

The Sub-regional Conference
"Achieving the Millennium Development Goal 1: Approaches and Strategies"
November 2–3, 2004

The Sub-regional Conference **"Achieving the Millennium Development Goal 1: Approaches and Strategies"** was held in Minsk on 2 - 3 November 2004. It was organized under the auspices of UNDP with the support of the UN Children's Fund and the Global MDG Fund. The Conference's 125 participants represented governments, parliaments, business and academic communities, religious groups and the civil society of Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and Belarus.

The Conference aimed at:

- developing common approaches to adapting the Millennium Development Goal 1 on poverty reduction to regional conditions,
- promoting campaign on achieving MDGs, and
- drafting recommendations for integrating country-specific MDG targets and indicators into national social and economic planning frameworks, including national poverty reduction strategies in Belarus and other countries of the sub-region.

The conference schedule spanned two days. Day 1 was dedicated to plenary meetings and panel sessions, and day 2 to informal discussions and site visits.

The themes debated on 2 November included:

- Origin of poverty and its dimensions: national specifics of identification, evaluation and monitoring;
- Achieving the Millennium Development Goal 1: current practices, problems and adapting to the national environment;
- Conceptual approaches to developing poverty reduction strategies and programs;
- Integrating poverty reduction into national policy and planning processes (e.g. budgets, development, industrial, labour markets, health and education, etc.)
- Social policies in the region: country specifics and common trends;
- Economic opportunities for poverty eradication;
- Strengthening the role of the civil society, NGOs and international organizations in poverty reduction.

The debate led to the adoption of a resolution summarizing the main findings and recommendations:

Based on the presentations, as well as the views, opinions and information exchanged during the conference,

Considering the experiences and research findings within the region,

Reaffirming commitment to stronger regional partnerships in achieving the MDG 1,

Recognizing the role of UNDP, UNICEF, Global MDG Fund and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Republic of Belarus in making this conference possible,

Participants have agreed on the following:

- The problems area referred to by the MDG 1 is a priority for all of the countries represented at this conference;
- The variety of tools and diversity of country-level approaches and practices are an invaluable resource for implementing the MDG 1 within the region;
- UNDP country offices in the region are facilitating regional linkages and contacts, thereby contributing substantially to achieving the MDG 1

Participants have concluded that:

- The MDG 1 can be achieved within the region by:
 - Securing sustainable economic growth and creating an enabling environment for human development;
 - Pursuing effective and efficient social policies aimed at reducing unemployment and ensuring adequate provision of social services by the government;

- Maintaining current levels of social capital and ensuring equal access to health care and education for all people.
- The unique socio-economic context within the region creates the need for adjusting the MDG 1 to the conditions of each country.
- The MDG 1 should be mainstreamed into the national planning and forecasting mechanisms and systems of each country.
- The monitoring of the MDG 1 should rely on a set of indicators that fully reflect popular the living standards and the quality of life in each country.
- Achievement of the MDG 1 is aided by proactive public-private partnerships, dynamic interaction between the national governments, NGOs civil society mobilization.
- Gender equity plays a critical role in poverty reduction and is prerequisite to sustainable economic growth and development within the region.

Participants in the conference recommended the following:

In MDG 1 localizing and poverty monitoring:

- Considering the regional specifics of poverty in the region, the monitoring of the MDG 1 should use the absolute poverty threshold of 4.30 PPP dollars per person per day;
- A set of indicators should be developed to support the regular monitoring of progress towards achieving the MDG 1 and to incorporate such monitoring in national MDG and human development reports;
- National poverty monitoring systems should utilize indicators reflecting the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction and take into account all forms of human deprivation related to both income and opportunity;
- Support should be provided to further research that employ innovative tools for measuring different aspects of quality of life and popular living standards;
- The findings of poverty monitoring should be discussed in a broad-based public forum in order to gather feedback from all stakeholders within society.

With respect to social policies and sectoral linkages, the conference recommends that further efforts be made towards:

- Greater targeting of social assistance;
- Expansion of social insurance mechanisms;
- Focusing of policies on promotion of productive employment;
- Increasing reliance on wage-based incentives;
- Deepening linkages between different policy sectors.

In area of economic empowerment:

- Early Warning System should be developed and established to enable early poverty prevention;
- Efforts should be made to promote corporate social responsibility and socially responsible enterprise restructuring;
- Conditions should be created to help working-age individuals lift themselves out of poverty through self-employment and entrepreneurship;
- Further expansion of the most effective and efficient small business support institutions should be encouraged by every means - this applies to micro-lending programmes, small business consulting, ICTs and access to assets;
- Further liberalization of the economic environment is advisable. This should result, inter alia, in simpler rules and regulations concerning business registration and management;
- Regional disparities in development levels should be carefully considered. Regional governments and communities should be encouraged to play a greater role in poverty prevention and reduction

On day 2 of the conference the conference participants were invited to join on-site panels, enabling them share their views, perspectives and experiences with each other and to relate those to the national practices of Belarus.

Members of panel 1 ("Public social support systems") visited the National Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Belarus and the Integrated Social Services Centre of Minsk's Oktyabrsky District.

Participants who wished to learn more about national employment promotion practices joined Panel 2 ("Adjustment of the socially vulnerable population groups to a new labour market environment").

The panelists visited the social works centre for disabled individuals and the Center of the multi-profile Youth Social Service.

Comments from the conference participants:

Mr. Razumov, Deputy Director of the Federal research institution "All-Russian Center for living standards », Russia

«...The conference has been extremely useful and has provided an excellent opportunity for experts from different countries to exchange information and practices related to poverty reduction. This type of conference should be held on a regular basis, with continued sponsorship from UNDP»

Ms. Libanova, Advisor to the President of Ukraine, Deputy Director for Science, Institute of Demography and Social Studies under the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

«The conference is a clear indication that countries of the region are ready and willing to share their experiences with each other. We have had a lot to tell our colleagues, and have also learned a lot from them. We are thoroughly impressed with the partnership between UNDP and the ministries involved in implementing the project to develop a national poverty prevention strategy for Belarus. We would like to learn more about the findings of the project's research...»

Ms. Moraru, Head of the Main Department of Forecasting and Development Programming, Ministry of Economy of Moldova

« ...I am impressed by the achievements of Belarus' social policy. I was particularly pleased that we were able to not only hear about these successes, but also to see how they were impacting the day-to-day lives of ordinary Belarusians. Integrating on-site visits into the conference programme was a good decision. Conference organization was exceptional. I am deeply thankful for the attention and the warmth with which I have been greeted.»

Ms. Kalinaeva, Coordinator of UNDP gender programmes, Russia

«... We are impressed by the large number of influential leaders from the government and civil society who attended the conference - deputy ministers, members of parliament, leaders of leading NGOs, church hierarchs and members of the academic community. The work of the conference's support personnel deserves special praise, especially given their small number. You have an interesting experience of partnership with an NGO on child entrepreneurship. We invite you to work together ...»

A selection of conference materials is posted at the project web - www.poverty-by.org.