

The Millennium Development Goals Report



UNITED NATIONS

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Northern Africa leads in tackling poverty, but successes may backslide in economic downturn

LITTLE PROGRESS ON EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

CAIRO, 6 JULY – Northern Africa remains on track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2015 deadline, but some of the region's successes may now be threatened by the changed economic climate, says an annual progress report released by the United Nations today.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009, launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, says the percentage of people in extreme poverty — living on less than \$1.25 a day — decreased steadily between 1990 and 2005, from 5 to 3 per cent, putting the region very close to the target of cutting the poverty rate in half.

Current projections, however, suggest that poverty rates in the developing world will fall in 2009 at a much slower pace than anticipated had progress been uninterrupted. This might undermine otherwise bright prospects for the region.

Encouraging trends in the global effort to halve the proportion of hunger were under threat as a result of the current economic crisis and rise in food prices. Northern Africa has the lowest rate of people going hungry, at only 3 per cent of the population, but this rate remained unchanged between 1990 and 2008. The complete lack of progress is cause for concern, especially in light of the economic downturn.

The report – which monitors the eight development goals agreed by world leaders in the year 2000 – also points to the following successes for Northern Africa:

- In education, the region is now on par with the richest countries – with 96 per cent of children enrolled in primary school.
- In the drive to reduce child deaths, tremendous progress has been made—the largest recorded—from the 1990 rate of 83 deaths of children under five per 1,000 births, to 35 per 1,000 in 2007.
- The region has improved access to safe drinking water, although not fast enough to meet the target by 2015 of reducing by half the percentage of people without access to safe drinking water. It has also made progress in providing toilets, latrines or other forms of improved sanitation to the population, and is almost on track to reach the safe sanitation target.

But Northern Africa's impressive progress is marred by its poor record on improving gender equality and empowering women, the report finds. In spite of the overall gains on primary school enrolment, there is still a significant gender gap.

In 2007, women in the region held only 20 per cent of paid jobs outside of agriculture, and this percentage has remained largely unchanged since 1990. The region also has the largest gender gap in the percentage of working people who hold vulnerable jobs (self-employed or unpaid workers in family businesses) —51 per cent of women against 31 per cent of men.

At the political level, women in the region have been able to secure higher representation in parliament—from 2 per cent of seats in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2009. But this rate remains among the lowest in the world.

Progress on maternal health is also slow in the region. The rate of mothers who die in childbirth remains relatively high at 160 deaths per 100,000 live births, still far from the target of reducing by three-quarters the level of 250 deaths observed in 1990. Access to reproductive health services also remains unsatisfactory; with only 56 per cent of pregnant women benefiting from the minimal pre-delivery care recommended by the World Health Organization.

The Millennium Development Goals Report is the most comprehensive global MDG assessment to date. It is based on a set of data prepared by over 20 organizations both within and outside the United Nations system, including the World Bank and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The project is overseen by the UN Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

For more information, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals or <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/>

MEDIA CONTACTS

Fethi Debbabi

UN Information Centre, Cairo

Tel: +202 27 959 816, mobile: +20 18 144 7227

Email: fethi.debbabi@unic-eg.org

Newton Kanhema

UN Department of Public Information

Tel: +1 646 207 1950

Email: kanhema@un.org