



For immediate release

A new initiative to fast-track development in the dry areas of Eastern Africa

Eight ministers from six countries in the region endorse the project targeting pastoralist communities

Nairobi, Kenya (23 July 2010) — The MDG Centre, East and Southern Africa, launched today, in partnership with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), an initiative to bring accelerated development to pastoralist communities living in the drylands of 6 countries in the region.

Under the Drylands Initiative, thousands of pastoralists who have historically been neglected will benefit from animal production, infrastructure, health, education, and business projects in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan. The MDG Centre is also in talks with Eritrea.

The launch took place at the end of a two-day meeting on the initiative, with the participation of African and international government and UN officials, experts, scientists, and civil society representatives. The meeting was attended by the First Lady of Uganda and Minister for Karamoja, Mrs. Janet Museveni.

The Drylands Initiative was first unveiled in January 2010, at the signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding between The MDG Centre and COMESA. Since then, different sites have been identified in participating countries and the project is about to move to

the implementation phase. In northern Kenya, such field work has been ongoing in Dertu Millennium Village since 2006. Based on the promising progress recorded there, the project is being scaled up to the district and other sites have been selected too.

'Poverty levels are extraordinarily high in the drylands of East Africa, and the people who endure that poverty lack access to the most basic services: education, primary health care, safe water and sanitation, veterinary care for their livestock, and security from the ravages of drought and other environmental shocks. Climate change threatens to make the situation even more dire, unless active efforts are made to promote development and community resiliency,' said Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Special Advisor to UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon on the Millennium Development Goals.

'Fortunately, the people of the drylands are hard-working and are eager to invest in a sustainable future. With targeted efforts in critical areas — for example, livestock management and marketing, scaled-up health care, new educational opportunities, and upgraded infrastructure, pastoralist communities can achieve a major gain in productivity and economic wellbeing. This is what the Drylands Initiative sets out to achieve. Moreover, bringing economic improvement and climate resiliency will not only raise living standards but will also promote peace. Recent history has amply demonstrated that many of the conflicts in the drylands result from water stress, hunger, and other vulnerabilities of the drylands. Investing in drylands development is therefore also investing in peace and security,' added Professor Sachs, one of the initiators of the project.

COMESA Secretary General, Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya, said: 'We are happy to partner with The MDG Centre in this endeavor. Accordingly, our specialized agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), will work very closely with the Centre to ensure that there are improvements in the livelihoods of communities living in the drylands.'

'Building upon the success of the Millennium Villages Project, the Drylands Initiative will bring multi-sectoral development to isolated, yet sizeable communities. With the right approaches, such as mobile technology and access to markets, we hope that pastoralist communities will

be able to integrate into the mainstream economy and record progress on the Millennium Development Goals,' concluded the director of The MDG Centre, Dr. Belay Begashaw.

The Initiative will operate at a regional level, recognizing that the drylands of Eastern Africa form a single economic space and that challenges and opportunities don't stop at national boundaries.

-Ends-

COMESA

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), headquartered in Lusaka, Zambia, was established in December 1994 to replace the former Preferential Trade Area (PTA).

COMESA was established as an organisation of independent sovereign states which agreed to co-operate in developing their natural and human resources for the good of all their people and as such it has a wide-ranging series of objectives which necessarily include in its priorities, the promotion of peace and security in the region.

With its 19 member States and a population of over 389 million, COMESA forms a major market place for both internal and external trading. The COMESA agenda is to deepen and broaden the integration process among member States through the adoption of more comprehensive trade liberation measures.

Consequently, COMESA endeavours to achieve sustainable economic and social progress in all member States through increased co-operation and integration in all fields of development particularly in trade, customs and monetary affairs, transport, communication and information, technology, industry and energy, gender, agriculture, environment and natural resources.

www.comesa.int

The MDG Centre, East and Southern Africa

The MDG Centre, East and Southern Africa, was established in July 2004 by the Earth Institute at Columbia University to assist in the attainment of the eight internationally-recognized MDGs in the region, mainly through the Millennium Villages Project (MVP). Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, the Centre currently assists with operations in seven countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda but is gradually increasing its scope to cover other countries. It delivers on its mission through the services of a small interdisciplinary group of specialists and support staff organized into thematic clusters: agriculture and environment, health and population, water and sanitation, gender and education, infrastructure, integrated district development, and business development.

www.mdgcentre.org

For more information, please contact:

Joelle Bassoul Mojon, in Nairobi: +254-714606058 or email j.bassoul@cgiar.org

Carol Jilombo, in Lusaka: +260-977513535 or email cjilombo@comesa.int