

## Midway to the Goals, the UN and The World Bank Are Hopeful, But See Disturbing Signs

By Barbara Crossette

As one of the most optimistic eras in United Nations history was drawing to a close in 2000, the General Assembly made its most ambitious commitment to the global future. It adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals to tackle the world's most persistent problems: extreme poverty and hunger, low education levels, female inequality, child mortality, the dangers of motherhood, the high toll of diseases, environmental depletion and imbalances in the global financial and trade systems.

A decade of milestone international conferences through the 1990s – on environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, human rights in Vienna in 1993, population and development in Cairo in 1994, social development in Copenhagen in 1995 and the status and rights of women in Beijing the same year – had produced blueprints and action plans.

The task that Secretary-General Kofi Annan's team took on – led by his political advisor John Ruggie, now at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and an *InterDependent* contributor – was to distill a mountain of pledges into clear commitments. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals were the results. Working from a baseline of 1990 statistics, the goals – and later the targets and indicators to measure them – projected what had to be done by 2015 to create a more livable world for all.

The world has passed the halfway mark to 2015, a good time to survey how we are doing: country by country, region by region and globally. The goals will be a priority issue in the General Assembly this fall, and a meeting parallel to the GA has been called to chart the next seven years. The news is mixed, as data and articles on the following pages show. It is unlikely that all eight goals can be met everywhere,

but some goals have already been reached in countries around the developing world.

Where there are failures, there will be various explanations and excuses. Salil Shetty, who directs the UN's Millennium Campaign, told the *InterPress* news service in June that reasons for lagging can always be found when governments are not committed to succeed.

"Last year people used to say that climate change will hamper the progress of the Millennium Development Goals," he said, "and now people say that the food crisis will impact the MDGs. But my take is that if the governments had invested in the MDGs, we would not be confronted with this problem."

As populations in the poorest countries continue to grow at a much faster rate than in industrialized nations, the needs become urgent. The UNDP reported this year that although numbers of the poorest of the poor may be falling in most regions, nearly 1 billion people still live on less than \$1 a day and 850 million go to bed hungry every night. School enrollments are up globally to about 85 percent of children at the primary level. But enrollment does not necessarily imply attendance or completion, nor does it measure the quality of the teaching.

While school enrollments are rising in some regions, 38 percent of developing nations are not likely to reach 100 percent primary attendance. And by 2005, only 32 of 147 countries were on track to cut deaths among children under 5 by two-thirds.

Yet success is possible everywhere. All regions except sub-Saharan Africa are



Some 33 million people today, half of them women, are uprooted by political conflicts and natural disasters, making the quest for Millennium Development Goals more elusive than ever. Here, a mother finds help after Cyclone Nargis devastated much of Burma, killing 20,000 people.

on track to meet the first poverty target: halving the number of people between 1990 and 2015 who live on less than \$1 a day. Bangladesh, a poor country with an Islamic majority, has already met the goal of educational parity between boys and girls at the primary level. It can be done.

Brief reports on how each goal is being met, or not, follow. Then **Christopher S. Wren**, a former *New York Times* correspondent in Africa, looks at why sub-Saharan Africa falters; **Farah Ameen** writes about how her home country, Bangladesh – poor and buffeted by natural disasters that could only get worse with climate change – has nevertheless improved the lives of girls and women; and **Ernest Corea** reports on how communications technologies work for villages in India. ■

### Charting a More Livable World for All

*Regions vary widely in meeting the goals. Progress has been most positive in the East Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Central Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are moving more slowly. The full impact may not be felt yet from the past year's global food crisis and soaring fuel prices. Some countries, including those the World Bank calls "fragile states," do not have reliable data, making their outlook perhaps even less promising.*



#### MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

**GOAL:** Cut by half the percentage of people living on less than \$1 a day.

**STATUS:** Nearly 1 billion people live at extreme-poverty level, down from 1.25 billion in 1990, yet 850 million people still go hungry.

**PROGRESS:** 24 of the 71 countries reporting have met the target or are on track.



**LAGGING:** 47 countries are off track. Hardest hit is sub-Saharan Africa, with 4 out of 10 people living below subsistence level. Also behind are 15 countries in Europe and Central Asia and 11 in Latin America and the Caribbean; 143 million children under age 5 – most in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – suffer from poverty-related malnutrition.



#### MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

**GOAL:** Full primary schooling by 2015.

**STATUS:** Enrollment and literacy rates have grown; 46 countries in 4 regions have achieved the goal.

**PROGRESS:** South Asia is on track for girls in primary and secondary school but not for boys. Literacy is nearly 100 percent for people ages 15 to 24 in East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Middle East and North Africa show major progress.



**LAGGING:** Sub-Saharan Africa shows improvement in some areas, but is generally off target.



#### MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

**GOAL:** Eliminate the gap between boys and girls in primary and secondary school.

**STATUS:** Most regions are broadly on track.

**PROGRESS:** Major gains made in developing countries. Interim goal for ending disparities by 2005 was reached only in Latin America and the Caribbean; East Asia and the Pacific are close to that goal.

**LAGGING:** Sub-Saharan Africa. Classroom gender disparities are largest in poor and rural communities, where secondary-school attendance is also lowest, especially among girls.

**GOAL:** Empower women.

**STATUS:** Little progress has been made in closing the large gender gaps in wages and workforce participation.

**PROGRESS:** Women earn slightly more now in Egypt, Malawi and the Maldives.



**LAGGING:** Gaps are widest in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. In Chad, men earn ten times more than women; in Albania, double.



### MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality

**GOAL:** Reduce the under-5 death rate by two-thirds.

**STATUS:** 3 million more a year survive compared with 1990; 10 million still die each year of starvation and disease.

**PROGRESS:** 90 countries, including 53 developing nations, expect to reach the 2015 target.



**LAGGING:** 107 countries are off track, including most of sub-Saharan Africa. Child death rates have risen in 12 countries.



### MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health

**GOAL:** Reduce maternal mortality rate by three-fourths and provide access to reproductive health care for all.

**STATUS:** 500,000 women die each year from complications in pregnancy and childbirth, 99 percent of these women are in "fragile" or developing countries.

**PROGRESS:** Skilled health care for births has improved in all areas. Adult fertility rates are down; 87 percent of reporting countries have higher contraceptive use.



**LAGGING:** Sub-Saharan Africa, with a maternal mortality rate 20 times higher than Europe and Central Asia.



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

**GOAL:** Reduce infectious diseases and reverse spread of HIV/AIDS; provide affordable treatment for all.

**STATUS:** 33 million people have HIV/AIDS; 2.5 million are new cases and 2.1 million died of AIDS last year.

**PROGRESS:** A moderate decline worldwide, with most progress in sub-Saharan Africa.



**LAGGING:** 69 countries showed a rise in HIV/AIDS prevalence; 30 percent of people are infected in southern Africa. In India, some 2.5 million people have HIV/AIDS. Malaria rates are still high, and measles and polio are resurgent.



### MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

**GOAL:** Ensuring environmental sustainability and reducing by half those without safe water and sanitation.

**STATUS:** More than 1 billion people have no regular access to clean drinking water; 2.5 billion lack basic sanitation, contributing to 1.8 million deaths a year.

**PROGRESS:** Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific are on track for both goals; South Asia is for water but not sanitation.



**LAGGING:** The Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and Central Asia. Sustainable development remains elusive.



### MDG 8: Foster Global Partnerships For Development

**GOAL:** Develop a global partnership between developed and least-developed nations for technological aid and debt restructuring.

**STATUS:** Still far from goal.

**PROGRESS:** Aid from developed nations to low-income countries was up 124 percent from 2000 to 2006; debt relief for lower-middle-income countries rose by 175 percent from 2002 to 2005, then dropped back 47 percent in 2006.



**LAGGING:** Of 56 countries with reliable data, 8 low-income countries are in debt distress. ■

—Compiled by Joy Cook and Max McGowan

**W4:LINK** To learn more:  
The MDGs, targets and indicators  
[www.undp.org/mdg/goallist.shtml](http://www.undp.org/mdg/goallist.shtml)  
Global Monitoring Report 2008:  
Millennium Development Goals  
[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)  
The Millennium Campaign  
[www.millenniumcampaign.org](http://www.millenniumcampaign.org)  
UNICEF [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)