



# World Economy & Development *in brief*

European Briefings on Globalisation, North-South Relations and International Ecology

## **G8: Surprise Us ... and Remember Your Promises! Heiligendamm would be a wonderful opportunity**

In a few weeks, eight of the world's most important leaders will meet in Heiligendamm. Joining them will be media and activists from around the world, closely following the proceedings, ready to analyse the implications of every word. So as the G8 meets again, what can we expect? Well, for those working towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, I would say not much, writes **Eveline Herfkens**.

What we know is that leaders are likely to announce a few small sectoral initiatives on poverty. While I am sure that these will make the headlines and sound important, I'm equally convinced they won't make much of a difference. And even if leaders were to surprise us with more 'important sounding' announcements, I would still remain nonplussed.

Why? Because I've seen it all before. Remember Gleneagles? It seems the G8 leaders would conveniently forget. And going further back – remember the Africa Action Plan from Kananaskis, in 2002, where G8 leaders promised that no poor country with the plans and policies to reduce poverty would be thwarted in their efforts because of lack of funding?

The Gleneagles summit – held two years ago – was hailed as an historic summit for Africa, with important promises being made on aid, trade and debt. But, little has happened since to really put Gleneagles in the history books or to suggest that it was a turning point in Africa's fortunes.

At Gleneagles, G8 leaders promised a substantial increase in development assistance, and a doubling of aid to sub-Saharan Africa by 2010. But, two years down the line, total aid is decreasing again and a massive share of aid delivered in the past two years has actually been debt relief. The picture for sub-Saharan Africa is just as bleak: excluding debt relief, aid to the region is stagnant, and even the hard-nosed economists at the World Bank tell us that no country – strong performers included – has seen the increase in aid that would make the Millennium Goals achievable by 2015.

Rather than taking a frank look at the facts and renewing their resolve to actually meet their promises on aid, G8 leaders at Heiligendamm are set to announce a couple of sectoral initiatives. But, these are likely to be little more than a damaging diversion. A diversion because they are small and are unlikely to be additional to existing promises. And damaging because sectoral initiatives often undermine efforts to improve the impact and effectiveness of aid.

While aid needs to increase, I very much agree with the German Presidency that it is as at least as important for it to become more effective. This requires that donors change their practices so aid genuinely meets the needs and priorities of the developing countries themselves, so that it supports local ownership, and so that it no longer imposes the crippling burden of administration that it has in the past. Developing country governments must set their own priorities in full collaboration with their own citizens, particularly the poorest, and must be accountable to them. And they must manage and be responsible for the development process themselves. Again I agree with the German Government that achieving the Millennium Goals is the primary responsibility of developing countries, as agreed in the Millennium Declaration.

Thus, we need to radically change the design and implementation of all of our aid by implementing the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, as promised at Gleneagles. But, we also need to apply the principles of aid effectiveness when dreaming up new schemes with the intention of making headlines. Evidence from the ground reminds us that there is an inherent tension between genuine local priority setting in developing countries, and the kind of single-issue funds and programmes that the G8 leaders are likely to announce. What is more, such small sectoral initiatives just add to the already increasing proliferation of aid programmes, donors and procedures, when we know this takes a devastating toll on the capacity of developing countries to manage their own development process.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, G8 countries need to take the lead in reviving the Doha round of trade negotiations and

in ensuring a development-friendly outcome. It is only G8 countries, including G8 members of the European Union, that can ensure progress on this issue. And they promised at Gleneagles to do so.

So the scorecard for the Gleneagles commitments is pretty dismal reading. You might wonder how this can be, when the commitments were made with such fanfare.

Well, for a start, there has been no willingness on the part of the G8 countries to monitor their own progress. 2 years after the Gleneagles summit, Heiligendamm would be the ideal opportunity to do this, but there is no appetite for such a stocktake. Perhaps because leaders know that they aren't delivering.

Promises alone are not worth the paper they are written on. And implementing them requires the same kind of political vision and courage as making the promise in the first place.

However, it is not too late. G8 leaders still have the opportunity to show great leadership in addressing world poverty, in responding to the development needs of Africa and in ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Goals. But, we don't need new initiatives. All we need is for leaders to deliver what they already promised ... at Gleneagles in 2005. A promise is a promise, and a promise to the world's poor should not be taken lightly: their very future depends upon it.

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