



MDG 1: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

Moderator:

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte, PC, MP
(Canada)**

Lead Speakers:

**Dr Rick Staphenurst (World Bank
Institute)**

**Hon. Akanyang Magama, MP
(Botswana)**

Smt, Sushma Swaraj, MP (India)

Delegates from different regions of the CPA were unanimous in highlighting the role that Parliamentarians can play in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

Dr Rick Staphenurst of the World Bank Institute started the discussion by noting that world leaders in 2000 had set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) covering a range of global development issues. A unique feature of these MDGs was the commitment from governments to work together and build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world. In effect a global partnership was formed with developing country governments

committing themselves to implementing appropriate policies and reforms and developed country governments committing themselves to increasing aid.

He noted that the MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger were achieved, it would free more than a billion people from abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty.

These goals were being implemented though Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSPs), which were country driven and owned, results orientated and were driven by poverty priorities of individual countries. These provide a framework for countries to direct and co-ordinate poverty reduction programmes and donor support.

Dr Staphenurst also noted Parliaments had an important role in holding their governments to account in implementing these goals. Currently developing country Parliaments were not engaged enough in providing an oversight function of the development of the PRSP process. Parliaments should be involved if the PRSP process

is to have meaningful country ownership, participation and genuine political support. The PRSP process creates obvious entry points for Parliaments to become and remain involved. The World Bank and other donors have recognized this and are providing support to sustain Parliaments¹ involvement in the PRSP process.

Africa's challenges

Hon. Akanyang Magama, MP, (Botswana) dealt with how Africa has been striving to meet the MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. He began by noting that the post colonial period in Africa has been generally turbulent and disastrous in terms of economic development. The resulting situation has seen increases in poverty, unemployment, income disparities and social decay, and therefore Africa was far away from achieving the MDGs. Most African countries had not yet begun to develop institutional mechanisms to facilitate the accomplishment of these goals. What Africa needed was a development strategy that would result in qualitative

and quantitative improvement in the lives of the majority of the people, the elimination of poverty, ignorance, disease, income disparities, unemployment, meaningful participation of people in decision making processes, and the ability to make critical political choices.

He noted that although one of the poorest countries in the world at independence (in 1966), Botswana had over the years transformed itself into one of the richest countries in sub-saharan Africa. However, this has been growth with uneven development as exhibited by rising unemployment, persistent poverty and income disparities. The example of Botswana demonstrates that economic growth without a redistributive development agenda does not automatically translate into employment creation, poverty eradication and the general improvement of the material conditions of people.

Mr. Magama stated that the levels of poverty and inequalities are set to worsen as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has caused many of the limited achievements in the health sector to be dramatically reversed. However the HIV/AIDS pandemic should not be regarded as purely a medical problem. There is a link between the rates of infection and poverty and gender discrimination. Governments should come up with a comprehensive strategy, he said, that also addresses the issues of poverty and income disparities in the long term.

Mr. Magama added that to achieve the MDGs, national, regional and global institutional reforms were necessary. At the national level a strong legislature is required to initiate and monitor implementation of policies geared towards poverty eradication. At the regional level, policies should be harmonized. Global institutions should be democratized and made more representative. Each of these institutions have specific and complementary roles in the fight against poverty and hunger.

India's experience against poverty

Smt. Sushma Swaraj, MP, (India) noted that it was ironic that on one hand, people were dying of poverty and hunger in some parts of the world, on the other hand there was a conspicuous

consumption by the affluent sections of society elsewhere. Poverty is a complex issue, and needs to be addressed in an integrated manner. Poverty and hunger cannot be attributed to famine and drought alone. What was required, she said, was the creation of employment and durable assets to enable people to earn a livelihood. In the intervening period. Parliamentarians must also ensure that immediate deprivations are adequately addressed through targeted interventions.

Smt. Swaraj said that India since independence in 1947 had been engaged in a gigantic task of reduction and removal of poverty, which had been recognized in its constitution. In

keep the removal of poverty and hunger high on their agenda and ensure that adequate allocation of funds are made available in national budgets, and that these are properly utilized.

Successes and failures

In the discussion that ensued, Hon. G.R. Musafir, MLA, (Himachal Pradesh) said that various government assistance programmes in India were making considerable progress towards eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

Mr. Christos Mavrokordatos, MP, (Cyprus) said that extreme poverty was, and would continue to be, a major issue for all Parliaments. He noted that



Moderator and Lead Speakers engaged delegates in a debate on poverty-reduction.

India, food security, which is closely linked with poverty alleviation, has been a consistent policy of successive governments through a multi-sectoral approach to food security — including availability of food, access to food, absorption and utilisation of food and reduction in vulnerabilities.

She also noted that from India's experience there is an important difference between hunger and undernourishment and ignoring this distinction can lead to inappropriate interventions. Poverty reduction is one of the most important issues facing the elected representatives of the people, particularly in developing countries. Parliaments had a clear role in the fight against poverty and hunger. As resource mobilizers, Parliamentarians should

donor countries had recently faced financing issues relating to the increase of levels of overseas development aid to 0.75 of gross domestic product (GDP), and that governments needed to improve their efforts to meet this target. His colleague Dr Eleni Theocharous, MP, (Cyprus) said that the use of oil revenues by developing countries in defence procurement needed to be addressed. These funds needed to be directed towards poverty reduction activities, rather than to purchasing weapons.

Hon. Moses Wetangula, MP, (Kenya) said that the World Bank's previous Structural Adjustment Programmes had produced 10 years of non-achievement in the reduction of poverty in Africa, and that debt re-servicing and unfair

international trade practices had not allowed African nations to deliver on reducing poverty and hunger in the region.

Hon. Ibrahim Isa, MLA, (Kwara) noted that his country, Nigeria, had developed a programme to invite white farmers from Zimbabwe to work and develop the farming industry. This was not only assisting in the development of food security in the country, but was also providing employment opportunities for local people.

Both Hon. Liow Lai, MP, (Malaysia) and Hon. Datuk Talib Zulpilip (Malaysia) noted the achievement of effectively eradicating poverty in Malaysia and that both government and Parliament had had important roles in this achievement. Redistribution of land and free education to the poor were important in enabling development, and this would allow the opportunity for greater wealth distribution. They also noted that Parliaments had an important role in the oversight of government and fighting corruption.

Hon. Afsatu Kabba, MP, (Sierra Leone) said that education was a key-factor in the reduction of poverty as it empowered people to make considered decisions. The youth in developing countries also needed access to opportunity, or otherwise there was great potential that they would fall into a world of violence and drugs.

Role of multinationals and global institutions

Hon. Chibuiki Amaechi, MLA, (River State) said that the economic growth of a country did not necessarily lead to food on the table for all. He also noted that multinational companies in developing countries focused on profits, which were often taken out of the country, rather than assisting in poverty reduction.

Dr the Hon. George Mtafu, MP, (Malawi) said that the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes were a mistake and had been over prescribed to the developing nations of the world, and called for a less prescriptive form of assistance from the banks and donor nations. He noted that the financial burden of servicing loans was a major problem for debt-ridden nations, and this was not

allowing for a focus on the immediate need to reduce poverty and hunger. He believed that MDG 8 (that of developing a global partnership for development) was the most important of the MDGs, and called for **donor** countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to achieve this goal.

Mrs Margaret Ewing, MSP, (Scotland) said that Parliaments and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association needed to consider how they would drive the discussion on poverty reduction with the G8, the United Nations and other international organizations. She also noted that Parliaments had an important role to play in the oversight of poverty reduction and the delivery to the poor in each country.

Hon. Ndey Njie Cham, MP, (The Gambia) said that corruption was a major problem in developing countries and this needed to be tackled. Progress in good governance and participation by women were needed to assist in the reduction of poverty and hunger. He also noted that developing countries needed to look at themselves first, not just point the fingers at donor countries on the lack of prosperity in



Hon. Ndey Njie Cham, MP.

developing countries.

Hon. Andi Asenatha Thou Thou, MP (Fiji Islands) said that the Fiji Islands experienced poverty and had developed an integrated approach, which included cultural, political and spiritual considerations, in reducing

poverty.

Hon. Katoo Metito, MP, (Kenya) said that the priority needs of developing countries were different from one to the other and that donors needed to gain a greater appreciation of this. He also noted that developing countries needed justice and fairness from donors, not just generosity.

Sen. K. L. K. Theko (Lesotho) said a strengthening of Parliaments was needed to provide a greater scrutiny of government actions and work in eradicating poverty.

International trade

Hon. McHenry Venaani, MP, (Namibia) said that unfair international trade practices had contributed to a slower response to the reduction of poverty in developing countries, and called for a fairer international trading environment for all countries.

Hon. Kashmala Tariq, MP, (Pakistan) noted the effect the World Trade Organization and unfair international trading policies had on the reduction of poverty in developing nations, and said that Parliaments had to do more to provide oversight of government decision-making and fight against corruption.

Hon. Franklin Khan, MP, (Trinidad and Tobago) said that it was impossible to have redistribution of wealth if there was no wealth created. He noted that capitalism was the best way to create wealth, but added that it did not cater for the redistribution of wealth. He suggested that governments should intervene and redistribute wealth to reduce poverty, but that this should only be considered once industry was fully developed.

Dep. Maurice Dubras (Jersey) said that greater poverty- reduction could be achieved in developing countries if national government funding was not directed towards the purchasing of weapons and corruption was tackled at all levels of government.

In conclusion delegates noted that great efforts were being made to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, that there were many challenges facing developing countries in achieving this, and that Parliaments had an important role in providing an oversight of governments' delivery of these strategies and programmes.