

Statement on behalf of Eurostep

by Rudy De Meyer (11.11.11) at Roundtable 4 on Emerging issues during the
HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE MDGs

The long way from emerging issue to 'emergency'

1. Puzzled by the word

I must admit that I am a bit puzzled by the word 'emerging issue'; Looking at the outcome document and the long list of reports and publications that were launched in the run up to this summit, I found that about 99 % of the 'emerging issues' have been around for at least 10 to 30 years.

2. A question of time?

The question seems to be: how does one evolve from emerging to emergency. How to get from analysis and common moaning to real action and adequate policy measures? The time span between the two is much too long. In a lot of policy areas the loss of time has become a problem in itself.

3. Example 1: the currency transaction tax

The meeting room next door is packed with people who want to hear about innovative financing and the proposal on a currency transaction tax. The initiative was taken by the governments of France, Japan and my own country Belgium. Some years ago, already in the context of another UN process, a German minister organised a side event on the tax.

Having worked on the tax for some years, I wonder what we are waiting for. The need for resources and new instruments for stabilizing financial flows is clear and urgent. The technical feasibility has been proven for a long time. Experts agree that the tax would be relatively easy to implement. In a way it is a shame that this kind of instrument is not used yet. But at least there seems to be some political momentum.

4. Example 2: the negative impact of inequality

This is yet another example of a very old emerging emergency. We were very pleased that at least the problem of inequality (and the negative impact on the MDGs) has popped up in governmental and UN texts. But, again, inequality is not new or emerging. It has been there for a long time.

Recognition is one thing. But looking at the outcome text, there is hardly anything that looks like an operational instrument or concrete measure against inequality. And I am not only talking about inequality within countries, but also about inequality between countries and growing inequality within countries caused by trends and policies in the international context.

Will it once again take ten years or more before we get down to real action?

5. Innovative UN mechanisms?

Too often international (and N-S) dialogue ends in a kind of paralysing trench war, where every inch forward is countered by one inch back.

We have, in this UN system, to find a shortcut between the emerging of an issue, and the moment that it becomes a real political emergency.

If not, future conferences and follow up conferences will be like pushing on the repeat button, and getting the same old song...