

**Keynote Address by Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP and
chair of the United Nations Development Group at the
Opening Session 11th High Level Round Table
Meeting 2013**

“Accelerating MDG Achievement and Inclusive Development”

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National Convention Centre (NCC), Vientiane, Lao PDR

DELIVERED ON HER BEHALF BY HAOLIANG XU, UN
ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL, UNDP ASSISTANT
ADMINISTRATOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL
BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**Excellency, Mr. Thongsing Thammavong, Prime Minister of
the Lao PDR and Chair of the National Round Table Process
Steering Committee,**

**Excellency, Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister
and Minister of Foreign Affairs,**

**Excellency, Mr. Somdy Douangdy, Minister of Planning and
Investment,**

**Excellencies Ministers, Vice Ministers, Governors and
leaders of the National Assembly,**

Distinguished Development Partners,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be in Vientiane today at this important High Level Round Table Meeting. This is my first visit to your wonderful country and I look forward to a sustained interaction about your development experience in my new position since September as Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

I am honoured to be co-chair for this event. Before taking up that role, however, I am delighted to deliver the keynote speech in this opening session on behalf of Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP and Chair of the United Nations Development Group.

I am particularly honoured to do so in the presence of the Prime Minister of Lao PDR, H.E. Mr. Thongsing Thammavong. Your presentation, Mr. Prime Minister, resonates strongly with

the Administrator's view from a global perspective that I am pleased to read out now.

The MDG agenda

Thirteen years ago, we began a bold global effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Since then, we have catalyzed one of the greatest surges in human well-being that the world has ever seen. Together, we have produced real, massive and inspiring change.

Yet there is still work to be done, in Lao PDR as elsewhere, and we have less than 800 days to achieve the MDGs.

For maximum impact, we must leverage the strength of all actors in partnership for development.

Today's agenda is very much consistent with the international dialogue to craft a strong post-2015 development agenda, intended to build on the foundations laid by the MDGs, complete the unfinished business, and respond to new challenges.

The Post 2015 agenda will be crucial for Lao PDR as you aim toward realizing development progress that will qualify you for graduation from Least Developed Country status by 2020.

This morning I would like to highlight the implications arising from the Special Event on the MDGs convened by the General Assembly in New York on September 25, and the High Level Round Table Meeting agenda today.

The Special Event provided timely new evidence that should accelerate actions to achieve the MDGs, as does the recently completed Mid Term Review of the 7th National Socio Economic Development Plan and the MDG progress report for Lao PDR.

First, at the Special Event, delegations resolved to target the most off-track MDGs and those where progress has stalled, and this is our intention today as well.

Lao PDR faces challenges in addressing the same off-track MDGs.

The 5 Action Plans included in the background document prepared for this meeting map out the way forward to bring these MDGs on track.

I encourage the Government of Lao PDR and international partners to take the necessary steps to turn these plans into reality, as well as to consider addressing in a similar manner the remaining pressing issue of environmental sustainability.

Second, the Special Event resolved to focus on those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged, across all MDG acceleration efforts.

In the Lao context, this often means the people living in remote locations and without access to services, including ethnic groups, women and children.

This also encompasses the special MDG for Lao PDR on those affected by Unexploded Ordnance (UXO).

I urge the Government to ensure that Action Plan implementation consistently prioritizes these most vulnerable elements of society.

World leaders recognized also that promoting gender equality, and empowering women and girls, underpins and advances progress across all the MDGs.

Lao PDR can boast of an impressive 25% of seats in its National Assembly being held by women and significant progress in achieving gender parity in education.

But more needs to be done to strengthen the role of women in other decision-making institutions and in ensuring greater parity at the higher secondary and tertiary levels of education.

A third conclusion of the Special Event was to place strong emphasis on all approaches that have a crosscutting and multiplier effect.

In this regard, I welcome the recent progress in Lao PDR to take an integrated approach to bring the food and nutrition

security targets on track. Despite present efforts, the annual reduction in under nutrition has been only one percentage point, yet with an integrated approach we can move to a four percentage points annual improvement and reach the MDG target.

As with other off track MDGs it is vital today that we collectively resolve, under national leadership, to ensure adequate resources and political will are devoted to removing constraints and achieving Action Plan targets by the end of 2015.

Macroeconomic parameters

Lao PDR has had great success in generating high levels of economic growth, particularly fueled by Foreign Direct Investment.

However, the challenge remains in ensuring that such growth translates into equitable benefits.

In the context of promoting equity, in Lao PDR as in many other countries, access to land is a vital factor in improving sustainable livelihoods and building resilience amongst the poor. More progress in addressing policy, legal and administrative aspects of land ownership would provide an essential boost to rural development.

Recent assessments of macroeconomic performance have raised concerns about the ability to ensure the funding needed to implement Action Plans to achieve MDG targets.

Critically, implementation of commitments to sustain the increases in budgets for education and health, including increasing the proportion of non-wage funding, and addressing concerns with the quality of expenditures, need clear prioritization by government and concerted application at all levels to realize results.

I am encouraged by the set of measures taken already, including establishing a high level taskforce to better coordinate macroeconomic affairs. Apart from immediate

fiscal concerns it is vital to address monetary, credit and banking, exchange rate and reserve issues, as well as inflation if confidence is to be restored and development sustained.

But it is essential also to address longer term structural constraints, including the role and size of the civil service and intra-governmental fiscal transfers.

Three priorities for improving public finance management would be to make planning and budgetary processes consistent, to manage public investments in a three year rolling framework, and to monitor progress against results based development outcomes prioritised in the national plan.

In this context, and as the Mid Term Review of the 7th National Socio Economic Development Plan notes, the expansion of private enterprise in sectors other than natural resource exploitation will be of particular importance, not

only in creating more decent jobs, or in managing migration, but also in increasing budgetary revenues.

The constraints raised in several surveys of the business environment as well as intensifying support for vocational skills development need your attention.

Governance reform

The second area of focus in today's agenda – good governance– is also mirrored in the MDG Special Event.

There, leaders reaffirmed the importance of promoting human rights, good governance, the rule of law, and transparency and accountability at all levels.

The Government's ambitious four pillar governance reform programme has demonstrated progress in several areas, including public service improvement, people's representation, legal and justice reforms, and public finance management.

In respect of people's participation and accountability of government, as witnessed globally, civil society can play an

important role in dialogue with government about jointly achieving development goals.

In this context I note progress in registering more national and local non-profit associations, but this first step needs to be followed by many further actions by government to create a wider, more consistent and safer space for both national and international civil society to operate.

The National Assembly is playing a key role in representing citizens' views in the national debate. This oversight role is of particular value and is worthy of continued support. This is also important for stronger legislative development, which will help foster improved access to justice and overall development in Lao PDR.

Empowerment of people to engage in similar ways in communities, districts and provinces will further enhance the relevance and effectiveness of development interventions.

I encourage the Government of Lao PDR to take bold decisions and for international partners to continue to provide support for governance reforms.

Development effectiveness

The third special topic for our discussions today is development effectiveness. I welcome Lao PDR's participation in the global partnership for development that has emerged post Busan.

In working together at the global level it is vital that there is local interpretation and action on implementing nationally the Busan partnership agreements. For this reason, I urge early approval of the revised Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VDCAP).

From an international perspective UNDP would be happy to support collective efforts to continue to improve the development effectiveness through the Round Table Process, in the context of progress towards LDC graduation.

In the spirit of the Busan Partnership agreement I would encourage the participation of all partners in providing information on development finance and cooperation, especially major sources of foreign investment, as well as to promote increased South-South Cooperation.

I congratulate the Government in further increasing transparency of ODA information by launching successfully yesterday the public portal of the Aid Management Platform.

Conclusion

The MTR underlines the need for a coherent approach that integrates, in a balanced manner, the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Getting the balance right between the social, economic and environmental dimensions is indeed a challenge.

I urge the Government not to miss this opportunity over the next two years to prioritize actions to achieve MDG targets, to promote private sector development, to mobilize civil society support and to continue reforms that support

the structural changes needed to succeed in the goal of LDC graduation by 2020.

I encourage you all to pursue a frank dialogue today, with positive results in mind, and to intensify your collaboration in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

When we work together, anything is possible. I wish you all a successful Round Table meeting.”

I have come to the end of Helen Clark’s presentation and I thank you for your kind attention.

Khor Khop Chai.