



Rollout of poverty reduction strategies target MDGs

15 DECEMBER: UNDP is supporting the Government implement a poverty reduction strategy to respond to a number of development crises that threaten the country's chances of attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Programme (PRSAP) was approved by cabinet a few months ago, and is now being taken to the various key sectors of Swazi society to promote public understanding as well as political support and ownership. As the strategy prepares to be rolled out early in 2008, UNDP support has been concentrated on two areas. The first is supporting an advocacy strategy for ensuring that key sectors of Swazi society are sensitized on the programme, especially among political leaders. The strategy has already been presented and discussed with such key groups as the cabinet, principal secretaries, members of parliament, the media and urban community leaders.

The Prime Minister, His Excellency Dr. A.T Dlamini who attended two separate workshops on the PRSAP expressed gratitude at the UNDP support, and is enthusiastic at the prospects that the initiative may finally turn the country's ailing fortunes around. Swaziland which experienced economic growth rates averaging 10% GDP in the 80s and 90s, has suffered from a series of social and economic misfortunes. While the country has been going through an HIV&AIDS epidemic which has spanned almost 20 years, a series of years of drought have all but destroyed the country's agricultural sector. Annual food production which stood at around 120,000 tones of the staple crop, maize, was down to 20,000 tones in 2007. Almost half the population now survives on food aid.

Over the years, poverty has been increasing and deepening. A Swaziland Household Income and Expenditure Survey (SHIES) in 1995 found that 66% of the population lived under the poverty line. That number had climbed to 69% in 2001. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is currently finalizing its report which will show the current levels of poverty following the completion of the household income and expenditure survey of 2007. Poverty is also concentrated in the rural areas where 70% of the population lives. The PRSAP recommends policy reforms not only to increase food production in the rural areas but also crop diversity to counter increasingly erratic weather patterns. If the economy will recover sufficiently for the country to attain the MDGs, GDP will have to grow by at least 5% annually, which has raised the profile of the importance of the private sector. Consultations with the business community have highlighted the importance of fiscal reforms to encourage pro-poor taxation and investment patterns.