

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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Sub-Saharan Africa continues to enrol primary students at a rapid pace, but poverty stays high and incoming aid is falling below target

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

(Dakar / Johannesburg / Lagos / Nairobi, 23 June) Sub-Saharan Africa has achieved the fastest progress among all developing regions in making primary education available to school-age children – improving from 58 per cent enrolment in 1999 to 76 per cent in 2008, the UN reported today.

Moreover, with consistently high economic growth rates over most of the decade, the region has shown some resistance to the effects of the global recession. The percentage of those employed relative to the total population remained steady from 2008 to 2009 at 65 per cent – slightly higher than the ratio at the end of the 1990s, and better than in any other developing region outside of Asia and the Pacific. Declines in output per worker however have contributed to poorer working conditions, worsening the plight of workers in a region where labour productivity was already low preceding the economic crisis.

Some trends in the international environment have favoured growth, such as the easing of external debt and better access to rich-country markets for developing and least developed countries (33 of the region's 50 countries are classified by the UN as least developed). A surge in mobile phone coverage and broadband Internet access – albeit from very low base lines – has accompanied the economic expansion.

But growth has not yet translated into widespread improvements in living standards, and poverty rates remain stubbornly high, according to the United Nations *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, released today by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York, and in regions around the world.

TARGET OF HALVING EXTREME POVERTY IN JEAPORDY

Overall, more than half (51 per cent) of sub-Saharan Africans were living on an income of less than \$1.25 a day in 2005, down only seven points from 58 per cent in 1990. Based on World Bank projections, sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to reach the target of cutting the rate of extreme poverty (benchmarked at \$1.25 a day) in half between 1990 and 2015.

The downward trend in employment classified as “vulnerable” that was gathering momentum since the year 2000, moreover, was interrupted by the economic crisis, and the share of workers in the region in these precarious positions – labouring in the informal sector or without benefits – is estimated to have increased from 75 per cent in 2008 to 77 per cent in 2009. The International Labour Organization projects that sub-Saharan Africa had the highest working poor rate among all regions in 2009 (the share of employed workers who are in households whose members live below the \$1-a-day poverty line), and that this increased from 58 per cent in 2008 to 64 per cent last year.

The slowdown in economic growth since 2008 also has placed pressure on budgets of major donor countries, and some have reduced or postponed the pledges they made for 2010. The slowdown in aid growth could especially affect Africa.

Despite donor pledges at the 2005 G8 Summit in Gleneagles, United Kingdom, to double official development assistance (ODA) to Africa by 2015, the UN report estimates that only about \$11 billion out of the \$25 billion increase envisaged will be forthcoming. The shortfall is due mainly to underperformance of some European donors who traditionally earmark large shares of their aid to Africa. Preliminary data show that bilateral ODA to Africa as a whole rose by a mere 3 per cent in real terms between 2008 and 2009.

Despite some progress, gender disparities in the region remain large, especially with regard to education and work. The gender gap is the second largest among all regions in primary school enrolment (91 girls per 100 boys) and the largest in secondary school enrolment (79). Eighty-four per cent of employed women are own-account workers or work without pay within a family, as compared to 71 per cent of men.

FORMIDABLE HEALTH CHALLENGES

The *MDG Report 2010* shows that with concentrated effort, some of the poorest countries in the region have achieved striking progress in reducing mortality of children under five years of age. But as of 2008, the region still accounted for half of the 8.8 million child deaths worldwide, with the highest levels of mortality in Western and Central Africa.

The region also remains the most affected by HIV, with 72 per cent of worldwide new infections in 2008, although the UN report shows considerable progress in meeting the target of MDG Goal 6, to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Among the remaining challenges are improving public knowledge about the disease and increasing the use of condoms.

In 2008, 89 per cent of malaria deaths in the world occurred in Africa, but control efforts are being stepped up. All countries with trend data show very large increases in the use of insecticide-treated bed nets. Also, since 2003 many countries in the region have shifted their national policies to promote the use of artemisin-based combination therapies. Coverage differs widely across countries in the region – from 1 to 67 per cent.

Bringing water to rural households in sub-Saharan Africa remains a huge challenge. Only 47 per cent of the rural population is covered, as compared to 83 per cent in the cities. Gains in the share of households with access to toilets or latrines have been negligible – a mere 3 percentage point increase from a very low 28 per cent in 1990 to just 31 per cent in 2008.

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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