

Developing world lags food and nutrition targets

The developing world's progress is "seriously lagging" on global targets relating to food and nutrition, with child and maternal mortality rates still unacceptably high, according to the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2012.

The report was released on Monday, 23 April 2012, by the World Bank and the IMF.

Recent spikes in international food prices had stalled progress across several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the report said.

However the report said that good progress had been made across some other MDGs, with targets related to extreme poverty reduction and providing access to safe drinking water already achieved, several years ahead of their 2015 deadline.

Also, targets on education and the ratio of girls to boys in schools were within reach, the report said.

In contrast, the world was significantly off track on the MDGs to reduce the mortality rates of children under five and mothers. As a result, these goals would not be met in any developing region by 2015 according to the report.

Progress is slowest on maternal mortality, with only one-third of the targeted reduction achieved so far.

"Progress on reducing infant and child mortality is similarly dismal, with only 50% of the targeted decline achieved."

Justin Yifu Lin, the World Bank's chief economist and senior vice president for development economics, said that "high and volatile food prices do not bode well for the attainment of many MDGs, as they erode consumer purchasing power and prevent millions of people from escaping poverty and hunger, besides having long term adverse impacts on health and education."

"Dealing with food price volatility must be a high priority, especially as nutrition has been one of the forgotten MDGs," he added.

GMR 2012 also provided solutions for making countries and communities more resilient in the face of food price spikes.

Countries should deploy agricultural policies to encourage farmers to increase production, use social safety nets to improve resilience, strengthen nutritional policies to improve early childhood development, and design trade policies that enhance access to food markets, reduce food price volatility and induce productivity gains, it said.

However, Hugh Bredenkamp, deputy director of the IMF's strategy, policy and review department, said that the challenges that countries faced in responding to high food prices had been made more difficult as a result of the global recession.

"The fragile global economy could very well slow developing countries' progress on human development goals, since the fiscal, debt, and current account positions, particularly of low income countries, have been weakened by the global financial crisis," he said.

While food prices had declined from their 2011 peaks, commodity prices remained volatile, the report said.

"To help deal with volatility, more developing countries are complementing their fiscal and monetary policy responses with insurance or hedging operations, such as selling crops in forward markets. This can be part of a broader strategy for managing risks like natural disasters and swings in commodity prices," said Lynge Nielsen, senior economist at the IMF.

Jos Verbeek, lead economist at the World Bank and lead author of GMR 2012, cautioned that declining development assistance, population growth and high food prices would make the need to focus on nutrition programmes for the poor even more challenging.

"According to our projections, an estimated 1.02 billion people will still be living in extreme poverty in 2015. Clearly, assistance must be leveraged in new ways if we are to improve food security and nutrition, particularly for the poor and vulnerable," Verbeek said.

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