

# AFRICA'S PROGRESS TOWARDS THE MDGs

Policy brief no.6 – March 2011

In 2000 world leaders gathered at the UN Headquarters in New York to adopt the Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a global partnership to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cover key socio-economic and human development issues and give the global community a basis on which to fight poverty and under-development.

African progress on the MDGs has been steady but not uniform and, at the current rate, a number of countries will not achieve most of them. With five years left to the 2015 target date, world leaders gathered for the MDG Summit reaffirming the international community's commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs in Africa and the world.

Overall progress towards the MDGs in Africa was mixed even before the financial and economic crisis and has been further dampened by the slowdown in growth in 2009. Despite considerable progress in social development, in particular in aspects of education and gender equality (Goals 2 and 3), African governments and donors must step up efforts to achieve a majority of the goals. In this context, without a renewed commitment, accomplishing Goals 1, 4 and 5 by 2015 will be unlikely. Due to a

lack of aggregate data, an adequate assessment on the progress of Goals 6 and 7 is difficult to make.

## Goal 1: Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Even before the onset of the financial and economic crisis, the number of people living in extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa rose drastically (see Figure 1)<sup>1</sup>. High population growth overshadowed modest gains made in reducing the percentage of people living in poverty, which would have to fall to 29% by 2015 to be in line with the global MDG target.

To reduce absolute poverty Africa needs to achieve employment-intensive growth based on dynamic structural change of its economies, rural development and support to sustainable agriculture among other strategies.

This document is part of a series of policy briefs produced by the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA) and the NEPAD-OECD Africa Investment Initiative for African policymakers and their development partners. The policy briefs provide an overview of key economic and development issues affecting Africa today. They are available at [www.un.org/africa/osaa](http://www.un.org/africa/osaa), and at [www.oecd.org/daf/investment/africa](http://www.oecd.org/daf/investment/africa). For more information, please contact: David Mehdi Hamam, Chief (OSAA) at [hamamm@un.org](mailto:hamamm@un.org) or Karim Dahou, Executive Manager (NEPAD-OECD Initiative) at [karim.dahou@oecd.org](mailto:karim.dahou@oecd.org).

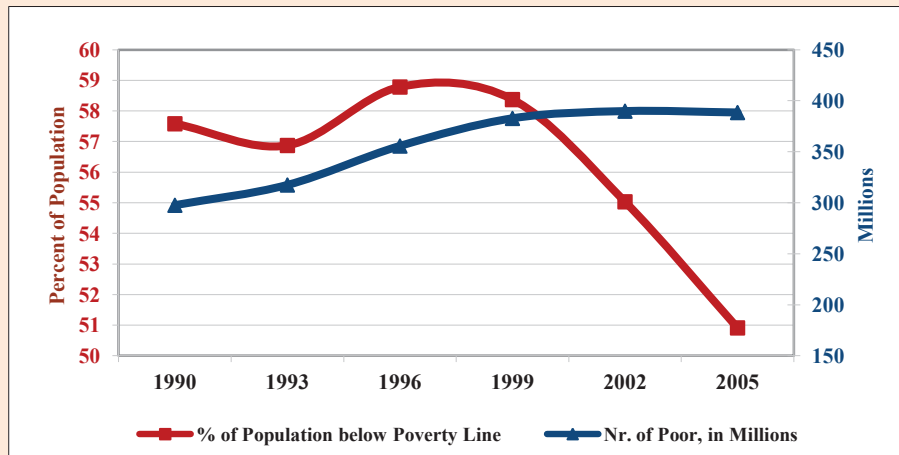


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**Figure 1: While the share of poor in Sub-Saharan Africa has decreased the absolute number has increased**



Source: Based on World Bank PovcalNet Database. Data only available until 2005

## Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

African countries performed well on this goal and the continent is likely to come close to achieving universal access to primary school education by 2015. Indeed, net enrolment in primary education increased from 58% in 1998 to 76% in 2008<sup>2</sup>. However, violent conflicts continue to be a major impediment in the achievement of MDG 2 in some parts of Africa.

## Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

MDG 3 aims to eliminate gender disparity in education and increase women's share in wage employment and parliaments. Africa is on track to achieve MDG 3 in primary education but is less successful in secondary and particularly tertiary education where female enrolment was only 67% of male enrolment in 2008<sup>3</sup>. The future of female empowerment rests on the education of young girls so parity of enrolment, especially beyond primary education, is crucial.

## Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality

Infant and under-five mortality rates (U5MR) have declined overall, but progress varies widely within and across countries and the rate of improvement in child mortality is insufficient for Africa to meet MDG 4 – reducing mortality rates by two thirds by 2015. The greatest advances have been made in Northern

Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, the U5MR has declined by 28% since 1990<sup>4</sup>. However, the U5MR for the continent has dropped (see Fig. 2). Countries experiencing at least one major armed conflict were among the countries reporting the highest U5MR between 1990 and 2005. Diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia are key causes for more than half of under-five deaths. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for nearly half of the 8.1 million deaths in children under five worldwide in 2009.

## Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health

MDG 5 targets the wellbeing of mothers and their children and aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters. Progress has been registered in sub-Saharan Africa since maternal mortality rate decreased from 870 per 100,000 live in 1990 to 640 per 100,000 live in 2008. However, a woman's chance of dying due to maternal causes in her lifetime is still an alarming 1 in 26 in Africa, compared to 1 in 120 in Asia and 1 in 290 in Latin America<sup>5</sup>. Recognizing the major gap in MDG 5, the G-8 has committed an additional US\$ 5 billion at the Muskoka Summit in June 2010 to achieve MDGs 4 and 5.

## Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

MDG 6 aims to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and to provide universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment.

Africa registers a declining trend of infection rates, and access to treatment has significantly expanded, from 14% to 43% of affected patients between 2005 and 2008 in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS remains very high in particular in Southern Africa. To achieve MDG 6, targeted interventions in key areas and regions have to be scaled up.

### Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Despite the continent's minor contribution to emissions – it is responsible for a mere 2% of man-made carbon dioxide emissions<sup>7</sup> – Africa's economic and social development is undermined by climate change. As with the health targets, the public provision of water and sanitation and the introduction of more efficient national water management systems is the most promising approach for reaching MDG 7 by 2015.

### Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

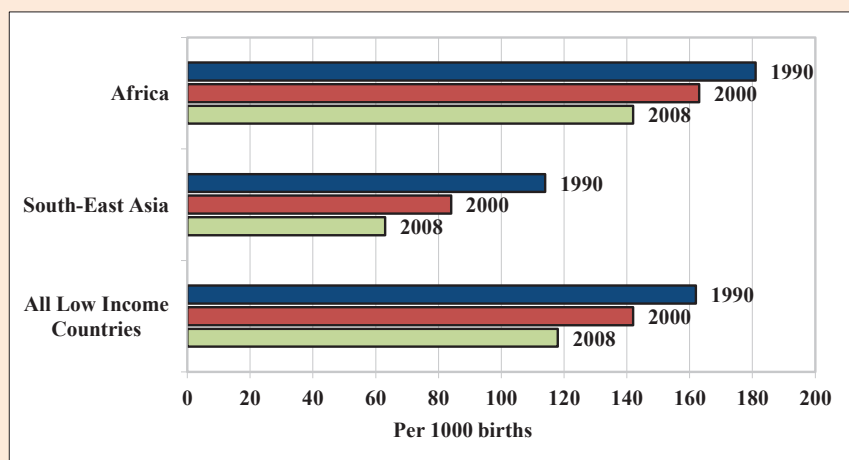
MDG 8 calls for a fair, predictable and non-discriminatory global trade and financial regime, consideration for the special needs of land-locked and least developed countries, and a comprehensive solution to the debt problems faced by developing

countries. Official development assistance to Africa and debt relief efforts have accelerated significantly in recent years (see Policy Briefs Nr. 1 and 3 on Aid and on Debt), backed by international support for improved effectiveness of aid, as set out in the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness. But efforts are still not sufficient to meet the financial and development needs of African countries. Indeed, Africa is likely to receive only about USD 11 billion of the USD 25 billion increase envisaged at Gleneagles.

## Recent Developments

A number of emerging issues affect Africa's chances of achieving the MDGs. The economic crisis has been a real setback (see Special Focus Box) but there are already signs of recovery. However, climate change and the related occurrence of disasters and natural hazards threaten to more permanently reduce countries' ability to reduce poverty and increase human development. To reconcile the double challenge of achieving economic growth and development in Africa while limiting greenhouse gas emissions, significant investments in both adaptation to and mitigation of climate change will be needed<sup>8</sup>. Significant development of renewable energy will be one important aspect of these investments and the global community will have to mobilise adequate resources to finance this effort<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 2: Under-5 mortality rate and MDG target rates 1990 - 2008**



Source: Based on World Bank PovcalNet Database. Data only available until 2005

## Special Focus: Impact of the Crisis

Evidence shows that economic downturns have a negative impact on social indicators and this effect is usually stronger than the positive impact of an upturn. Unsurprisingly thus, the global economic and financial crisis which slowed African growth in 2009 to a mere 2.4% (see Fact Sheet on Main Economic Indicators) has put a dent in Africa's progress towards achieving the MDGs. The 2010 Global Monitoring Report on the MDGs concluded that "the impact of the crisis on poverty will be long lasting and poverty responds less to growth when the initial poverty rate is high". Globally, the crisis itself is estimated to have left an additional 114 million people in extreme poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of the population living on less than US\$1.25 a day could be as high as 43.8% in 2015 according to World Bank simulations, significantly off target, as compared to 35.9% had the robust pre-crisis growth continued<sup>10</sup>. The same dip is noticeable in MDGs 2 to 7 on human development. The ultimate impact of the crisis will of course depend on the speed of recovery. Thanks to the quick global recovery, the resilience of many African countries to the crisis, and their expansionary macroeconomic stance, output is projected to expand significantly in 2010 and return to pre-crisis levels, and thus limit the negative impact of the crisis.

The impact of armed conflict on social development and the MDGs can be even more drastic. Social exclusion and poverty are key causes of conflict, and armed violence in turn undermines human security and any gains made on meeting the MDGs. Strengthening local and national governments and institutions, strong political leadership on a national and regional level, coupled with effective support for peace building and longer-term development are key strategies to stabilise post-conflict countries and prevent the emergence of new conflicts<sup>11</sup>.

Ten years of a concerted effort to achieve the MDGs have also revealed a number of lessons that should inform the world's efforts in the coming years. Key among them are promoting country ownership to allow governments to adopt national development strategies suitable to local conditions and constraints; establishing a supportive macro-economic policy framework as a way to promote development-friendly economic growth and structural transformation of national economies; and universal

access to social services, supported by predictable and consistent development assistance.

## Outlook and Prospects

The Global MDG Summit in September 2010 acknowledged that progress towards achieving the MDGs, while significant, falls far short of what is needed to achieve the goals by the 2015 target date. To accelerate progress, the Summit called for increased action by all stakeholders and agreed on a detailed action agenda, with particular emphasis on women's and children's health, which received over US\$40 billion in new pledges of support. It also issued a strong call for the international community to honor its commitments towards Africa. Meanwhile, the General Assembly will continue to review, on an annual basis, the progress made towards the achievement of the MDGs. In this spirit, the UN General Assembly will organize a special event in 2013 to follow up on efforts made towards achieving the MDGs.

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### Notes

1 AfDB, ECA and OECD (2010): African Economic Outlook 2010

2 UN (2010): The Millennium Development Goals Report

3 *ibid.*

4 UN (2010): The Millennium Development Goals Report (Addendum 1)

5 AfDB, ECA and OECD (2010): African Economic Outlook 2010. These figures are maternal mortality rates, which are calculated per 100 000 women of child-bearing age

6 *ibid.*

7 UN (2010): The Millennium Development Goals Report

8 The OECD issued guidance on how this challenge can be addressed through an integrated approach and outlines a number of priorities and recommendations for governments and international donors. For more details, please see "Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into Development Co-Operation", OECD 2009. For general information on green growth, please see: <http://www.greengrowth.org/>

9 The International Energy Agency Report on Energy, with projects up to 2050 and details on renewable energy, can be found here:

[http://www.iea.org/textbase/nppdf/free/2000/2050\\_2003.pdf](http://www.iea.org/textbase/nppdf/free/2000/2050_2003.pdf)

10 World Bank (2010): Global Monitoring Report – The MDGs After The Crisis

11 Indeed the Accra Declaration on Achieving the MDGs in Crisis Settings highlights this issue