

PROGRESS OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Forty-eight indicators have been agreed upon in the United Nations system for measuring implementation of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Statistics for these indicators are compiled through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators led by the Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, of the United Nations Secretariat. These data, compiled from countries and estimated at regional level by the competent agencies, are made available through the United Nations Millennium Indicators Database (<http://millenniumindicators.un.org>).

<[Click here for data on LDCs in tables 1-19](#)>

Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1. Halve, between 1990 and 2025, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day

Indicator 1. Proportion of population below \$1(PPP) per day

Indicator 1A. Proportion of population below national poverty line

Indicator 2. Poverty gap ratio Indicator 3. Share of poorest quintile in national consumption

The World Bank's latest-year estimates for this indicator cover 22 of the 50 least developed countries (see annex table A1). Included are half of the LDCs in sub-Saharan Africa (17 of 34 countries) and half of the LDCs in Asia (5 of 10). No data are available for Haiti or the 5 Oceania LDCs.

In sub-Saharan Africa, relatively low rates of extreme poverty (less than 30 per cent) are found in Mauritania, Senegal and Tanzania, and high rates (over 55 per cent) in Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Zambia. The underweighted country average is 49 per cent.¹ This is substantially higher than the underweighted country average for LDCs in Asia of 30 per cent.

The World Bank publishes trend estimates for regions but not for countries. In sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, where 34 of the total of 54 countries or areas are LDCs, the rate of extreme poverty has actually increased slightly from 1990 to 2001, from 44.6 to 46.5 per cent. From this, it appears unlikely that the average rate in LDCs has decreased much if any. In Asia, Oceania and Haiti, economic and social circumstances among the LDCs and the sub-regions are too various to make any assessment as to the trend of extreme poverty in those LDCs.

The World Bank also reports data for the rate of poverty in these countries according to national poverty lines. (See also table A1.) The country averages based on national poverty lines for 22 LDCs in sub-Saharan Africa are fairly consistent with those based on the international extreme poverty line—52.5 compared to 49.3—but

¹ See annex table A1 for the countries for which no estimates are available.

significantly higher for the 5 LDCs in Asia—43.8 compared to 30. This difference may result from different conceptions of acceptable poverty lines in these two regions, or from methodological differences.

The difference in rates given in table A1 for national and international poverty lines in LDCs in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia may also be due to a different structure of consumption distribution. In sub-Saharan Africa the LDC average poverty gap, indicating the depth of extreme poverty, is 22.4, compared to 7.7 in Asia. The limited data available on the poorest quintile's share in national income or consumption (see table A2) also suggest that inequality is much greater in the LDCs of sub-Saharan Africa than Asia.

Target 2. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Indicator 4. Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age

Indicator 5. Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption

The United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization prepare estimates of children moderately or severely underweight from household and health surveys in developing countries. Table 1 gives the available aggregate estimates for this indicator and for indicator five, on the estimated proportion of population with inadequate calorie supply. Indicator 5 estimates are prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Overall, average rates of severely or moderately underweight children were lower around the year 2000 than rates of total population undernourished in Africa—27 per cent compared to 38 per cent—and in Haiti—28 per cent compared to 50 per cent—but the reverse was the case in Asia—40 per cent of children compared to 32 per cent of the total population. Trend estimates are not available for this series.

The FAO benchmark estimates of percentage of population undernourished based on insufficiency of calorie supply are available for 1990/1992 and 1998/2000. They cover most of the LDCs except those in Oceania.

These estimates show levels of undernutrition of less than 25 per cent (still a significant proportion) in only 11 countries and an average rate in sub-Saharan Africa of 38 per cent and Asia of 32 per cent. Rates of 50 per cent or more, with no significant progress since 1990/1992, were found in five countries (Afghanistan, Burundi, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea and Zambia).

Eleven countries recorded significant decreases (5 or more percentage points) in the rate of undernutrition while nine recorded significant increases (5 or more percentage points). In three countries, the rate of undernutrition increased by 9 or more percentage points—Burundi, Chad, DR Congo and Tanzania. Overall, there was no significant change in the average undernutrition rate in the least developed countries of sub-Saharan Africa and a very small estimated improvement of 1.7 percentage points in those of Asia.

Goal 2. Universal primary education

Goal 3. Gender equality and empowerment of women

Least developed countries made considerable progress in achieving universal primary education in education and literacy between 1990 and years around 2000 but are still far short of achieving the goals in most LDCs in Africa and in Haiti, and in several of the LDCs in Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Yemen. Only a few data are available for the five LDCs of Oceania, but these indicate general achievement of these goals.

Most of the least developed countries in all regions have made good progress in achieving gender equality in primary education and literacy but lag somewhat at the secondary level and even more at the tertiary level. At the tertiary level in the LDCs of Africa, there are on average fewer than 50 women per 100 men enrolled.

Women participation in non-agricultural wage employment was very low in nearly all of the LDCs in all regions in 1990, less than 30 per cent of the total wage employment outside of agriculture. To date, 2000 data for this series are only available for a few LDCs. The participation of women in parliament continued at very low levels in 2003, on average 12 per cent in African LDCs, ten percent in Asia and two in Oceania. In Asian LDCs, however, ten per cent in 2003 was a significant increase from five per cent in 1990. Among the African LDCs, women's participation actually declined in seven countries.

See details in tables A3, A4, A5

Goal 4. Child mortality

Average under-five and infant mortality rates declined in the African LDCs by 10-12 percentage points from 1990 to 2002, but nearly twice that in the Asia LDCs and Haiti, according to available estimates. Rates in the Oceania LDCs were nearly half those in the Asia LDCs, or even lower. Without significant improvements in the African trends, those LDCs would at best reach levels in 2015 currently found in the Asian LDCs, far short of the possible and desirable targets.

See details in table A 6.

Goal 5. Maternal health

Estimated ratios of maternal mortality remained well over 500 per 100,000 live births for most of the African LDCs, and for some of the LDCs of the other regions as well, such as Haiti, Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Yemen and Tuvalu. One of the main interventions widely endorsed to reduce these very high ratios is the presence of skilled, qualified attendants at birth but the proportion of births with skilled attendants is still less than half in most of the least developed countries except Oceania.

See details in table A7.

Goal 6. HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has been particularly deadly in the African least developed countries and in Haiti, with 17 of those 35 countries with estimated infection rates over four per cent and six of those over nine per cent. In the Asian LDCs, Cambodia, Myanmar and Nepal have high rates of infection mainly in high-risk groups such as intravenous drug users and prostitutes, posing considerable danger of spreading to the general population.

Malaria infection rates are also very high among virtually all of the African LDCs and are the major cause of death among young children. Malaria is a much lower risk in the LDCs of other regions.

See details in tables A8, A9, A10.

Goal 7. Environmental sustainability

Deforestation is occurring in nearly all of the least developed countries. The average of loss was about two percentage points over the decade 1990-2000 but the rate varies widely among countries, as does the extent of forest cover. Least developed countries most heavily affected are Benin, Burundi, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Malawi, Sudan, Togo, Uganda and Zambia in Africa, and Haiti, Myanmar, Nepal and Samoa.

Carbon dioxide emissions per capita are also rising rapidly in the least developed countries. From 1990 to 1999, they increased by an average of 23 per cent in the LDCs of Africa and by 135 per cent in those of Asia.

Looking at improved water supply, a modest average improvement is found in the rural areas of African least developed countries, from 44 to 51 per cent, but with an offsetting decline in rapidly growing urban areas, from 79 to 75 per cent, and general declines in Haiti. Estimates show no appreciable overall average changes in access to improved sanitation in these countries except in urban areas of Haiti. Trend data are not available on water and sanitation in the Asian and Oceania LDCs, but levels of access in 2000 were in all cases higher than in the African LDCs and Haiti.

See details in tables A11, A12, A13.

Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

Includes: a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally

*Target 13. Address the special needs of the least developed countries
Includes: tariff and quota free access for the least developed countries' exports;
enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) and
cancellation of official bilateral debts; and more generous official development
assistance (ODA) for countries committed to poverty reduction*

Official development assistance

Indicator 33. Net official development assistance, total and to the least developed countries as a percentage of OECD/DAC donors' gross national income

Table 2. Net official development assistance to developing and least developed countries, total and as a percentage of OECD/DAC donors' gross national income

	1990	2001	2002
	(\$US billions)		
(a) Annual total assistance			
To all developing countries	53.0	52.3	57.0
To least developed countries	16.7	13.6	17.3
Percentage to LDCs	31.5	26.0	30.4
(b) Share of OECD/DAC donors' gross national income	1990	2001	2002
	(Percentage)		
To all developing countries	0.33	0.22	0.23
To least developed countries	0.09	0.05	0.06

Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003 Development Co-operation Report, "Statistical annex".

For country detail on donors and recipients, *see tables A14 and A15.*

Indicator 34. Proportion of total bilateral, sector-allocable ODA of OECD/DAC donors to basic social services (basic education, primary health care, nutrition, safe water and sanitation)

1995-1996	2001-2002
(Percentage)	
8.1	17.3

Table 3. Proportion of total bilateral, sector-allocable ODA of OECD/DAC donors to basic social services (basic education, primary health care, nutrition, safe water and sanitation)

Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *2003 Development Co-operation Report*, "Statistical annex".

Data refer to all developing country aid recipients. Separate data are not available for LDCs.

Indicator 35. Proportion of bilateral official development assistance of OECD/DAC donors that is untied

Table 4. Proportion of bilateral official development assistance of OECD/DAC donors that is untied

1990	2001
(Percentage)	
67.6	79.1

Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *2003 Development Co-operation Report*, "Statistical annex".

Data refer to all developing country aid recipients. Separate data are not available for LDCs.

Indicators 36 and 37. These indicators pertain to landlocked developing countries and small island developing States only.

Trade

Indicator 38. Proportion of total developed country imports (by value and excluding arms) from the least developed countries, admitted free of duty

Table 5. Proportion of total developed country imports (by value and excluding arms) from the least developed countries, admitted free of duty

	1996	2000	2001	2002
	(Percentage)			
(a) Excluding arms				
Developing countries	54.8	62.8	65.7	..
Least developed countries	67.9	78.0	77.4	78.5
(b) Excluding arms and oil				
Developing countries	56.8	65.1	66.1	..
Least developed countries	81.1	70.5	69.1	..

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and World Trade Organization, based on data and information compiled by the International Trade Corporation, UNCTAD, WTO and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division.

Indicator 39. Average tariffs imposed by developed countries on agricultural products and textiles and clothing from developing countries

Table 6. Average tariffs imposed by developed countries on agricultural products and textiles and clothing from developing countries

	1996	2000	2001	2002
	(Percentage)			
(a) Agriculture				
Developing countries	10.5	9.4	9.9	10.2
Least developed countries	4.3	2.5	3.3	3.2
(b) Textiles				
Developing countries	8.1	7.3	7.4	6.7
Least developed countries	4.2	3.8	3.7	3.6
(c) Clothing				
Developing countries	12.2	11.5	12.2	11.5
Least developed countries	8.5	8.1	8.0	8.3

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and World Trade Organization, based on data and information compiled by the International Trade Corporation, UNCTAD, WTO and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division.

Indicator 40. Agricultural support estimate for OECD countries as a percentage of their gross domestic product

Table 7. Agricultural support estimate for OECD countries as a percentage of their gross domestic product.

1996	2000	2001	2002
(\$US billions)		(% of GDP)	
351	318	1.9	1.2

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Agriculture Policies in OECD Countries, Monitoring and Evaluation*, Paris (annual).

Indicator 41. Official Development Assistance provided to help build trade capacity

Table 8. ODA provided to help build trade capacity

Least developed countries

	2001	2002
	as % of ODA	as % of ODA
Africa	2.8	1.3
Latin America and the Caribbean (Haiti only)	4.8	4.0
Asia	0.6	1.4
Oceania	0.5	4.4
All least developed countries	2.3	1.5

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *2003 Development Co-operation Report*, "Statistical annex".

For country details, see table A16.

Debt sustainability

Indicators 42 and 43. Total cumulative number of countries that have reached their decision points, number that have reached their completion and debt relief committed under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Table 9. Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative participation and debt relief committed, least developed countries.

	2000	2003	2004
	(Cumulative numbers)		
Reached decision point	19	20	21
Reached completion point	1	7	7

Source: International Monetary Fund and the World Bank

Total debt relief committed, cumulative, 1/2/2000-23/2/2004, \$US 51.691, of which \$US 36.949 billion for least developed countries

For country details, *see table A17*.

Indicator 44. Debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services in least developed countries

For country details, *see table A18*.

Youth unemployment and access to new technologies.

Indicator 45. Unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 years, each sex and total in least developed countries

Almost no reliable data are available on youth unemployment in the least developed countries. The great majority of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, where there is little or no active labour market, or at best a highly seasonal market, and the traditional concepts of employment and unemployment have little relevance. In urban areas, the labour market in the traditional sense hardly exists and the large population of young men and women are chronically underemployed, with weak attachments to sporadic and unorganized informal economic activity, again making systematic and meaningful statistical measurement nearly impossible with traditional statistical concepts and methods. Recognizing these problems, the International Labour Organization is developing improved methods of measurement for this target in future years.

Indicator 46. Proportion of population in least developed countries with access to affordable essential drugs on a sustainable basis

The World Health Organization has only recently begun to compile rough estimates of availability of essential drugs in least developed countries. These are prepared by national experts on the basis of a global list of essential drugs, adapted in countries to each country's social and economic circumstances. The results from studies carried out in 1995 and 1997 are being analyzed by WHO and new methods and estimates are being prepared. In all of the least developed countries including Haiti but excluding Oceania, where almost no data are estimated, and uniformly across the different regions, these estimates indicate less than half the population has access to essential drugs in two thirds of the countries and in none is estimated access greater than 80 per cent.

Indicators 47 and 48. Telephone lines and cellular subscribers per 100 population, and Internet users per 100 population in least developed countries

Table 10. Telephone and cellular services and Internet users in the least developed countries

	Telephone lines and cellular subscriber per 100 population		Internet users per 100 population
	1990	2001	2001
Africa	0.3	1.3	0.2
Latin America and the Caribbean (Haiti only)	0.7	2.1	0.4
Asia	0.3	1.0	0.1
Oceania	1.8	3.6	1.5

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, DESA, *Millennium Indicators database*. Internet site at <http://millenniumindicators.un.org>. Based on data compiled by the International Telecommunication Union.

For country details, see *table A19*