



Climate Change and the MDG's  
Eveline Herfkens, Coordinator UN MDG Campaign  
Dusseldorf August 31, 2007

Climate change and global poverty are both key global justice challenges of our times. The Live8 concert in 2005 and the LiveEarth concert in 2007 demonstrate the appeal of these issues to the public.

This "showcasing" in mass concerts and feel-good rallies, however, can also convey an impression of yet another fashionable cause; the rising popularity of one issue can divert attention from another.

This is tragic, because climate change and extreme poverty are serious challenges that require governments and the public to concentrate efforts on combating BOTH simultaneously. An effective attack on poverty and the ill-effects of climate change requires taking comprehensive action that encompasses both issues.

We cannot effectively address global poverty without accounting for the impact of climate change on agriculture, disease patterns, and violent weather events, all of which impact particularly least developed countries.

We cannot fight climate change, unless we see it as a development issue at the same time:

Today over two billion people in the world lack access to a reliable energy source. But to reduce poverty, expand health services, promote sustainable, job-creating economic growth, - in short - for the Millennium Goals to be achieved, a significantly increased energy supply is necessary in developing countries. The source of this energy- coal, oil, or renewable- will have tremendous ramifications for global emissions of greenhouse gases. If a third of the planet's population continues to live in poverty and cannot afford clean energy sources, this will increase the pressure on land, water, forests and other natural resources exacerbating climate change.

Scientists warn that total worldwide emissions of greenhouse gases will have to peak around 2015, and decline sharply thereafter, if we are to avoid the most dangerous climate change forecasts. This means that the energy path that developing countries follow and the choices they make in their present MDG strategies will have a significant impact on climate change. As staying impoverished is not an option, how poor countries develop will affect climate change.

Neither is climate change only an environmental issue:

Climate change already presents significant threats to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Evidence (the Stern Report, the UNFCCC) is accumulating daily that points to the disproportionate negative impact climate change will have on the poorest nations, those nations who have contributed least to the problem. Climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of severe weather events. Poor countries lack the infrastructure necessary (e.g. storm walls, water storage) to respond adequately to such events. Diseases, such as malaria are likely to have wider ranges, impacting more people in the poorest nations that are already most affected by them. Changing rainfall patterns could devastate the rain-fed agriculture on which so much of the population in developing countries depends for survival.

Rising ocean levels, droughts, floods and extreme weather threaten to undo decades of development gains and the efforts made thus far towards meeting the MDGs.

The achievement of each of the MDGs is directly or indirectly threatened by climate change.

Let me elaborate these links:

#### *Goal 1: Poverty and Hunger*

Global warming and changing rainfall patterns lead to lower yields from agriculture and fishery; they undermine food security, and reduce the few assets of the poor. Most severely, changed rain patterns will increase the prevalence of drought in Africa, where only four percent of cropped land is irrigated, leaving populations without food and unable to produce and sell their cash-crops.

Pests such as tree-killing beetles and crop-killing fungi will increase their range and breed more rapidly. And an increasing incidence of extreme weather (floods, droughts) will both damage crops directly and nurture species that prey on them.

#### *Goal 2: Education*

The link is less obvious, but loss of assets might reduce the time a child can spend at school, while displacement and migration tend to reduce the opportunity to go to school. The reverse link is obvious: how can climate change be fought effectively without an educated population...

#### *Goal 3: gender*

Climate change is expected to exacerbate gender inequalities: women -as they are the poor farmers- are more affected by depletion of natural resources and reduced agricultural productivity.

#### *The Health Goals 4, 5, & 6*

Higher incidence of tropical diseases, as climate change increases the prevalence of vector-borne diseases (Malaria, dengue fever), and, as it impacts on availability of safe drinking water, water borne diseases, such as cholera and dysentery. Children and women are most susceptible to these diseases.

#### *Goal 7: environmental sustainability*

Obviously, climate change alters the quality and productivity of natural resources and ecosystems, some of which may be irreversibly damaged; this may also decrease biological diversity and compound existing environmental degradation. Clearly, the fight against global warming is part of countries' Goal 7 commitments.

Moreover, among developing countries the negative impact of climate change is first and worst for the poorest countries and the poorest people: there, the climate sensitive sectors (agriculture and fisheries) are the most important for their economy. They also have the least human, institutional, and financial capacity to anticipate and respond to effects of climate change. Already, to date over 96% of deaths related to disasters caused by extreme weather (WHO: more than 150.000 in 2000) were in poor countries...

Vulnerability is highest for least developed countries and the poorest people in the tropical and subtropical areas. Hence, the countries and people with the fewest resources are likely to bear the greatest burden of climate change in terms of loss of life and relative effect on investment and the economy. It is the poorest of the poor in the world who have contributed least to the atmospheric buildup of greenhouse gases linked to the recent warming of the planet - who are being hardest hit by its impacts. These are also countries and sections of populations who are the least equipped to deal with the harm they face both for reasons of lack for economic resources and as a result of being geographically located in areas with higher vulnerability to the impacts of warming. Africa accounts for less than 3 percent of the global emissions of carbon dioxide from fuel burning since 1900, yet its 840 million people face some of the biggest risks from drought and disrupted water supplies

Wealthy nations which have contributed by far the most to the atmospheric changes linked to global warming are not only experiencing fewer effects but are also better able to withstand them.

**AS CLIMATE CHANGE WORSENS POVERTY AND POVERTY ACCELERATES CLIMATE CHANGE : we have to break this vicious cycle.**

**COMPREHENSIVE COLLECTIVE ACTION IS NEEDED ON BOTH FRONTS:**

Obviously negotiations for a multilateral post-Kyoto treaty need to deliver results rather sooner than later. Also, developing countries must integrate environmental issues in their national development plans. They must implement policies, pursue laws and governance to protect the environment, but also to protect poor communities that depend on natural resources and increase their resilience.

However, clearly, **RICH COUNTRIES MUST TAKE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY**, as they are most responsible for climate change.

It is time rich countries get serious about emission cuts: and I commend Germany for being in the frontline in doing so.

And rich countries must reach out to developing countries by helping their adaptive capacity through the transfer of technology and financial support.

Also, it would help to expand the potential of the carbon finance resources that flow from the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

But to be credible, these efforts should not divert funds meant for poverty reduction: they must be additional to the commitments rich countries made in the past but still failed to implement: the commitments embodied in the 8<sup>th</sup> Millennium Goal: rich countries promised to increase aid (to 0.7% of their national Income); to improve its effectiveness; and to ensure the rules of international trade foster poor countries' development. Implementation on these three issues has been lagging.

### 1. Aid volume

While Official Development Assistance (ODA) trends have improved, the reality remains that ODA-levels will still fall short of those promised. E.g. Germany promised 35 years ago to spend 0.7% of its National Income on aid. And, while the percentage today is higher than it has ever been, Germany is lagging: With 0.36% of Germany's National Income spent on Aid in 2006, Germany is well below the donor country average, including below France (0.47%) and the U.K. (0.52%), and still far below the long promised 0.7%, which has been surpassed for many years by some of its neighbors.

### 2. Aid effectiveness

would require yet another half hour speech, so let me summarize that too much aid is still driven by donor's own geopolitical agenda's and domestic economic interests. E.g. Germany spends almost half of its aid budget (47%) on Middle Income Countries who do not need external concessional resources to achieve the MDGs...

### 3. Trade

is key to the achievement of the Goals.

Two thirds of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture: they cannot lift themselves out of poverty as long as rich countries maintain barriers against their exports and as long as our agricultural subsidies destroy markets poor farmers depend on.

Talks on a new world trade agreement under the so-called Doha "Development" Round were supposed to tackle these issues, but they are almost dead in good part because of rich countries' reluctance.

In this context I am worried about the trend among some environmental groups to promote food to be grown as locally as possible: this could unfairly single out farmers in developing countries and deprive them of their only source of income, which they derive from selling their products to our rich consumer markets.

Moreover, I question if the limited environmental impact of air travel is worse than the environmental impact of the large scale energy subsidies with which we grow vegetables in greenhouses in Northern Europe or the pesticide use and water waste resulting from growing cotton in Spain and Greece, subsidized by the European CAP.

If we want to be serious about the greenhouse emission of air transport, let us bring air travel under emission laws and let airlines pay fuel tax, so we all share the burden, including our selves for our luxury holidays abroad – which account for much more emission than the fresh vegetables flown in from Africa.

And, of course, reform the European Common Agricultural Policy, which cost the average European family 100 euros a month, without helping our own poor farmers or our environment, but in the meantime destroys rural livelihood in poor countries...

**CONCLUDING: WE CAN PROTECT THE PLANET AND ITS POOREST INHABITANTS; BUT POLITICAL WILL IS THE MISSING INGREDIENT...**

We know what should be done, and by whom. We have the promises to do so from the highest levels:

World leaders representing virtually every country on the planet signed up in September 2000 to these 8 interlinked Goals to be achieved by 2015 – the Millennium Development Goals; Goal 7 being the one focused on environment and climate change, as part of the broader commitment to sustainable development. These goals represent the holistic package to deal with the world's ills and injustices.

2007 is the mid-point from 2000 to 2015 for the achievement of the Millennium Goals and we are running out of time both on protecting the planet and its poorest inhabitants. These actions are achievable and affordable and taking action simply needs political will from leaders of rich and poor countries.

We at the UN can provide the platform where commitments are made, but we do not have the means to make our member states comply with them: in a world of sovereign states, it is only the citizens, and their elected representatives, who can hold their governments to account.

A lot can be done at the local level – particularly to reduce your carbon footprint. However these actions can not compensate for action by national governments. And that takes awareness building and mobilization across the country, to show politicians their electorate cares.

Clearly, in Germany the political constituency to deal with Climate Change is strong – manifested in the Governments intention to reduce emissions by 40% by 2020 – far beyond the EU position of 20%.

However, on development Germany is lagging, and I call on all of you to raise your voices, including in your political parties, to raise this issue, and to reach out to your citizens, here in Dusseldorf to do the same.

Our action now will define our generation and, ultimately our global legacy.

We are the first generation to get the wake-up call that our planet is warming, in an unsustainable way and we know and can afford what needs to be done.

We are the first generation with the resources and know-how to put an end to poverty

We also know we have to act on BOTH fronts

Let's not squander the opportunity to do so now, as the longer we wait the more expensive action will be...

**What is at stake is the fate of our planet and its people...**