

# TERRAVIVA

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MDGs in danger

# Poor Sidelined Again

**The World Summit was called to review progress on the MDGs, but this objective seems to have been overtaken by an agenda focused on global security and UN reform.**

By Thalif Deen

**T**he UN summit, billed as one of the largest single gathering of world leaders, will prove to be an exercise in futility — if its primary focus on poverty and hunger eradication is subverted by other extraneous political issues, according to development experts, senior UN officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international relief agencies.

“With an agenda dominated by global

security and UN reform, it appears that the decisions needed to lift millions of people from abject poverty are not being given the prominence they deserve,” complains Kumi Naidoo, chair of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP).

The original objective of the summit was to review progress made by the world's poorer nations on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000. A pledge to halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 was a high priority on the agenda.

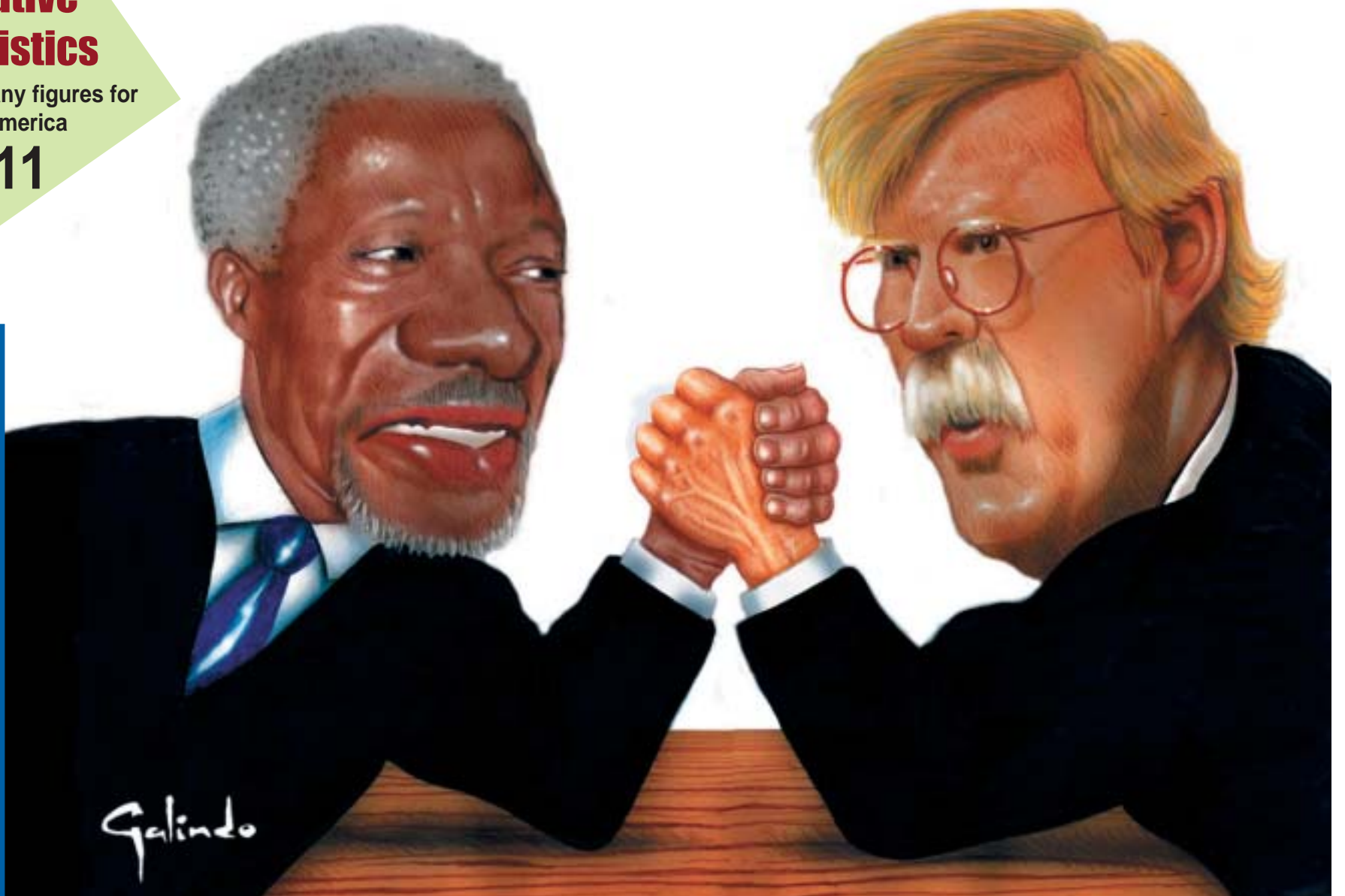
But this objective seems to have been overtaken by other political priorities,

including human rights, terrorism, peacekeeping, disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the restructuring of the Security Council.

Last week, the United States was embroiled in a controversy over its demand that all references to MDGs be eliminated from a declaration that is to be adopted at the summit.

Naidoo said the summit “is a chance for world leaders to reaffirm a timetable for achieving poverty reduction and get back on track with the promises made in 2000 to achieve the MDGs by 2015”.

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# Glossing Over Womens' Issues

**Bangladeshi activists fear that women's rights issues are getting lost amid an ocean of global development initiatives.**

By Qurratul Ain Tahmina

**A**re the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a boon to women's concerns? Bangladeshi activists are not so sure.

They are worried about how little gender parity is enshrined in the targets and indicators of the eight MDGs and concerned that other international women's rights initiatives like the Beijing Platform of Action (PFA) may be sidelined in the current rush to implement the MDGs.

"While the eight millennium goals are time-bound and concrete, with 18 targets and 48 indicators specified for measuring achievements, they lack a rights-based approach," Salma Khan, a member of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee told IPS. "They do not realise women's human rights as a development goal".

The third millennium goal promotes gender equality and empower women, but the lone target specified is eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015, pointed out Khan. This is limiting and risks giving governments wiggle room. "For example, Bangladesh has already achieved gender parity at least in terms of (school) enrolment, and our government could get away with that".

"Besides, in the absence of specification, the other goals may not address gender-based discriminations, concerns and issues," said Khan. "The target set out for the goal to eradicate extreme poverty talks only about income-poverty, that too without mentioning the essential gender perspective".

Gender equality should be a theme cutting across the goals, she said, noting that issues concerning women's participation in politics and decision making; their reproductive rights; violence against women; and discriminatory laws and practices needed to be explicitly mentioned.

The activists' concern is compounded by the fear that overemphasising MDGs could divert the government's focus from its CEDAW commitments, as well as sideline the PFA, adopted at the U.N.'s 1995 Beijing women's conference and which sets out strategies to advance women's equality.

"Following the Beijing Conference, we worked for two years helping the government prepare our country action plan," said Prof. Mahmuda Islam, president of Women for Women, a research and study group here. "We already have very clear goals and strategies. Now there is pressure from donors to prioritise MDGs and we fear that the PFA could be marginalised in the process".

"Six important U.N. summits

**"Without addressing the concerns and commitments of the Beijing process, the world has again set up new goals," noted Khanam. "Governments, including ours, may now try to sidetrack women's rights issues by using these goals. Every other day we get new targets for development — it confuses people".**

held in the 1990s had been based on the universal declaration of human rights and upheld the agenda of non-discrimination and gender equality in a substantive sense," said Khan. "The millennium goals seemingly bypass the earlier premises set out by the previous conferences and water down the concerns".

Economist Qazi Kholiquzaman Ahmad noted that Bangladesh's interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) had included women's development in the main strategies for poverty reduction, but now that the country is close to finalising the PRSP,

women have been relegated to the 'supporting strategy' section "along with children, tribal people, disabled people and other disadvantaged groups".

Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, the country's largest women's organisation, says there is a need to understand why the PRSP, initiated by the World Bank and the IMF, was able to replace the country's traditional five-year development plan.

"Why did the government go for a PRSP, discarding its five-year plans for development? We need to understand that process."

"The process of women's human rights, strengthened in the latter half of the last century, has taken a regressive trend in the 21st century... It's digressing from its basic concerns," she added.

Khanam noted that Bangladesh last year changed its National Policy for the Advancement of Women negating some of its crucial equality principles.

"Without addressing the concerns and commitments of the Beijing process, the world has again set up new goals," noted Khanam. "Governments, including ours, may now try to sidetrack women's rights issues by using these goals. Every other day we get new targets for development — it confuses people".

In the economist Ahmad's opinion all such goals and agendas, including the MDGs, were linked to the market economy and foreign aid. "While we are distracted by streams of development goals, an uncontrolled and unplanned market economy is increasing disparities in countries such as ours".

## Poor Sidelined Again

The MDGs include a 50 percent reduction in extreme poverty and hunger; universal primary education; promotion of gender equality; reduction of child mortality by two-thirds; cutbacks in maternal mortality by three-quarters; combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a North-South global partnership for development.

A meeting of 189 world leaders in Sep. 2000 pledged to meet all of these goals by the year 2015.

But Nicola Reindorp, of the international relief agency Oxfam, warns that if governments fail to make clear commitments regarding development goals, including the eradication of poverty and hunger, “progress would be so gradual that the Millennium Development Goals would not be met even in 100 years”.

Although Secretary-General Kofi Annan believes that development, security and human rights are interlinked, he points out that world leaders will have to make a stronger commitment to meet the MDGs.

“Instead of setting targets, this time leaders must decide how to achieve them... If current trends persist, there is a risk that many of the poorest countries will not be able to meet many of the goals.”

Asked to single out the successes and failures of MDGs over the last five years, Salil Shetty, director of the UN Millennium Campaign, says that in concrete terms, many developing countries have operationalised the consensus by adapting the Goals to their own national context and started implementing strategies and plans with clear budgets attached to them e.g. Vietnam and Brazil.

In an interview with TerraViva, Shetty said that on Goal 8, namely commitments from rich countries, “there is no doubt that aid levels have gone up after decades of decline for the first time in the last couple of years because of (commitments made at the Interna-

**Last week, the United States was embroiled in a controversy over its demand that all references to MDGs be eliminated from a declaration that is to be adopted at the summit.**

tional Conference on Financing for Development in) Monterrey and MDG commitments”.

The Group of 8 (G8) industrial nations have made some commitments on debt relief that take a small step forward on debt cancellation, he added. “A very important development has been the massive global effort from civil society in its broadest sense to mobilise citizens against the scourge of poverty and to use the MDGs as the minimal package that governments must deliver by 2015,” Shetty added.

On the down side, he said, the data on progress are very disconcerting. “The overall performance on most Goals are far behind where we should be by now. The relatively good performance on the first Goal at the aggregate level masks huge disparities across and within countries and regions.

“Looking ahead to the next ten years, we still feel that if govern-

ments across the world and international institutions have the political will, the Goals can be achieved. This will can be created only through citizens pressure and active campaigning.”

Asked whether or not the targeted deadline should be pushed beyond 2015, Shetty said that commitments made in 2005 will have to be monitored and enforced.

“There is no question of pushing back the deadlines, these Goals were so minimalistic in the first instance and the cost of their non-achievement can only be measured in terms of tens of millions of lives lost for no reason other than our collective inaction,” he said.

Jeffrey Sachs, a professor at the Earth Institute at Columbia University and a director of the UN Millennium Project, is equally pessimistic.

“If the MDGs are not achieved by 2015,” he warns, “then the world will have failed to reach its goals to save the 30 million children who would otherwise die; to provide 300 million more people with access to basic sanitation who would otherwise lack it; to ensure an adequate food supply for 230 million people who would otherwise go hungry; to ensure equality for women and men; and to ensure sustainable environment for the coming generation.”

Such a failure, he said, will lead to rising insecurity since extreme poverty is an important driver of conflict. And the year 2005 is the make-or-break year for the MDGs, he added.

### LDC q&a

## LDCs need extra hand to reach MDGs: Chowdhury

**The 50 LDCs are the least likely as a group to reach the MDGs, says Anwarul K. Chowdhury, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. To avoid this failure their needs must be put high on the global development cooperation agenda, he says.**



### Have any of the LDCs reached any of the MDGs?

It is too early to say whether any of the 50 LDCs have reached any of the seven MDGs as it is only five years since the Millennium Declaration was adopted and we have 10 more years to go. However, it is very clear that without very determined and concerted support from the international community, these 50 most vulnerable countries of the world will remain way behind. At present, the indicators for the seven goals for all the LDCs are not encouraging, though some have shown progress with regard to universal primary education target. Left to themselves, without international support, these countries will not only fail to reach the MDGs, but their failure will almost ensure a global failure. As the needs of these countries put together are not very large and as many of them are making serious efforts to eradicate poverty, which is the primary goal, I believe that with good support from the development partners, the LDCs can achieve most of the seven goals. But, again, that support has to be committed right now and effectively delivered. As 34 of the 50 LDCs are located in Sub-Saharan Africa, I believe that the special attention the world is committing to give to Africa, the LDCs as a group stand to benefit in a big way.

### Considering their economic constraints, will the LDCs need additional assistance to help them reach the goals by 2015?

Given their extreme vulnerability and the magnitude of their poverty that are compounded by many extraneous constraints, the LDCs have the least chance as a group under the present condition to reach the MDGs by 2015. A very important step for helping the LDCs would be to put

their needs high on the global development cooperation agenda. It is unfortunate that the voice of the LDCs continue to get marginalized in terms of global attention. We should be proud of the relentless struggle the LDCs are making to improve the quality of life of their people. Therefore, a little bit of real extra support between now and 2015 will go a long way in assisting them to reach the MDGs. This support, in addition to development assistance, should include capacity development for effective trade, good governance and an enabling environment for investment, particularly in infrastructure development. Cancellation of all debt for all LDCs would also give a big boost to their development efforts.

### What are the main constraints to the LDCs achieving the MDGs?

Lack of expected progress with regard to debt, trade and ODA all constrain, in a big way, the ability of the LDCs in reaching the MDGs. But the LDCs also suffer greatly from recurrent natural disasters, high population growth, continuing conflicts and civil strife, capacity-debilitating diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis and large-scale environmental degradations. All of these problems and their solutions are connected one way or the other to external factors and developments. It is daunting to recognize that people living in extreme poverty in LDCs are projected to increase from 335 million in 2000 to 470 million in 2015. LDCs are also doubly constrained because of their geographic locations – 16 of them are landlocked and 12 are small islands, making more than 50% of LDCs geographically handicapped.



# Working Children Demand Action

**M**y name is Tambaké Tounkara and I'm a welder like my dad. I don't know how old I am. I first realised this when I went to school because they couldn't find my official papers. Before that I used to help my dad in his workshop. I started welding when I was about seven years old. I nagged my dad so much about it that he finally sent me to school, even though he couldn't afford it. He encouraged me a lot and gave me revision lessons at home.

I did welding part-time to earn a bit of money to buy provisions and to help me continue in school. Although I didn't have much time, I still managed to work and play with my friends.

I met some kids who were members of an Association of Working Children and Youth. At first I was distrustful, but soon I realised that they weren't out to exploit me, but were children and young people in the same situation as me. We got organised and started activities to improve our living and working conditions and to develop our rights as children. Our government minister even came to visit us.

Then, through the African Movement of Working Children and Youth we heard about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and got together to discuss them. But we realised that in our part of town, in the suburbs, no one had heard of these millennium goals except perhaps two or three intellectuals who listen to the radio and read the paper.

But people can understand the

Millennium Development Goals when we talk about improving the education system. Where we live some effort is made, but the quality of education is still not very high. Our parents don't place much importance on girls' education. What we do through the working children's association is to set up education programmes for those children who don't have

the opportunity to go to school, even though they want to learn.

What I see around me are people who are fighting every day against their own poverty; they can't afford to wait until someone comes to their aid. Because of this, many different groups have developed: mothers who set up groups of dry-cleaners/dyers, solidarity groups, groups of

shopkeepers or business women. And children's organisations have started economic activities such as making loincloths, soap and mango jam.

But it is only those groups which are well organised, recognised or those with links to people in high places that get support for their anti-poverty economic activities. The others

have to manage alone. So now we realise that all those people who want to back the fight against poverty (the authorities, the international community) must support even more the associations and groups who are developing activities in their local areas. Supporting them not only means giving them financial aid, but also giving technical help, training, and teaching them how to manage their money.

We also need to create more businesses so that mothers, as well as young people who are studying, can have job prospects. This would give them hope, because studying and then not being able to find work at the end of it is very disheartening!

I mentioned earlier that not many people have heard about the Millennium Development Goals, but they understand what it is like to be poor, uneducated and unable to make a living. These are the things that these goals should be putting right. These are the things that mothers and children are already trying to put right. But they need help. That's not just about giving money; it's about

training and helping people so that they are able to take care of themselves. This is what we want.

When world leaders meet to discuss the Millennium Development Goals, we have a message for them:

**To Governments:** Keep your obligations, support our initiatives, and fight against poverty and exclusion. Manage resources well to develop our countries in harmony and tolerance among all. Protect us against conflicts, sicknesses and other calamities.

**To the international community:** Redouble efforts to support our governments and children. Work to make children of all continents really equal by ensuring good education, good health, and work for our parents.

**To the private sector:** Invest in the fight against the poverty of children and our parents. Respect international norms in favour of children. Build houses and dig wells for drinking water.

**To adults:** Listen to us, children. Encourage us, and take our proposals into consideration before acting. Keep your promises.

We hope that our leaders and the rest of the world's leaders will try to make the Millennium Development Goals real and that they will help make sure that all children in Africa have access to education and/or training, as well as jobs once they have finished their education.



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# Haven't We Been Here Before?

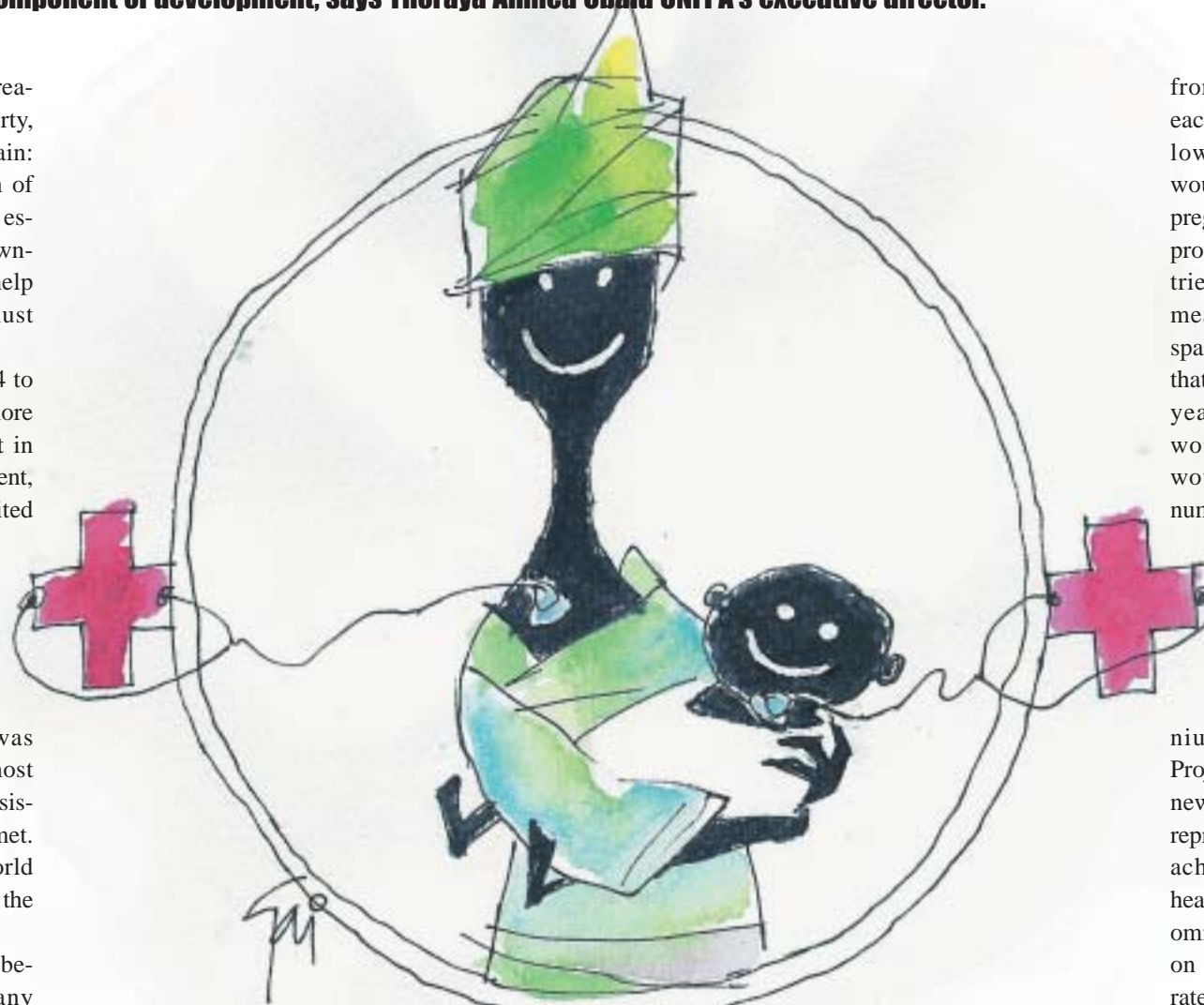
**The 2005 World Summit is an opportunity for the world's leaders to show that they believe that women's reproductive health is an important component of development, says Thoraya Ahmed Obaid UNFPA's executive director.**

**T**here are all sorts of reasons for extreme poverty, but one factor is certain: the extremely poor, a billion of them worldwide, can no more escape it than if they were drowning in quicksand. They will help themselves, but first we must help them.

A lifeline is ready. From 14 to 16 September, leaders from more than 170 countries will meet in New York to discuss development, security, human rights and United Nations reform. A key segment of the discussion will be the Millennium Development Goals adopted with the aim of eradicating extreme poverty. A lot has happened since the Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000. Perhaps most important is growing public insistence that the Goals must be met. The idea that the end of world poverty is in sight has captured the world's imagination.

But haven't we been here before? There have been many agreements and many failures. The difference is that the Millennium Development Goals have focused development planning and spending, in both rich and poor nations, on a common end. The Millennium Project – the work of a group of 265 leading experts in development – has broken down the eight Goals into reachable targets and indicators of progress, from maternal death to poor countries' debt. They are all real-world calculations, based on experience: many come from the great series of conferences on social issues that took place in the 1990s, among them the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994.

Cairo was where reproductive health met development. Looking back on years of work, the most successful developing countries—successful in terms of economic growth, less poverty, longer lives and healthier people—were those which had guaranteed the right of ordinary men and women to make their



**Reproductive health is a human right, part of the right to health. Protecting women's reproductive health is also a considerable contribution to development: yet it has never been high on the political agenda. Giving it priority now calls for leadership at the highest level.**

own decisions about how many children to have, and when. Given a real choice, most women had smaller families than their mothers. So, in less than a generation, average family size in South-east Asian countries fell from over five to fewer than three. Taking advantage of falling fertility accounts for about a third of the “Asian tigers” explosive economic growth over that period.

The key word is “real”. Choice means that women and men can make up their own minds about what to do, and have the information and the means to do it. The successful countries invested

heavily, for example, in education, and made sure that girls as well as boys went to school. They also invested in health care.

“Invested” is the right word. There is a two-way relationship between economic growth and health, says the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London: “Life expectancy and adult survival rates exercise a positive impact on human capital formation and hence on economic growth. In turn, sustained growth rates allow for better health conditions.” In plain language, that means that healthy people make better workers, better workers

make stronger economies, and stronger economies allow people to live better.

Poor women have known this for a long time. Or rather, they know that ill health means they can't work, and then the whole family suffers, for women in poor families aren't just breadwinners; they are cooks, cleaners, nurses and child-care experts, too. When the World Bank asked poor women what they feared most, ill health was the first thing they mentioned.

The biggest single cause of ill health among poor women is maternity. Pregnancy, childbirth and the period immediately afterwards should be a time of joy. Instead, they can be the most dangerous times of a woman's life. According to the World Health Organization, reproductive health problems account for a third of the burden of disease worldwide among women of reproductive age (15–44). In Africa, the figure is two thirds.

Over half a million women die

from pregnancy-related causes each year, nearly all of them in low-income countries. Many would have preferred not to be pregnant in the first place. Merely providing women in poor countries with the information and means to choose the size and spacing of their families—a right that has been theirs for nearly 40 years—would save 126,000 women's lives every year. It would avoid many times that number of maternal illnesses and injuries. It would keep families healthy that could otherwise fall apart—a child whose mother dies is twice as likely to die itself.

To strengthen the Millennium Goals, the Millennium Project team has recommended a new target, universal access to reproductive health by 2015, to be achieved through the primary health care system. They also recommend additional indicators—on the contraceptive prevalence rate, the proportion of births attended by skilled attendants, the availability of emergency obstetric care, the adolescent fertility rate, and the proportion of demand for family planning satisfied. The proposal has strong backing from Member States, both rich and poor.

Reproductive health is a human right, part of the right to health. Protecting women's reproductive health is also a considerable contribution to development: yet it has never been high on the political agenda. Giving it priority now calls for leadership at the highest level.

The 2005 World Summit is an opportunity for the world's leaders to make that decision. This September, the women of the world will find out if their well-being is to be a priority or not.

**Thoraya Ahmed Obaid is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.**

# Africa Falters in Food Security Goals

**Poor political and economic governance, inadequate funding for agriculture, poor water resources management, and neglect of research and development have contributed to making sub-Saharan Africa the only region in the developing world where the shortage of food has “substantially worsened” over the last three decades, a new study says.**

By Thalif Deen

**S**ub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the developing world where the shortage of food has “substantially worsened” over the last three decades, a new study warns.

As a result, says the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Africa will fail to meet the much-trumpeted U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which project the “eradication of extreme poverty and hunger” by 2015.

“To hear that the developing nations, especially in Africa, are not on track to meet these goals will surprise no one,” says the 60-page report.

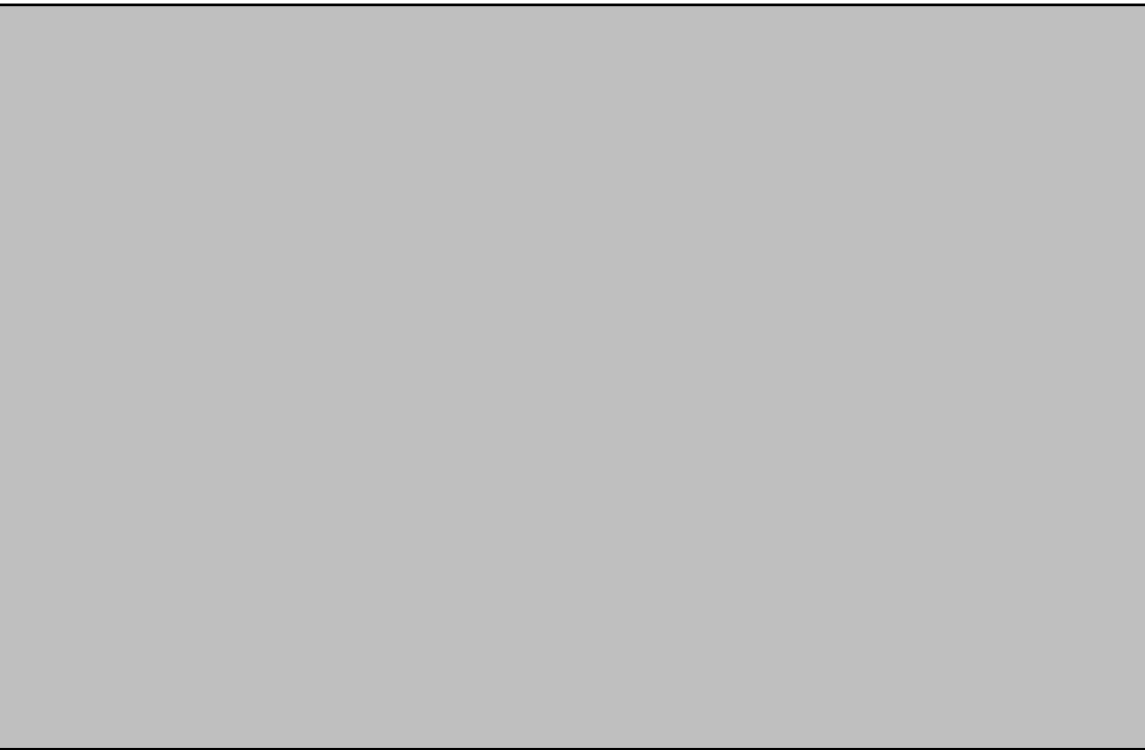
Although the proportion of malnourished individuals in sub-Saharan Africa has remained in the range of 33-35 percent since around 1970, the absolute number has increased substantially with population growth: from around 88 million in 1970 to an estimate of over 200 million in 1999-2001.

“This record is in stark contrast to that of other developing regions such as South and East Asia, which have made significant strides in combating malnutrition over the same time frame,” adds the report, titled “Looking Ahead: Long-Term Prospects for Africa’s Agricultural Development and Food Security.”

Many of the challenges facing Africa’s agricultural sector stem from a few root causes, including poor political and economic governance, inadequate funding for agriculture, poor water resources management, and neglect of research and development.

Other challenges that Africa faces in building food security include: climate, geography, and poor resource endowments; socio-economic factors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, gender inequality and lack of empowerment of women; and low water availability.

At a U.N. press conference, the president of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Amba-



sador Munir Akram of Pakistan, pointed out that rising debt problems were increasingly hampering the fight against poverty and hunger in Africa.

He said he believed the total African debt was more than one trillion dollars, with some 40 billion dollars being cancelled as a result of a recent decision by Western donors.

Akram said that would relieve the debt servicing of 18 heavily-indebted countries, amounting to about 1.5 billion dollars per year.

“For the countries concerned, that was a substantial improvement,” he said, adding that “some 30 other countries were still under stress from heavy debt burdens.”

Asked about the impact of rising debts on Africa, Mark W. Rosegrant, lead author of the IFPRI study, admitted that “the debt burden can limit the amount of funds for productive investment in development in Africa.”

“The 40 billion dollars in relief is a welcome source of funds which could provide a significant boost to agriculture and food security — if invested well,” Rosegrant told IPS.

“Key priorities identified in our study include agricultural research, rural roads, irrigation, education, clean water and health,” he added.

Asked what additional action-oriented steps world leaders should

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take (at the upcoming U.N. summit meeting in September) to resolve the problem of food security in Africa, Rosegrant said: “The September meeting should seek to solidify the commitment both outside and within Africa to commit the level of investment funds needed to seriously address the Millennium Development Goals.”

He said that prioritisation of funding to high impact investments such as those identified in the IFPRI study, together with implementation of hard targets for disbursement of funds, would be a big step forward.

“Commitment to trade liberalisation, which we show to generate in excess of 5 billion dollars annually in benefits to Africa, should be made and carried forward in World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations” leading to quota-free and duty-free access to third world exports in industrial nations, said

Rosegrant, IFPRI’s division director for environment and production technology.

In the study, IFPRI poses the question: is it actually possible for Africa to reach the MDGs targets for cutting hunger and poverty in half; and if so, what would it take?

**The priorities listed in the study include:**

- First, agricultural policies, trade and tariffs should be reformed. Africa’s high export prices limit farmers’ access to international markets. In addition, domestic subsidies, protective tariffs, and other trade barriers imposed by wealthy nations harm farmers in Africa and other poor developing nations;

- Second, investments are needed in rural infrastructure, education and social capital. Significant increases in investment in rural infrastructure would help increase food production and consumption, de-

crease malnutrition, and increase food security;

- Third, management of crops, land, water, and inputs must be improved. Sustainable productivity growth is one of the keys to food security improvements. Thus, agricultural input and crop technologies should focus on land and natural resources conservation, while at the same time increasing agricultural productivity;

- Fourth, dramatic increases in investment in agricultural research and extension are needed if any plan for food and nutrition security in Africa is to be successful;

- And finally, greater investment in women. Improvement in the status of women can influence food security and nutrition because women provide 70 to 80 percent of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa.

And while farm plots run by women have been found to have 20-40 percent lower yields than those run by men, it has been shown that when women receive the same levels of education, experience and farm inputs as men, they can increase yields of some crops by 22 percent.

The study says that the upcoming U.N. General Assembly summit provides an opportunity to make good on the promises made five years ago when the MDGs were launched.

“The new research provides a reality check that ‘business as usual’ simply will not work, and offers policy makers option for reach these important (Millennium Development) goals,” the study concludes.

The MDGs include a 50 percent reduction in poverty and hunger; universal primary education; reduction of child mortality by two-thirds; cutbacks in maternal mortality by three-quarters; the promotion of gender equality; the reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; sustainable development; and a North-South global partnership for development, all by 2015.

A summit meeting of 189 world leaders in September 2000 pledged to meet all of these goals by the year 2015. But their implementation has depended primarily on increased development aid by Western donors.

# Dispossession Adds to burden of AIDS Widows and Orphans

**Activists are struggling to halt the traditional practice of relatives of the deceased dispossessing widows and orphans of property, a situation which, with Namibia's high AIDS rate, is pushing more women further into poverty.**

By Catherine Sasman

**“W**hen my father died my uncle and his wife came and took all our stuff. They even took away our television,” said an eleven-year-old orphan in Namibia, describing a tradition that allows relatives to take land, livestock, furniture and even clothes from bereaved families.

The child was speaking at a recent conference in the capital, Windhoek, on women's property rights within the context of Namibian inheritance laws.

A woman from the northern Caprivi region told a similar tale about how, after her husband died, his family came and “took away everything”. According to the women, the deceased had left a will in which his property was to be transferred to her, but the in-laws claimed that it was not customary to consult wills.

When she approached the police about the matter, the family threatened her with witchcraft. The women ended up withdrawing her case.

Said another woman from the northern Ohangwena region who was also left destitute, “If I could only warn women not to get married, I would do so especially after what happened to me.”

With AIDS claiming an ever-increasing number of lives in Namibia, it seems certain that a great many women and children are finding themselves dispossessed. According to the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS, the country has a prevalence rate of 21.3 percent.

“A bleak picture is emerging on the human rights score for AIDS widows and orphans in Namibia,” Uni-

ted Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation representative Moiketzi Mokati said during the Windhoek meeting.

Cases have even been recorded where the in-laws of widows have burnt down residences in a bid to expel the women and their children.

“The system is failing women and children. Property and land grabbing is like rape: women and children suffer in silence,” says Doris Roos, head of a child protection unit that the United Nations Children's Fund operates in Namibia. She believes that scavenging relatives often use culture and traditional beliefs as an excuse for exploiting widows and orphans.

To a large extent, customary law exists on a par with common law in Namibia.

Intricate kinship systems are used to determine inheritance under customary law, says Mercedes Ovis, who researches this law. While there are

significant differences between the systems, most tend to limit or cancel the inheritance rights of widows and orphans.

“The question arises (whether) it is customary law in operation when it comes to the impoverishment of women and children due to the HIV/AIDS scourge in communal areas, or mere opportunism, or a bit of both,” says Delme Cupido, coordinator of the AIDS Unit at the Windhoek-based Legal Assistance Centre.

Widows may even be considered part of the estate. In these instances it is common practice for the widow to be taken into the household of a brother-in-law after undergoing a “death cleansing”, which involves sex with the brother-in-law.

Customary law is not permitted to infringe on the constitution, which guarantees equality for all Namibians. The constitution also provides for the advancement of equal opportunities for women, which would seem to put it in opposition

**Widows may even be considered part of the estate. In these instances it is common practice for the widow to be taken into the household of a brother-in-law after undergoing a “death cleansing”, which involves sex with the brother-in-law.**

to inheritance traditions that disadvantage women.

Justice Minister and Attorney General Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana claims that ongoing legal reforms are underway to prevent discriminatory inheritance practices. These include the introduction of a Succession Bill that seeks to guarantee surviving spouses a specific portion of the property of partners who die intestate and to ensure that surviving spouses have lifetime rights over household goods and land

used by the extended family.

“We need to arrive at a legal and social reality in which women and men are treated equally in the broader sense of human rights and gender rights, but also in the narrow sense of women's access to land and property rights,” Ivula-Iitana has said.

“We need to extend this equality to children, especially as between the girl and the boy child. We need to protect the growing number of our orphans.”

The Married Persons Equality Act of 1996 and the Communal Land Reform Act of 2002, which allows widows to remain on common household plots, also provide a basis for improving the situation of women.

However, the legislation is being poorly enforced. Women and children continue to be evicted from common plots, despite the fact that this land may provide their only livelihood.

For Ovis, the remedy lies somewhere between customary law and common law.

“One approach is perhaps to maintain the dual system in terms of law reform, and not to completely discard customary law, thus creating mere paper laws,” she says.

Roos also notes that many traditional leaders have expressed ignorance of the ongoing reports of property grabbing. And, “Traditional leaders have indicated that they will follow up on these cases. Whether they will in fact do this is another matter,” she adds.

Delme Cupido appears even less hopeful than Roos.

“Traditional leaders are enforcing a very patriarchal system when it comes to inheritance,” he notes.

“They see the needs of women and children as subservient.”

# Asia Pacific Falls Behind on MDG Targets

**Asia and the Pacific may be one of the world's most dynamic regions, but none of its 37 developing countries are on track to meet all of the global anti-poverty goals by 2015, says a new report on Asia Pacific's Millennium Development Goals progress, released on September 7. The report reviews the progress and suggests policy changes as well as regional and global partnership needed to achieve the goals.**

By LA Nguyen

**D**espite the fact that Asia Pacific is the world's most dynamic region and has made rapid progress toward many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), none of its 37 developing countries are on track to meet all the anti-global poverty goals in the next decade, according to the latest report on the Asia Pacific's progress towards the MDGs, released on the eve of the World Summit in New York.

Some of the region's developing countries are making good or even dramatic progress in reducing income poverty, particularly China and India, while others including Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Mongolia are actually slipping backward.

Many countries seem destined to miss at least half other important targets, such as those related to health and the environment, unless dramatic steps are taken, the report, conducted by three prominent

international organizations, the United National Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), said.

"There are a lot of diversities in the region," said Anuradha Rajivan, the UNDP's Regional Program Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific Regional MDG Initiative. "But not one of them meets all the goals. Some are off-track, and some even slipping backwards on some goals."

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by all 191 UN members since 2000, encompasses eight global goals intended to reduce by half the number of the world's extreme poor by 2015.

## **A mixed picture of development**

The most difficult areas include maternal mortality, where more than two-thirds of Asia-Pacific

countries are off-track, and carbon dioxide emissions, where more than half have fallen behind targets. For several high-priority indicators, including rural water supply, infant and under-5 mortality, and malnutrition, four countries – Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and Mongolia – are not expected to achieve any of their targets, with 14 other countries off-track for more than half of the high-priority targets.

The poorest-performing sub-region is South and South-West Asia, the only sub-region in which a majority of countries are off-track for more than one-third of MDG indicators. Gender disparities likewise remain significant in the lack of achievement of the Goals, particularly in South Asia, in life expectancy, employment and wages, and empowerment of women. In addition, most countries across the entire Asia-Pacific

region, especially the large ones, display significant disparities in MDG achievement within their own borders.

On a positive note, some of the best performances have been under the goal related to gender equality in education, for which more than three-fourths of countries are on track.

Asia Pacific has made dramatic progress on the poverty target, with the proportion of people living on less than \$1 per day in 23 country fell from 31 to 20 percent between 1990 and 2001. Despite population growth, the absolute number of poor people also fell from 931 million to 679 million. However, the region's overall poverty reduction, inevitably swayed by the achievements of China and India, are well on target, while some countries are slipping backward, including Armenia, Bangladesh, Laos and Mongolia.

**The report argues for major institutional changes at the local, national and regional levels to make the development process fairer and more inclusive. It advocates for changes that could lead to better provision of public services and highlights new patterns of regional cooperation that could have high payoffs for the anti-poverty goals.**

Some countries are still struggling with hunger. The worst situation is in Tajikistan, where 61 percent of the population are hungry, and North Korea, 31 percent. Up to 48 percent of children are under-nourished in Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, and 47 percent in India.

The region also has been doing well in achieving universal primary education, with most countries' primary enrollment ratios above 80 percent, and many above 90 percent. At least eight countries have already achieved the target, and 11 more are on target. On promoting gender equality and empowering women, there has been good progress on eliminating gender disparity in education, but not enough on participation and empowerment.

On reducing child mortality, half of 47 countries with data available have already achieved their target and all have child mortality rates below 45 per 1,000 live births. For the remaining half, four countries are on track, 14 are off target, and three are regressing. In 2003, the largest number of child deaths was in India, 2.3 million, followed by China, 650,000.

The maternal mortality target seeks a reduction by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, but the ratio in average Asian developing countries has only declined from 395 to 324. Around two

thirds of Asian maternal deaths, or 164,000, take place in India and Pakistan.

As of 2004, the Asia Pacific region has over 9 million people living with HIV/AIDs and each year half a million of them die. The region is not on track for compliance with its HIV/AIDs and other diseases targets.

With regard to ensuring environmental sustainability only five of the region's 55 nations have done so and another 10 are on target. Micronesia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia have registered the most rapid rates of deforestation.

The Asia Pacific region is doing well in halving the proportion of people without sustainable ac-

cess to safe drinking water and sanitation. For urban water supplies, of the 40 countries offering data, 31 are early achievers or are on track. The situation in the rural areas is different, with coverage typically 10 to 20 percentage points lower.

**We won't meet the goals, unless we do something**

International organizations working closely with Asia-Pacific countries said the region won't meet all the goals, unless governments embrace institutional changes and global partnership.

The diversity of the region requires cooperation among coun-

tries, as many states are vulnerable. There are 14 under-developed countries in the region, some are landlocked and without significant resources, and for many the majority of their populations still live on \$1 per day.

"The starting point of these countries is very difficult," said the UNDP's Rajivan. "Some countries are very poor and we tried to identify the importance of financial aid."

Most governments have recognized that the MDGs are their own development goals, and are in the process of modifying their development plans to be in line with the UN goals, she said.

According to Geert van der Linden, ADB's vice president in charge of knowledge management and sustainable development, countries fall short of the MDG targets for primarily because of lack of money, local capacity, and government priorities.

"In some countries, governments do not give enough priority in some areas," said Linden. "All the governments adopted the millennium development goals in 2000, so all of them are committed, but some haven't emphasised them."

He said the report highlights some achievements and the countries that can set examples for others to follow in some certain areas, for example China and Vietnam in reducing poverty, and Thailand in containing the spread of HIV/AIDs.

The report argues for major institutional changes at the local, national and regional levels to

make the development process fairer and more inclusive. It advocates for changes that could lead to better provision of public services and highlights new patterns of regional cooperation that could have high payoffs for the anti-poverty goals.

"By analogy, countries can also work together to eliminate "international public bads" such as pollution, communicable diseases or trafficking in person," the report said. "If countries are to achieve more of these goals, they will need to invest more resources. But countries will also have to change how they do things, reforming national and local institutions so that they best contribute to progress."

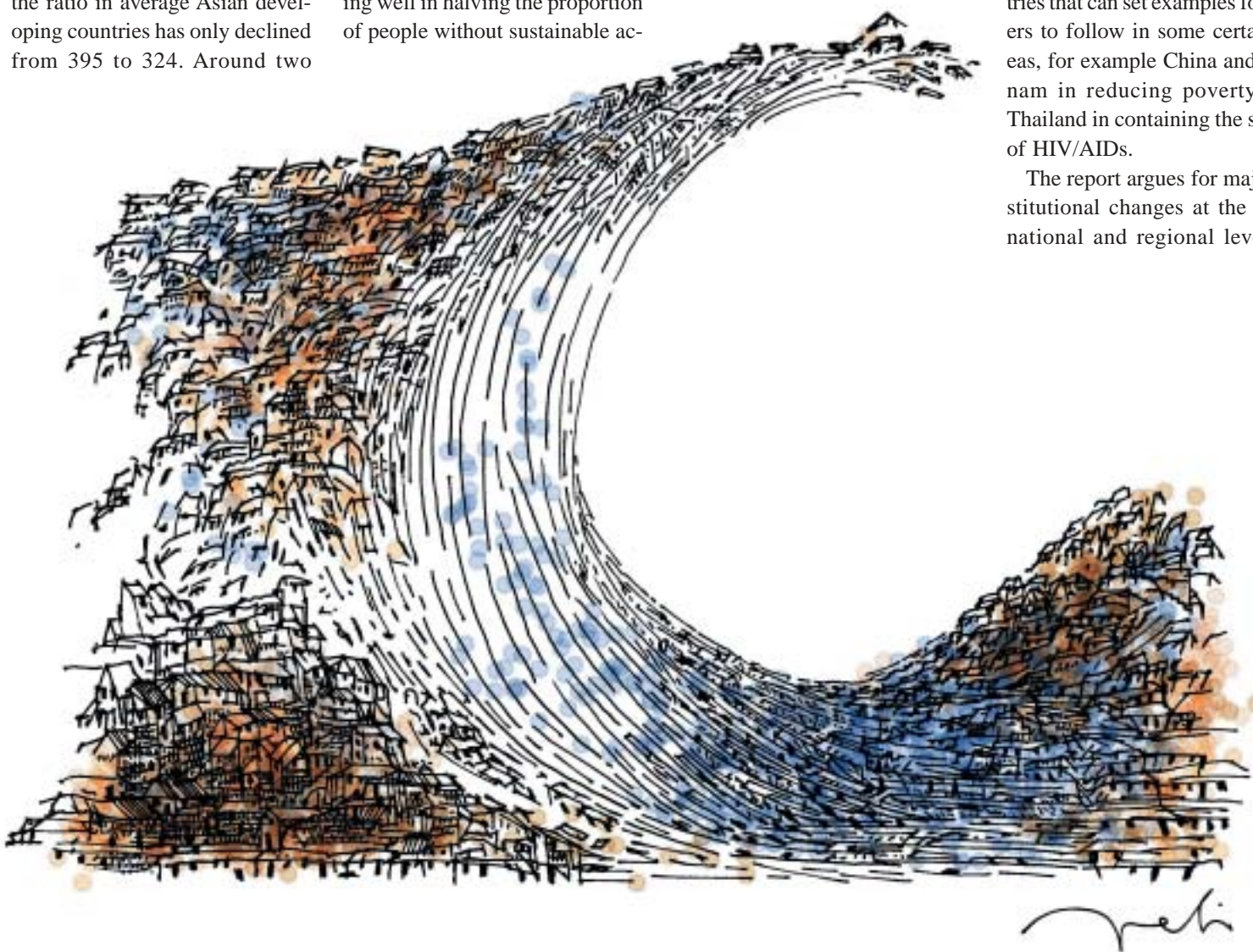
The report suggests that governments develop the necessary capacity, and ensure that their national and local institutions fit the needs and aspirations of the 21st century.

"One of the most direct ways in which Governments can address poverty, and meet the MDGs, is ... ensuring adequate basic services, either providing them directly or sustaining a framework for provision through the private sector or civil society."

The report, which builds on the findings of an earlier assessment conducted in 2003, recommends ways to overcome these barriers while taking advantage of opportunities for cooperation within the region in the areas of trade, foreign direct investment and official development assistance, especially for low-income and landlocked Asia-Pacific nations.

"We believe cooperation is very important for several reasons," said Linden "The experiences in the last 10 -15 years have shown that the most important factor in achieving the goals is strong economic development. The countries that have had high levels of economic growth like China and Vietnam have generally done quite well in realizing MDGs. It's very important that these countries continue to grow strongly in the years ahead."

"Cooperation is extremely important in making sure that we will see the same economic growth in the future as we have seen in the past, especially for the poor countries, they can really obtain high growth rates if they look for larger markets," he added.



# Globalisation Driving Inequality, UN Warns

By Haider Rizvi

**D**espite unprecedented economic growth in recent years, the rich have become richer and the poor even poorer, says a new U.N. report that also shows women facing more hardship than men in all walks of life.

The report, titled “The World Social Situation: The Inequality Predicament,” was issued just weeks ahead of the world summit called by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to address the pressing issues of global poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy.

Sounding the alarm over “persistent and deepening” inequality, the authors focus on the chasm between the formal and informal economies, the widening gap between skilled and unskilled workers, the growing disparities in health and education, and opportunities for social, economic and political participation.

The world is more polarised today than it was 10 years ago, says the report, which calls for a deeper commitment to keeping the pledges made by world leaders at the Summit for Social Development held in the Danish capital of Copenhagen in 1995. At that meeting, they promised to confront profound social challenges and place people at the centre of development.

“But (since then) some decades-old social gaps have actually widened, particularly gender disparities,” Jose Antonio Ocampo, under-secretary-general of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, told reporters as he introduced the report.

Noting that one of the “most pervasive” forms of inequality is gender discrimination, Ocampo noted that about 60 percent the world’s informal workers, who lack legal protections, are women. “That’s a very hard proportion given the fact that women have a lower level of labour force participation than men,” he said.

Although more women and girls are being educated, formal employment figures for women



have stagnated or even decreased in some parts of the world, he said, describing the sharp increase of women in the informal sector as “even more troubling.”

The 158-page study shows that inequality between and within countries has often accompanied greater economic globalisation. These inequalities have had negative consequences in many areas, including employment, job security and wages.

“Ignoring inequality in the pursuit of development is perilous,” the report warns. “Focusing exclusively on economic growth and income generation as a development strategy is ineffective, as it leads to the accumulation of wealth by a few and deepens the poverty of many.”

The authors note that in a world of increasing technological development, when societies should be benefiting from economic progress, many are facing “alarming increases” in the discrepancies between rich and poor.

Even comparatively wealthy nations like the United States, Canada and Britain have failed to escape this trend. And while

**Although more women and girls are being educated, formal employment figures for women have stagnated or even decreased in some parts of the world.**

China and India have seen considerable economic growth, the two largest Asian nations have also failed to address the issue of inequality.

Similar patterns are found in the distribution of wealth elsewhere in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The report says that in sub-Saharan Africa alone, the number of poor people increased by almost 90 million in little more than a decade (from 1990 to 2001).

In Latin America, unemployment rose from nearly seven percent in 1995 to nine percent in 2002, with many workers forced to turn to the informal sector, where conditions are “often inhumane and the wages are low”.

The report suggests that in countries like Brazil, Guatemala and Bolivia, race and ethnicity

continues to be a main determinant of economic opportunities. Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations earn an average of 35 to 65 percent less than white men, and are much less likely to have access to education and housing, the report says.

Regarding solutions to inequality, the report stresses the need to adjust the economic imbalances not just within nations, but also among them, noting that 80 percent of the world’s domestic product belongs to one billion people living in the industrially developed world, while the remaining 20 percent is shared by five billion people living in developing countries.

Worried about the slow pace of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Annan has repeatedly urged

wealthy nations to fulfill their pledge of giving at least 0.7 percent of gross national income for development in poor countries.

This issue is also highlighted in the draft document for the September Summit, but the United States has expressed strong reservations.

In fact, the United States recently introduced more than 750 amendments that would eliminate new pledges of foreign aid to poor countries, instead focusing on issues such as terrorism and security.

The eight MDGs include a 50 percent reduction in poverty and hunger; universal primary education; reduction of child mortality by two-thirds; cutbacks in maternal mortality by three-quarters; the promotion of gender equality; environmental sustainability; reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and a global partnership for development between the rich and poor — all by 2015.

“The U.S. government calls for striking any mention of the MDGs, and the administration has publicly complained that the document’s section on poverty is too long,” according to the Washington Post, which obtained the text of Washington’s proposals.

In their report, U.N. researchers also argue that the growing schism between the “haves” and “have-nots” poses a major threat to democracies around the world, and will breed further violence and terror if the trend is not reversed.

In his remarks, Ocampo warned the world community of the consequences of inaction.

“Failure to address this inequality predicament will insure that social injustice and better living conditions for all people remain elusive,” he said, adding that it would lead to further social instability in the world, “for which every one will have to pay the price”.

By Staff TerraViva

# What Did Those Figures Say Again?

**There are as many figures pointing to a country's progress towards the Millennium Development Goals as there are grains of sand on a beach.**

**B**y adding cans to the products she scavenges and sells in Mexico City, Guadalupe raised her average monthly earnings from 70 to 85 dollars. But she feels as hard-pressed as before and finds no reason to celebrate. The Mexican government, however, is congratulating itself on statistics that show that Guadalupe and thousands of other impoverished Mexicans no longer fall into the category of extreme poverty, which means the country is making progress towards the MDGs.

As the World Summit deadline approaches, governments wish to demonstrate how well they have been doing in honouring their commitments. But there is little enough to show. The figures on MDG progress at the UN statistics division are uneven and rarely go beyond 2003. Most in fact are from 2000-2001, indicating that the whatever progress shown is not a direct result of the radical policy shifts required by the MDG targets.

The Millennium Declaration states that its first target is "to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger". However, the Millennium Development Goal Indicators Database has added a little, but significant change to the Declaration: "to halve, **between 1990 and 2015**, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day".

Using this yardstick, Chile has already halved the proportion of people living in extreme poverty or on less than one dollar a day, while Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Uruguay are on target to do so, says a report issued in June by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

According to the UN Statistics Division (updated on 19 April 2005) Chile had six percent of its population in extreme poverty in 1990 and just two percent in 2000.

By using 1990 as the starting point, Chile had achieved its 2015 goal before even starting the race.

Brazil's figures were 14 percent in extreme poverty in 1990, 10 percent in 1998, and eight percent in 2001. Mexico has no data for 1990, but in 1995, 16 percent of its population lived on less than one dollar a day, and in 2000 the figure was 10 percent.

Going by the Declaration, made in 2000, Mexico will only have to reduce its extreme poverty rate by five percent. However, using the MDG Indicators Database measurement – which begins in

2002, still way off the 16 and 10 percent quoted by the UN Statistics Division.

And then there is the case of Ecuador, which, according to the UN Statistics Division had less than two percent of its population in extreme poverty in 1994. However, a year later, that figure had ballooned to 20 percent.

Adding to the confusion of numbers, there is no guarantee of compliance with the MDGs, because of the danger of financial turmoil or economic or political crises, Rebecca Grynspan, ECLAC director for Central America and Mexico, told TerraViva.

In addition, the skewed distribution of wealth, which undermines progress towards poverty alleviation, persists in many countries, she added. Latin America has the largest gap between the rich and poor.

In Mexico, for example, several studies indicate that the number of people living in poverty, as measured strictly on the basis of income, has been shrinking, and others show that this has had no effect on social inequalities.

For 10 percent of the population of 104 million, per household income averages 4,261 dollars a month, while the poorest 10 percent earn 166 dollars a month, according to a study by the National Institute of Statistics published earlier this year.

The UN Statistics Division show that the poorest 20 percent of Mexicans consumed only 3.1 percent of the national wealth in 2000.

Strangely enough, Nicaragua and Jamaica had the fairest distribution rate in 2000-2001, with the poorest consuming 5.6 and 6.7 percent of the national income, respectively.

For 32-year-old Guadalupe, one of the army of poor who scavenge for recyclable materials on the streets of Mexico City, the numbers game means nothing. "I'm earning more by collecting cans instead of just paper like before. But nothing has changed," she said.



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**What is known about a country's progress towards the MDGs also depends on whose figures you look at.**

1990 – the country will have to reduce the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day by eight percent.

What is known about a country's progress towards the MDGs also depends on whose figures you look at. There are even contradictory data within the UN to be using a different set of figures.

ECLAC uses a World Bank figure from a year ago, to point out that in Mexico the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day had shrunk from 24.2 to 20.3 percent between 2000 and

# Poverty Makes Women Easy Mark for Sex Traffickers

By Kester Kenn Klomegah

**Poverty and inadequate incomes are forcing Russian women to seek jobs abroad, but many are finding out that the dream job touted by recruitment agencies do not exist.**

facility for many NGOs helping trafficked women. It has rehabilitated more victims than any other shelter in Russia and continues to develop innovative strategies to attempt successful reintegration of victims into society.

Many women are being driven into prostitution also by low income. The Moscow Centre for Gender Studies said in a report that the average monthly wage of women in 2004 was 6,929 rubles (230 dollars).

Beyond low income it says a lack of social awareness is a major hurdle to overcome. The problem is little publicised because the victims are usually too ashamed to lodge a formal complaint. Gangsters often threaten them into silence.

Kouzbit estimates that no more than two percent of women make complaints to the police on their return, and then the police are reluctant to investigate them.

In the face of growing criticism over inaction, the interior ministry has set up a unit for border checks to stop human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women. The Moscow city government has set up a commission to prevent human trafficking and prostitution.

“The commission is looking to secure strong criminal laws against trafficking and prostitution,” coordinator of its interdepartmental legislative working group Tatyana Kholshchikova told IPS. Legislation to toughen laws against trafficking of women is due to receive its first reading in the *duma* (parliament) next month after drafting by a 20-member working group.

“In Moscow and all over Russia we have not been able to combat this problem because we don’t have a well-defined law against the trafficking of women,” she said. “Now, we are drafting an excellent anti-trafficking law and proposed revisions to the criminal code that will make trafficking of women a major crime.”

**D**riven by family poverty and low pay, Katrina finally accepted a job offer as waitress at a restaurant in Bangkok. The job turned out to mean striptease and prostitution.

The 28-year-old Katrina had her passport taken away and was held in debt bondage for three years. She could not leave her work place.

Katrina had left her hometown Smolensk four years ago after graduating from the local university. She was among about 50 other women from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus aged 18-30 who were taken to Thailand by an agent promising good income.

“Given the financial pressure from the family, I decided to go notwithstanding the consequences,” Katrina (not her real name) told IPS. “When I arrived in Bangkok, I was enslaved, sometimes beaten and forced to sleep with different men throughout the night.” It took her more than three years to get away.

Hers is the kind of story becoming increasingly more familiar in Russia, according to research by the Russian non-governmental organisation, The Angel Coalition. The coalition comprising 61 groups was set up in 1999 to fight increased trafficking of women from Russia and other ex-Soviet states.

The Coalition cites studies from the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to say that more than 500,000 women from the former Soviet Union have been trafficked to more than 50 countries in the past 10 years.

The group says that as many as 80 percent of the women trafficked were ensnared by criminal gangs. It said Ukraine and Russia are the largest source of trafficked women.

“The trade is secretive, the women are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous, prosecution is rare, and few agencies have the staff and adequate finance to res-

**In the face of growing criticism over inaction, the interior ministry has set up a unit for border checks to stop human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women. The Moscow city government has set up a commission to prevent human trafficking and prostitution.**

cue them,” the Coalition says.

The scale of trafficking has been increasing, with Moscow becoming the primary transit point, director of The Angel Coalition Oleg Kouzbit says.

“Few of these countries have laws to prevent trafficking or to prosecute traffickers, and these criminals are free to operate with impunity,” Kouzbit told IPS.

The Coalition sharply criticises the Russian government for failure to take decisive action against the growing problem, even though the government is enacting new legislation to curb such trafficking.

“We are confident we will be able to provide the government with the information it needs to

formulate a comprehensive programme to abolish the trafficking of women and children in Russia,” Kouzbit said. “Russian women have suffered enough exploitation. They do not deserve to become (prostitutes) of the world.”

The Angel Coalition set up a rehabilitation project and staff training facilities earlier this year in partnership with ‘Women and Children First’, the MiraMed Institute, and similar non-governmental organisations with some funding from the Sweden-based World Childhood Foundation.

So far the St. Petersburg Psychological Crisis Centre has served as a model and training