

PRESS RELEASE

ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES STILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO TURN ROBUST GROWTH INTO ANTI-POVERTY SUCCESS

New York, 20 September 2010—Countries of Asia and the Pacific are at a crucial point in driving forward progress to cut hunger and poverty and achieve higher levels of health and education by 2015, according to a new report launched today at the start of a three-day summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at United Nations headquarters in New York.

“In the aftermath of the financial crisis, poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals should occupy centre stage of development strategies for countries in Asia and the Pacific,” said Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). “Lifting people out of poverty is an essential step in building domestic demand in Asia and sustaining global economic growth.”

The groundbreaking publication, *Paths to 2015-MDG priorities in Asia and the Pacific*, offers a snapshot of the region's status in achieving the eight goals and suggests a way forward to the deadline for achieving them in five years. The report—a collaboration between UNESCAP, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—reveals mixed results in the Asia and Pacific region, home to more than half of the world's population.

Striking Success and Challenges Ahead

One of the region's greatest MDG successes has been a reduction in the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day from 1.5 billion to 947 million between 1990 and 2005. This success has been a significant contributor to global progress on cutting poverty and means the region as a whole is making strong progress in halving the proportion of people living in poverty, says the report.

The region has also made strong progress in ensuring all children have primary school access and succeeded in cutting gender disparities in primary education, beginning to reduce HIV prevalence, reducing the use of ozone-depleting substances, and halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.

However, the region remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor and hungry, with one in six malnourished, and it has been slow to reduce child mortality and to improve maternal health. If the region continues on its current development track without refocusing its efforts in addressing key poverty issues, it will find itself in 2015 with:

- Almost 35 million extra people in extreme income poverty
- Nearly 900,000 extra children suffering from malnutrition
- 1.7 million births not attended by skilled professionals
- 70 million more people without access to improved sanitation

The Path Forward

The report notes that with the right actions and political will, the Asia and Pacific region—which has rebounded from the global recession and has some of the world's fastest economic growth rates—can turn around and meet targets that it currently lags behind.

It singles out areas where governments should act, including strengthening social safety nets for the poor; stimulating domestic demand and intra-regional trade; creating more inclusive and sustainable economic growth; ensuring access to financial services for the poor and marginalized; reducing persistent gender gaps; giving stronger support to least developed countries; and harnessing the potential of regional economic integration.

"The region needs to reduce inequality by ensuring a much more inclusive development strategy and improving social protection is vital for helping those who get out of poverty stay out of poverty," said Ajay Chhibber, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP's Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. "As world leaders gather for the MDG summit, there is much to learn from the region and much to be gained by renewing the political will to accelerate progress on the MDGs."

Building Foundations

The report also highlights the important role of basic infrastructure in achieving MDG targets that would help 1.9 million people in the region living without basic sanitation, 470 million without safe drinking water, and the quarter of all households without access to electricity.

"Without stronger basic infrastructure, particularly better roads, water supplies, sanitation, electricity, information and communications technology and other essential services, developing countries will be hard-pressed to meet the MDG targets," said Haruhiko Kuroda, President of the ADB.

The MDGs are eight internationally-agreed targets, set 10 years ago, aiming to reduce poverty, hunger, maternal and child deaths, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality and environmental degradation by 2015.

About 140 heads of state and government are expected to attend this week's summit, convened by the UN General Assembly.

For more information about the report, please visit: <http://www.undp.org/asia/>

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