

Setting a Development Agenda for Asia and the Pacific in the Post-MDG Era

ADB's developing member countries performed very well overall on the income poverty MDG. But progress on non-income human development goals, such as improving maternal health and environmental sustainability, was slow and even regressed in some crucial aspects.

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) draw to a close, practitioners are looking back on the MDG experience and its achievements to help inform a post-2015 development agenda, and this is already the subject of an intense global debate.

All countries in Asia and the Pacific adopted the MDGs, and the region contributed more than its share to global progress on reducing extreme poverty. While Asia is doing particularly well in this respect, progress on human development indicators and environmental sustainability has been rather less robust, most notably in the areas of infant and maternal health, reducing hunger, basic sanitation, and reversing the trend of carbon emissions.

The region's biggest achievement of the MDG-era has undoubtedly been reducing extreme poverty by half, the first Millennium goal. Even so, Asia and the Pacific continue to account for two-thirds of the world's extreme poor, concentrated in South Asia. Getting over that hump will be one of the foremost challenges of a new agenda for the region.

Overall Assessment

Independent Evaluation's study *ADB's Support for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* assesses how Asia and the Pacific are advancing the MDGs, the effectiveness of ADB's support to developing member countries for achieving them, and the emerging issues for a new development roadmap for the region. The study also seeks to answer a question that will be crucial for that agenda: does setting goals make a difference to development results?

Some \$32 billion of ADB's total sovereign financing between 2002 and 2011, the period covered by the study, was for direct MDG support. Projects and programs aimed at reducing income poverty and promoting environmental sustainability comprised the major share of that portfolio, while human development MDG support was less prominent. A quarter of these operations have been completed and assessed. Of these, the study found that interventions directly supporting MDGs had a 75% success rate, higher than ADB's overall historical success rate of 63%. Of 57 MDG-related initiatives directly targeting the poor to increase incomes or employment, 68% were rated *successful*.

The Impact of Goal Setting

The evidence, on balance, supports the positive effects of goal setting. Some countries adjusted their policies to the MDGs, contributing to better performance on several indicators. Two major concerns emerging from the analysis of goal setting were the different starting points of countries, and poor data collection and data quality. Many developing countries were unable to adequately track their MDG progress due to data problems. Both issues must be addressed in setting the framework for a post-2015 agenda.

ADB's Role in a Post-2015 Framework

As the MDG era progressed, it became evident that the pattern of Asia's economic growth—strong though that was—failed to address rising inequality and environmental sustainability. For relevance and impact, a new framework will require the joint pursuit of growth, human development, and environmental dimensions. ADB's current focus on inclusive growth and environmental sustainability is in line with this in principle. To achieve high payoffs ADB could:

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Thematic Evaluation Study on ADB's Support for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Main Report)

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Stretch current priorities. ADB puts considerable emphasis on promoting environmental sustainability. Pushing its main infrastructure investments further in this direction would strengthen ADB's role in improving the environment in the region.

Achieve synergies. To maximize synergies among goals, ADB should consider balancing its far more substantial support for income generation with non-income human development goals, particularly in health and education.

Build alliances. ADB should review its strategy of developing partnerships to support noncore sectors to determine whether these are providing sufficient support, especially where off-track or slowly progressing MDGs are concerned.

Confront lagging indicators. Targeting lagging and off-target indicators in the region, such as for sanitation and carbon emissions, would be in line with ADB's commitment to the MDGs and with its long-term Strategy 2020.

Set a floor. Focusing on developing member countries whose progress falls furthest below a minimum standard of basic goals seems warranted. ADB could allocate more concessional funds to support countries most in need of achieving minimum levels for, among other things, income, hunger prevention, education, and health.

Although new themes for a post-2015 agenda are already emerging, the MDGs present a significant unfinished agenda for the region. These will almost certainly carry over in some form to a new framework. One way to envisage the minimum standards for basic goals would be to identify the areas where there is greatest commonality of need. Based on ADB's *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2012*, the targets that are slowest, most off-track, or regressing across a majority of developing member countries are: carbon emissions, protected forest cover, proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility, proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, maternal mortality ratio, infant and under-5 mortality rates, HIV prevalence, completion of a full course of primary schooling, and proportion of people suffering from hunger.

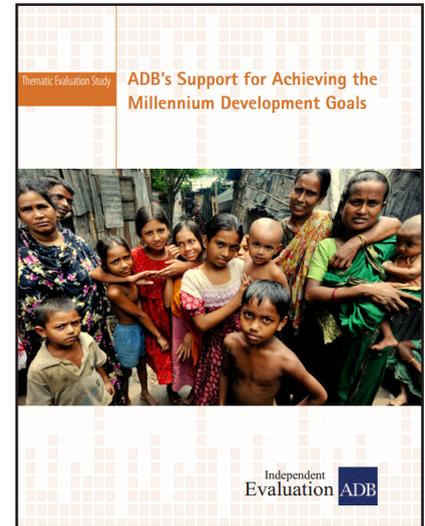
Emerging Trends and Issues for a New Development Agenda

To accelerate poverty reduction and improve the state of human development, certain trends and issues are under the spotlight in the post-2015 discourse.

Rising inequality threatens to undermine progress in reducing poverty, even in countries that have achieved income goals. The Gini coefficient of developing Asia has risen from 39% to 46% since the early-1990s (had it not, another 240 million people would have escaped poverty). Inequality extends beyond income poverty, with the poor more likely to die in infancy, less likely to attend secondary school, and much less likely to attend a college of higher education.

Demographic shifts have major implications for post-2015 development, with aging populations putting rising pressure on public health services. Rapid urbanization is already placing an intolerable burden on overstretched infrastructure. Improving access to basic urban services will be a high priority for a post-2015 agenda to ensure that cities and towns continue to serve as engines of growth, innovation, and technology to promote national development.

Environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly critical development challenge. The unbridled use of natural resources to fuel rapid economic growth and meet the demands of expanding populations is causing immense damage to the environment. Natural disasters, meanwhile, are increasing in their frequency and intensity because of the effects of rising populations in disaster-prone areas, environmental degradation, insufficient disaster preparedness, and climate change. A post-2015 agenda will need to prioritize global, regional, and country-level responses to strengthen national and local capacities to improve the quality of the environment. Of equal importance is building capacity to respond to natural disasters, also at the national and local levels.



Read the full report at
www.adb.org/documents/thematic-evaluation-study-ADB-s-support-achieving-millennium-development-goals

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