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## **Asia-Pacific Region Will Miss MDGs If “Gaps” Are Not Filled Immediately**

*ESCAP, ADB and UNDP Launch Regional Report On Millennium Development Goals*

Bangkok (United Nations Information Services) – Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region may not meet all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) due to gaps in several key areas according to a joint report by the United Nations and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The report, entitled *A Future Within Reach 2008*, was launched today, at a high-level panel meeting on the MDGs, during the annual session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It is the third regional report on MDGs produced by ESCAP, ADB and the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) Millennium Development Goals Initiative team, based in Colombo.

The eight MDGs – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by most of the world’s countries and all of the world’s leading development institutions.

Building on previous regional updates, *A Future Within Reach 2008* takes stock of significant MDG progress to date across Asia and the Pacific, and highlights existing and potential challenges to their achievement.

“On the positive side, the region has an unparalleled singular record of freeing more than 350 million people from extreme poverty between 1990 and 2004,” said Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. “But that’s just not enough, we cannot rest for a minute – the gaps cited in the report need to be filled and they need to be filled immediately.” Currently, 641 million of the world’s poorest – nearly two-thirds of the global total – live in the Asia-Pacific region.

The report highlights the need for international organizations in the region to better coordinate their assistance to countries trying to make the MDGs a reality.

“Everyone involved – from all the agencies and funds of the United Nations and regional development entities to bilateral donors – needs to lift their game in this respect,” said Ms. Heyzer. “It’s essential that development partners contribute according to their unique strengths, yet uphold the spirit, principle and practice of uniting to ‘deliver as one.’”

The report outlines a “regional road map” that all development partners could use as a way to create synergies in their efforts to bring the MDGs to fruition.

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*Headquartered in Bangkok, ESCAP is the largest of the UN's five Regional Commissions in terms of its membership, population served and area covered. The only intergovernmental forum covering the entire Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP works to promote sustainable and inclusive economic and social progress. More information is available at [www.unescap.org](http://www.unescap.org).*

***Extra \$25 billion a year needed to help poorest Asian countries achieve MDGs***

The financing gap on the MDGs remains huge. Helping the 14 least developed countries in Asia achieve the goals will need an extra \$8 billion between now and 2015. Enabling all 29 of the countries that receive support from ADB's Asian Development Fund – which offers grants and loans at very low interest rates to Asia's poorest nations – to achieve the MDGs, will require an additional \$25 billion annually.

“The needs of Asia and the Pacific as a whole are far larger. This calls for strengthening inclusive and sustainable growth in the region as emphasized in our long-term strategy, as well as concerted action by all development partners,” said ADB Vice-President Ursula Schaefer-Preuss.

Apart from the gap in financing the MDGs, the report also detects gaps in governments' pursuit of pro-MDG growth. The report identifies these as gaps in growth, strategy, policy, implementation and resources. “Coordinated support and action in these areas is necessary to turn the corner on poverty in our time,” said Ms. Schaefer-Preuss.

***Economic growth alone not enough to achieve MDGs***

The report finds that if per capita gross domestic product (GDP) rises by one percentage point, the headcount poverty ratio tends to fall by 0.86 per cent, but growth has less effect on other MDGs such as under-nutrition, child and maternal mortality.

“Even in the unlikely event that countries boosted their projected per capita GDP economic growth by three percentage points, many countries would remain off-track in achieving some of the MDGs,” said Ms. Heyzer. “To achieve the MDGs they will need to improve the structure and quality of economic growth as well as make appropriate changes to national development strategies.”

The report points out that until now, the MDGs have not been strongly integrated into budgetary plans. This indicates a gap in the strategic planning – for, to be effective, national MDG strategies should be “need based,” setting out national targets and priorities that are consistent with reaching the MDGs.

“The effectiveness of all efforts at achieving MDGs will depend critically on the quality of governance,” said UNDP's David Lockwood, the acting head of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. “Raising standards of governance will assist countries in their efforts to achieve ‘pro-poor’ growth.”

*A Future Within Reach 2008* says that policies aiming at economy-wide institutional and policy reforms, macroeconomic stabilization, sectoral policies, and pro-poor expenditure and revenue policies need to be strengthened. On the other hand, some of these policies may harm the poor in short to medium term, thus great care is required to take account of the adverse impacts of the policies on the poor.

“If these policies to foster growth are accompanied by improvements in both physical and social infrastructure – ‘MDG goods and services’ – they will help achieve the Goals,” UNDP's Lockwood said. He added that this should be a self-reinforcing process: expansion in the MDG goods and services sectors can also act as an engine of growth, turning “pro-MDG growth” into “pro-growth MDGs.”

The previous regional MDG report, *A Future within Reach - Reshaping institutions in a region of disparities to meet the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific*, was issued in 2005. The first report, *Promoting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific*, was published in 2003.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has pledged to mobilize national leaders in a drive to reach the MDGs when they come to United Nations Headquarters in New York for the General Assembly's annual high-level debate in September. In January, he said the world is at the "mid-point" of the campaign to end world poverty, set forth in the MDGs, and called for attention to the poorest of the world's poor, known as the 'bottom billion.'

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