

# The Millennium Development Goals Report

2008



UNITED NATIONS



This report is based on a master set of data that has been compiled by an Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, in response to the wishes of the General Assembly for periodic assessment of progress towards the MDGs. The Group comprises representatives of the international organizations whose activities include the preparation of one or more of the series of statistical indicators that were identified as appropriate for monitoring progress towards the MDGs, as reflected in the list below. A number of national statisticians and outside expert advisers also contributed.

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NEW YORK, 2008

**END POVERTY 2015** *Make it happen*  
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS



# Foreword

In adopting the Millennium Declaration in the year 2000, the international community pledged to “spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty.” We are now more than halfway towards the target date – 2015 – by which the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved.

The MDGs encapsulate the development aspirations of the world as a whole. But they are not only development objectives; they encompass universally accepted human values and rights such as freedom from hunger, the right to basic education, the right to health and a responsibility to future generations. We have made important progress towards all eight goals, but we are not on track to fulfil our commitments. This report quantifies the achievements that have been registered and provides a measure of the tasks that remain.

These tasks have now become more challenging because the largely benign development environment that has prevailed since the early years of this decade, and that has contributed to the successes to date, is now threatened. We face a global economic slowdown and a food security crisis, both of uncertain magnitude and duration. Global warming has become more apparent. These developments will directly affect our efforts to reduce poverty: the economic slowdown will diminish the incomes of the poor; the food crisis will raise the number of hungry people in the world and push millions more into poverty; climate change will have a disproportionate impact on the poor. The need to address these concerns, pressing as they are, must not be allowed to detract from our long-term efforts to achieve the MDGs. On the contrary, our strategy must be to keep the focus on the MDGs as we confront these new challenges.

Some of the recent adverse developments reflect a failure to give these matters sufficient attention in the past. The imminent threat of increased hunger would have been lessened if recent decades had not been marked by a lack of investment in agricultural and rural development in developing countries.

Climate change would be a less immediate threat if we had kept pace with commitments to sustainable development enunciated again and again over the years. And the current global financial turmoil reveals systemic weaknesses that we have known about – and left inadequately addressed – for some time now.

The current troubled climate poses a risk that some advances in reducing poverty may unravel. There could also be setbacks with regard to other MDGs. Some gains, however, cannot be undone. A child will forever benefit from the primary education he or she might not otherwise have received. Many individuals are alive today thanks to a measles vaccination or antiretroviral therapy for AIDS. Millions of tons of ozone-depleting substances have been prevented from entering the atmosphere. External debts have been written-off, freeing resources for development. These and other examples provide ample evidence of what can and has been achieved with sound strategies backed by political will and financial and technical support.

Looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, there is no question that we can achieve the overarching goal: we can put an end to poverty. In almost all instances, experience has demonstrated the validity of earlier agreements on the way forward; in other words, we know what to do. But it requires an unswerving, collective, long-term effort. Time has been lost. We have wasted opportunities and face additional challenges, making the task ahead more difficult. It is now our responsibility to make up lost ground – and to put all countries, together, firmly on track towards a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable world.



BAN KI-MOON  
*Secretary-General, United Nations*

# Overview

The eight Millennium Development Goals have been adopted by the international community as a framework for the development activities of over 190 countries in ten regions; they have been articulated into over 20 targets and over 60 indicators. This Report summarizes progress towards the goals in each of the regions. However, any such synthesis inevitably masks the range and variety of development experiences in individual countries since the goals were adopted.

## Mid-point shows some key successes

The single most important success to date has been the unprecedented breadth and depth of the commitment to the MDGs – a global collective effort that is unsurpassed in 50 years of development experience. It is not only governments of developing countries and the international community that have adopted the MDGs as their framework for international development cooperation, but also the private sector and, critically, civil society in both developed and developing countries. Besides being advocates for the MDGs, private foundations in the developed countries have become an important source of funding for a wide range of activities intended to achieve them. NGOs in developing countries are increasingly engaged in undertaking these activities, as well as in monitoring the outcomes.

This global collective effort is yielding results. Adding more recent data to those contained in earlier Reports largely confirms the patterns identified previously. There has been sound progress in some MDG areas, even in some of the more challenging regions, and a number of targets are expected to be reached by their target dates, mostly 2015:

- The overarching goal of reducing absolute poverty by half is within reach for the world as a whole;
- In all but two regions, primary school enrolment is at least 90 per cent;
- The gender parity index in primary education is 95 per cent or higher in six of the 10 regions, including the most populous ones;
- Deaths from measles fell from over 750,000 in 2000 to less than 250,000 in 2006, and about 80 per cent of children in developing countries now receive a measles vaccine;
- The number of deaths from AIDS fell from 2.2 million in 2005 to 2.0 million in 2007, and the number of people newly infected declined from 3.0 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007;
- Malaria prevention is expanding, with widespread increases in insecticide-treated net use among children under five in sub-Saharan Africa: in 16 out of 20 countries, use has at least tripled since around 2000.
- The incidence of tuberculosis is expected to be halted and begin to decline before the target date of 2015;
- Some 1.6 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water since 1990;
- The use of ozone-depleting substances has been almost eliminated and this has contributed to the effort to reduce global warming;
- The share of developing countries' export earnings devoted to servicing external debt fell from 12.5 per cent in 2000 to 6.6 per cent in 2006, allowing them to allocate more resources to reducing poverty;
- The private sector has increased the availability of some critical essential drugs and rapidly spread mobile phone technology throughout the developing world.

Some of these successes have been achieved by means of targeted interventions or programmes – such as the delivery of bed-nets, drugs and vaccines, and mobile phones. For example, the production of insecticide-treated mosquito nets rose from 30 million in 2004 to 95 million in 2007, the number of people living with HIV in developing countries who received antiretroviral treatment increased by almost 1 million in 2007, and there were over 60 million new mobile telephone subscribers in Africa in 2006.

Achieving some other goals or targets, such as reducing maternal mortality, will depend on country-wide systems of qualified and adequately equipped personnel and an effective institutional infrastructure. Building these capacities requires strong political commitment and adequate funding over a longer period before the effects become visible. To address these needs, external assistance to MDG-oriented social sector activities has increased, to some extent at the cost of building productive capacity and physical infrastructure, including in agriculture. Increased attention to sectors directly related to the MDGs has often produced results, but should occur without depriving other important sectors of needed resources. Providing all the assistance that is necessary will require delivery of the additional official development assistance (ODA) that has been promised and cannot be achieved by reallocating resources among different sectors.

## Greater effort is required in other areas

Alongside the successes are an array of goals and targets that are likely to be missed unless additional, strengthened or corrective action is taken urgently:

- The proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than \$1 per day is unlikely to be reduced by the target of one-half;
- About one quarter of all children in developing countries are considered to be underweight and are at risk of having a future blighted by the long-term effects of undernourishment;
- Of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment by the target date of 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015;
- Almost two thirds of employed women in the developing world are in vulnerable jobs as own-account or unpaid family workers;
- In one third of developing countries, women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians;
- More than 500,000 prospective mothers in developing countries die annually in childbirth or of complications from pregnancy;
- Some 2.5 billion people, almost half the developing world's population, live without improved sanitation;
- More than one third of the growing urban population in developing countries live in slum conditions;
- Carbon dioxide emissions have continued to increase, despite the international timetable for addressing the problem;
- Developed countries' foreign aid expenditures declined for the second consecutive year in 2007 and risk falling short of the commitments made in 2005;
- International trade negotiations are years behind schedule and any outcome seems likely to fall far short of the initial high hopes for a development-oriented outcome.

## Addressing the multiple dimensions of poverty

Taken together, the results achieved to date highlight, once again, the multifaceted nature of poverty, the interactions of its various causes and manifestations and the wide-ranging and mutually reinforcing nature of the actions that have to be taken. The poor are not only those with the lowest incomes but also those who are the most deprived of health, education and other aspects of human well-being. Poor mothers are more likely to die in childbirth; children of poor families are more likely to be malnourished and are correspondingly more susceptible to an early death from childhood diseases; poor children receive less education and some may receive none at all; and gender imbalances are more pronounced among the poor, excluding them from recognized development benefits and opportunities. These characteristics, in turn, perpetuate income poverty. For the poor more than others, incomes are likely to be adversely affected by conflict, natural disasters and economic fluctuations, as well as the recent increases in food prices and the increasingly visible effects of global warming.

Overall, most poor people are caught in a vicious circle. Breaking this circle requires an array of simultaneous actions: a single intervention is unlikely to be sufficient. Governments should ensure that poverty reduction is mainstreamed into all policies, ranging from national macroeconomic strategy to local-level administrative actions. Particular attention should be paid to the creation of additional opportunities for decent work. Public investment and public institutions should endeavour to target the poor, particularly in their expenditures on education, health and infrastructure.

Ensuring gender equality and empowering women in all respects – desirable objectives in themselves – are required to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to ensure sustainable development. The limited progress in empowering women and achieving gender equality is a pervasive shortcoming that extends beyond the goal itself. Relative neglect of, and de facto bias against, women and girls continues to prevail in most countries. As an indispensable starting point for women's betterment in later life, all countries that failed to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment by the target year of 2005 should make a renewed effort to do so as soon as possible. Improved support for women's self-employment, and rights to land and other assets, are key to countries' economic development. Above all, however, achieving gender equality requires that women have an equal role with men in decision-making at all levels, from the home to the pinnacles of economic and political power.

People living in rural areas are furthest from achieving several of the MDGs in most regions. The rural population is suffering from the cumulative neglect of agriculture over the years, but it is also disadvantaged because progress towards several of the MDGs depends on government institutions, services and support, such as schools, health facilities, agricultural extension and physical infrastructure, as well as trade and interchange with others. Such facilities are usually less readily available in rural areas, and much of the rural population remains trapped in their own circle of poverty. The emergence of a world food crisis has served to highlight, once again, the need to give greater attention to developing the agricultural sector and addressing the needs of the rural population.

The hardship of rural life is encouraging migration to towns and cities, with the result that approximately half the world's population is now living in urban areas. This has, however, not necessarily resulted in either an escape from poverty or better progress towards the MDGs. In 2005, for example, slightly more than one third of the urban population in developing regions lived in slum conditions, with the associated problems of inadequate water and sanitation facilities, and lack of social infrastructure, including for health and education.

Despite the global focus on the MDGs and the impressive results achieved in some areas, the results to date show that, in most countries, there are usually segments of society that do not share in the benefits without targeted

actions to reach them. The MDGs are universal: they are intended to embrace not only all countries but also all people within each country. Government and other actors should therefore pay special attention to any and all at risk of being bypassed by the progress towards the MDGs.

## Looking ahead to 2015

It is only in the past few years that MDG-related data for the period since 2000 have become available. Encouragingly, for many variables, the data show accelerated progress since that date. This suggests that the Millennium Declaration and related undertakings did make a difference to development accomplishments. It equally implies that trends from 1990 to 2000 provide a poor basis from which to extrapolate outcomes in 2015. But the data do not yet show the effects of the present deterioration in global development prospects. A greater effort will be required to achieve the MDGs if the economic situation of the developing countries weakens significantly. In such a case, the recently improved progress towards the MDGs would also no longer be a good indicator of future prospects.

Most developing countries' efforts to achieve the MDGs have benefited from the improved economic growth and relatively low inflation that characterized much of the period since 2000. The immediate prospects are for reduced global growth and higher inflation. Both threaten continued success in reducing income poverty and are likely to affect progress towards other MDGs unless there is a commensurate response from all stakeholders.

A first component of this response is to ensure that the present course of action is accelerated and expanded so that recent progress is sustained and broadened. All stakeholders should renew their commitment to the wide range of interrelated activities that are already contributing to progress towards the MDGs around the world. Successful policies, programmes and projects should be expanded wherever and whenever appropriate.

At the same time, national governments and the international community need to respond to the lessons of experience and to adjust to changing circumstances. Additional resources have to be mobilized by both the developed and the developing countries to address longstanding and long-term challenges pertaining to agriculture, rural development, infrastructure and environmental sustainability, including climate change. The current food crisis calls for special attention to be given to the potential escalation in hunger and malnutrition.

This agenda will require a sustained and wide-ranging effort over a period that extends until 2015 and beyond. The task is broad and complex, but the progress achieved to date demonstrates that success is feasible with sound strategies and the political will. The latter must, however, include a greater financial commitment. Despite the potentially less favourable economic conditions, the developed countries must honour their undertaking to provide substantial increases in ODA and generally foster an international environment more conducive to development.

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All citizens of the world, especially the poor and the most vulnerable, have a right to expect that their leaders will fulfil the commitments made in 2000. This is possible if governments, together with civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other international organizations, commit to building on the momentum and tackling the challenges that are evident from this Report.

SHA ZUKANG  
*Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs*

# Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger

## TARGET

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

## Higher food prices may push 100 million people deeper into poverty

New data, based on the latest estimates of the cost of living in developing countries, may change our view of the scale and distribution of global poverty (see box). But the continuing economic growth in all developing regions suggests that the downward trend in poverty continued through 2007. The goal of cutting in half the proportion of people in the developing world living on less than \$1 a day by 2015 remains within reach. However, this achievement will be due largely to extraordinary economic success in most of Asia. In contrast, previous estimates suggest that little progress was made in reducing extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. In Western Asia, poverty rates were relatively low but increasing. And the transition economies of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and South-Eastern Europe were still recovering from the rise in poverty in the early 1990s.

Since 2002, one of the factors contributing to growth in many developing countries, notably in sub-Saharan Africa but also in Western Asia and Latin America, has been the increased prices of commodities, including oil. For exporters, this has been a boon. But higher commodity prices, particularly oil prices, have dampened growth in countries importing these products. Many are among the poorest countries in the world.

The recent increases in the price of food have had a direct and adverse effect on the poor. Poor people who do not produce their own food are the most severely hurt because a larger proportion of their expenditure is allocated to food. Higher food prices limit their ability to obtain not only food but also other essential goods and services, including education and health care. Most of the urban poor and the landless rural poor are in this position. Poor farmers, on the other hand, can benefit from higher food prices if they are able to produce more than they consume. But many lack the resources to do so, in part because higher oil prices have raised the cost of fertilizer. Overall, higher food prices are expected to push many more people into absolute poverty, with estimates suggesting that the increase will be as many as 100 million. Most of the increase will occur in



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