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Ambition and action are as important as commitments

By Jeffrey Sachs

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The World Summit document adopted yesterday by the UN General Assembly failed to produce major agreements on reform but did arrive at an important agreement on Global Partnership for Development.

The signatories reconfirmed the Monterrey Consensus, in which they had pledged "to make concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7 percent of GNP in official development assistance".

The declaration commits to Quick Impact Initiatives, including the fight against malaria, the expansion of local school meal programmes using home-grown foods rather than food aid where possible, and the elimination of fees for primary education. The governments also committed to a "Green Revolution" for Africa.

The key is to turn this into action. That process will depend on a little noted clause (paragraph 22a) in the document, in which all the countries agree to: "adopt, by 2006 and implement comprehensive development strategies to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals".

From now on, development strategies such as those prepared with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are to be "comprehensive" and designed to achieve the development goals.

This is a breakthrough in concept. It will force a change in the behaviour of governments and institutions around the world.

Paragraph 22 calls on the rich countries, as well as the poor countries, to implement comprehensive strategies to achieve the development goals. It makes clear that success depends on "supportive global programmes, measures, and policies aimed at expanding the development opportunities of developing countries."

The UN Millennium Pro-ject has found the current international system is biased against achieving results in the fight against poverty. We do not yet have a "goal-based" system. When poor countries try to put forward ambitious plans of action today, they are told by donor countries, the IMF and the World Bank that donor financing is not

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adequate to support such ambitious programmes.

Under the new declaration, this must change.

In a set of pilot countries in coming months, which includes the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Tajikistan and Yemen, governments will present national development strategies designed to meet development goals.

The programmes will signal ambitious timetables for scaling up the fight against disease, agricultural productivity and infrastructure needed to cut extreme poverty. Countries will table exactly what they are being called upon to produce.

Now here is the rub. These programmes will require more official aid than a "standard" programme, as standard programmes today are not ambitious enough to achieve development goals.

They often include minuscule public health budgets, backed by minuscule aid.

Under the new arrangements agreed by the World Summit, the dynamics must change. IMF, World Bank, donor governments, UN and other international agencies must work with each impoverished country to ask what it would take to achieve the development goals.


A week after the UN summit, the IMF and World Bank will have their own annual meetings. This is all for the good. This week's UN deliberations will set a new work plan for the international system. Those organisations should get prepared to play their part, which is indeed a crucial role in the emerging global partnership.

Jeffrey Sachs is director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and has been an adviser to the UN.

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