

SECTION I:

Introduction

Africa continues to make progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but this progress remains uneven across goals and subregions. Progress in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to considerably lag behind all other regions of the world. Nonetheless, during 2008 there continued to be high-level political support both inside and outside Africa for the MDGs. In July, at the African Union Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, African leaders discussed and adopted a resolution urging all countries to deploy every means necessary to achieve the targets by the set dates.

The Report of the United Nations Secretary-General's MDG Africa Steering Group was launched and considered at the AU Summit held in July 2008. In September, at the UN High-Level Event (UN-HLE) on MDGs, world leaders expressed concern about the slow rate of progress, especially on the human development indicators. In the MDGs Call to Action that resulted from the September UN-HLE, countries were requested to scale up efforts to achieve the MDGs. The Secretary-General's MDG Gap Task Force Report highlighted shortfalls in meeting Goal 8, on Partnerships, and urged major development partners to honor and fulfill their previous commitments on aid and trade.

On a more positive note, there have been significant improvements in data collection and monitoring, both in terms of reporting and in terms of coverage. This is largely due to enhanced efforts

at the country level to collect MDG-relevant data by national statistical agencies. Improvements have been bolstered by intensified advocacy for data by continental institutions, such as the African Union Commission and the United Nations Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDGs indicators.

A number of new challenges to meeting the MDGs in Africa emerged in 2008. Notable among these were the fuel crisis, the food crisis, and the global economic and financial crisis. The global financial and economic crisis presents major obstacles to achievement of the MDGs in Africa, threatening to stall, erode, or reverse hard-won gains in the region. For example, preliminary evidence suggests that the slump in exports is resulting in an increase in poverty incidence. Artisanal mines have closed as a result of which many artisanal miners have lost their source of income. Inflation is rising, local currencies are depreciating, and the prices of staple foodstuffs and imported commodities are on the increase. These changes will have an adverse impact on the strength of national economies. In particular, balance of payments are deteriorating and are bringing in their wake many secondary effects such as shortage of imports and weak domestic currencies. In some cases, it is making it more difficult for governments to import medicines to advance progress toward the health targets. Lower incomes and reduced demand for finished goods will negatively impact manufacturing, leading to a rise in unemployment in many countries, and the possibility of social unrest. Governments

have to be careful in the policy choices that they make to attenuate the impact of the crisis and ensure that these do not result in reversals of progress made to date.

To summarize progress made on specific goals and targets:

- » **Goal 1:** Although data on income poverty are not readily available, the current crisis is likely to erode some of the progress already made in countries like Ghana in reducing the poverty headcount. The crisis could also undermine actions already taken by governments to reduce poverty.
- » Progress toward full employment in the region has been slow, despite positive economic growth over recent years in many African countries. Labor productivity growth was positive across all regions during 2006 but it was not strong enough to accelerate progress toward full and decent employment for all. Labor productivity growth remains vulnerable to exogenous shocks and cyclicity.
- » **Goal 2:** The region is on track to meet the primary education enrollment target. However, progress toward the target for primary completion, although improving, is unlikely to be achieved if current trends continue. The urban and income gradient in enrollment underscores the need to focus more attention on rural areas and poor households in order to meet the targets.
- » **Goal 3:** The trend toward gender parity remains strong in primary education but the gender gap continues to be wide at secondary and tertiary levels. One encouraging sign is the growing number of women in national parliaments, as evidenced in recent elections in a number of countries.
- » **Goals 4, 5, & 6:** Progress toward the health goals continues to present a serious challenge, particularly for child and maternal mortality rates. However, immunization coverage is approaching universality and is thus reducing infant mortality rates significantly in many countries. Reduction in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is also being achieved, but not at a rate to reverse the spread of the disease.
- » **Goal 7:** The proportion of the population with access to improved water supply and sanitation is growing but is mostly concentrated in urban areas. More effort needs to be directed to rural areas.
- » **Goal 8:** Significant gaps in fulfilling the global partnership for development remain. These include the inability to conclude the Doha Round of trade negotiations, and the inability of major OECD/DAC countries to reach the ODA/GNI ratio target of 0.7 percent. The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) continue to pose a risk to the African trade development. Meanwhile, trade with emerging economies like China, India, and South Korea is growing, particularly in the mining sector.
- » The current global financial and economic crisis presents both opportunities and risks. In particular, it provides opportunities for African countries to deepen their financial systems, persevere with structural and economic reforms, and to adopt economic and social

policies aimed at providing safety nets for the poor and socially vulnerable. Such actions will reinforce and secure progress already made toward achieving the MDGs.

Overall, this report reiterates much the same message as that of the 2008 Report: The continent is making steady progress on a few goals, but less so on others. There is no convergence either in levels or rates of progress across the subregions. Achieving the MDGs in North Africa though remains less of a challenge than in other subregions.