

MAKING IT HAPPEN

TECHNOLOGY, FINANCE AND STATISTICS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2014/15



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations*

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) promotes regional cooperation for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific, a dynamic region characterized by growing wealth, diversity and change, but also challenged with persistent poverty, environmental degradation, inequality and insecurity. ESCAP supports member States with sound strategic analysis, policy options and capacity development to address key development challenges and to implement innovative solutions for region-wide economic prosperity, social progress, environmental sustainability and resilience to external shocks. ESCAP, through its conference structure, assists member States in forging a stronger, coordinated regional voice on global issues by building capacities to dialogue, negotiate and shape the development agenda in an age of globalization, decentralization and problems that transcend borders. A key modality for this strategy is the promotion of intraregional connectivity and regional integration.

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries substantially reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to the majority of the world's poor. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in 177 countries and territories, UNDP offers global perspectives and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

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FOREWORD

This is a historic year: the end of 2015 is the target date for the Millennium Development Goals. Since 2001, governments across Asia and the Pacific have been striving to meet ambitious goals that aimed to improve the lives of more than half the world's people.

As this report points out, mostly the news is good. In 2001, it may have seemed a daunting task to halve the 1990 poverty rate – the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 per day. In fact Asia and the Pacific has cut that poverty rate by more than two-thirds. The region has not achieved all the goals, and some subregions and countries have made faster progress than others. Moreover, because of inevitable lags in gathering the most recent information, this report, whose data largely correspond to 2014, should perhaps be seen as the final milestone rather than the finishing post. Nevertheless, even at this stage it is clear that the MDGs have spurred heartening levels of commitment and achievement.

As one era draws to a close, so another opens. This year, world leaders will assemble to consider a proposed post-2015 agenda, expected to be formulated as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will offer a fresh opportunity to build on the MDGs – completing “unfinished business” in such vital areas as maternal and child mortality, while addressing other major concerns that have risen to the top of the global agenda, notably climate change and rising levels of inequality. This proposed new agenda can also make up for weaknesses in the MDGs, notably in Goal 8 which fell far short of its potential for strengthening a global partnership for development.

Since 2004, these Asia-Pacific MDGs efforts have been supported by a unique multilateral partnership between ESCAP, ADB and UNDP. Working together, we have produced a regular series of *Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Reports* that have presented concise graphical scorecards of achievement, while also highlighting challenges and opportunities for accelerating progress towards the goals.

This 2014/15 report, *Making It Happen*, follows the same principle. It assesses the state of progress on the MDGs, but then considers how we can move towards the SDGs. The report is based on a series of Asia-Pacific consultations with governments, civil society and academia. These meetings focused on “implementation” – on how we can embark on this new agenda and do so in an inclusive way that extends the benefits of development to the most marginalized groups and regions.

For this purpose, the report zeroes in on three key issues. The first is technology. In an era where much economic growth is impelled by rapid technological change, how can Asia and the Pacific ensure that these new technologies drive human development not just for a fortunate few, but for everyone? It argues that the priority is not so much to “transfer” technologies from developed to developing economies but to identify and disseminate the most productive technologies, some of which may be found on our own doorsteps.

The second issue is finance. Achieving these new ambitions will require political commitment, but also significant financial resources. In the past, the necessary investment in developing countries might have come largely from the public purse. But today, the financing landscape has changed – while the strategic initiative needs to be backed by greater public funds, the largest sums are in private hands. In the years ahead sustainable development will need to be financed from a more diverse range of sources – public, private and joint financing options, both domestic and international, recognizing not only the need to move more funds towards financing investments in sustainable development but also to build capacities and mechanisms to help countries attract money from all possible sources. A shared agenda suggests how key constituents can work together to make money work for a development where benefits are not only more equitably shared but will last for generations to come. And such partnerships will look beyond the traditional North-South flows, recognizing that Asia and the Pacific offers major opportunities for South-South cooperation.

The third issue is statistics. The need to monitor the MDGs has already stimulated governments to generate a broader and richer flow of data. The SDGs will be even more demanding. Countries across Asia and the Pacific must find better ways of tracking both old and new priorities – and at a level of detail and disaggregation that reveals the lived experience of the region's most marginalized people. More important still, however, such statistics should serve as a launching pad for evidence-based policymaking.

Over the 15-year period of the MDGs, Asia and the Pacific became a driving force for the global economy and wider human progress. In the post-2015 era, this region has opportunity to steer its development towards a more sustainable and inclusive path and to ensure prosperous future for all.



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OVERVIEW

MAKING IT HAPPEN

TECHNOLOGY, FINANCE AND STATISTICS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

With more than half the world's population, and some of its most dynamic economies, the Asia-Pacific region has helped drive the world towards the Millennium Development Goals. To maintain this momentum for the post-2015 agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals, the region will need to address three key areas of implementation: extending the benefits of technologies to all; mobilizing the necessary financial resources; and building statistical systems that can monitor the progress of the poorest groups and ensure that no one is left behind.

Over the past 15 years the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have made a major contribution to development in Asia and the Pacific. They have helped to focus attention and resources behind common objectives and have spurred action and achievement on a wide range of important issues. Across the region, governments recognized the value of a clear set of goals and many have incorporated the MDGs framework into their national development planning.

For all its strengths, the framework also had some weaknesses. In particular, Goal 8 on the global partnership for development did not live up to expectations, and its potential for strengthening regional and global partnerships for development remained underutilized. The current debate on the post-2015 development agenda offers a fresh opportunity to review the global partnership for development.

Towards the Sustainable Development Goals

In an increasingly globalized world it is clear that sustainable development cannot be based on national action alone, but requires a compelling and supportive international framework of development cooperation. The contours of such a framework have started to emerge. The UN Intergovernmental Open Working Group has outlined a new set of objectives: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These could form part of a broader and more integrated agenda that addresses all aspects of sustainable development – a combined environmental, social and economic pathway to a better world. This will also be an agenda that aims to reach excluded or marginalized people – building on the

principle of “leaving no one behind”. These objectives have received strong support across Asia and the Pacific. Many countries have already expressed readiness to embrace the new agenda and tackle higher levels of ambition.

In 2012 an Asia-Pacific expert meeting, on “Goal 8: what's next”, identified three key development enablers that will be crucial for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda – finance, technology and statistics. These will be core and interrelated components of implementation – whatever goals are chosen for the post-2015 agenda. The 2014/15 *Asia-Pacific MDGs Report* therefore has two main parts. First it looks back at the experience of the MDGs. Second it considers these three areas of implementation and how they relate to each other.

The report considers technology in its broadest sense – encompassing all dimensions of the origins, flows and uptake of know-how, experience and equipment. It takes a similarly comprehensive view of the region's options for raising the necessary finance, not just for disseminating technology but also for achieving the SDGs as a whole. Finally it considers how all of these activities can be measured and monitored through a more rigorous collection and analysis of statistics, combining old and new sources of data.

MDGs – the final milestone

Over the past 15 years, the Asia-Pacific region has taken dramatic strides and is expected to meet 13 of the 21 MDG targets tracked for this report. The greatest success has been for poverty. Between 1990 and 2012, the proportion of the

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region's population living on less than \$1.25 per day fell from 53 to 14 per cent, and by 2015 it is projected to fall to 12 per cent. The MDG target was to halve the poverty rate, and of the countries with sufficient data, all except two are expected to meet that target.

A second notable achievement concerns water. More than two-thirds of countries are expected to meet the target of halving the proportion of the population without access to safe drinking water. For the region as a whole, that proportion has fallen from 28 to 7 per cent. The region has also met other important targets. Nearly all primary-aged children now complete school, and students at all levels of education benefit from gender parity. On the health front, the region has reduced the incidence and prevalence of tuberculosis. And among the environmental targets, the region has maintained the proportion of land covered by forests, and increased the proportion that has protected status. Asia and the Pacific has also reduced CO₂ emissions per unit of GDP.

It is also important to note that even where the targets have not been reached there have often been impressive advances towards them. The rates of under-five and infant mortality, for example, fell short of the required two-thirds reduction, but still more than halved. And often the most rapid progress was registered in the countries that started furthest behind.

This still leaves however, an extensive "unfinished agenda". In 2012, 569 million people were still living on less than \$1.25 per day, 21 million children were not enrolled in primary school, and more than one-fifth of under-five children – 75 million – were underweight. In addition, 1.2 billion people in rural areas, and 480 million in urban areas, still lacked access to safe sanitation.

Did the MDGs make a difference?

To what extent was progress over the past 15 years a response to the challenge of the MDGs? Without counterfactual evidence, this is impossible to prove, but some indications can be gleaned from the average annual rates of change in

progress in the high-deprivation group was faster than in the low- and medium-deprivation groups.

Transformation through technology

Governments that accept the challenge of the Sustainable Development Goals will have to identify the best ways of achieving them. Critical to these efforts will be the ways in which they are able to use technology. Most people think of technology in terms of digital gadgets or machines, but technology should be considered in a broader sense – encompassing all dimensions of the origins, flows, uptake and transformation of know-how, experience and equipment.

Technology was addressed by Millennium Development Goal 8, though only to a limited extent. The Sustainable Development Goals can establish a more comprehensive agenda. This will not be straightforward, because there are multiple competing interests and challenges: most technology is privately owned by companies, and each country will have different economic and political priorities. Countries will have to identify the best technology for their particular needs in different sectors and adapt them to local circumstances. Then there are problems of measurement: technologies, especially digital ones, evolve rapidly and require frequent revisions to product classifications which makes it hard to quantify the effects, and particularly the social impacts. Moreover, for a number of subject areas there are few reliable data, especially regarding the differentiated use and needs of women and men and for systems of indigenous knowledge or those that emerge from the informal sector.

Creating public goods

Technology has boosted many aspects of human development. But some technologies have also had negative consequences. Industrial production and urban transportation, for example, have made a major contribution to living standards, but have often polluted city air. And intensive agriculture that has boosted food security has

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