

The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region

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The year 2005 marked the five-year review of progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a broad development agenda aimed at eradicating poverty in its various dimensions and improving the lives of women and men alike. Emanating from previous international conferences and summits, and based on the principles and values expressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration that was adopted by 191 countries at the Millennium Summit (6th-8th September 2000), the MDG agenda encompasses 8 mutually re-enforcing goals, 18 time-bound targets to be achieved by the year 2015 and 48 measurable indicators to track progress.

On the occasion of the 2005 World Summit in which world leaders and heads of state met to review progress and follow-up measures in relation to achieving international development goals, including MDGs, a number of stock-taking reports were prepared by various UN regional and specialized agencies, in addition to country reports prepared by governments in cooperation with civil society. In the Arab Region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-

TABLE 10 Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
Goal 5: Improve maternal health
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

ESCWA) partnered with a dozen United Nations specialized agencies to prepare the *Report on the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005*.² The report, approximately 45 pages and available in both Arabic and English, is intended for a broad audience including government, international development organizations and financial institutions, the donor community, and civil society. The report aims to raise awareness on the MDGs and highlight areas in need of concerted efforts and resource allocations. The following is a synopsis of the report's main findings and the full report is available in both Arabic and English on the ESCWA website at www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/scu.

Progress Toward Achieving the MDGs in the Arab Region

The Arab countries have demonstrated progress in many of the MDGs. However, progress varies, across the sub-regions, at the country level, and

from goal to goal. Moreover, significant gaps in progress and status exist between women and men, girls and boys, and urban and rural areas. Overall, the Arab Least Developed Countries (Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen) by far face the most challenges across all eight Goals, particularly in terms of funding and basic services and infrastructure. The middle-income countries of the Mashreq (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syrian) and Maghreb (Algeria, Libya Morocco and Tunisia) have made good progress with regard to some goals, for example, education, but have been less successful in others, for example, eradicating poverty. In those countries, poverty, unemployment and migration are key issues of concern. However, in Iraq and Palestine, which are exceptions to overall trends in the Mashreq, the achievement of MDGs is tied to conflict and occupation. In these areas, efforts and resources must be focused on peacebuilding, building effective public institutions, strengthening civil society

¹ The author wishes to thank Ms. Gheda Temsah for contributing to this article.

² The *Report on the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005* could not have been prepared without the dedication and generous contributions – both technical and financial – of participating UN agencies. The following agencies collaborated in this inter-agency effort: FAO, ILO, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNDP-SURF, UNESCO, UNEP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, WFP, and WFP.

and economic development. The rich countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) possess the resources to surpass the targets set by the MDG framework. However, the issue of sustainability, whether economic, environmental or social, is pivotal in the GCC region.

Poverty

It is unlikely that the Arab region as a whole will succeed in eradicating poverty and hunger (Goal 1) without concerted efforts and increased resources, particularly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In 2000 it was estimated that almost one-half of the populations of those countries lived in poverty and more than one-third suffered from food deprivation.

Education and Gender equality

Despite modest progress since 1990, in 2002 almost 20% of children of primary school age were not enrolled (Goal 2) and some 44 million adult women aged over 15 years could not read or write. While gender equality in enrolment across all levels of education has generally improved, in many countries absolute levels are low for both boys and girls. Moreover, gains in education have not translated into commensurate progress in women's economic and political participation, which remain among the lowest in the world (Goal 3). In 2000, the economic activity rate of Arab women was 29% and their share of seats in national parliament was a low 8% in 2005.

Child mortality, maternal health and the spread of HIV/AIDS

In underdeveloped and conflict stricken countries – namely Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, under-five child mortality rates are close to or higher than 100 per 1,000 live births, compared to the regional average which was 70 in 2003. Maternal mortality is a major health concern in the Arab LDCs, where slightly more than one-half of births were attended by skilled health personnel during the period 1995-2000. In those countries

child and maternal health challenges are tied to access to quality primary and sexual and reproductive health care, in addition to access to basic services – namely, clean water and sanitation; and the spread of infectious diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis (Goal 6). Although the overall prevalence of HIV/AIDS is relatively low in the Arab region, the general trend is towards an increase in infections and expansion of the epidemic. Between 1990 and 2003 the number of reported AIDS cases rose by some 42% to 13,865. Over half of those cases were in the Arab LDCs where more than 1% of the population aged between 15 and 45 years was HIV positive.

Environmental sustainability

Progress toward achieving environmental sustainability (Goal 7) requires more concerted efforts to protect and conserve natural resources – especially energy and water; to improve efficiency of non-renewable energy and water sources; and to correct market failures and distortions by accounting for the environment in national accounts. Despite the region's vast energy resources, in 2003 some 64 million people, mostly in rural areas, had no electricity. Access to sanitation is lower than that of safe drinking water, particularly in rural areas and the Arab LDCs. If concerted actions are not taken, some 82 million people in the Arab region in 2015 will lack access to safe drinking water, 124 million will be without access to basic sanitation and 50% of those persons will be living in the Arab LDCs.

Partnership for development: aid and trade

The achievement of MDGs requires global and regional partnerships (Goal 8) based on mutual accountability and responsibility, in which wealthier nations, through funding, debt relief and fair trade agreements, support the efforts of developing countries to adopt relevant development strategies within a supporting global environment. One major problem facing the Arab region is that it is still perceived by many donors as be-

ing resource-rich. This misconception ignores that fact that almost one-quarter of the Arab population reside in the Arab LDCs, which are in most need of increased development assistance and funding.

Development aid

In recent years, total aid, measured in current United States dollars, to the Arab region increased from \$5.33 billion in 1999 to \$8.32 billion in 2003. However, three middle-income countries, namely, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, received over half of all aid in 2003, reflecting, in part, new donor priorities, which are influenced by political considerations. Moreover, with the exception of 2002, LDCs consistently received less than the regional average in aid per capita: in 2003, they received only 16% of all official development assistance (ODA), which was \$8.3 billion, despite constituting 22% of the total Arab population in that year. It must be noted that the richer Arab countries have made significant contributions to ODA at the regional and international levels in the past: between 2000 and 2003, the GCC countries provided a total of \$13.7 billion in development aid.

Trade

Most Arab States have initiated trade liberalization programmes, albeit with varying degrees of success. In 2003, total exports from the region made up only 4.1% of total world exports, while imports represented 2.7% of total world imports. Moreover, notwithstanding attempts to diversify, most countries in the region continue to export a narrow range of low value-added goods, dominated by fuels, which accounted for 70% of total exports in 2002, agricultural products, textiles and chemicals, to a limited number of export markets, and, predominantly, the European Union.

Challenges for Achieving the Goals

Notwithstanding differences in progress toward achieving the goals, the Arab countries face a common set of issues

and challenges – namely, peace and security; the eradication of poverty and development; greater regional partnerships and integration; respect for human rights, democracy and good governance; and the protection of the environment.

The Way Forward

The achievement of MDGs is largely dependent on the adoption and implementation of integrated and compre-

hensive development policies and strategies related to poverty reduction, unemployment, gender equality, the environment, rural and urban development, health systems, education, science, technology and innovation. Pro-poor social and economic policies based on partnership between the public sector and civil societies are needed, while promoting a larger role for the private sector in terms of social responsibility and environmental sustainability and civil society, especially the media, in terms of advocacy and raising aware-

ness. The way forward requires sustained action at the local, national and regional levels, and reforms aimed at regional partnership and integration – with a view to pooling and harnessing human, financial and natural resources and capacities; good governance, democracy and respect for human rights; and institutional capacity building, particularly strengthening national statistical capacities to produce quality statistics that are needed to support a culture of evidence-based and effective policy-making in the region.