



Briefing Paper 7

ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Despite considerable progress by many least developed countries in improving education, health care, fresh water sources, sanitation and energy, a steep climb lies ahead in achieving universal access to these standard-of-living basics.

More than half of the population in LDCs still lives in extreme poverty, with large numbers of underweight children, high maternal mortality rates, and constrained access to water, sanitation and energy. Huge gaps between urban and rural areas, rapidly expanding populations, and persistent inequalities with respect to gender and ethnicity further hamper fulfilment of the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Here are some of the latest facts and figures* on efforts to move towards universal access to essential services:

EDUCATION

- Primary school enrolment ratios in the least developed countries jumped from just over 52 per cent in 1991 to almost 79 per cent in 2008 — but are still far short of the MDG target of universal enrolment.
- Girls' secondary school enrolment ratios in LDCs improved substantially from 58 girls to 81 girls for every 100 boys between 1991 and 2008. But according to the 2011 *Report of Eminent Persons* acting on behalf of the least developed countries, only about a quarter of LDC secondary school-age children were enrolled in school.
- In Bhutan, the Gambia and Myanmar, more than 50 per cent of children were enrolled in secondary school in 2008 — close to the average enrolment rate in non-LDC countries.
- Literacy rates of 15-24 year olds increased from 56 per cent in 1985-94 to almost 70 per cent in 2005-8. But the gap between



Primary school children in class, Harar, Ethiopia | UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

men (75 per cent) and women (65 per cent) in the most recent period remains significant. It should also be noted that literacy rates vary widely among the 48 least developed countries.



The abolition of school fees at primary school level has led to a surge in enrolment in a number of LDCs. In Tanzania, primary school fees were dropped in 2005, and the enrolment ratio doubled to 99.6 per cent by 2008, compared to 1999 rates. But the surge in enrolment has brought a new set of challenges: providing enough teachers and classrooms. To meet demand, Tanzania has embarked on an ambitious programme of education reform, building 54,000 classrooms and hiring 18,000 additional teachers over a four-year period.

HEALTH

- In ten LDCs (Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Mali, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia), more than 50 per cent of the population were using insecticide-

* Unless otherwise noted, all statistics are from the *MDG Report 2010*, compiled by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



Women carrying water near Bandiagara, Mali | UN Photo/John Isaac

treated bed nets to prevent malaria between 2007 and 2009, and five LDCs (Eritrea, Madagascar, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Zambia) reduced their confirmed malaria cases or malaria admissions and deaths by more than 50 per cent in recent years. [*World Malaria Report 2010*, WHO]

- Against steep odds, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Laos, Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal and Timor-Leste have reduced their child mortality rate by 50 per cent or more since 1990. However, according to the Eminent Persons, child mortality rates are falling much more slowly in the LDCs overall than in other low or lower-middle income countries.
- The percentage of the population aged 15 to 49 with HIV in the least developed countries has dropped only slightly, from 2 per cent in 2002 to 1.8 per cent in 2008. But the proportion of HIV-infected people who received antiretroviral drugs in LDCs grew from just 13 per cent in 2005 to 46 per cent in 2008.
- The percentage of women aged 15 to 49, married or in union, who were using contraception in LDCs more than doubled in the last two decades, from 17 per cent in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2007.



In 2006, Bangladesh conducted the world's largest-ever measles campaign, vaccinating 33.5 million children between the ages of nine months and 10 years over a 20-day period. Last year, the country launched another two-week national polio and measles immunization campaign, targeting about 20 million children under the age of five. In order to ensure widespread participation, community health workers made loud-speaker announcements and door-to-door visits, advising families about the importance of immunization. The child mortality rate in Bangladesh dropped by 65 per cent between 1990 and 2009.

WATER AND SANITATION

- Just 62 per cent of the population in least developed countries were able to access safe drinking water in 2008. While 80 per cent of urban residents had access to safe drinking water, the

rate was only 54 per cent in the countryside.

- Only 36 per cent of the LDC population were using adequate sanitation facilities in 2008.



To provide an estimated 60 per cent of schools with water, toilets and latrines, and to promote safe hygiene practices in school, the Government of Mali, with support from UNICEF and other partners, developed a National Strategic Plan for the Promotion of Hygiene Education in Schools. For children at Koutienso Primary School near the town of Segou, life at school has completely changed: A new pump provides safe drinking water, latrines are within reach, and soap and clean water allow children to wash their hands. Girls have separate latrines from boys, boosting their school attendance and chances of completing their education.

ENERGY

- More than 70 per cent of people in the least developed countries lack access to electricity.
- More than 80 per cent of the population in the LDCs primarily rely on solid fuels such as wood, charcoal and dung for cooking and heating, compared to 56 per cent in the developing world overall, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Every year, 2 million people worldwide die from indoor air pollution caused by burning solid fuels.



Thanks to the 100-kilowatt micro hydropower plant built at Bom Khola, Nepal, by the local community in collaboration with their Government, UNDP and the World Bank, 193 households now have electricity in the town of Lukla, often known as the gateway to the Everest region. Many houses have been converted into hotels and lodges, and residents have been enabled to open restaurants, retail shops, tailoring and ironing businesses, a movie theatre and an Internet café. Inaugurated in April 2010, the Bom Khola plant is also saving trees, as many fewer are cut down for firewood.

The town of Lukla was developed for tourism, following construction of a hydropower plant in Bom Khola, Nepal. | UNDP Photo/Sangita Khadka

