particular threats to the poor.

As we are realizing, a cluster of “hardcore” MDG targets are proving very difficult to tackle without special support and political will. The areas most at risk are firstly, the high pockets of income poverty especially among vulnerable groups. Societies still have deep fault lines along gender, ethnicity, caste and creed that lock many into poverty. Secondly, we have a cluster of health and health-related goals covering hunger, malnourishment particularly among children, high levels of maternal and child deaths and access to sanitation and safe drinking water. Some of them also face very serious challenges in coping with environmental degradation and are most likely to fail to meet the targets in achieving environmental sustainability.

Robust economic growth has not translated into inclusive economic development. The clear message is that economic growth on its own, while necessary, is not sufficient to achieve all the MDGs. In several cases, gains made during the early 1990s have been lost due to ineffective macroeconomic management, public corruption, poor governance and the continued exclusion of women, the poor and the marginalized in local-level delivery of health, education and sanitation services.

We are finalizing the next collective report of ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank and the UNDP, that examines the impact of the economic crisis on the MDGs. Though data remains patchy for many indicators, it is becoming clear that despite the progress made since 1990, most countries will not meet all of the MDGs by 2015, some not even the goal of halving poverty levels. Least developed countries, the landlocked countries and small island Pacific developing states in our region are most at risk at missing the targets by 2015. Even large countries will also miss many targets. These development gaps, if not addressed, would widen disparities within and across countries in the region. Such disparities violate a sense of fairness, particularly when the individuals affected can do little themselves.

What are the gaps in reaching the 2015 targets? There are several but possibly the most important ones are a lack of clear policies and strategies to achieve the MDGs, financial and human resource gaps, and above all, implementation gaps. However, the reasons for the MDG-achievement gaps vary among countries with a range of causes contributing to such gaps - poor physical and institutional endowments, governance, conflict, insufficient resources and low human development. Some are within the control of governments; but most of them would require regional and international support. The Asia Pacific region has the resources, the skills and the experiences to achieve the MDGs and this has to be a regional priority alongside greater economic integration.

What is the way forward for the region? First we need a strategy to take us from 2010 to 2015. This will be the task of the 2010 Global Summit on MDGs, convened by the SG. Then we need to figure out what should be done after 2015. We also need an accountability framework that will connect international, regional and national actions with MDG outcomes. In other words, we need to reflect on aspects of MDGs that have worked and those that have not worked as well as take cognizance of the new realities of our fast changing world.

Our agenda therefore for MDG achievement is incomplete. In a sense we are in the middle of a development emergency that requires a redoubling of efforts by all stakeholders along all fronts. The achievement of the MDGs is a public good, and is an invaluable insurance for a more stable Asia Pacific region.

Thank you.