

Executive summary

This report on progress towards the MDGs in Asia and the Pacific has two parts. Part 1 assesses whether countries are on or off track for the various indicators. Part 2 examines disparities within countries. Overall, much of the news is good. Asia and the Pacific is one of the world's most dynamic regions, and has been forging ahead on many of the MDGs. The main conclusions of the report are:

Extreme poverty – The region as a whole is on track to reach the target of reducing extreme poverty by half. China, the largest early achiever, has been leading the way and a number of other countries have also hit the target already, but the Least Developing Countries are making slow progress.

Children underweight – On this indicator, the picture is more mixed. A high number of countries in South Asia and South-East Asia are advancing too slowly.

Primary education – Here the situation is more encouraging – the region as a whole is on track to achieve the goal. Although South Asia without India is making slow progress, it will nevertheless come quite close to it by 2015.

Gender parity in primary enrolment – This is another relatively successful area: the region is well on its way towards gender parity at primary and secondary levels – and in some cases girls are ahead of boys.

Under-five mortality – Many more children are surviving beyond their fifth birthday, and South-East Asia as a whole is on track, though some countries are advancing too slowly and there are many CIS countries of concern.

HIV and AIDS – There has been progress in many countries, but a number in North and Central Asia are regressing. Around 6 million people are living with HIV, which represents over a million of new infections over the past two years.

Tuberculosis – The prevalence and death rates of TB have been falling across the region but ris-

ing throughout the CIS countries.

Deforestation – Many countries are still losing forest cover at alarming rates, particularly the least developed countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific – this and rising energy use are also contributing to higher emissions of carbon dioxide.

Water and sanitation – The region is making slow progress in improving water supplies in urban areas, but doing better in rural areas – due largely to rapid progress in South Asia. For sanitation, coverage in most countries lags behind that for water, particularly in rural areas.

Since this region is home to 61 per cent of world population the number of those affected is often large. So along with headline trends it is also useful to consider some headline numbers. For example, Asia and the Pacific accounts for 75 per cent of the world's rural population and 63 per cent of the urban population who do not have access to safe sanitation – 1.9 billion in total. We also have quite high shares of people suffering from TB and of underweight children. In addition despite the region's success in reducing poverty we still have 641 million people living on less than \$1 per day.

The region therefore still faces quite a challenge. Most of the developing countries can point to success in some of the goals, but none is on course to achieve all of them. Of even greater concern, the Asia-Pacific region also includes a number of countries that on present trends are likely to miss many, even most, of the MDGs. Those with the greatest difficulties are often the Least Developed Countries and some of the Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

Part 2 of the report looks at trends in intra-country disparities. One of the most striking developments it notes is the rise in income inequality: in the past decade or so, out of 20 countries in the region, 14 saw inequality rise, while only six saw it

fall.

This pattern is also reflected in uneven progress towards a number of the MDG goals. The chances of children surviving beyond their fifth birthday, for example, differ significantly according to which part of a country they are born in and to what type of household. Under-five mortality rates are typically far higher in rural than in urban areas, often by over 50 per cent, and these rural-urban gaps have persisted. Moreover in both rural and urban areas, the children least likely to survive are those in the poorest households. The poorest 20 per cent of households typically account for considerably more than 20 per cent of a country's child deaths – for some countries, around 30 per cent. It is possible in some countries to combine these data – revealing that the poorest rural quintile can be four times more likely to die than those in the richest urban quintile. A similar pattern is evident for under-five nutrition. Children in the rural areas, and those in the poorest households, are twice as likely to be underweight as those in the urban areas or in the richest households.

Households in rural areas are also more deprived when it comes to supplies of safe water. In urban areas, coverage is often above 90 per cent,

but rural areas often lag by 10 to 20 percentage points. Nevertheless there are still serious problems for urban households as a large influx of migrants to cities has caused urban coverage to fall. For basic sanitation, for which provision is lower than that for safe water, the rural-urban gaps can be wider, with rural coverage sometime less than half that in urban areas. Even so there can also be stark contrast within urban areas with very low sanitation coverage in the poorest districts.

In the epilogue the report considers the eighth Millennium Development Goal which seeks to build a 'global partnership for development', complementing the efforts of national governments for mobilizing resources by providing more equitable access to opportunities for trade, growth and development. It emphasizes in particular the value of such a partnership for supporting the region's LDCs.

The report concludes by pointing out that the Asia-Pacific region has been setting the pace for the developing world, particularly in economic growth – but that it has now the opportunity to focus again on equity, and extend the benefits of rapid economic and social development to all its people.