

Sub-Saharan Africa's progress towards anti-poverty goals is encouraging but needs to be accelerated to meet 2015 targets

Development Goals, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 25 September 2008

JOHANNESBURG, 12 September 2008 – The proportion of the population in sub-Saharan Africa living below the World Bank's new international poverty line of \$1.25 a day decreased from 55.7 per cent in 1990 to 50.3 per cent in 2005 – showing some progress, but far from the pace needed to reach the over-arching Millennium Development Goal of halving the rate of poverty by 2015, according to a just-released UN report.

Because of population growth, the number of people in the region living in extreme poverty actually grew by 100 million over this period. One person in two lives in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa; in Southern Asia, the region with the second highest poverty rate, the proportion is less than 40 per cent.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 provides statistical evidence of the progress that sub-Saharan Africa has made in addressing the multiple dimensions and causes of this extensive poverty.

As a sign of potentially better prospects in the future, the region's total net enrolment ratio in primary education increased from 54 to 58 per cent between 1991 and 2000, and then accelerated to 71 per cent in 2006. Girls account for an increasing share of this total, with the gender parity index rising from 83 per cent in 1991 to 85 per cent in 2000 and 89 per cent in 2006. Despite these improvements, the region will have to intensify its efforts if it is to achieve the Goal of universal primary education by 2015 and the target of primary school gender equality, originally set for 2005. At the secondary level, there has been a slight deterioration in the gender parity ratio, with the number of girls enrolled falling from 82 per cent of the number of boys in 2000 to 80 per cent in 2006.

Improvements on AIDS and malaria, but not TB

The UN report also points to accelerated, but narrow and insufficient improvements on the health front. Most notably, primarily thanks to the increasing availability of anti-retroviral drugs, the number of deaths from AIDS has halted its seemingly inexorable increase. The corollary is that, because infected people now survive longer, the number of those living with the disease continues to increase. Among these, the majority are women, who now account for almost 60 per cent of those with the disease in the region.

The proportion of people living with HIV who need treatment and are receiving antiretroviral therapy rose from 21 to 30 per cent between 2006 and 2007, mostly thanks to the substantial amount of public and private external funding provided for this purpose. Here again, despite the progress, there remain some 5 million people in the region who do not have access to the therapy they require.

