



# END POVERTY 2015 *Make it happen*

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 25 September 2008

**EMBARGOED**

**Until 11 September 2008**

**12:01 a.m. local time**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**MDG Report 2008**

## **Strong progress on poverty reduction and education in Asia, but only slow gains for women**

*Millennium Development Goals Report also shows  
problematic environmental record*

BANGKOK/NEW DELHI, 11 September 2008 – The percentage of people living below the newly redefined poverty line of \$1.25 a day in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia fell from 56 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent only fifteen years later, according to a United Nations progress report released today. These two regions have already met the Millennium Development Goals target of reducing 1990 levels of extreme poverty by half.

Progress in reducing extreme poverty was slower in Southern Asia, where the pace will need to accelerate for the region to be able to meet the target. In India, for example, poverty decreased from 52 to 41 per cent between 1990 and 2005. Because of population growth, however, the number of people living in extreme poverty rose by 20 million during this period.

Poverty reduction will not be achieved without full and productive employment and decent work for all. But in Southern Asia, 83 per cent of employed women and 73 per cent of employed men are classified as “vulnerable” – working as self-employed or unpaid family workers. As the Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 noted, even in South-Eastern and Eastern Asia almost two-thirds of women and over half of men hold insecure jobs.

Strikingly, although progress was made in reducing extreme poverty, child malnutrition – a key indicator of hunger and poverty – remains remarkably high in many parts of Asia, the report finds. Southern Asia has a larger proportion of underweight children than any other developing region – with 46 per cent of children under five severely or moderately underweight in 2006, down from 54 per cent in 1990. Child malnutrition also remains high in South-Eastern Asia, at 25 per cent. The exception is represented by Eastern Asia, which managed to bring malnutrition levels down to 7 per cent in 2005 – the second best performance among all developing regions, after Northern Africa.

### **Success in primary education**

A different picture emerges from looking at access to primary education. Progress was remarkable in Southern Asia. The region reached 90 per cent enrolment in 2006, up from only 72 per cent in 1991. And as part of its success in raising total primary enrolment, Southern Asia has made the most progress among all regions in gender parity – from 77 girls per 100 boys enrolled in 1991 to 95 girls per 100 boys enrolled in 2006. Similarly, over the same period, the ratio of girls to boys improved in secondary education from 60 to 85.

The pattern for primary education in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia is different, the report notes. Here, there were already very high levels of enrolment in the 1990s, but recent progress has been patchy. Rates have actually deteriorated recently in Eastern Asia, and an initial decrease over the 1990s was followed by only a marginal upsurge in South-Eastern Asia.

Progress was also uneven with regard to gender equality. Southern Asia emerges as the sub-region where the percentage

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of paid jobs held by women is the lowest among all developing regions, only 19 per cent in 2006. But Eastern Asia is rapidly moving towards parity, reaching a 2006 rate of 41 per cent. In South-Eastern Asia, the situation has remained static, although starting from a relatively high level.

In terms of political decision-making, the report found that Southern Asian women made wide gains, with their proportion of parliamentary seats almost doubling between 2000 and 2008 (from 6.7 to 12.9 per cent) and in South-Eastern Asia, women's participation rose from 9.7 to 17.4. In Eastern Asia, on the other hand, there has been no progress, and the percentage of seats held by women has actually dropped slightly since 1990.

### Poor record on reproductive health

Southern Asia has the poorest performance among all developing regions in providing adequate reproductive health services to women, the report found. Although there has been progress since 1990, this is the region with the lowest percentage of births attended by health personnel (only 40 per cent in 2006) and the lowest proportion of women attended during pregnancy (65 per cent in 2005). Poor attention to women's reproductive health is reflected in the high number of maternal deaths, and its ranking as second only to sub-Saharan Africa in high maternal mortality ratios.

Despite some progress, child mortality remains unacceptably high in Southern Asia. Greater gains were recorded in South-Eastern Asia. The number of child deaths per 1000 live births in 2006 was less than half its level in 1990, putting the region on track to meet the target of reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

The Asian region also has a poor environmental record. Economic growth brought a rapid increase in carbon dioxide emissions in Eastern Asia, from 2.9 billion metric tons in 1990 to 6.1 billion in 2005. Eastern Asia now has the largest CO2 emissions among all regions of the world, and the largest emissions per unit of gross domestic product. Over the same period, emissions doubled in Southern Asia – from 1 to 2 billion metric tons – and tripled in South-Eastern Asia, from 0.4 to 1.2 billion metric tons. In addition, Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia hold the second and third lowest proportion of environmentally protected land and marine areas among all regions.

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](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals).