

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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EMBARGO UNTIL 6 JULY

Recent gains in eradicating hunger and poverty endangered by economic and food crises, says UN report

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON RICH AND POOR COUNTRIES
TO BOOST EFFORTS AND MEET AID COMMITMENTS

6 JULY, GENEVA – More than halfway to the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), major advances in the fight against poverty and hunger have begun to slow or even reverse as a result of the global economic and food crises, a progress report by the United Nations has found.

The assessment, launched today by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Geneva, warns that, despite many successes, overall progress has been too slow for most of the targets to be met by 2015.

“We cannot allow an unfavourable economic climate to prevent us from realizing the commitments made in 2000,” Mr. Ban states in the foreword to the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*. “The global community cannot turn its back on the poor and the vulnerable.” He adds: “Now is the time to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. The goals are within reach, and even in the very poor countries, with strong political commitment and sufficient and sustained funding.”

GLOBALLY, THE PICTURE IS MIXED:

- Gains in the eradication of hunger since the early 1990s—when the proportion of hungry people decreased from 20 per cent in 1990-92 to 16 per cent in 2004-06—were reversed in 2008, largely due to higher food prices. A decrease in international food prices in the second half of 2008 has since failed to translate into more affordable food for most people around the world.

- In the period 1990 to 2005, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day decreased from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion (prior to the economic crisis and higher food prices). But major gains in the fight against extreme poverty are likely to stall, indicators show, although data are not yet available to reveal the full impact of the recent economic downturn. In 2009, an estimated 55 million to 90 million more people will be living in extreme poverty than anticipated before the crisis.

- More than one-quarter of children in developing regions are underweight for their age, and the meagre progress on child nutrition from 1990 to 2007 is insufficient to meet the 2015 target. This will likely be eroded further by high food prices and economic turmoil.

- Global unemployment in 2009 could reach 6.1 to 7.0 per cent for men and 6.5 to 7.4 per cent for women, many of whom remain trapped in insecure – often unpaid – jobs, holding back progress towards gender equality.

Furthermore, the report suggests that many global gains were due to a dramatic fall in poverty rates in East Asia. Elsewhere, progress has been slower. Sub-Saharan Africa counted 100 million more extremely poor people in 2005 than in 1990, and the poverty rate remained above 50 per cent.

The MDG Report also says that funding gaps are evident for programmes needed to improve maternal health (MDG 5), the goal towards which least progress has been made so far. Most developing countries have experienced a major reduction in donor funding for family planning since the mid-1990s, on a per woman basis, despite the undeniable contribution of such programmes to maternal and child health.

The ability of countries themselves to finance development programmes may also be in jeopardy. Export revenues of

developing countries fell in the last quarter of 2008, as the financial meltdown in high-income economies began to trickle down. The debt service to export ratio of developing countries is likely to deteriorate further, especially for those countries that enjoyed increased export revenues for the last several years.

At the 2005 Group of Eight summit at Gleneagles and at the General Assembly World Summit later that year, donors committed to increasing their aid. The majority of these commitments remain in force, but as the global economy contracts in 2009, as anticipated, the absolute amount of such commitments would diminish, since most are expressed as a percentage of national income. For many developing countries, lower levels of aid would not only impede further progress, but could reverse some of the gains already made, says the MDG Report.

MAJOR ADVANCES BEFORE THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The report portrays remarkable advances that many countries and regions had made before the economic landscape changed so radically in 2008:

- In the developing world, enrolment in primary education reached 88 per cent in 2007, up from 83 per cent in 2000. In sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, enrolment increased by 15 percentage points and 11 percentage points, respectively, from 2000 to 2007.
- Deaths in children under five declined steadily worldwide — to around 9 million in 2007, down from 12.6 million in 1990, despite population growth. Although child mortality rates remain highest in sub-Saharan Africa, there have been remarkable improvements in key interventions, including the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets to reduce the toll of malaria – a major killer of children. As a result of ‘second chance’ immunizations, dramatic progress is also being made in the fight against measles.
- Worldwide, the number of people newly infected with HIV peaked in 1996 and has since declined, to 2.7 million in 2007. The estimated number of AIDS deaths also appears to have peaked, in 2005, at 2.2 million, and has since declined to 2 million in 2007, partly due to increased access to antiretroviral drugs in poorer countries. Still, the number of people living with HIV worldwide – estimated at 33 million in 2007 – continues to grow, largely because people infected with the virus are surviving longer.

CHALLENGES

The report calls on governments and all stakeholders to revitalize efforts to provide productive and decent employment for all, including women and young people. It points out that employment opportunities for women in Southern Asia, Northern Africa and Western Asia remain extremely low.

The target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed. The report urges governments to intensify efforts to get all children into school, especially those living in rural communities, and eliminate inequalities in education based on gender and ethnicity.

Greater political will must be mustered to reduce maternal mortality, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, according to the report. Rapid acceleration of progress is needed to bring improved sanitation – toilets or latrines – to the 1.4 billion people still lacking, or the 2015 sanitation target will be missed. And slum improvements are barely keeping pace with the rapid growth of developing country cities.

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Sha Zukang, described the report as the most comprehensive global MDG assessment to date. It is based, he said, on a set of data prepared by over 20 organizations both within and outside the United Nations system, including the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

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