

# **The United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development**

A proposal related to the theme of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment 2003:

## ***Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development***

### **1. Vision and need**

The Secretary-General's report for this year's High-Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (Document E/2003/51) emphasizes the importance of creating alliances and partnerships in designing and implementing interventions for poverty eradication and sustainable development in rural areas. One of its key recommendations is to support or create, at national and international levels, alliances of governments, donors, NGOs, civil society organizations, and the private sector. As a step toward achieving this, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation with other UN entities and members of civil society, proposes to establish a *United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development*.

Accelerated rural development is essential to reducing poverty and promoting better standards of life for much of the world's population. Three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas of developing countries and depend mainly on agriculture and related activities for their livelihoods. The Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day, and those who suffer from hunger, by 2015, cannot be achieved unless rural poverty is urgently reduced. Moreover, attaining the other MDGs will not be possible without significant increases in rural incomes and opportunities and significant improvements in rural health, education and social services.

National and international businesses can have a powerful influence toward helping to achieve these improvements. Pro-poor policies and practices by business and other stakeholders can help to promote economic and social well-being and at the same time generate profitable returns on investment. Helping to harness these potential benefits is the motivating principle of the UN Public-Private Alliance.

### **2. Concept and working methods**

The proposed Alliance would focus on win-win situations, working to harmonize the economic and profit motives of the private sector with the internationally-agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. It would focus on recognizing and stimulating positive impacts in terms of profitability, alleviating poverty and ending hunger, and working toward higher standards of living, expanded employment, and real economic and social progress.

The Alliance would constitute a new step in public and private sector cooperation, highlighting and promoting replication of successful business undertakings that benefit all concerned, and bringing these to the attention of the international community through the UN Economic and Social Council.

Ideas and details for this would be worked out in consultation with representatives of businesses and business-related networks, and other stakeholders, in developed and developing countries, so as to ensure broad interest, involvement and ownership of the endeavour. Central to the Alliance would be a focus upon achievement of discernable results in actually improving peoples' lives.

The Alliance would also draw upon experiences and lessons learned from efforts such as the UN Information and Communications Technology Taskforce, the UN Global Compact, and the UN Financing for Development Secretariat, and from various business-related networks, including those launched in the context of the recent global conferences on financing for development (Monterrey) and sustainable development (Johannesburg). Business and industry groups that are working internationally in agriculture and other aspects of rural development would also be contacted. The Alliance would seek to draw upon and supplement such existing networks, so as to help create greater inter-linkage, support and leverage.

In placing emphasis upon successful business strategies and practices with broadly positive impacts, the Alliance would also give attention to necessary features of the enabling environment – in terms of regulatory frameworks, political and economic stability and predictability, viable infrastructures, required technologies, investments in human resource development, appropriate credit facilities, etc.

The Rotarian's "***four-way test***" in making business decisions is relevant here as well, as it promotes a standard of excellence by asking: ***Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?*** Such elements are among the basic expressions of corporate social responsibility.

Participation in the Alliance would include representatives of private sector businesses engaged in agricultural and rural development enterprise, and representatives of governments, UN agencies, NGOs and other civil society organizations. ECOSOC would receive reports on the functioning and results of the Alliance in 2004 and 2005, enabling the Council to assess and determine its future.

### **3. Principal areas of focus**

Types of initiatives in which the Alliance could engage include the following:

(1) **Establish a forum** for periodic discussions among representatives of business, governments, UN entities and other pertinent groups. The forum would bring together different points of view in an informal setting, with the aim of highlighting successes, voicing concerns, and coming to better understandings among stakeholders. The forum could assemble twice a year to explore a chosen topic and related rural development issues. Discussions would raise awareness about the different expectations and objectives held by forum members, work toward promoting and replicating successful business efforts that advance pro-poor rural development.

(2) **Produce a catalogue** of relevant programmes or activities by business - including in relation to governments and UN entities - with a recognized focus and impact for poverty eradication and sustainable rural development. The catalogue, with contact information and brief descriptions, would enable the establishment of a database on potentially useful efforts for application elsewhere.

(3) **Conduct and disseminate case studies** of successful business examples that have achieved quantifiable impacts, with an eye to replication in other business sectors or regions or countries. The purpose would be to learn and share in-depth information about how these work, and under what circumstances (i.e., investment levels, local government relationships, community commitment and other partnerships). This initiative could include both preparation of new studies and broader distribution of existing studies.

(4) **Create policy and regulatory advice and support** to help stimulate positive impacts. Such advice and support could include cooperative efforts among business, governments and UN entities. One of the areas for attention could be entrepreneurship development, especially for small and medium enterprises including group-led and women-owned businesses. A main intent throughout would be to bring the work of the Alliance closer to the people, and to enable real changes that are sustainable and cost-effective.

(5) **Grant “Good Practices” awards** to businesses for initiatives that demonstrably lead to rural poverty reduction and the achievement of internationally-agreed development goals, including those contained in the UN Millennium Declaration. The objective of the award programme would be to promote and publicize successful business efforts resulting in poverty eradication and sustainable development in rural areas. After an identification and selection process, a first round of awards could be made at the time of the ECOSOC substantive session in July 2004.

Candidates for the awards competition should meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrate impact leading to positive change in the living conditions of either identifiable under-privileged groups or large numbers of people;
- Create a more conducive or enabling environment for improvement;
- Demonstrate an innovative and replicable approach;
- Be sustainable;
- Promote partnerships to link activities with other stakeholders;
- Encourage leadership and community empowerment;
- Promote gender equity.

#### **4. Funding**

The work of the Alliance would need funding to cover network-building at international and national levels, expenses for the initiatives described above and support to a core secretariat. Resources would be mobilized from participants in the Alliance, from related civil society institutions and from other donors. The Alliance would work through existing institutions and mechanisms and would also help facilitate the creation of new partnerships. A detailed project proposal would be submitted in due course.

#### **5. Secretariat arrangements**

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs would organize the launching of the Alliance. Following the approval of budgetary estimates and secretariat arrangements, a small core secretariat would be set up as an autonomous project linked with the Department's Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination. The project would function in accordance with the financial and administrative rules and regulations of the United Nations for technical cooperation projects. The secretariat of the Alliance would provide necessary substantive and administrative support, and would coordinate the implementation of activities – (draft 23/05/03).