

Elements for the speech by Managing Director Dr Eisenblätter at the International Conference “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: A Challenge for Global Higher Education” in Berlin on 3 November 2004

International Conference on the topic of universities and MDGs

Welcome address

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a company working in the field of international cooperation, we provide advisory services in our partner countries on questions of sustainable development. Our task is capacity building: establishing and strengthening skills within the partner countries so they can take development into their own hands. This encompasses important policy areas such as poverty reduction, growth, democracy and governance. The GTZ's work plays a key role in more than 130 countries. We act as a specialist advisor and sometimes a mediator, bringing together decision-makers from politics, business and civil society and providing advice on processes of social change.

So what does all this have to do with our topic today, the contribution universities can make to achieving the Millennium Development Goals? To put it very clearly, we need modern and competent universities in both the North and the South. Universities should be a living venue for communicating and disseminating knowledge. Universities train the decision-makers of the future in both industrialised and developing countries. As you know from your own experience, universities are faced with the problem that the education they offer is often too academic, and not sufficiently related to everyday realities. By incorporating university know-how locally in our projects – in the field of education, water, conservation of natural resources, health or employment, for example – we are helping to improve the dialogue between theory and practice. This is reflected in better, more appropriate courses of study.

As you know, the GTZ has laid the foundation for successful university cooperation in many cases, often in close cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service. A good example of this is the SPRING international course on regional planning. Another current example, which also shows the excellent results that can be achieved with limited funding, is the initiative “Between lecture room and project”, a multi-disciplinary approach to forge links between theory and practice and to promote cooperation between the North and the South. The primary concern here is to raise awareness in the coming generation for the topic of

sustainable development. The GTZ offers students in Germany and our partner countries the opportunity to take a look at practical work in development cooperation and to integrate this into their studies.

The GTZ is not an academic research centre, as you know. Nevertheless – or perhaps because of this – we need the universities, and we believe the universities need us. The GTZ and other institutions represented here should use this two-day conference to specifically underline the “win-win” situation between universities and international development cooperation. More than ever before, we need alliances between the different institutions to put our various competences and networks to work.

I do not need to go into the current analyses and reports on the MDGs by – say – the World Bank, the OECD or UNESCO here. They clearly demonstrate the contribution made by universities towards reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs. This runs right through major sectors including education, health, good governance and the promotion of civil society. Large-scale growth can only occur when good universities exist. And the corollary also applies: countries can only afford good universities when the economy is strong. Above all, universities, as storehouses of knowledge, are important partners in shaping policy.

In a nutshell, we believe that universities can and should act as a seismograph for social trends, both in the developing countries and also here in Germany. This will help us take a forward-looking and sustainable approach to advising our partners on political change processes. Drawing on its many years of experience, the GTZ is making a substantial contribution here in building structures and sustainability.

I very much hope that this conference will be successful, and that you all have fruitful discussions leading to effective, concrete results.

Thank you!