

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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Africa's progress towards development targets under threat as impacts of economic crisis mount

DRIVE TO REDUCE HUNGER IN JEOPARDY

6 JULY, JOHANNESBURG – Ambitious plans to tackle hunger in Africa are now under threat because of the on-going financial and economic crisis, warns a United Nations report released today.

The study, launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Geneva, says that the current rate of helping undernourished people and underweight children is not good enough to meet the target set for 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). And experts fear that fragile countries in sub-Saharan Africa will be hit the hardest.

The proportion of hungry people in sub-Saharan Africa was driven down from 32 per cent in the early 1990s to about 28 per cent over a fourteen-year period. But as a result of the recent food crisis, it had increased to 29 per cent last year.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009 projects that overall poverty rates in the developing world will still fall this year, but at a much slower pace than before the onset of the economic crisis.

The encouraging trends that were observed up to 2007 in the decrease of the working poor and those in vulnerable employment – self-employed or unpaid workers in family businesses – might also reverse or at best stagnate, says the report. According to projections by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the proportion of working poor – those who are employed but do not earn enough for themselves and their families to rise above the poverty line – in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to rise back to its 1997 level of 64 per cent.

The MDG Report tracks progress on the commitments made by world leaders at the UN-sponsored Millennium Summit in 2000, which are organized around eight targeted goals.

The situation is particularly alarming with regard to maternal health, says the study. African women face the highest risk as mothers among all developing regions: half of the world's maternal deaths occur in this region. More than half of all births occur without the assistance of trained personnel and less than half of pregnant women receive proper prenatal care. Reducing maternal deaths is the goal on which the least progress has been made globally, but there are signs that the international community, UN agencies and philanthropic foundations are mobilizing to tackle this problem.

PROMISING NEWS

The MDG Report also contains some promising news for Africa, applauding intensified measures to prevent child deaths that have started to yield some results. By 2007, 73 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa were immunized against measles, up from 55 per cent in 2000. Insecticide-treated anti-malaria bed nets are also reaching African chil-

dren more widely—their use increased from 2 per cent in 2000 to 20 per cent in 2006, though the region still has the highest child mortality: in 2007, close to one in seven children died before their fifth birthday.

Prevalence of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa has leveled off and access to treatment has improved. More HIV-positive pregnant women are receiving treatment to prevent transmission to their babies. But, the report warns, sub-Saharan Africa is still home to 67 per cent of people living with HIV. Over one third of new HIV infections and 38 per cent of AIDS deaths in 2007 occurred in the south of the continent alone in 2007.

In another positive account, the report says that major breakthroughs in education have been achieved in sub-Saharan Africa, with enrolment increasing by 15 percentage points from 2000 to 2007. But still, almost half of the 72 million children out of school worldwide live in sub-Saharan Africa. And these numbers of out-of-school children are dropping far too slowly for the education target to be reached by 2015.

Sanitation coverage in sub-Saharan Africa, which was dramatically low in 1990, has improved markedly, with the proportion of people using toilets, latrines or other forms of improved sanitation increasing by over 80 per cent since then.

Although donor countries have recognized the need to increase aid, especially to Africa, total aid remains well below the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of donor country gross national income, according to the report. And with the global economy contracting in 2009, even if the majority of donors' commitments remain in force, the absolute amount of such commitments will diminish.

Looking at progress since the 2005 Gleneagles summit, where G-8 members projected that their commitments, combined with those of other donors, would double official development assistance (ODA) to Africa by 2010, the MDG Report says that preliminary data for 2008 show that, excluding debt relief, bilateral ODA to sub-Saharan Africa rose by 10 per cent in real terms from the previous year. Despite this progress, donors will need to rapidly increase their aid to Africa if they are to fulfil their 2005 pledges.

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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