

Harnessing More of the Trade in Ideas: Proposal for a Centre for MDG®InterConnect in Dubai

Introduction

Dubai is an established business centre with connections going deep into Asia, Europe and large parts of Africa. It is also, however, an interchange for ideas from these and other parts of the world. The knowledge traffic that flows through this interchange is, for the most part, concerned with the world of business. But Dubai also provides a platform for doing more—harnessing more of the world’s trade in ideas, and including business knowledge within the larger realm of economic and social development. This note outlines how this could be done within the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were adopted by the international community in the year 2000.

The proposed initiative is a centre that would host MDG®InterConnect. This note is aimed primarily at the potential sponsors of such a centre. It first describes the concept of MDG®InterConnect and then highlights the strengths and opportunities that make Dubai a suitable location for the proposed centre. Finally, the note outlines a methodology through which the concept owners would work with a design team and the sponsors of the initiative to make it operational.

What is MDG®InterConnect

MDG®InterConnect* is a distinctive concept for linking people who are striving for the attainment of the MDGs. The international community adopted these goals in 2000, and 191 countries currently subscribe to them. The goals they have agreed are as follows:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

The international community has established 18 targets corresponding to these eight goals, and these are described in Attachment 1. The deadline for meeting 10 of the most pressing targets is 2015—just a decade away.

There are two main premises behind the MDG®InterConnect concept. One: most developing countries do not require appreciably larger amounts of external assistance to

* MDG®InterConnect is a trademark concept owned by Research & Management Enterprise (Pvt.) Limited of Islamabad.

meet the MDG targets—and much more may not be available in any case. Two: throughout the developing world, there are examples in each sector of relevance to the MDGs that show how people can make rapid progress, and sustain it with their own resources. These examples are living signposts to the future, but they are not being documented and disseminated systematically. Acknowledging the potential value of these examples, MDG@InterConnect works with the following mission:

Identify and document the best Help the rest catch up with the best
And help the best do better.

“The best” (in relation to each MDG target) means initiatives that have achieved rapid gains in a cost effective manner, and engaged the human, social and financial capital required to sustain them. Such initiatives include programmes as well as enabling policies, and they may be found in the public, private or non-governmental sectors. They are identified through relevant networks, documented by means of benchmarking, and disseminated through exposure, dialogue, skill development, systems development and other forms of facilitation. The process represents an inductive approach to knowledge, focusing on what works and supported by assistance to facilitate implementation.

Dubai’s Strengths and Opportunities

Dubai benefits from a number of strengths and opportunities that suggest that the time is right for bringing MDG@InterConnect to Dubai. These include the following:

- o The UAE has, by some accounts, more than 1,000 service providers offering training courses in Arabic and English throughout the region. Most of these courses are aimed at the for-profit business sector, but many also cater to governments and individuals. The capacity that already exists here is not only a potential base for the proposed initiative but also a likely beneficiary of the opportunities it would open up.
- o Through business, tourism and cultural ties, the UAE has forged strong links with many of the countries of Asia and Africa that receive development assistance from the rich countries. UAE’s partners in the developing world have given birth to a host of home-grown solutions that promote economic and social development, but these solutions are becoming known only slowly and inefficiently, if at all. MDG@InterConnect would enable Dubai to tap into this knowledge base, contribute to development processes throughout Asia and Africa, and help these regions acquire a greater voice in global discourse.
- o Concern with broad-based human development in the Arab world crystallised this year with the publication of the first Human Development Report that focused on the Arab countries as a group. Sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, this report attracted widespread attention as well as acclaim among the intelligentsia. There is, however, no regional forum for continuing this work through inquiry and dialogue among Arab countries, and Dubai, obviously, is well-placed to fill this gap.

- o The UAE has earned respect in east and west alike not only for its achievements but also for promoting a culture of tolerance. Questions of global and national development often raise emotionally-charged issues that need to be discussed in a culture of tolerance. Free of narrow vested interests, Dubai offers a neutral platform for regional and international dialogue on such issues.

Proposed Approach

The development and establishment of MDG®InterConnect would take place through a three-way partnership between the owners of the concept, a sponsor (or sponsors) and a team of design consultants. The design team would include EDC (Pvt.) Limited, a development and management consulting firm introduced in Attachment 2. EDC would employ a structured four-phase methodology to assist the sponsors in designing and operationalising MDG®InterConnect according to their requirements. This methodology, which is internationally tested, consists of the following main steps:

- o Phase 1 is a well-defined planning exercise that could be completed in one-to-two months, depending on the sponsor's requirements. It consists of scoping and sizing the engagement with the sponsors and building working relationships between the design team and the sponsor's team that will take the assignment through to completion. The scope of the engagement is clarified, in particular, with reference to the sponsor's requirements (e.g., budget, location, goals and targets to work on, etc.) These requirements are reflected in specific activities during the remainder of the engagement. The end result of Phase 1 is a detailed activity schedule, budget and responsibilities for Phases 2 and 3, as approved by the sponsors.
- o Phase 2 focuses on the analysis of the market situation with which the sponsors and their customers are concerned, and the operational requirements of the sponsors. It concludes with agreement on priorities and solutions. The solutions are identified with reference to the most relevant best practices and stated in terms of organisational structure, affiliations, policies, standard operating procedures, resource requirements, etc.
- o Based on the agreement reached in Phase 2, Phase 3 aims to deliver an implementable plan in the form of a complete prototype (policies, standard operating procedures, resources required, and terms of reference or job descriptions). Training for the implementation team may be provided on the basis of the prototype at the end of Phase 3 or in the early part of Phase 4.
- o In Phase 4—implementation—EDC can help the sponsors implement the agreed prototype and improve it on the basis of on-the-ground experience. EDC's involvement in Phase 4 depends on whether or not it is empowered by the sponsors to help implement and improve the agreed prototype.

The first step for a potential sponsor is to plan a Phase 1 exercise with EDC.

Attachment 1: Millennium Development Goals and Targets

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of population living on less than a dollar a day

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to finish a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS

Target 8: Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

Target 11: Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications

Attachment 2: Introduction to EDC (Pvt.) Limited

EDC was established in 1988 as a small firm specialising in rural development and community participation. It subsequently diversified successfully into agricultural policy analysis and irrigation management (1989), area development projects (1990), overseas consulting (1991), the social sectors (1993), environment and host country project implementation (1994), management consulting (1995), and internationally-tendered technical assistance for project preparation (1996). The corporate capability acquired in the process—almost 200 assignments, including short-term and multi-year contracts—represents work done with most of the donor agencies active in Asia, several NGOs, corporations and international institutes, and the Federal and Provincial Planning Departments of Pakistan.

EDC's Managing Director, Tariq Husain, is a graduate of Columbia University, New York, and PhD in economics from the University of Chicago. EDC's strength, demonstrated in a variety of settings and sectors, is that it is a customer-driven, knowledge-based organisation. It has helped its clients with every process in the project cycle, from country strategy and project formulation to implementation and evaluation, and often helped improve the process. And it has conducted research and analysis, including operational research, on its own as well as in collaboration with international centres of excellence. In the process, EDC has worked with and assisted a wide range of businesses, government agencies and non-government organisations in Pakistan and 19 other countries.

EDC consultants are trained to lead complex change management assignments through a structured and disciplined methodology that has been internationally tested. EDC's prior experience extends to the following areas of expertise:

Public Sector Reform

Change Management and Restructuring
Decentralisation and Devolution
Local Level Institutions

Management Services

Human Resources Management
Process Management Manuals (ISO 10013)
Surveys and Statistical Analysis

Social Development and the Social Sectors

Community Based Development
Poverty Alleviation
Gender and Women's Development
Multi-sectoral Social Sector Initiatives

Enterprise and Finance

Social Responsibility
The Informal Economy
Small Enterprise Development
Credit and Savings

Agriculture and Rural Development

Area Development
Water Management
Forestry
Agricultural and Irrigation Research

Environment and Urban Development

Environmental Strategy
Natural Resources Management
Wildlife Conservation
Katchi Abadi Development
Urban Sanitation