

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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Asia leads world with sharp drop in poverty, but Southern Asia lags in nutrition, sanitation and gender equality

UN progress report on Millennium Development Goals highlights successes and challenges facing the region in lead-up to September Summit

(Bangkok/New Delhi, 23 June) The sharpest reductions in poverty worldwide continue to be recorded in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, where the Millennium Development Goals target of halving extreme poverty has already been met, while most of Southern Asia is in danger of missing the target, according to a United Nations progress report released today.

The percentage of people living on less than \$1.25 a day in Eastern Asia dropped from 60 per cent in 1990 to just 16 per cent in 2005, and from 39 to 19 per cent in South-Eastern Asia. Poverty rates in China are expected to fall to around 5 per cent by 2015.

While India is expected to reduce its poverty rate from 51 per cent in 1990 to 24 per cent in 2015 – slashing its number of extremely poor by 188 million – progress in the rest of Southern Asia was slow and not sufficient to cut poverty in half by the 2015 target date, the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* finds.

Southern Asia also has a large percentage of people in so-called vulnerable employment, characterized by inadequate earnings, substandard working conditions and a lack of formal work arrangements and benefits. With 77 per cent of people employed as either own-account or unpaid family workers, Southern Asia has the second-largest rate of vulnerable employment among all regions, next to sub-Saharan Africa.

SLOW PROGRESS AGAINST HUNGER

In Eastern Asia, after a striking drop in the prevalence of hunger in the 1990s, the rate of malnourishment has stalled at 10 per cent between 2000 and 2007. South-Eastern Asia, which was already close to the target for cutting the hunger rate in half against 1990 levels, made additional progress – but not as rapid as its rate of poverty reduction. In Southern Asia, the prevalence of hunger actually increased between 2000-2002 and 2005-2007, from 20 to 21 per cent.

Southern Asia has the highest rate of child malnutrition in the world, according to the report, with 46 per cent of children younger than five years underweight in 2008, down a negligible 5 percentage points from 51 per cent in 1990. Malnutrition in children is often linked to both a lack of quality food and inadequate water and sanitation services, which lead to frequent diarrheal diseases. In Southern Asia, feeding practices are poor, and nearly two-thirds of the population lack access to improved sanitation, such as toilets or latrines, with almost half practicing open defecation – the highest rate among all regions.

In Eastern Asia, child malnutrition was reduced to 7 per cent of children in 2008 – well below half of its 1990 level – and South-Eastern Asia is on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals target by 2015.

A different picture emerges for child mortality, where, despite some progress in all three sub-regions, Asia is not on track to meet the target by 2015. Most progress was made in Southern Asia, where the number of child deaths per 1,000 live births dropped from 121 in 1990 to 74 in 2008.

UNEVEN PROGRESS ON EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

Southern Asia also made strong progress on access to primary education, according to the report. The sub-region reached 90 per cent enrolment in 2008, up from 79 per cent in 1999, and is on track to meet the target of universal primary education by 2015. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, however, although school enrolment has always been relatively high, there was little progress since 1999 and, if trends continue, the two sub-regions will not meet the target by 2015.

With regard to gender equality, progress has also been uneven. According to the report, girls in Southern Asia have been catching up in primary education, but still lag behind boys in secondary and tertiary education, with 87 and 76 girls per 100 boys enrolled, respectively, in 2008. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, the gender gap has been closed at all three levels, with as many girls as boys enrolled in school.

In Southern Asia, gender inequality in education is mirrored by inequality in the labour market, the report notes. Only 20 per cent of those employed outside agriculture are women. And only 9 per cent of senior or managerial positions are held by women – the lowest percentage among all regions. Progress was made in political participation, with the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women reaching 18 per cent in 2010, up from only 7 per cent in 2000 in Southern Asia.

On environmental sustainability, large disparities remain in terms of CO2 emissions in Asia. While all sub-regions experienced exceptional growth in emissions over the period 1990-2007, Eastern Asia, mainly due to China's emissions, emerges as the region with the highest per-capita emissions in the developing world.

At a September UN summit, world leaders will seek agreement on an action agenda to build on successes and close the gaps in achieving all the MDGs by the target year of 2015. More than 100 Heads of State and Government are expected, along with leaders from the private sector, foundations and civil society organizations.

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 UN and international agencies. Produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the report has been designated by the UN General Assembly as an official input to the MDG summit. A complete set of the data used to prepare the report is available at <http://mdgs.un.org>

For more information, press materials and inter-agency media contact list, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals

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