
**Policy Messages from the ECOSOC Special Event on
Philanthropy and the Global Public Health Agenda, New York, February 23, 2009**

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Madame President, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor to address you this afternoon to present the key policy outcomes of the Special Event on Philanthropy and the Global Public Health Agenda held in New York on February 23rd. The organizers of this Special Event were the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Office for Partnerships, in collaboration with the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy and the World Health Organization.

On behalf of the organizers, I am pleased to use this occasion to launch the Final Report of the Meeting. The report reflects the main elements of the discussion held on the two priority themes of maternal and girl's health and neglected tropical diseases. It also proposes some lines of action to implement the recommendations that emerged from the meeting. Copies of this publication were made available earlier today and additional copies are available in the room.

At the Special Event on Philanthropy and the Global Public Health Agenda, more than 500 representatives from the private sector, philanthropic institutions, NGOs and academe participated in discussions with Members States and experts from the United Nations system on how to improve health outcomes for women and girls and how to raise awareness of the opportunities to prevent and treat neglected tropical diseases. Two facts demonstrate that these issues are of utmost importance: (1) According to 2005 data, more than 500,000 women continue to die every year of causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. This is the Millennium Development Goal on which there has been the least progress. (2) More than 1 billion people throughout the world are affected by neglected tropical diseases, the control of which can help alleviate conditions that promote poverty.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon observed in his remarks at the Special Event, "Women are engines of development and drivers of improved health. Maternal health is a critical component of the well-being of any society." But the statistics show clearly that there is still much work to be done.

The dialogue in New York concluded that there is a clear need for a broad global initiative with a common framework to bring all stakeholders together to improve health outcomes for women and girls. Existing frameworks – the Cairo Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform, Countdown 2015 – offer important points of departure for coordinated actions to implement what we know will reduce maternal and child mortality dramatically. To address the magnitude of the need, there is an opportunity through enhanced incentives to catalyze corporate involvement in the cause, bringing the experience, knowledge, capacities and resources of the private sector to bear on the challenges ahead. The roles of philanthropy, NGOs and local associations were also recognized during the dialogue. For example, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health is supporting capacity building among health professionals to contribute to achieving MDGs 4 and 5, and the Global Health Council has worked with leaders from the maternal, child and reproductive health communities to develop a Global Family Health Action Plan to accelerate progress on MDGs 4 and 5. Based on the successful examples of international mobilization in the fields of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, partnerships among key actors in the philanthropic, corporate, NGO and public sectors will be important resources in scaling up the response to maternal and child health and improving health outcomes for women and girls significantly by 2015.

There are some 1.2 billion people living on less than two dollars per day. Many of these individuals are also at highest risk of contracting one or more neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), parasitic and bacterial infections that not only kill some 500,000 people annually, but also stigmatize, disable and inhibit millions more from caring for themselves or their families. Controlling NTDs, as the report states, is “an untapped development opportunity to alleviate poverty in the world’s poorest populations, based on the availability of effective, low-cost tools – such as safe donated drugs, proven control strategies, a high return on investment and a solid track record of success.”

Participants agreed that partnerships have provided an important mechanism to address global public health challenges in this area, both to make existing drugs broadly available among affected populations and to search for new treatments. Success at scaling up these programs will depend on mobilizing broader development resources – e.g., proper delivery systems, locally trained staff, coordinated supply chains – and on integrating these efforts more fully in national health systems. Finally, there was a call for more research on implementation, monitoring and evaluation of successful programs and on how to ensure effective coordination of efforts to avoid fragmentation.

In his special keynote address, President Bill Clinton reinforced the importance of strengthening health systems for making continued progress on maternal and child health and NTDs and called for continued engagement by the philanthropic community and the private sector, even in the face of the financial crisis, because “working in the poorest countries in the world is the least expensive thing we can do to fulfill our responsibilities as global citizens.”

Among the conclusions and next steps were recommendations to scale up community and mid-level health workers; to build a global partnership or business coalition for maternal and child/girls health to guide corporate and philanthropic involvement in

women and girls health initiatives; to devise new intellectual property management policies to encourage needs-driven research and development for new tools to attack neglected tropical diseases – as well as technology transfer of these tools to developing countries; creating a network of partnerships on neglected tropical diseases; a global fellows program to provide for secondment of trained medical and business personnel to country programs; and the implementation of periodic dialogues under ECOSOC auspices to coordinate the response of various NGO, private sector and philanthropic organizations to the challenges of achieving key MDGs.

This is a brief and incomplete summary of the very rich discussions at the Special Event on Philanthropy and the Global Public Health Agenda. I refer you to the meeting report for further details.

Finally, on a personal note, I valued the interaction with ECOSOC and partners during the Philanthropy event. In my capacity as the new President and CEO of the Global Health Council, I intend to engage more actively in ECOSOC's important work and to bring on board our diverse constituency, who are already doing much to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We are willing to bring new ideas to ECOSOC at next year's Special Event on Philanthropy, which will consider the theme of Gender and the Empowerment of Women. We look forward to continuing to work together on such critical issues.

Thank you for your kind attention.