

MDG PROGRESS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Despite some success stories during the 1990s, on balance Sub-Saharan Africa's record in moving towards the MDGs has been inadequate, especially for the poor: 23 countries are failing in half or more of the goals, and 12 do not have enough data to be assessed, which leaves a mere 10 countries on track to meeting half the goals or more.

Progress was slow for child mortality, basic education, malnutrition, improved water supply, maternal mortality and gender discrimination in primary enrolment. With the exception of safe water, regional progress during the 1990s was less than one-tenth of the agreed target. Since the MDGs are to be achieved over a 25-year span starting in 1990, 40 per cent of the road should have been covered by 2000—meaning that Africa's progress represents about one-fifth of what should have been accomplished by now. Even worse, little or no progress was achieved in reversing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which continues to have a devastating effect on families and communities.

Between 1990-1999, the number of poor increased by one-quarter, making SSA the region with the highest proportion of people in poverty. At current trends, Africa will account for nearly half of the poor in the developing world in 2015, up from less than one-fifth in 1990. Only 16 countries are on track to halving hunger by 2015, by which time Africa may be able to feed less than half its population.

The region saw some progress in expanding the net primary school enrolment ratio but, at the present rate, it will not witness universal primary education until after 2100. There has also been some progress in closing the gender gap in literacy and in net primary enrolment ratios, although the pace will need to accelerate considerably if the goal of gender equality is to be met by 2015. Progress in sanitation and access to safe water has been slow too, and the same applies to under-five mortality rate (U5MR), which declined during the 1990s but at too slow a pace to achieve a two-third reduction by 2015. Only 7 countries are on track to reach this target.

Levels of immunisation against major childhood diseases remain inadequate—and have even dropped for measles. There has only been minimal change in the proportion of births attended by health personnel during the 1990s, which helps explain why SSA has the highest maternal mortality ratio in the world. The progression of HIV/AIDS is adding further burdens to the region, aided by the lack of open and frank discussions about a disease that thrives in a climate of silence and ignorance.

Key issues to be addressed in accelerating progress toward the MDGs in Africa- through the implementation of NEPAD- are:

- How to produce consensus on practical steps to accelerate work toward the MDGs.
- How to institute a robust MDG campaign agenda in the region.
- How to ensure an effective monitoring and reporting mechanism on progress toward the MDGs.

- How to accelerate progress toward the education target, given its key role in unlocking positive externalities and synergies with the other MDGs, including for the reversal of the spread of HIV.