

**Response by John W McArthur<sup>1</sup> and Jeffrey D Sachs<sup>2</sup>  
on behalf of the Millennium Village Project to**

**Buse, K., E. Ludi, M. Vigneri. (2008). Beyond the village: The transition from rural investments to national plans to reach the MDGs. Sustaining and scaling up the Millennium Villages. Synthesis Report of a formative review of the Millennium Villages Project. London: Overseas Development Institute.**

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We thank the ODI team for their careful and thoughtful review of the Millennium Villages project. The ODI team made an enormous investment of time and consultations in the research and preparation of this report. We appreciate ODI's recognition of the Millennium Village project's "remarkable results," and strongly concur with ODI that "MVP-type interventions are patently and urgently necessary to achieve the MDGs." We also agree with ODI that the Millennium Villages should be implemented as part of a broader scale-up process, and that donors should commit funding to expand MVP-type programs and complementary investments at a broader scale.

Several current MVP countries have already put forward national plans to scale-up the village approach to the national level, perhaps most notably in Mali and Rwanda. The national plans are exciting and bold and have been presented to the international community. Properly, in our view, these plans incorporate the MVP-type interventions directly into core government operations at the community level, with higher-level government planning and supervision. We underscore that, fully consistent with ODI's recommendations, we view the MVP as a strategy that should be part of a government's national efforts (albeit in partnership with NGOs and the private sector) rather than a stand-alone project outside of government (or still less, as a way to circumvent government, as in some NGO approaches).

Recently, the President of Malawi has also called for "every village a Millennium Village," as have a large number of Ugandan Members of Parliament. Nigeria has initiated an effort to expand Millennium Villages to many more states. Meanwhile, more than a dozen other African countries have also asked to join the Millennium Villages project. All of these governments are prepared to put in their own resources, but they all need considerable help from donors as well.

The MVP has therefore created a powerful pressure to expand as a result of its notable successes. African governments are calling on donors for needed support, either to join the project or to expand from the existing small scale. There is no shortfall of demand to implement Millennium Villages in the context of broader national programs and strategies. The limiting factor, we emphasize again, is the supply of donor resources needed to implement those processes. In this context, therefore, the review team's recommendation that donors should support governments that want to join, emulate, or scale-up the MVP is **crucial**. We also underscore the finding that the continued and scaled-up success of MVP-inspired programs depends on donors meeting their existing commitments, which have still not been fulfilled despite many promises. If there are no added financial resources with which national and local officials can scale up, the commitment to scaling up will remain a dead letter.

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There are two areas where we differ slightly with the review team's findings. The first pertains to human resources. At times the report suggests that the MVP relies too heavily on highly trained staff, to an extent that cannot be scaled up to national level in the near future. This is contrary to our experience and analysis. Skilled workers in key areas – for example in agriculture, health, hydrology, and civil engineering – are often available but underemployed because of the lack of real projects which would benefit from their skills. For example, we have found that there are many effective agricultural extension officials in government ministries, but these skilled workers often have too little to do if local communities lack the tools (e.g. improved seed varieties) that the extension officers can help to deploy. Similarly, many countries have unemployed or underemployed nurses, because national and local budgets have not been able to keep these health workers on the payroll or to dissuade them from temporary or permanent migration to other countries.

There are several other effective responses to the scarcity of human skills. First, there are new and clever ways to economize on high-skilled labor. In the health sector, for example, there are important new programs underway for one-year in-service mass training of community-based health workers, who will work under the supervision of trained doctors and nurses. Second, new information technologies are facilitating large-scale distance training of thousands of skilled workers. Third, clever applications of the new information technologies also allow for the cross-border deployment of skills, for example through telemedicine or the provision of off-site technical support for the operations and maintenance of infrastructure. Fourth, some new technologies (e.g. rapid diagnostic kits for malaria testing, replacing traditional skilled microscopy) can economize on the need for on-the-ground skilled workers. Fifth, and finally, many of the key interventions of the Millennium Villages project can be sufficiently standardized to be documented in handbook form and scaled up in a rapid manner with common shared protocols.

Our second modest disagreement involves ODI's recommendation for "adapted MVs" which aim to economize on the costs of MVs by focusing on the lowest-cost interventions. We believe that such an approach represents a "false economy," in fact a scaling back of vital interventions because donors have not yet met their long-promised commitments. "Adapted MVs" would not provide the investments needed to enable impoverished villages to escape from extreme poverty, and thus run counter to the philosophy and core strategy of the Millennium Villages project. Scaling up only single interventions or only a subset of low-cost interventions will not meet the integrated real challenges of disease, education, agricultural productivity, environmental management and infrastructure that are essential to meeting the MDGs.

We think that donors will come around to this view, and will, with sufficient advocacy by the development community and backing by the general public, fulfill their long-standing aid commitments. In this spirit, we draw hope and inspiration from Gordon Brown's recent four-step challenge delivered during the United Nations' High-Level Event held to mark the midpoint of the Millennium Development Goals on 25 September 2008. He asked for an urgent and integrated set of priorities for achieving the MDGs, very much along the lines of the Millennium Villages approach. Specifically, he asked:

First, on health, that we recruit and train a million health workers, saving the lives of three million mothers and seven million children; second, on malaria, we agree that we will stop all malaria deaths by 2015, to ensure everyone has a bed net by 2010, to fund the research for the vaccine that can prevent the loss of life; and then on education, to get 24 million more children into school by 2010, to get us back on track to universal education by 2015; and fourth, on famine, to prevent today's starvation in the Horn of Africa, to fund and deliver seeds and fertilizers to 30 countries in time for the planting season, to invest

tens [of] billions in Africa so it can feed not just Africa but feed beyond Africa with its exports.

In the same event, Bill Gates laid forth a forceful diagnosis of the MDGs and the necessary focus they prompt on large-scale results.

The Millennium Development Goals can guide the search for new discoveries by showing us where innovation can bring the biggest returns. This is their genius, and I am optimistic about what they can help us accomplish. They can bring together new partnerships with the private sector, the philanthropic sector and government and UN agencies working in new ways. [...] So I disagree with those who focus only on the disappointments and try to spread around blame. People aren't motivated by blame and guilt. People are motivated by success. And we have many successes and opportunities for many more.

We are highly gratified by the vision of these global leaders, their commitment to the MDGs, and their recognition of their feasibility through practical, scalable approaches and innovative partnerships.

In conclusion, we are grateful for ODI's report and for its central message of the need to scale up the Millennium Villages. We believe that such scaling up is not only feasible, but on the verge of a takeoff. The interest of host countries is clear and urgent. The technical feasibility is clear and being demonstrated in the villages. The innovative partnerships – bridging government, business, academia, philanthropy and non-profit sectors – are forming rapidly. Now is the time for action.

John W McArthur and Jeffrey D Sachs  
On behalf of MVP  
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