

# Concept Paper

## **A New Strategic Thrust For The Millennium Campaign**

By

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Established by the United Nations' (UN) Secretary General in 2002, the Millennium Campaign is an inter-agency initiative to facilitate achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>i</sup> Pending completion of an external evaluation of its work, the Campaign will launch a planning process to determine its future strategy. This Concept Paper argues that mobilizing and engaging citizens in resource allocation and project implementation is a logical core thrust for a new Millennium Campaign Strategy.

### ***Current Situation***

The UN System is assisting countries to improve their capacity to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These services focus on three strategic pillars:

- (1) Conducting diagnostics and investment planning to determine the technical and financial assistance needed to achieve the MDGs over the long term;
- (2) Developing policy options and choices to address reforms and frameworks needed to accelerate growth with equity, and to promote long-term human development;
- (3) Strengthening national capacity to enable effective service delivery at national and local levels.

While identifying a number of successes in its mid-point evaluation, looking ahead to 2015 the 2008 MDGs report indicates that greater effort is needed in a number of areas, noting that;

*"... in most countries there are usually segments of society that do not share in the benefits without targeted actions to reach them. ... Government and other actors should therefore pay special attention to any and all at risk of being bypassed by the progress towards the MDGs."<sup>ii</sup>*

Recognizing that the global recession will retard progress towards the MDGs, the 2008 report indicates that additional resources will have to be mobilized by both the developed and the developing countries, and national governments and the international community.<sup>iii</sup>

### ***Implications for a New Millennium Campaign Strategy***

Consistent with the values and principles of the Millennium Declaration, a fundamental premise of the Millennium Campaign is that citizen mobilization and engagement is a key strategy in achieving the MDGs. Yet the 2008 MDG evaluation suggests that in most countries, citizens are not fully mobilized or engaged. Similarly, the current strategic pillars of the Campaign do not specifically address citizen mobilization or engagement. When combined with the resource pressures created by global recession, these factors suggest that mobilizing and engaging citizens in resource allocation and project implementation and aligning their efforts with those of governments and the international community is a logical core thrust for a new Millennium Campaign Strategy.<sup>iv</sup>

One of the fundamental dilemmas that citizens face when they aspire to eradicate poverty and stimulate sustained growth and development is that they cannot rely exclusively on governments or the international community to plan, organize, control, direct, finance, or perform all the work that must be undertaken to provide and produce the public and quasi public goods and services that are needed such as public health, education, and physical infrastructure. Governments are often new and still developing the means and mechanisms of

governance. Public finances – even when augmented by external assistance – are inadequate because the economy is developing and thus producing no or very limited surplus.

Nor can citizens rely exclusively on either the private or civic sectors. Both sectors often lack capacity and while international organizations may stand ready to assist, they often encounter obstacles or introduce unsustainable solutions because they are not familiar with local needs, preferences, customs, organizations, and institutions.

Yet indigenous capacity in government, private, and civic sectors cannot be strengthened without growth and development of public economies, which presents a conundrum: How can a country simultaneously develop its public economy and its administrative and governing capacity?

The evidence from countless examples in every region of the world over many hundreds of years suggests that societies overcome this conundrum by creating mechanisms that allow citizens to self-organize and, where appropriate, to partner with local and national governments to allocate and manage resources at the community level. Acting as individuals, communities, and cooperative associations, citizens rather than governments become the engines of poverty reduction, growth, and development.<sup>v</sup>

The rationale for self-governed citizen driven development is straightforward: Citizens are often the most legitimate, informed, and reliable source of information about not only their own priorities, but what is feasible in their community. And when citizens govern their own public economies at local levels rather than through centralized administrative bureaucracies, they have an incentive to better utilize goods and services, maintain facilities, contribute to the cost of public and quasi-public goods and services, and more efficiently employ investment funds.

Contrary to a great deal of received wisdom, even the poorest citizens already participate in resource allocation in developing countries however typically their efforts are not understood or effectively aligned with the resource allocation efforts of government representatives, philanthropists, and other development assistance partners. Misalignment between citizen driven and other public resource allocation processes leads to coordination failures, missed opportunities, ill-spent resources, and sub-par political and economic performance. Coordination can be improved if those “at the top” who aim to achieve the MDGs develop mechanisms and processes that stimulate self-governed citizen driven resource allocation activities and better align their efforts with those of citizens.

Not only does citizen-governed resource allocation develop public economies on a large scale without substantially increasing central government capacities, it strengthens democracy, increases confidence in government and the economy, stimulates the development of private and civic sectors, provides a means to avert brain drain, engages diasporas, and encourages émigrés to return and rebuild their countries.

Article V(25) of the Millennium Declaration urges the international community:

*“To work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries.”*

The MDGs can be achieved but it will require mobilizing and engaging citizens at all levels of society in self-governed community development to fully realize the ambitions of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Campaign.

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<sup>i</sup> The 8 MDGs are to 1) eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; 2) achieve universal primary education; 3) promote gender equality and empower women; 4) reduce child mortality; 5) improve maternal health; 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) ensure environmental sustainability; 8) develop a global partnership for development. The goals have been adopted by the international community as a framework for development activities in 190 countries in 10 regions; they have been articulated into over 20 targets and over 60 indicators.

<sup>ii</sup> Overview in *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*. United Nations: New, York, NY.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> For an overview of citizen-driven resource allocation concepts, see Polski, Margaret M. 2009. "Building Sustainable Political Economies By Aligning Citizen Driven Resource Allocation and Public Budgeting Processes." Concept Paper. June 13. [Http://mason.gmu.edu/~mpolski](http://mason.gmu.edu/~mpolski).

<sup>v</sup> For an overview of experience with community-driven development, see Dongier, Philippe, Julie Van Domelan, Elinor Ostrom, Andrea Ryan, Wendy Wakeman, Anthony Bebbinton, Sabina Alire, Talib Esmail, and Margaret Polski. 2000. "Community Driven Development." In *The Poverty Reduction Sourcebook*, Volume I, Chapter 9. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.