



United Nations Press Release

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UN finds progress on world anti-poverty goals, but crisis areas remain

(UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 7 September) – Developing countries are reducing extreme poverty, extending access to primary education and alleviating disease and hunger in many regions of the world, in pursuit of targets set in the year-2000 UN Millennium Declaration, according to an annual progress report from Secretary-General Kofi Annan released today.

In eastern, southern and south-eastern Asia, there are more than 200 million fewer people living in extreme poverty (on less than \$1 a day) since 1990, and the report sees progress in northern African countries also in slashing extreme poverty rates in half by 2015. Primary school enrolment rates are above 90 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, most of Asia, northern Africa and the Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet republics), nearing the target of universal enrolment by 2015. Hunger is receding in all regions of the world since 1990, although not everywhere at a rate currently sufficient to reach the 2015 target of reduction by half. According to very recent statistics, there is broad improvement in access to improved water sources.

“In four short years, the eight Millennium Development Goals derived from the Millennium Declaration have transformed the face of global development cooperation,” the report says. “The broad global consensus around a set of clear, measureable and time-bound set of development goals has generated unprecedented, coordinated action.”

But the UN warns that progress has been hardest to come by in the poorest nations: those that are landlocked or least developed, and those that are in sub-Saharan Africa. In many cases, there is lack of significant progress or even reversals. There is a discouraging lack of progress on child survival and on very poor rates of maternal mortality that prevail in much of the world, and slow advances on access to improved sanitation.

Reshaping development

The Millennium Development Goals set targets for progress in eight areas: poverty and hunger; primary education; women’s equality; child mortality; maternal health; disease; environment; and a global partnership for development. Most of the targets call for substantial improvements by 2015, compared with 1990.

Many developing countries are in the process of retooling development programmes and strategies in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the report at least 65 countries and five regions or sub-regions have issued reports geared to measuring progress on the MDGs.

Their preparation has tended to move from drafting by a small group to a process whereby governments are engaging in national debates and tailoring MDG targets to national priorities and circumstances, the UN says of the MDG reports. This has resulted in a stronger sense of national ownership and caused national policy decisions and planning efforts to gradually coalesce around a defined set of development aspirations.

United Nations work at the country level is also being reshaped, under the coordination of the UN Development Group and in partnership with developing country governments and civil society.

An international partnership

Primary responsibility for Goal 8 – having to do with issues such as trade, aid and debt – lies with the developed countries. Progress on this goal, as with the first seven, is mixed, according to the UN report.

Regarding negotiations within the World Trade Organization, developed countries are faulted for a lack of willingness to allow a level playing field for developing countries to utilize their comparative advantages, particularly in agriculture and textiles. The European Union decision to allow tariff-free imports from least developed countries of “Everything But Arms” and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act of the United States are graded as positive steps, but with small results so far.

Official development assistance (ODA) has risen substantially since the Millennium Summit. In 2000, total ODA was at a low ebb, in real terms, of \$52.4 billion. In only two years, by 2003, it had reached an all-time high, in both nominal and real terms, of \$68.5 billion (a figure slightly inflated by depreciation of the US dollar and also reflecting extraordinary outlays in Afghanistan and Iraq). Five countries – Belgium, France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom – have newly pledged to improve their ODA to reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI), at which point they would join Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The US, while at a much lower level in terms of percentage of GNI, nevertheless remains the world’s largest donor and has increased outlays substantially, including under the terms of its new Millennium Challenge Account.

The report notes, however, that estimates such as those by the High-Level Panel on Financing for Development, led by former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, peg the amount of annual ODA necessary to help developing countries achieve the MDGs at approximately \$100 billion.

The debt ratio of 37 nations eligible for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative fell from 109 per cent of GNI in 1997 to 86 per cent in 2002. But, the report says, “given evidence that countries have been using debt relief savings to invest in MDG-focused areas such as health and education, relief should be accelerated” and HIPC eligibility extended to some larger and middle-income countries in acute crisis.

This year’s annual report monitoring progress on the MDGs precedes a more comprehensive report from the Secretary-General in early 2005, and a General Assembly high-level event on the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals scheduled for September 2005.

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