

Poverty

Data from 2005 showed that around 1.4 billion people, one in four of those in the developing world, were subsisting on less than \$1.25 per day¹, defined by the UN as an international indicator of poverty².

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set out in 1990, aim to tackle the most acute problems arising from extreme poverty, with targets including halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (less than \$1 a day) and hunger by 2015. The 2009 MDG report shows a greatly reduced proportion of people in extreme poverty in some developing regions – from just under half of the population in 1990 to slightly over a quarter in 2005. Most of the reduction has taken place in China and other Asian countries. There has generally been much less progress in the very poorest countries.

The relationship between population growth and poverty is a vicious circle. Rapid population growth is an obstacle to economic progress in some of the poorest countries³, depriving those societies of funds for investment to develop. At the same time, poverty fuels overpopulation by depriving women of both the incentive and the means to have fewer children.

There may be limited or no access to contraception due to problems with administration, awareness, distribution, conflict, or afford-

ability. High child mortality rates contribute to women bearing many children, as they will be unsure of how many will survive. Households may rely on the labour of their children. In many developing countries, children are the only means parents have of assuring their own security in their old age.

Conversely, high population growth contributes to poverty. High fertility rates affect the health of mothers and families, increasing the risk of maternal, infant and child mortality, all of which combine to entrench poverty. At a societal level, rapid population growth increases the number of people in need of health care, education and livelihoods. This in turn requires more financial, material and natural resources. With the exception of a few oil-rich states, no country has risen from poverty in recent times whilst still maintaining high levels of fertility⁴.

A further link between poverty, overpopulation and sustainability is that communities which are poor and overpopulated are generally those which suffer most as a result of rapid environmental change and so called 'natural' disasters, as illustrated by the 2010 flooding of large parts of Pakistan. Being poor makes it impossible to pay for measures to mitigate the effects of climate change, and the more people there are the more difficult it is for them to move or to **migrate** to areas less affected by the changes.

References

Internet references accessed 06/12/2010.

1. MDG report 2010 Overview <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20English%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf> ; also see World Bank news release August 26 2008
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