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Role of social innovation highlighted at UN forum focusing on Latin America



UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, and Nobel Laureate Mohammad Yunus

22 February 2010 – The United Nations development chief today **stressed** the need for good social policies to help Latin America deal with the impact of the global economic crisis, which threatens to undo the progress achieved in the region in fighting poverty and other socio-economic ills.

“The region is on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), but the effects of the global economic crisis – combined with the food crisis – threaten to jeopardize the gains,” Helen Clark, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**), said, referring to the set of globally agreed targets to halve poverty, hunger, illiteracy and other problems, all by 2015.

“For this reason, social policies play a key role to promote human development, and the region shows several good examples, particularly through conditional cash transfer programmes,” she told the Third Forum for Social Strategic Thinking in Latin America, a two-day meeting which began at UN Headquarters in New York today.

As forecasted by a UN report released last November, the global economic crisis has increased the number of the poor in Latin America by 9 million in 2010 and has added another 2.5 million individuals to the ranks of the unemployed in the region.

Governments in the region have reacted quickly, UNDP noted in a news release, with many having strengthened job security plans and social programmes as a means to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis.

Conditional cash transfer programmes have played a substantial role in the design of such social policies, the agency pointed out, citing Oportunidades (Opportunities) in Mexico, Bolsa Familia (Family Grant) in Brazil and Familias en Acción (Families in Action) in Colombia, which along with other programmes, are reaching over 22 million households in 17 countries in the region.

The Forum, convened to discuss social policy innovations to respond to the economic crisis, was opened by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Muhammad Yunus, a pioneer in the field of microcredit, and includes the participation of over 35 ministers and officials in charge of social affairs from 17 Latin America nations.

“The financial crisis can be seen as an opportunity,” said Mr. Yunus. “This is the moment to redesign social programmes, stimulating social businesses and self-employment for the poor, particularly women.

“Human beings have unlimited capacity. All we have to do is to free them from the chains that we have put around them. If you ask me how to fight poverty, I’d sum it up like this: credit,” he stated.

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