

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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Progress on development goals in Latin America and the Caribbean faces risk of reversal as impact of global economic turmoil hits

6 JULY – Latin America and the Caribbean remain on track to reach some of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets by the 2015 deadline, but the on-going global economic and financial crisis threatens to derail the progress the region has made so far, according to a UN progress report.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009, launched today in Geneva by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, says that the full repercussions of the global economic crisis have yet to be felt, and some of the progress observed before the crisis hit might slow or be reversed. The report indicates that there are areas where signs of the impact of the recent economic downturn are already visible.

Riding on the economic growth of the past decade, Latin America and the Caribbean made progress in the fight against extreme poverty from 1999 to 2005, with a reduction from 11 to 8 per cent of people living on less than \$1.25 a day. But it is now projected that in 2009, the number of people living in extreme poverty will be higher than anticipated before the crisis, which might dampen the positive trends observed in the region. And even if progress had continued at the same pace, the rate of change was too slow for the region to reach the poverty target by 2015.

MAJOR CHALLENGES, DESPITE PROGRESS

The report says that the encouraging trend in the eradication of hunger since the early 1990s — when the proportion of people in hunger decreased from 12 per cent in 1990-92 to 8 per cent in 2004-06 — was halted in 2008, largely as a result of higher food prices. And preliminary figures just released by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (not included in the report) put the number of people suffering from hunger in 2009 in the region at 53 million, 13 per cent higher than in 2008.

The region has made progress in reducing the proportion of children under five suffering from malnutrition, and if trends observed between 1990 and 2007 had continued uninterrupted, the region would be close already to reaching the target of cutting the proportion of underweight children by half. But progress is likely to be eroded by high food prices and economic turmoil.

Again, impressive strides have been made towards achieving universal primary school education, with 95 per cent of children enrolled. However, reaching those children still out of school has proven to be a challenge, as progress over the last few years has been slow.

NEW HURDLES FOR WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The report says that the Latin America and Caribbean region is leading the way among the developing world in efforts towards achieving gender parity in parliamentary representation—with 22 per cent of seats held by women in 2009, up from 15 per cent in 2000. There has also been progress in providing women equal opportunities in

education and work. The region has already reached the target of gender parity in education and has the highest share of women in paid employment outside agriculture (45 per cent in 2007) after the CIS countries.

The ongoing economic crisis, however, may create new hurdles for women's employment. The International Labour Organization estimates that, globally, 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.

The region also has a very good record in reducing the death rate of children under five, and is on track to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate by 2015. The rate decreased from 54 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, to 24 deaths in 2007.

Fallout from the global financial situation may include compromised funding for programmes to improve maternal health, the goal towards which there has been least progress so far. The report notes that most developing countries have already experienced a major reduction in donor funding for family planning on a per woman basis since the mid-1990s.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, maternal mortality is moderate, but progress observed between 1990 and 2005 was slow. It is encouraging, however, that access to antenatal care has increased significantly over the same period and that, with 83 per cent of women receiving at least four antenatal visits during their pregnancy (as recommended by the World Health Organization), the region has now the highest percentage among all developing regions.

On the negative side, the region has a very high adolescent fertility rate. The number of births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 is the second highest among all developing regions, after sub-Saharan Africa. Early pregnancies undermine girls' opportunity in education and their full social and economic advancement, says the report.

CONCERN OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

The Latin America and Caribbean region has already met the target of halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. However, huge disparities remain between urban and rural populations. Only 73 per cent of people in rural areas use an improved water source, compared with 97 per cent of urban dwellers.

Noting that greater priority must be given to preserving our natural resource base, the report warns that the world has not acted forcefully enough – or in a unified way – to combat climate change; fisheries are imperilled; forests, especially old-growth forests, are receding; and water scarcity has become a reality in a number of arid regions. Latin America and the Caribbean, together with sub-Saharan Africa, remains the region with the largest net loss of forests.

The Millennium Development Goals Report is the most comprehensive global MDG assessment to date. It is based on a set of data prepared by over 20 organizations both within and outside the United Nations system, including the World Bank and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The project is overseen by the UN Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

For more information, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals or <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/>

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