

11th September 2008, Bangkok, New Dehli – The percentage of people living below the newly redefined poverty line of \$1.25 a day in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia fell from 56 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent only fifteen years later, according to a United Nations progress report released today. These two regions have already met the Millennium Development Goals target of reducing 1990 levels of extreme poverty by half.

Progress in reducing extreme poverty was slower in Southern Asia, where the pace will need to accelerate for the region to be able to meet the target. In India, for example, poverty decreased from 52 to 41 per cent between 1990 and 2005. Because of population growth, however, the number of people living in extreme poverty rose by 20 million during this period.

Poverty reduction will not be achieved without full and productive employment and decent work for all. But in Southern Asia, 83 per cent of employed women and 73 per cent of employed men are classified as “vulnerable” – working as self-employed or unpaid family workers. As the Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 noted, even in South-Eastern and Eastern Asia almost two-thirds of women and over half of men hold insecure jobs.

Strikingly, although progress was made in reducing extreme poverty, child malnutrition – a key indicator of hunger and poverty – remains remarkably high in many parts of Asia, the report finds. Southern Asia has a larger proportion of underweight children than any other developing region – with 46 per cent of children under five severely or moderately underweight in 2006, down from 54 per cent in 1990. Child malnutrition also remains high in South-Eastern Asia, at 25 per cent. The exception is represented by Eastern Asia, which managed to bring malnutrition levels down to 7 per cent in 2005 – the second best performance among all developing regions, after Northern Africa.

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