

Message to the UNDP Global Management Meeting

New York, June 26, 2011

Mr. Thabo Mbeki

The Rt Hon Helen Clark, Administrator of the UNDP,

Distinguished participants at the UNDP Global Management Meeting;

Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to thank the Administrator for her kind invitation to me to address your important meeting.

I regret that I could not travel to New York to speak directly to you. This is because we are working with the Sudanese Parties to conclude the various agreements which will help to govern the relations between the two Sudanese neighbours after the secession of South Sudan two weeks from today, on July 9th.

We are also preparing shortly to travel to Malabo in Equatorial Guinea to report to the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the various matters which serve on the current Sudan peace and democratisation agenda.

However I am pleased that it has nevertheless proved possible for me to convey my views to you relying on modern means of communication.

It is an incontestable fact that the process of globalisation has resulted in the greater integration within the global community of nations of even the least developed countries in the world.

This would suggest that this has created the space for the developing countries, which contain the overwhelming majority of humanity, to make their voices heard in the global discourse about the challenge of development.

It seems to me that contrary to this, the more the process of globalisation entrenches itself, the greater the marginalisation of the voice of the poor of the world.

It is possible that as Africans we feel this negative development more acutely than the peoples of other Continents, partly because we have experienced its pernicious manifestation in the context of such conflicts as those in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya.

The challenge of development, targeted at the eradication of poverty and providing the conditions for all human beings to lead lives which enhance human dignity, remains one of the leading items on the global agenda.

This is despite the existence of a plethora of multilateral organisations dedicated to address the issue of development. These include the UNDP, the IMF and the World Bank, the Regional Development Banks, the WTO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, the WHO, UN Women, UNESCO, the ILO and others, including even the G20.

At the same time we are, so to speak, blessed by a similar cascade of development policies and programmes, with the programme to achieve the Millennium Development Goals being perhaps the most well-known.

And yet, despite the existence of these many development policies and programmes, and a multiplicity of organisations committed to address the development challenge, I am certain that all of us will agree that global society is not achieving the necessary high rates of development we need to achieve an early eradication of poverty globally.

This is despite the fact that modern human society disposes of sufficient means and know-how indeed to make poverty history.

I strongly believe that what I have said presents the UNDP with a particular challenge and opportunity.

During the e-discussions preparatory to your Meeting, relating to the topic “Leading the UN Development System on a New Sustainable Development Model for the Future (beyond 2015)”, the important point was made that the UNDP could and should reinvent itself as what was described as a “global development solution exchange”.

I fully agree with this important suggestion and am privileged to commend it to the Global Management Meeting.

While I completely respect the work and thinking that has gone into the design of the agenda of the Meeting, I would humbly suggest that it would help enormously to advance the global development process if the Meeting could spend the bulk of its time addressing the truly vital agenda item - “Leading the UN Development System on a New Sustainable Development Model for the Future (beyond 2015)”.

In this context I would request your Meeting to pose the question – does a universally accepted Sustainable Development Model exist, which gives coherence to the extant and multiple development initiatives?

I suspect that your answer to this question would be that such a Model does not exist, which I believe would be correct.

Surely the consequence of this must necessarily be that the resultant lack of coherence means the absence of concentrated and coordinated focus on goals that would be identified through a commonly understood and accepted Sustainable Development Model.

Of course there is everything right about the MDGs. Nevertheless they do not constitute a Development Model.

I would like to believe that acting as a “global development solution exchange”, and relying on development experience accumulated over many decades, the UNDP could elaborate a Sustainable Development Model based on the following propositions, among others:

1. all development requires sustained availability of capital for investment purposes: accordingly, to achieve development in the developing countries, an effort must be made to mobilise domestic and foreign capital to ensure sustained and high rates of investment;

2. such investment requires the availability of suitably trained people: accordingly, to achieve development in the developing countries, sustained and relevant human resource development programmes should be instituted in the countries concerned, which could be financed through development assistance grants rather than loans;

3. to place the developing countries on a sustainable development path, their areas of comparative advantage should be identified as target areas for investment and development. Intuitive reasoning would suggest that these are likely to be agriculture, relating both to food and agricultural raw materials, mining and tourism. In this context, the development process should include adding value to the raw materials derived from agriculture and mining;

4. development requires the availability of energy, a domestic market and access to the regional and global markets: accordingly funds would have to be generated to ensure the availability of electricity, and hopefully ‘green’ electricity, as well as the development of the domestic and regional road, rail, water-borne and air infrastructure, and seaports;

5. development in the developing countries also requires the existence of what has been characterised as a developmental state: the development project must therefore also focus on helping countries to build the institutions and entrench the practices that make for such a developmental state, which would include democratisation, women’s empowerment and a sustained struggle against corruption;

6. the development we are speaking of also requires the access of products from the developing countries into the markets of the developed world: this must mean that there is a continuing necessity to achieve the strategic objectives that were identified when it was decided to launch the Doha Development Round;

7. as development advances, it generates an ever growing demand for suitably qualified people: accordingly, the development process must attend to the challenge of raising the level of education and the health of the population as a whole, which also means the provision of potable water and ensuring food security, and promoting women’s empowerment, with the education and health programmes financed largely through grants rather than loans;

8. development requires breaking down the barriers which impede communication among people within and between countries: a determined effort should therefore be made to use modern information and communication technologies to facilitate such communication as well as use these ICTs to assist in the development process, for instance for marketing and banking purposes, and for tele-education and tele-medicine;

9. all development necessarily impacts on the environment and therefore requires that a conscious effort should be made to ensure the necessary equilibrium between development and environmental protection: apart from responding to the more elevated challenge of climate change, the environmental

response has to include such important issues as preventing soil erosion and desertification, protecting especially the indigenous forests and other flora and fauna, ensuring proper management of water resources, providing proper sanitation, and attending to the challenges of air and waste pollution especially in the towns and cities; and,

10. needless to say, sustained development requires conditions of peace and stability: in this regard experience has shown that much conflict and instability derives fundamentally from an antagonistic struggle for access to scarce resources. To mediate the impact of this reality, it is important that the development project should attend to such issues as democratisation, which creates the possibility of pursuing legitimate aspirations through peaceful means, promoting an inclusive process of development, and fighting against corruption and the abuse of state power to enrich the elite at the expense of the masses of the people, thus creating gross and stark inequalities in the distribution of wealth, income and access to development opportunities.

The UNDP is the development arm of the most representative multilateral organisation, the United Nations. This gives it the moral authority to act as the “global development solution exchange” that has been spoken of.

As such, it occupies a unique space which I believe gives it the possibility at least to try to persuade all other multilateral development institutions and donor countries to coordinate their programmes on the basis of the acceptance of such a Sustainable Development Model as we have suggested.

As was mentioned during the e-discussions, the UNDP also has the distinct advantage that it has an unparalleled network of country offices.

This means that of all the development institutions it maintains the closest interface with the challenge of development and the most intimate relationship with the intended beneficiaries of the development process.

This gives it the unique advantage such that, at least in principle, it is best placed to assess the impact of the development interventions in many countries, advise on the specific country application of any Development Model, help to empower countries to take ownership of their development processes, and serve as the global voice of the poor of the developing countries, the very subjects of development.

As far as I know, the core and non-core resources available to the UNDP in 2008 amounted to US \$4.8 billion and US \$4.68 billion in 2009.

It is obvious that these sums constitute a tiny fraction of the composite of development funds generated annually by individual countries, the multilateral development institutions and the non-governmental sector.

I say all this to make the obvious point that because of its limited access to development funds, the UNDP cannot rely on its own resources to make the kind of impact suggested by the elements of the putative Sustainable Development Model we have mentioned.

This brings me back to the proposition that, to enhance its relevance, the UNDP should reinvent itself as a “global development solution exchange”.

This must surely mean that it should therefore reassess its organisational capacity to ensure that it has the ability, among others, to:

1. liaise with and partner other development institutions in implementing such a Development Model as we have suggested;
2. assist developing countries to build the capacity to own their development processes and establish themselves as developmental states; and,
3. undertake the global advocacy work to gain universal acceptance for its approach to development, thus to persuade all those involved in development to internalise this approach.

I am honoured to wish the Global Management Meeting success and hope that the humble suggestions I have made might help you in your important deliberations.

Thank you.