

## International Journal of Rural Studies October 2007 Editorial

The Millennium Declaration of 2000 set clearly defined goals in key areas for a 15-year period. Now, the Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 has been published, showing just how far these goals have been achieved in the first five years of the declaration.

The first and arguably most important goal is to halve extreme poverty by 2015. In this respect, Asia has done very well. Eastern Asia has seen the highest gains. The number of those living in extreme poverty dropped from 33% to 9.9% between 1990 and 2004. In Southeast Asia during the same period, there was a decrease from 20.8% to 6.8%. In Southern Asia, which includes India, the same period saw a drop from 41.1% to 29.5%. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, the numbers of very poor have leveled off and there has been a drop of almost 6% in the poverty rate. Provided this trend proves sustainable, poverty reduction targets are well on the way to being met.

Unfortunately, this positive trend has not been matched by any improvement in income equality. Indeed, the gap between rich and poor has widened even further. In Eastern Asia, the poorest people saw their share in income drop from 7.1% to 4.5%. The worst inequality exists in Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, where the poor only account for 3% of national consumption.

In other goals set by the Millennium Declaration, there has been significant progress. Primary school enrolment increased from 80% to 88% between 1991 and 2005; women are gradually participating more in politics though the growth rate is slow; there has been a global decline in child mortality; and efforts to eliminate tuberculosis and malaria are making some headway.

But again, there is still a great deal to be done, in particular in the field of women's health. Complications in pregnancy and childbirth kill over half a million women every year. In sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 16 women will die from such causes compared to 1 in 3,800 in the developed world. Almost without exception, these deaths are preventable by timely treatment and pre- and post-natal support. Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest numbers of skilled health

attendants at birth and not surprisingly, their maternal death rates are the highest.

Another inequality very noticeable in developing countries is between urban and rural areas. For example, 89% women in urban areas have a skilled attendant at the time of delivery but in rural areas the number drops to 49%. Family planning advice and facilities are also more readily available to urban women. 25% of maternal deaths could be avoided by the prevention of unplanned pregnancies.

One cause for concern is the increase in those dying from AIDS. The report tells us that over 15 million children lost one or both parents from AIDS in 2005. Other areas where targets are not yet being met include the provision of basic sanitation, employment opportunities for young people and environmental measures.

The Millennium Declaration was a commitment between developing countries and the developed world. The Report shows clearly that developing countries are striving to reach their targets even though much remains to be done and progress in some areas is far too slow. However, the same level of commitment is not evident among their partners from the developed world.

The official ODA (Official Development Assistance) target is 0.7% of GNP by 2015. So far, only a tiny handful of nations have reached this target – Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

It is essential that aid be aligned with the policies and practices adopted by recipients. Aid must also be reliable and regular without any ties (such as obligatory purchases from the donor country).

Two things are evident from the Report. Firstly, a lot remains to be done; and secondly, it would be possible to achieve a great deal more if only those concerned would live up to their commitments.