



ATELIER SANTE ET DUCATION

Palais des Nations

9 Mai, 2006

MME VITA DE WAAL

Foundation for Gaïa, Planetary Association for Clean Energy

Do MDGs Need Prioritising?



Mrs President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank the AIDE Federation for organizing this event.

When, as an environmental NGO, we read through the Millennium Development Goals the one thing we noticed was that the environment is mentioned only once and that is in Goal 7. And when looking at the targets related to this seventh goal, then only target 9 mentions the need to... reverse the loss of environmental resources. That is all there is on the environment. Targets are there for

governments to move towards and attain these by the year 2015. What were they to make of these 6 words... reverse the loss of environmental resources... how was this to be interpreted?

Let us look at some *very* basic facts: about 50% of the world's population lives in rural areas and more than 50% of humanity is female. Women are the ones who most often tend the land, fetch water, search fire-wood, cook, look after and educate the children and look after their family's health. In a report, when women were asked what aspect they considered to be the most important one, the majority replied *'the environment'*, for it is the environment which nourishes her family and her animals. We need to listen to this, as the environment provides

living beings with food, water, clothing and natural medicines and by being better nourished all will enjoy better health. People living from the land keep their environment sustainable, a sustainability that has allowed limitless generations to dwell on the land. Over time people learnt the best sustainable way to tend the land and it became a local and a traditional way. Local because it related to their weather, their soil, their spirituality and their culture, it encompassed all their needs. It should be noted that the poorest countries are often those most affected environmentally and suffer water scarcity and thus Goal 7 is of great importance to them and Goal 7 is intrinsically linked to the environment.

While the MDGs are global, to deliver these there is a need to related them to local cultures and customs. Have local populations been consulted? Have they been informed, educated and asked what their needs were and which MDGs *they* considered to be a priority? It is crucial that those for whom the MDGs are intended have a say in how the MDGs are delivered, locally as well as nationally. It should not be a one-method fit all approach. The educational needs of an urban population are very different from the needs of nomadic populations.

Under that same Goal 7 there is the all-important Target 10: to halve by 2015 the proportion of those without sustainable access to safe drinking water. Experts consider 50 litres per capita to be the amount required in relation to the right to safe drinking water, the *human right* to safe drinking water. This includes cooking needs and sanitation. The average American uses 140-160 gallons of water a day. It is estimated that by 2015 about 2 billion people in 40 countries could be living with water-stress or with water-scarcity. In the near future water scarcity will impact the environment even further and the Sahel today stands as an example. Without water there is no sustainable environment, there will be further food scarcity and hunger, progressive ill-health, population migrations, urbanization and possibly wars about access to water. It goes without saying that women and children will be the ones most affected. By the land not being sustainable anymore, the men are migrating to urban centres and women are left with the full load: to look after and provide for their families. Fetching water and firewood from ever-more distant locations imposes further burdens on weeks of 100 hours of toil and affecting women's health. Without water most MDGs will be unattainable. Clean drinking water is a vital need and should *not* be a commodity but should be considered a human right.

There are 9 years left to reverse today's reality with regards the MDGs. Is it realistic to think that in a worsening situation this can be done? Do governments have the will to implement the MGDs or even part of them? What is being done? What can be done? While some of the poorest countries on earth have signed up to achieve the MDGs by the year 2015, how realistic is this? Many countries can not do this on their own and if the richest countries do not help then they do so at their own peril. The world has entered a global era and systems are inter-related and interdependent. The effects in one part of the globe reverberate and affect other parts. G8 countries, as representing the richest countries, are the ones who can achieve most of the MDGs themselves, but they also need to be the ones to help the poorest countries achieve theirs. There is a need to enter an era of solidarity.

But while civil society is aware of this, business conglomerates, transnational corporations (TNCs), are buying dwindling water resources and bottling filtered and safe water which they sell with big profits or they extract resources, be this oil or gold, leaving governments in developing countries afterwards to clean up the mess of overspill or cyanide into already scarce water resources, affecting whole segments of their populations. And the irony is that the poor countries hardly ever benefit themselves as the profits go to share-holders abroad. With these two examples alone we see that the MDGs are inter-related with trade and with much that is happening at the World Trade Organization, the WTO. The effort and responsibility to achieve the MDGs lies not only with governments and civil society but also with TNCs and bodies such as the WTO as well as other UN agencies, like UNDP, UNCTAD, UNEP and even the WHO. Are WTO strategies and governmental bi- or multilateral trade agreements in line with the MDGs? Environmental impacts and resources (Goal 7), gender (Goal 3) and sustainable development (Goal 8) have all implications with regards to these multinational empires. While TNCs can operate from countries whose laws are lax with regards to environmental, social and corporate responsibility as well as gender awareness, there is a need to create a requirement by which corporate activity goes hand in hand with what is being required through the MDGs. Another anachronism that needs to be rectified is that today \$1 a day is still being mentioned as the minimum required, though this figure was estimated to be needed in 1996. At that time the \$ was worth more. To be mentioning \$1 a day today is not realistic anymore and the amount should be at least \$1.50 - \$2 at today's value. This point is never being mentioned.

However, there is also some good news. There are new technologies, humanitarian technologies. For instance, there is much water in the air that machines will draw in extracting the water from it. The system is designed to operate anywhere, does not require piping and produces clean water within a day under minimal supervision. Depending on size, it can produce from as little as 1000 litre to 500,000 litres every 24 hours when the atmospheric conditions are at 30% humidity and over 1,000,000 litres at 60% humidity. The operating costs are estimated to be about 20 \$cents per 5,000 litres. However, while technologies can help, people in industrialised countries need to learn to use water and the environment much more sustainably. Herbicides, pesticides, fertilisers and hazardous chemicals all make their way into our water supply not only requiring costly purification procedures but much of it will affect the environment and animals, also live-stocks, thereby affecting human health through the food-chain. To this end much education is needed. Again, the same question: what is being done with regards to educating people about the MDGs? When in Goal 7 Target 9 the reversal of the loss of environmental resources is mentioned, are citizens ready to change a life-style that we know today to be irresponsible and are TNCs conscious that products need to meet new and stringent requirements? That selling products that are detrimental to living beings and the environment should be considered a crime and that it is the governments duty to protect their citizen, as this is what they have been mandated to do. This is something each government has to do. Environmental sustainability is a prerogative. It could well be that it might already be too late to reverse the destruction the humanity has inflicted on to the environment, but that this is still

being perpetuated is beyond belief. There is a need to prioritise the MDGs and the environment should have been one of the first MDGs to be taken care of.

There will be many countries that will not achieve the MDGs by 2015 and civil society and NGOs can help governments by identifying which MDGs can be achieved and how and which would have the biggest effect. Much work lies ahead and opportunities for governments, civil society and business to work together. If we want sustainable abundance then this can only work if ALL are involved and all partake and share in this and all become responsible for this . There needs to be a willingness to achieve a fairer share for all. The MDG's are only the beginning.

Thank you.