

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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Progress on extreme poverty grinding to a halt in South Asia, but gains reported by UN on key health and education goals

7 JULY, NEW DELHI – Progress against extreme poverty in Southern Asia -- slower than in most other regions of the world between 1999 and 2005 -- is in danger of disappearing altogether under pressure of global economic contraction and lost jobs, the UN reports today with the release of its annual report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Bright spots do emerge from the report: An 11 per cent gain in primary school enrolment between 2000 and 2007 and a big victory for girls, moving from 84 per 100 boys in 1999 enrolment to 95 girls per 100 boys in 2007; and a drop in tuberculosis prevalence from 543 cases per 100,000 people in 1990 to 268 cases in 2007.

Countries in Southern Asia have largely escaped the increase in hunger rates seen in other parts of the world since 2007, according to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2009, and India has even made inroads against hunger in the face of rising prices.

But holding steady against hunger is not a satisfactory option in a region which is second only to sub-Saharan Africa in the proportion of people who are undernourished (21 per cent in 2008), and ranks the worst in proportion of under-five-year-olds who are underweight (48 per cent in 2007).

Likewise, Southern Asia has achieved its MDG target of cutting in half the proportion of people in 1990 without access to water. But it is lagging behind in providing access to safe sanitation to its population, with 580 million people still without access. From 2006 to 2015, the region will need to more than double the number of people currently using toilets, latrines or other forms of improved sanitation.

JOBS THREATENED

Contractions in economic growth in most Southern Asian countries outside of India are expected to devastate jobs and incomes. The percentage of productively engaged people classified as being employed in vulnerable sectors may be as high as 84 per cent for women and 74 per cent for men, according to International Labour Organization projections for 2008.

Even in the earlier period of 1999 to 2005 -- overlapping portions of two economic booms -- Southern Asia recorded only a meagre 3 percentage point drop in extreme poverty rates, from 42 to 39 per cent.

Despite gains for girls in grade school enrolment, Southern Asian women remain at a huge disadvantage in job opportunities. Only 19 per cent of paid jobs in the region, outside of agricultural employment, are held by women. Moreover, maternal health conditions remain dismal. Scant reductions in maternal mortality still leave an estimated rate of 490 deaths per 100,000 live births. Southern Asia by itself accounts for one third of the world's maternal deaths, and it suffers the lowest level of antenatal care coverage among all developing regions, with only 36 per cent of women receiving the recommended four visits during their pregnancy.

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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