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Latin America and Caribbean move ahead on water, health and equality for women and girls

But anti-poverty goal results disappoint, UN report says

MEXICO CITY, 11 September 2008 – There have been improvements in several dimensions of social well-being in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the region is making good progress towards achieving a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established by the United Nations in 2000. However, it is falling short of the over-arching goal of reducing poverty by half, according to a United Nations report released today.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 provides statistical evidence of the progress that the region has made in strengthening basic education and health and moving towards gender equality.

From 87 per cent in 1990, the region's total net enrolment ratio in primary education rose to 95 per cent in 2007. However, almost all of this improvement took place in the 1990s and the region appears to be struggling to fully achieve the goal of universal primary education. Nevertheless, the high total enrolment reflects the fact that almost all girls, as well as boys, attend primary school. At the secondary level, there are more girls enrolled than boys, underlining the high degree of gender parity that has been achieved in education in the region.

The UN report also points to good progress on the health front. A full 92 per cent of the population has access to improved sources of drinking water, up from 84 per cent in 1990. This means that the region has already achieved the MDG of reducing by half the proportion of the population without access to clean drinking water. Progress towards the corresponding goal for sanitation has been less rapid, although the target should still be reached by 2015 – 79 per cent of the population now have improved sanitation facilities, compared to 68 per cent in 1990.

Such advances have contributed to a decline in the number of deaths of children under five years of age – from 55 per 1000 births in 1990 to 27 in 2006. Another factor contributing to this success is near-universal vaccination against measles. The latest data show that 93 per cent of children in the region now receive this inoculation, compared to about three quarters in 1990.

In another case of a successful health intervention, the proportion of mothers-to-be who were attended to by skilled health care personnel when giving birth rose from 68 per cent in 1990 to 86 per cent in 2006. This helped to reduce maternal mortality from 180 per 1000 births in 1990 to 130 in 2005. Nevertheless, this figure remains unacceptably high and points to the need for further strengthening of health services, particularly in the poorer countries in Central America.

The region has a mixed environmental record. Economic growth has brought an increase in carbon dioxide emissions, from 1 billion tons in 1990 to 1.4 billion tons in 2007, partly because of deforestation. Reflecting governments' desire to combat environmental degradation, the proportion of the region's sea and land resources that is protected increased from 7.3 per cent in 1990 to 18.8 per cent in 2007.

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Progress towards gender parity is also being made in public governance. The proportion of parliamentary seats held by women almost doubled from 11.9 per cent in 1990 to 22.2 per cent in 2008.

The Millennium Development Goals Report, an annual assessment of regional progress towards the Goals, reflects the most comprehensive, up-to-date data compiled by over 25 organizations both within and outside the UN System. Supervised and coordinated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Report is produced at the request of the General Assembly. A complete set of the data used to prepare the report is available at http://mdgs.un.org.

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