

Millennium Development Goals in Sri Lanka: A statistical review

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POVERTY ALLEVIATION:

In the year 2000, the leaders of the world decided to launch a concerted attack on poverty and the problems of illiteracy, hunger, and discrimination against women, unsafe drinking water and a degraded environment.

The United Nations at the dawn of the new Millennium, leaders from virtually all countries agreed to a set of eight ambitious Goals called Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Developing countries, have been taking the lead in this campaign, particularly regarding the first seven Goals concerning direct improvements in human well-being.

The eighth Goal includes steps that developed countries need to take for supporting the campaigns of developing countries to win the struggle of eradicating poverty.

Sri Lanka is one of the 189 member states that adopted the Millennium Declaration and in doing so committed itself to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This necessitates regular review reports and a user-friendly database to store, retrieve and present trends and patterns of MDG indicators for tracking progress in achieving the goals. It is to serve this purpose the department of Census and Statistics recently released a publication and a database system on the MDGs.

The "Millennium Development Goals in Sri Lanka - 2006" is a statistical review of a set of selected indicators for monitoring progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

There are 8 MDGs with 18 targets. For monitoring progress towards these targets, 48 indicators, with some additions, have

been recommended. The Department of Census and Statistics has compiled 24 of the MDG indicators on its own.

The trends and patterns of these 24 indicators over the past two decades are reviewed in this publication.

A user-friendly database to monitor the progress in achieving MDGs was also released with this publication. This database has been prepared by using the software DevInfo which is offered by the United Nations for monitoring MDGs.

Data on MDG indicators together with a set of tables, charts and maps presenting the trends and patterns of the indicators is included in this database.

Data available in this database can be retrieved and presented satisfying user needs easily.

The global MDGs are to be achieved over a 25-year period with 1990 as the base year and 2015 as the final year for most of the targets.

Taking the data from surveys and censuses conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics, this report and the database provide data mainly for two years, one year each from the 1990s and 2000s, depending on the availability of data.

The report provides a comparison of the expected achievements based on a linear extrapolation against the targets set for 2015. An initiative is now under way to identify the data gaps and to compile more MDG indicators to improve the monitoring of the Sri Lanka's progress towards MDGs.

The first Goal is poverty eradication. While all MDG goals are inter related, a main determinant of other MDGs is poverty. Poverty permeates all sectors and holds back progress.

There are two targets set for this Goal. Target 1 is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people below the poverty line.

For international comparison,

the poverty line is set at 1 US \$ a day. However, the national governments also set official poverty lines. The proportion of population whose income is less than the national poverty threshold is known as the poverty headcount ratio and this is the indicator presented here.

As measured by this indicator, as at 2002, about one fifth of the household population in Sri Lanka was living in poverty and given the recent trends the 2015 target of 13% is unlikely to be achieved. Accelerated efforts being made to eradicate poverty, might change this trend.

Halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger is the second target of Goal 1. Prevalence of underweight in children under five years of age is the indicator for monitoring progress. Underweight has declined from 37.7% in 1993 to 29.4% in 2000. Continuation of this will result in a prevalence of just under 12% by 2015 which is considerably lower than the target 19% and is therefore, well on track to reach this target.

Goal 2 of the Millennium Declaration is to achieve universal primary education: The target set for this goal is to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Achieving universal education is also a strategy to reduce poverty and expand the options available to both girls and boys.

Four indicators are used to track progress: net enrolment ratio in primary education, proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5, primary completion rate and literacy rate of 15-24 year olds. Sri Lanka has already made much progress in terms of all these indicators.

Net primary school enrolment ratio for both boys and girls is over 95%, proportion reaching grade 5 has exceeded 95%, and the literacy rate for 15 to 24 year

olds is over 95% for both males and females. Sri Lanka is on track to reaching universal primary education well in advance of 2015.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is the third Millennium Development Goal. The target for this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Two indicators related to education for monitoring progress of Goal 3 are ratio of girls to boys in primary school, secondary and tertiary education and ratio of literate women to men 15-24 years old.

Access to education and the ability to read and write are the essence of empowerment.

Sri Lanka has already eliminated gender disparity in both primary and junior secondary education, the parity index being nearly 100% in 2002. In senior secondary and tertiary levels share of women is even higher than that of boys. There is no disparity in literacy between men and women the parity being 100.9% in 2001.

Goals 4 and 5 are to reduce child mortality and maternal mortality respectively. The targets are to reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate and by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio. The indicators for child mortality are infant mortality rate, under five mortality rate and measles immunization coverage.

For maternal mortality they are maternal mortality ratio and births attended by skilled health personnel.

Child mortality and maternal mortality in Sri Lanka have recorded reductions to levels that are considerably low and comparable with those obtained in some developed countries. They are the lowest among South Asian countries.

Immunisation coverage has been sustained over 80%. About

96% of births occur in health institutions and are attended by skilled personnel.

The country continues to make progress in reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

The current trends indicate that Sri Lanka is on track to achieving child and maternal mortality goals.

The sixth goal of the Millennium declaration is combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Two targets are set. One is to have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. One of the proxy indicators used for this goal and for which data are available is the contraceptive prevalence rate for women 15-49 years of age.

By the year 2000, the contraceptive prevalence rate in Sri Lanka had risen to 70% from a level of 66% in 1993.

Ensuring environmental sustainability is the seventh Goal. One target of this goal is to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

While there are several indicators for this target, one for which data are available in Sri Lanka is the proportion of population using solid fuels.

Still a very high percentage (80%) of the population in Sri Lanka use solid fuels. According to the data available for 2001, use of solid fuels is significantly higher in rural (86%) and estate areas (96%) compared to urban areas (35%).

The second Target of this goal is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

The two indicators for monitoring progress are the population with sustainable access to an improved water source, urban and rural and the proportion of urban and rural population with

improved sanitation. The percentage of households in Sri Lanka having access to a source of safe drinking water is considerably high.

According to the Census of Population and Housing, 2001, 82% of the households in Sri Lanka have access to a safe source of drinking water. According to the same source of data, about 66% of the households have access to improved sanitation and further actions need to be taken to improve the situation. There are significant differences between urban and rural areas.

The final goal of the Millennium declaration is developing a global partnership for development. Seven targets are set under this goal with 17 indicators. Data are available for this report for three of them: unemployment rate, personal computers in use per 100 population and Internet users per 100 population.

The unemployment rate has been brought down from 32% in 1996 to 28% in 2002 and has been declining further. According to a study conducted in 2004, there are only 3.8 computers in use for 100 household population. Internet use is also very low and according to the same study only 2.8% people use Internet per 100 population.

The Millennium Development goals now constitute a central focus of national development. The country is potentially on track on most of the indicators described here.

Among the key achievements are access to safe drinking water, equitable primary education, literacy, child and maternal health. A significant achievement is that there is no gender disparity in these achievements. However, there remain considerable challenges.

The critical challenge is that 23% of Sri Lanka's population is still living below the national poverty line.