

# SECTION IV: Conclusion and Recommendations

This Report reiterates much the same message as the 2008 Report: The continent is making steady progress on a few MDGs but relatively little progress on others. There is no convergence either in levels or rates of progress across the subregions. Achieving the MDGs in North Africa presents less of a challenge than it does for the rest of the continent.

With approximately five years remaining to the target date of 2015, urgent action is required on the part of African governments, their citizens, and the private sector to scale up efforts toward achievement of the MDGs. Undoubtedly, the current global economic and financial crisis presents special challenges to sustain progress already made. But the current crisis will eventually end, while the challenge of meeting the MDGs will remain. While much effort has been expended in dealing with the crisis, a similar level of effort needs to be devoted to meeting the MDGs.

The outcome document of the 2005 midterm review of progress toward achievement of the MDGs called on countries to expand public sector investments. But nearly five years on, many countries still lack the resources to do so. And this situation is likely to be accentuated by the global economic and financial crisis. Fiscal space is still constrained by a host of factors, including loan conditionalities imposed by international donors.

Nonetheless, this short-term difficulty should not distract countries from continuing to pursue structural and fiscal reform policies that have underpinned the progress already made in the region. They need to continue to reform their economies and to improve governance and accountability. Further, intensified efforts should be made to mobilize domestic resources to scale up public sector investments in order to achieve the MDGs. Countries should not panic in their response to the current global financial and economic crisis, as ill-considered measures could jeopardize the hard-won gains already achieved. To deal with the immediate adverse effects of the crisis, African countries need well-targeted and flexible social protection measures. Such measures could include public works programs, food-for-work programs, contributory pensions, and health insurance policies.

It is also important for countries to begin to consider the unintended consequences of policies and programs which were adopted to promote and accelerate progress toward the MDGs. For example, the emerging problem of increasing under-representation of young men in secondary and tertiary education presents enormous challenges. Progress in female enrollment must not be at the expense of male enrollment. In some countries, increasing male underrepresentation in education and subsequently in the skilled labor market, risks driving young men into crime, religious fundamentalism, and ethnic jingoism.

These have the potential to result in conflict – both religious and ethnic – as well as increased domestic violence, all of which could undermine the successes achieved in the empowerment of women.

African governments should also ensure that short-term measures adopted to deal with the crisis do not create unsustainable fiscal burdens for the future. MDG-based planning and policy implementation should continue to be emphasized.

Governments should cascade MDGs-based development plans and poverty reduction strategies to lower tiers of government or subnational jurisdictions, as these are generally better placed to produce local public goods and to assure the efficiency of social services delivery. In doing so, care must be taken to ensure that increased assignment of fiscal responsibility to lower tiers of government does not result in coordination failures or undermine macroeconomic stability.