



PRESS RELEASE
MDG Report 2008

**Progress in achieving UN anti-poverty goals
for 2015 under threat, new report finds**

Higher food prices likely to deepen poverty in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 11 September – The world has made strong and sustained progress in reducing extreme poverty, the United Nations reports today, but this is now being undercut by higher prices, particularly of food and oil, and the global economic slowdown.

Since 2002, rising prices for minerals and agricultural raw materials have contributed to the remarkable run of economic growth in all developing regions, according to the UN's *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*. However, many developing countries are now facing higher import bills for food and fuel, jeopardizing their growth.

Improved estimates of poverty from the World Bank show that the number of poor in the developing world is larger than previously thought, at 1.4 billion people. But the new estimates confirm that between 1990 and 2005, the number of people living in extreme poverty has fallen – from 1.8 to 1.4 billion – and that the 1990 global poverty rate is likely to be halved by 2015. However, these aggregates mask large disparities among regions. Most of the decline occurred in Eastern Asia, particularly China. Other regions have seen much smaller decreases in the poverty rate and only modest falls in the number of poor. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the number of poor increased between 1990 and 2005.

In a reversal of this previous global downward trend, the prevailing higher food prices are expected to push many people into poverty, the report says, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, already the regions with the largest numbers of people living in extreme poverty.

“The largely benign development environment that has prevailed since the early years of this decade, and that has contributed to the successes to date, is now threatened,” Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon declares in the foreword to the report. “The economic slowdown will diminish the incomes of the poor; the food crisis will raise the number of hungry people in the world and push millions more into poverty; climate change will have a disproportionate impact on the poor,” the Secretary-General said. “The need to address these concerns, pressing as they are, must not be allowed to detract from our long-term efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. On the contrary, our strategy must be to keep the focus on the MDGs as we confront these new challenges.”

Action on the UN agenda

Given the nexus between poverty, climate change, and food and fuel costs, these issues will be taken up as a group as the General Assembly re-convenes at the UN this month.

Secretary-General Ban has called for a special high-level event to boost global action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, on 25 September. Nearly 100 Heads of State and Government are expected to participate, as well as many leaders from the private sector, foundations and civil society organizations. They are expected to announce a number of new initiatives and broaden coalitions to address health, poverty, food and climate change issues, at the meeting itself or during its many side events.

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The incoming President of the General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua, has cited action on the food crisis as a major theme for the new session that kicks off on 16 September. On 22 September, the Assembly holds a high-level meeting on the development needs of Africa, a region facing severe challenges in terms of climate change, agriculture and poverty reduction.

Progress and challenges

First agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, the MDGs set worldwide objectives for reducing extreme poverty and deprivation, empowering women and ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015. *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, now in its fourth year, assembles statistics from 25 UN and international agencies, and is produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

“Looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, there is no question that we can achieve the overarching goal: we can put an end to poverty,” Secretary-General Ban states in the foreword to the report. “But it requires an unswerving, collective, long-term effort.”

Among the MDG gains noted in the report released today:

- » Primary school enrolment has reached 90 per cent, and is in striking distance of the 2015 goal of 100 per cent, in all but two out of 10 regions of the world.
- » Within primary schools, gender parity (share of girls' enrolment as compared to boys') is at 95 per cent in six out of 10 regions.
- » Deaths from measles have been cut in one third between 2000 and 2006, and the vaccination rate among developing world children has reached 80 per cent.
- » More than one and a half billion people have gained access to clean drinking water since 1990 – but due to stress on fresh water resources nearly three billion people now live in regions facing water scarcity.
- » With help from the private sector, mobile phone technology and access to essential medicines are spreading in the poorest countries.
- » Thanks in part to debt write-offs from international lenders, spending on social services in developing countries is up: the share of developing countries' export earnings spent on external debt servicing fell from 12.5 per cent in 2000 to 6.6 per cent in 2006, freeing up resources that can be devoted to meeting the health and educational needs of the poor.

But many of the eight Millennium Development Goals and linked targets are in danger of going unmet by the deadline year of 2015 without redoubled efforts in developing countries, a sustained favourable international environment for development and increased donor support. Among the remaining challenges:

- » More than half a million mothers in developing countries die in childbirth or from pregnancy complications every year.
- » About one quarter of developing world children are undernourished.
- » Almost half of the developing world population still lack improved sanitation facilities.
- » More than one third of the growing urban population in the developing world are living in slums.
- » Almost two thirds of employed women in developing countries hold vulnerable jobs as self-employed or unpaid family workers.

Achieving the Goals is feasible, the report says, but it will require a greater financial commitment, including delivery by the developed countries of the increased foreign aid that they have promised in the past few years.

Media contacts:

Martina Donlon, donlon@un.org, tel 212-963-6816

François Coutu, coutu@un.org, tel 917-367-8052

Pragati Pascale, pascale@un.org, tel 212-963-6870

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