

PRESS RELEASE

Will Toya-ko Leave Its Mark in the Book of Global Health Legacies? The answer lays in the future leadership of Japan

Global Health Committee, 2008 G8 Summit NGO Forum

The success of the Okinawa Summit, once more: carrying the anticipation of civil societies working for global health, the G8 Hokkaido Toya-ko Summit officially convened. On July 9, 2008, two documents were released: the Communiqué on Development and Africa by the G8 leaders and the Toya-ko Framework for Action on Global Health, a report by the G8 Health Experts group.

Holding the legacy of bringing forth HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases as a major agenda item within global health at the Okinawa Summit, this Toya-ko Summit attempted to attain health related Millennium Development Goals by shedding light to not only the infectious diseases, but to issues that still lack adequate measures and action such as maternal and child health and health workers shortage in developing countries. In November of last year, Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura has called for a stronger engagement of the international community in Global Health by creating a common framework for action on Global Health. This led the Japanese Government to creating and holding G8 health experts group that has met three times since this February, setting the stage for the Toya-ko Summit.

“At this Toya-ko Summit, we should take special note that cooperation between the government and civil society has further developed throughout this health policy making process,” said Sumie Ishii, the chair of the G8 NGO Forum Poverty and Development Unit, “Japanese NGOs has made large contributions to the policy making process for the G8 Toya-ko Summit”.

However, the communiqué, as well as the framework for action, released at the Toya-ko Summit does not answer to the expectations of the civil society. On the issue of healthcare worker shortage in developing countries, the G8 countries has agreed to work towards the increasing health workforce coverage of 2.3 health workers per 1,000 people. However, progress on this issue was very limited, as this agreement came without any financial commitments to attain this target. On the issue of Maternal and Child health, which was perceived to make great progress, however, due to the difference of opinions among member countries, prevented any bold and concrete commitments to be made. The greatest barrier that the G8 countries could not overcome was the lack of their financial commitment to health.

Last year at the Heiligendamm Summit, the G8 countries committed to USD 60 Billion to fighting the three major infectious diseases and Health System Strengthening *over the coming years*. The time limit for achieving this goal was set for 5 years in this G8 communiqué. However, when calculating the total financial contributions necessary for various international mechanisms/organizations in the next 5 years to fighting the three infectious diseases and health system strengthening, a total of USD 170 Billion will be necessary. If the contributions of the eight major countries stop at 60 Billion, the current effort in fighting the three major infectious diseases and health system strengthening will only regress.

“The Framework for Action contains much about what the G8 ought to do, but without the necessary money, Africa, moreover the world, will not achieve health related MDG goals,” stated Masaki Inaba, chair of the Global Health Committee of the G8 NGO Forum Global Health Committee, “the G8 are expected to provide the financial contribution, yet at this G8 Summit, they have failed to do so”.

To evaluate the G8 on its progress in tackling global health issues, NGOs has created a report card, with five scores ranging from A to F. The overall score of the G8 was a C-. The only issue that received an A- is accountability. At the G8 Toya-ko Summit, the G8 countries agreed upon a mechanism to review their progress in meeting past commitments. However, there was no guarantee that this process will be carried over to Italy, Canada and beyond, nor was there any guarantee that this mechanism will be used effectively. In the end, this mechanism will be useless if it does not contribute and benefit the health those living in the developing countries. Thus, civil society has given the A- with a certain hope. Whether the G8 Toya-ko Summit will leave its mark in the legacies of achievements in global health - it will all depend on the leadership of Japan.