

# Global Campaign Calls for Tackling the Roots of Poverty

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*IPS - The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) made a commitment in Uruguay Saturday to extend their campaign until 2015, and to emphasise the structural causes that determine that over one billion people in the world are living in extreme poverty.*

GCAP was launched in 2005, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Its component organisations have committed themselves to continue the campaign until the 2015 deadline established by United Nations member countries to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger, from 1990 levels.

That is the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the international community in 2000, which include commitments to specific targets to improve health, education, gender equality, the environment and sustainable development.

At the international meeting that brought together 150 leading activists which ran Thursday through Saturday in the Uruguayan capital, GCAP decided to "highlight the causes of poverty, with a particular emphasis on the groups specifically affected by social exclusion," such as women, indigenous peoples and other sectors that suffer discrimination, Ana Agostino, a member of the GCAP International Facilitation Group, told IPS.

The need for this focus was stressed by Latin American and Caribbean organisations, with the support of the Asia Group and women's organisations, said Agostino, a member of GCAP's Feminist Task Force.

"There was an intense debate on whether or not to include sexual orientation when referring to excluded groups, because GCAP is characterised by great diversity," with hundreds of non-governmental organisations and social movements from around the world, said Agostino.

Religious associations were opposed to including sexual orientation, and in the end the activists agreed to not specifically mention the question with respect to concrete measures and actions, which will be left up to each country to decide.

In 2006, GCAP and the U.N. Millennium Campaign promoted an initiative called "Stand Up Against Poverty", in which 23.5 million people around the world "stood up" on Oct. 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and made the Guinness Book of World Records. In 2007 they hope to mobilise 50 million people, under the slogan "Stand Up and Speak Out."

The "Stand Up" action in 2006 had little impact in Latin America. One of the reasons, according to activists consulted at the time by IPS, was that the region's own priorities and agenda were not sufficiently taken into account.

In some countries, "nothing happened; it basically passed unnoticed," said Agostino.

This year, the aim is for each country and region to adopt their own "political messages" to promote participation in the coordinated Oct. 17 activities, among other measures aimed at increasing visibility of the event, said the activist.

The Latin American and Caribbean national coalitions and networks in GCAP said in San Salvador on Apr.

13 that the campaign should promote a view of poverty based on justice, not charity.

This should involve not handouts for the poor, but ensuring the conditions for the full enjoyment of civil rights, without discrimination of any kind, said the activists meeting in the Salvadoran capital.

The future of GCAP will only be sustainable if there is clarity about its political objective, which should be the basis for developing its strategies, and if mechanisms are adopted to democratise the way it works and make decision-making transparent, said the San Salvador statement.

The conference in Montevideo ended with the participants "in high spirits," and with a "strong sense of reaffirmation of the validity of their campaign," said Agostino.

The activists decided to maintain their decision not to "institutionalise" the coalition and to assess the progress of their actions against poverty every three years, until 2015.

GCAP achieved peak visibility in 2005, when it devoted its energies to extracting concrete commitments from the Group of Eight (G8) most powerful countries in the world, at their meeting in Scotland that year.

Although the G8 promised on that occasion to increase aid to developing countries by up to 50 billion dollars by 2010, in fact development aid from rich countries fell by five percent in 2006, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which was published in April.

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