



MEDIA BRIEF

MDG Report Card: Measuring progress across countries

Overseas Development Institute publishes new country-by-country assessment, showing real progress towards Millennium Development Goals

MDG Report Card: Measuring progress across countries is a new, comprehensive report that provides a country-by-country analysis of progress toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Based on research undertaken by the *Overseas Development Institute (ODI)*, Britain's leading think tank on international development, this report presents both an analysis of progress on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and a set of league tables based on selected indicators.

The MDGs were established in 2000 as a set of goals made by world leaders to significantly reduce extreme poverty and its root causes by 2015. Deliberately ambitious, the MDGs have provided a global agenda that has galvanised international action toward agreed upon indices of change.

The new report shows where substantial advances have been made, as well as where progress has been challenging and inequities exist for seven MDGs. The eighth MDG on global partnerships was not included in the analysis. The report makes a crucial distinction between absolute versus relative progress. Both measures are needed to tell the full story of progress over the past 10 years. Relative progress measures a country's progress relative to initial conditions. This highlights the degree to which they have closed the gap on MDG targets. Absolute progress measures change regardless of initial conditions. Low-income countries, especially those in Africa, tend to rank top on absolute progress, whereas middle-income countries tend to do better at closing the gap.

Key findings:

Findings show progress has been made on each of the first seven MDGs in a number of countries.

Highlights include:

- **MDG 1—Halve Rates of Poverty and Hunger:** One in five countries has already halved the share of people living on under a dollar a day, including larger countries such as China. While top performers on the (relative) MDG target tend to come from Asia and Latin America, six of the 10 top performers on absolute poverty reduction come from Africa.



- **MDG 2—Achieve Universal Education:** All but one of the top 10 performers in absolute terms is from Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, enrolment ratios across the continent have increased from an average of 52 percent to 74 percent from 1991 to 2007.
- **MDG 3—Promote Gender Equity:** Many of the top performers in terms of absolute progress on gender equality come from Sub-Saharan Africa. In education, 54 percent of countries had achieved equality in the enrolment of girls and boys in primary school in 2007, up from 44 percent in 1991. Progress has been most significant in West Africa, the region with the greatest disparities in 1991.
- **MDG 4—Improve Child Health - Reduce the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds:** Child mortality in developing regions declined by approximately one-third between 1990 and 2007. Absolute reductions in mortality have been significant in a number of African countries. Niger and Angola reduced their under-five mortality rates by more than 100 deaths per 1,000 live births over a 17-year period.
- **MDG 5—Maternal Health - Reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters:** Despite being reported as the most off-track goal, progress has been made in maternal health. This includes improvements in levels of access to professional health assistance in almost every country in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.
- **MDG 6—Combat HIV/AIDs and other diseases:** While Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest HIV infection rates of the developing world, 21 of the 27 countries that have reduced their infection rates are in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **MDG 7—Promote Environmental Sustainability:** Halve the proportion of people without access to safe water: Globally, the safe water target is on track to be achieved by 2015. Progress in Vietnam and Namibia is particularly striking with both countries reaching levels above 90 percent, starting from 68 percent and 73 percent respectively in 1995.

High achievers:

The report reveals a number of high achievers. Vietnam made unprecedented progress in improving the lives of the poor. It featured in the top ten of several indicators, including halving the proportion of underweight children, and reducing the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day from nearly two-thirds to one-fifth in just 14 years. Ghana outperformed all other countries around the world by reducing hunger by nearly three-quarters, from 34 percent to 9 percent, between 1990 and 2004. It will achieve MDG 1 before 2015.

Many other African nations made tremendous achievements. Ten African countries, including Ethiopia, Egypt, and post-conflict Angola, have already halved their absolute poverty levels. Angola and Niger have reduced their under-five mortality ratios by more than 100 per 1,000 deaths in less than two



decades. The West African nation of Benin ranked in the top ten in education improvements with school enrolments increasing from 43 to 83 percent between 1992 and 2007.

Challenges: Reversals and Inequities:

At a global level, progress has been most substantial in poverty reduction, access to education, improving gender disparities in primary education, and providing access to improved water sources. In other areas progress has been slower, or even reversed, and challenges remain in a number of countries. Access to maternal health services, for example, varies between 98 percent in Mauritius and 6 percent in Ethiopia. HIV infection rates also show significant discrepancies across Africa.

In some areas, countries have moved backward. For example, progress on MDG 1 across Latin America has been uneven, with seven countries, including Venezuela and Bolivia, experiencing unchanged or worsening poverty rates.

Within countries, gains are not always equitably shared. The report notes disparities between rich and poor, rural and urban populations and gender groups. In some areas and countries the situation of the poorest actually deteriorated while overall progress was being made.

While gender disparities improved significantly in education, significant challenges remain in health, including child nutrition and child mortality. In 60 percent of countries under-five mortality is higher for girls than for boys. This is particularly striking given that biologically the odds are stacked against boys in infancy. The rural/urban divide was also striking in a number of countries. In one-third of the countries for which data is available, child malnutrition is at least 70 percent higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

However some countries succeeded in both achieving MDG targets and eliminating inequities. Malawi, Mali, and Niger, for instance, not only improved child nutrition and reduced mortality rates overall, but also closed the gaps between poorer and better-off households.

Methodology:

The analysis is based on the MDG database, with the exception of income poverty data for Africa, which are based on the ReSAKSS database. The data on equity—the distribution of progress within a country—are based on household Demographic Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster surveys. Where the available data permit, countries have been compared over the same time period against average annual rates of progress, irrespective of population size. It should be noted that for many



indicators data are incomplete, and a number of countries are missing from the analysis. The results should therefore be interpreted with care.

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Resources:

Full Report: *MDG Report Card: Measuring progress across countries* is free to download from www.odi.org.uk/mdgreportcard.

Development Progress Stories: In a related project, ODI released case studies showcasing examples of national progress. They are available on request from Gareth Thomas at g.thomas@odi.org.uk

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Interviews with ODI authors can be arranged on request.

Notes to editors

1. ODI is Britain's leading independent think-tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Its mission is to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. Locking together high-quality applied research, practical policy advice and policy-focused dissemination and debate, ODI works with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries. Further details can be found on the ODI website (www.odi.org.uk).

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