

The Millennium Development Goals Report



UNITED NATIONS

2007

EMBARGO Until 2 July 2007 12:01 a.m. local time

Press Release

Progress Towards Development Targets Is Mixed, UN Finds Secretary-General Says Political Leaders Must Honour Commitments

UNITED NATIONS, GENEVA, 2 July – Halfway to a 2015 deadline, there has been clear progress towards implementing the Millennium Development Goals, a set of global commitments to lift millions of people out of extreme poverty. But their overall success is still far from assured, a progress report by the United Nations has found.

“The results presented in this report suggest that there have been some gains and that success is still possible in most parts of the world,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declares in the foreword to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2007, which was launched here today. “But they also point to how much remains to be done.”

The commitments, made by virtually every country on Earth at the UN-sponsored Millennium Summit in 2000, are organized around the eight targeted Goals.

The Goals call for quantified, time-bound progress in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

There has been significant progress toward the target of halving extreme poverty by 2015, the report found, noting that the proportion of people worldwide living on the equivalent of a dollar a day has dropped from 32 per cent (1.25 billion in 1990) to 19 per cent (980 million in 2004).

If that trend continues, the report estimates, “the MDG poverty reduction target will be met for the world as a whole and for most regions.”

It added that it found reason for hope in the fact that some progress is being made “even in those regions where the challenges are greatest.”

For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of desperately poor people has “leveled off,” and the region’s poverty rate has fallen by nearly six percentage points since 2000.

At the same time, the report says, a number of African countries are demonstrating that rapid, wide-scale progress towards the MDGs is possible when strong government leadership, sound policies and practical strategies for promoting public investments are combined with adequate financial and technical support from the international community.

There is also positive news from Asia, where rapid economic growth has put the region comfortably on track to achieve the MDG poverty target.

The report also cites these other signs of progress:

- More children in developing countries are going to school. Enrolment in primary education in developing countries rose from 80 per cent in 1991 to 88 per cent in 2005.
- Women’s struggle for equal rights has gained ground as a result of their growing involvement in politics and government, but progress overall has been slow.

- Child mortality has declined worldwide, in large part because of effective and inexpensive interventions to save children from such threats as measles.
- There has been a major expansion of key interventions to control malaria.
- The tuberculosis epidemic is on the verge of decline, although progress has not been fast enough to put the world on track to meet the target of halving prevalence and death rates by 2015.
- Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, causing profound climate changes that threaten human well-being. But there has been progress in the development of sustainable energy technologies.

But there is another side to the statistics cited in the report, and they paint a far less encouraging picture.

The report found that the most impressive reductions in extreme poverty were in Southern, Southeastern and Eastern Asia. But in Western Asia, the poverty rate more than doubled during the same period. And despite the gains in sub-Saharan Africa, that region's poverty gap remains the highest in the world.

Other severe problems also remain, according to the report. Over half a million women die annually of preventable and treatable complications in pregnancy and childbirth; there has been little progress in halving the proportion of underweight children; and AIDS deaths worldwide rose to 2.9 million last year from 2.2 million in 2001, while more than 15 million children have lost one or both parents to the disease.

Moreover, half the population of the developing world still has no access to basic sanitation, and the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change are already being felt.

Among the reasons for the lack of progress is that the benefits of economic growth are not being equally shared, the Secretary-General writes. Also in some countries, efforts to meet the MDGs are being undermined by insecurity and instability caused by such factors as armed conflict and HIV/AIDS.

The UN chief also pointed to the failure of most developed countries to live up to their commitments to provide "adequate financing within the global partnership for development and its framework for mutual accountability."

"In particular," the Secretary-General says in the report's foreword, "the lack of any significant increase in Official Development Assistance since 2004 makes it impossible, even for well-governed countries, to meet the MDGs." The leading industrial nations pledged to double aid to Africa by 2010 at their meeting in Gleneagles in 2005, but total official aid declined in real terms by 5.1 per cent between 2005 and 2006. Only five donor countries have reached or exceeded the United Nations target of allocating 0.7 per cent of their Gross National Income for aid.

"There is a clear need for political leaders to take urgent and concerted action," the UN chief writes.

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, José Antonio Ocampo, described the report as the most comprehensive global MDG assessment to date. It is based, he said, on a set of data prepared by over 20 organizations both within and outside the United Nations System, including the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

For more information and media contacts, please see www.un.org/millenniumgoals