



Behind the well documented hunger crisis in some parts of Africa, there is a different reality which is much less reported: two thirds of countries in the developing world are well on their way towards a crucial victory in fighting poverty.

According to a new report by the World Bank two thirds of all developing countries will reach the so called UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to half extreme poverty by the year 2015. The MDGs are tangible targets set by the UN in the fight against world poverty.

Obviously a country like Somalia is not one of them, but in those developing countries where there is a well functioning state, peace and growth, considerable progress is taking place.

This is the case especially in South-America and Asia where more or less all poor countries have increased their capacity to deal with crises and catastrophes. A good example is Bangladesh which has made considerable progress in fighting hunger and child mortality despite challenges such as natural catastrophes and extreme poverty.

But also many African countries have had great success, such as Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania.

Two-thirds of Africans are middle-class

The chief economist for the African Development Bank, Mthuli Ncube, says that actually one third of Africans are middle class; living on up to 20\$ a day.

This is not much in Western-European terms but it is enough for the family to have more money than it needs for barely surviving: it is able to invest in education and health.

This in turns means that women are giving birth to fewer children and the children who are born, live better and longer.

Economic development does not only benefit those who are a bit better off. There are also improvements for the poorest of the poor according to several indicators.

According to the World Bank the number of people living in extreme poverty has been halved from 1990 to date, which means that the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be reached.

The MDGs are arguably the best indicator to measure progress in development.

This is the situation so far – they are meant to be reached by 2015:

Poverty

Target: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

There are 700 million fewer people will be suffering extreme poverty in 2015 than in 1990. This success is largely due to progress in China, India and Brazil, but some indicators in Africa are also positive. The percentage of malnourished children in Africa has fallen from 29% to 18% (1990-2010) – that is 63 million children every year (WHO).

Education

Target: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

The MDG target is that all children worldwide should go to primary school. We are almost there or at 89%. As an example twice as many children go to school in Tanzania today as in 1999.

Gender equality

Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

In only ten years the ratio of girls versus boys in primary schools has increased from 91 per 100 to 96 per 100.

Angola and Rwanda have the highest ratio of women in parliament in the world, including both developed and developing countries.

Child mortality

Target: Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Child mortality is falling worldwide and has decreased by one third from 1990 to 2009. Countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Eritrea have seen child mortality decrease by 60%.

Maternal health

Target: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

Today 65% of all women were helped giving birth by a qualified midwives compared to 55% in 1990. The percentage of women who had at least one check up by a qualified health worker during pregnancy rose from 64% in 1990 to 81% in 2009.

HIV/AIDS

Target: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is under control. The number of HIV infected peaked in 1996 when it reached 3.5 million – in 2009 it was 2.6 million.

Sustainable development

Target: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

There is no good news of a new climate deal. Deforestation, however, is decreasing. On a global scale the volume of forests disappearing has been decreased by 3 million hectares per year and Brazil, as an example, has reduced by 75% the felling of trees in its rain forest.

More than two hundred million people have been taken out of slums since 1990 and have access to running water and toilets. The ratio of slum dwellers in the developing world has fallen from 39% to 33%.

The eighth goal is less easily quantifiable than the seven others - international cooperation. Nevertheless it can be argued that some progress has been made since the responsibility of developing countries for their own policies has been increased with the focus on development, health, education and sustainable development in the last ten years.

Another important element is that international cooperation has become more democratic. Until 1990 there were more dictatorships than democracies in the world, but here there has been radical change. A more democratic world has more capacity to find common solutions to global problems.

This is the good news, but by presenting it we are only pointing out that the glass is half full, rather than half empty.

The 2011 Report of the MDG Gap Task Force which was launched in New York 16 September clearly shows that there is a long way to go, despite these encouraging signs. In launching the report, Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General noted:

“I am very encouraged that, by and large, donors continue to provide substantial and vital resources needed to fund development activities – to fund tangible improvements in the lives and prospects of millions of men, women and children around the world.

Last year, donors provided a record-high \$129 billion in official development assistance. I commend this increase. In these days of fiscal retrenchment, every dollar counts.

Yet the international community has yet to meet the targets we have assigned ourselves. There is a troubling distance between what we have promised and what we are actually doing to support the global partnership for development. And that gap is expected to widen,” said Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

(Based largely on Verdens Bedste Nyheder, Copenhagen 9 September 2011)