

# The Millennium Development Goals Report



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## Asia records sharp reduction in poverty and steady improvements in health of mothers and children

### BUT SOUTHERN ASIA LAGS IN NUTRITION, SANITATION AND GENDER EQUALITY, UN REPORT FINDS

NEW DELHI, 7 JULY 2011 — Asia continues to record the sharpest reductions in poverty worldwide and is making steady progress in improving child and maternal health, a United Nations report released today shows.

The deep cuts in poverty are mainly found in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, where the Millennium Development Goals target of halving extreme poverty has already been met, while progress in Southern Asia has been slow and insufficient to meet the target, according to the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2011*.

The proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day – the international poverty line defined by the World Bank – fell from 60 per cent to 16 per cent between 1990 and 2005 in Eastern Asia, and from 39 per cent to 19 per cent in South-Eastern Asia. In China, the poverty rate is expected to fall below 5 per cent by 2015. In Southern Asia, however, only India, where the poverty rate is projected to fall from 51 per cent in 1990 to about 22 per cent in 2015, is on track to cut poverty in half by the 2015 target date, the report finds.

#### FEWER MOTHERS AND CHILDREN DYING

Maternal health – the health of women during pregnancy and childbirth – has greatly improved across Asia, according to the report. Between 1990 and 2008, maternal mortality declined by 63 per cent, 57 per cent and 53 per cent respectively, in Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern Asia, owing to increases in skilled attendance at birth, skilled antenatal care and contraceptive use, as well as reductions in adolescent childbearing, most notably in Southern Asia. Despite these advances, however, Southern Asia still has the second highest level of maternal mortality among all regions (after sub-Saharan Africa), with 280 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Asia has also made steady progress in reducing child deaths. The greatest success is found in Eastern Asia, where the mortality rate of children under the age of five declined by 58 per cent between 1990 and 2009. Southern Asia saw the strongest improvement worldwide in immunization against measles – an important cause of child deaths in the developing world – with the proportion of children aged 12-23 months who received at least one dose of measles vaccine rising from 56 per cent to 75 per cent between 2000 and 2009.

Southern Asia, however, is lagging behind in terms of child nutrition. With 43 per cent of children under five years of age underweight in 2009, the sub-region has the highest rate of child undernutrition in the world, the report finds. The poorest families have made the slowest progress: the poorest 20 per cent of households showed no meaningful improvement in child undernutrition between 1995 and 2009, while in the richest 20 per cent of households, child undernutrition fell by almost one-third.

Undernutrition in children is often linked to a shortage of quality food and poor feeding practices, combined with inadequate sanitation, which leads to frequent diarrhoeal diseases. In Southern Asia, only 36 per cent of the population use an improved sanitation facility, such as a toilet or latrine, and nearly half the population practices open defecation – the highest rate among all regions of the world.

By contrast, Eastern Asia has reached the target of halving child undernutrition, with the proportion of children under five who are underweight declining from 15 per cent to 6 per cent between 1990 and 2009, and South-Eastern Asia is on track, with a drop from 30 per cent to 18 per cent.

#### **MORE CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL, BUT SLOW PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY**

While Eastern and South-Eastern Asia barely improved their already very high primary school enrolment ratios (95 per cent and 93 per cent, respectively, in 1999), Southern Asia made strong progress on access to primary education, according to the report. The sub-region reached 91 per cent enrolment in 2009, up from 79 per cent in 1999, and is on track to meet the target of universal primary education by 2015.

Girls, however, remain at a distinct disadvantage in Southern Asia, with only 95 girls enrolled in primary education, 89 girls in secondary education, and 74 girls in tertiary education for every 100 boys. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, as many girls as boys, or even more girls than boys, were enrolled in school in 2009.

Gender inequality in education is mirrored by inequality in the labour market, the report notes. Fewer than one in five paid jobs outside the agricultural sector were held by women in Southern Asia in 2009. And despite strong improvements in political participation, only 18 per cent of parliamentary seats were held by women in Southern and South-Eastern Asia in 2011.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY REMAINS A CONCERN**

With regard to environmental sustainability, Asia was the only developing region to register a net gain in forested area, with additions of some 2.2 million hectares of forest annually over the past ten years, mostly thanks to large-scale afforestation programmes in China, India and Viet Nam, the report finds.

By contrast, carbon dioxide emissions, which contribute to climate change, continued to rise across the region, with Eastern and Southern Asia recording the highest levels among developing regions worldwide, due mainly to emissions in China and India.

*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 press materials, see [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

In New Delhi | UN Information Centre  
Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman, Tel. +91 11 246 23439, e-mail: [unicindia@unicindia.org](mailto:unicindia@unicindia.org)

In New York | UN Department of Public Information  
Wynne Boelt, Tel. +1 212 963 8264; e-mail [boelt@un.org](mailto:boelt@un.org)  
Newton Kanhema, Tel. +1 212 963 5602; e-mail [kanhema@un.org](mailto:kanhema@un.org)