

## The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): What achievements in Asia?

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**Abstract:** The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had been set by the international community led by the United Nations in a Millennium Declaration in September 2000. In order to achieve the MDGs the international community agreed that, for example, poverty will be halved by 2015 from all developing nations taking the 1990 benchmark. Together with the poverty reduction goal, the MDGs have additional seven goals. Each of these goals sets multiple targets to be achieved by 2015. Under the eight development goals there are 18 such targets to be met. The MDGs include the broad areas such as socio-economic, environment and partnership between developed and developing nations (World Bank, 2006). In this paper, an attempt has been made to investigate only the socio economic goals and their targets in some selected nations of East and South Asia. These goals cover five targets: poverty eradication, universal primary education, gender inequality, child mortality and maternal health. Although, the cut off date for achieving MDGs is 2015, yet many nations finding it major difficulties in living up to the commitments they made at the time of Millennium Declaration. There are many reasons for such a deficit however it appears that the East Asian nations are ahead compared to their counter parts in South Asia. The achievements and the non-achievements have been investigated in five countries in East and five countries in South Asia over 2000 and 2005 and the prospects to 2015.

**Keywords:** MDGs, poverty eradication, East Asia, South Asia

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### 1 Introduction

It is well known that East and South Asia carries more than half of the total population on earth. The latest developments suggest that all the countries under study (China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka) are now populated by almost three billion people. More precisely the figure is 3.40 billion in 2005 (Table 1). Demographically, therefore, East and South Asia is one of the critical and alarming regions of the world. By world standard, except China (due to single child policy), the region is characterized by very high rate of population growth, high density and high dependency. The major objective of this paper is to investigate the achievements and the non-achievements in meeting important targets of the MDGs in Asia since 2000 and what prospects in the future to 2015. In order to investigate such an issue it is important first to understand clearly the population and demographic issues of the countries under study. The reasons for analysing the demographic dynamics upfront are to demonstrate and to make the readers feel about the effect of the population problem in the course of achieving MDGs. Also, it shows how serious the population factor is, as a constraint to achieving MDGs. The attempt is made, first, to outline the general demographic situation in Asia. Next, an analysis on achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been attempted at the backdrop of the population dynamics of the regions.

### 2 The Demographic Conditions and Trends

Table 1 shows that in 2005 the population of all the countries under study have almost half of the world's total. Average population growth rate for East Asia over 1990–2005 was 1.21 per cent whereas for China alone is about one per cent. Among the East Asian nations the Philippines has the highest rate of growth (2.0 per cent) and the Vietnam has the highest density per sq. km. (268). In South Asia, the highest rate of growth has been witnessed by Pakistan (2.4 per cent) and Bangladesh has the highest density of population (1090 per sq km).

**Table 1 Demographic conditions**

Country	Area (in 000 sq. km.)*	Population (million)			Growth rate		Rural/total population (%)	
		1990	2005	2015	1990–2005	2005–15	1990	2005
China	9,597	1,135	1,305	1,378	0.9	0.5	70.6	59.6
Indonesia	1,919	178	221	244	1.4	1.0	69.4	51.9
Philippines	300	61	83	99	2.0	1.7	51.2	37.2
Thailand	514	55	64	69	1.1	0.7	70.6	67.7
Vietnam	330	66	83	92	1.5	1.0	79.7	73.6
India	3,287	849.5	1,095	1,248.5	1.4	1.0	74.5	71.3
Pakistan	796	108	156	190.5	2.4	2.0	69.4	65.1
Bangladesh	144	104	142	168	2.1	1.7	80.2	74.9
Nepal	147	19.1	27	32.7	2.3	1.9	91.1	84.2
Sri Lanka	66	17	20	21	1.0	0.7	82.8	84.9

Source: Human Development Indicators, 2004; \* FAOSTAT: World Bank (2004, 2007).

\*<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004379.html>

Table 2 provides further disaggregated estimates on population and land use in East and South Asian nations under study. The Philippines' and Vietnam's population have doubled over the period of 1975 and 2005. China, Thailand and Indonesia's population over the same period has increased by more than one and a half time (World Bank, 2007). Density of population in 2005 per sq. km. is very high in Vietnam (>250) and moderately high in China, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. Land use in arable category in 2005 was highest in Thailand (27.7 per cent) and lowest in China (11.1 per cent) out of total surface land of these nations. In South Asia, the population has doubled in almost all the countries under study except Sri Lanka over the last thirty years. Arable land use in 2005 was highest in Bangladesh (61.9) and lowest in Sri Lanka (14.2).

**Table 2 Population estimates and land use**

Country	Population density (in per sq km)**		Land use			
	1995	2005	1990		2005	
			Arable land hec- ta/100 people	Arable land (% of total)	Arable land hec- ta/100 people	Arable land (% of total)
China	126	140	8.1	11.1	8.0	11.1
Indonesia	101	122	10.3	11.2	10.6	12.7
Philippines	230	240	7.4	18.4	7.1	19.1
Thailand	113	126	25.6	34.2	22.4	27.7
Vietnam	201	268	8.2	16.4	8.0	21.3
India	283	368	15.5	54.8	14.8	53.7
Pakistan	163	202	15.2	26.6	14.1	27.6
Bangladesh	833	1,090	6.1	70.2	5.7	61.9
Nepal	149	190	9.4	16.0	8.9	16.5
Sri Lanka	273	304	4.7	13.5	4.8	14.2

Source: \*Human Development Report, 2004; \*\*FAOSTAT: World Bank-World Development Indicators, 2004, 2007.

### 3 Population Distribution

Distribution of population by age group and dependency ratio by country are presented in Table 3. In East Asia in recent years (2005), children in the age group 0–14 years constitute the second largest proportion of the total population of each country. In 1996, this proportion was very high for all the countries. In 2004, this is ranged from less than 25 per cent in China and Thailand to above 29 per cent in Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines. The high proportion in Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines reduced the population in working age group (15–64 years). The overall figures, however, suggest that the fertility rate in all these countries has declined over the last ten years. The issue of fertility rate has been illustrated further in subsequent section. In South Asia, the children below 14 years are highest in Pakistan (38.3 per cent) and lowest in Sri Lanka (24.1 per cent). Fertility rate also helped reduce population in South Asia.

The dependency ratio in Table 3 explains children (aged 0–14 years) and older people (65 and above) constitute the dependency load for persons in the primary working ages (15–64 years). The dependency ratios provided in Table 3 reveal that the Philippines have the highest dependency ratio of 720 and 660 (per 1,000) respectively in 1996 and in 2005 among the countries studied in East Asia. However, dependency has declined for all the countries. In South Asian nations dependency has reduced in all the countries over the period of 1996 and 2005. However, the highest dependency ratios have been attracted by Pakistan and Nepal (800 per 1,000) in 2005.

Table 4 presents the labour force participation rates for the Asian countries under study by sectors since the 1979–81. Under ‘other’ category, the figures mainly show combined participation in the industrial and services sectors. The figures for all the countries in 1979–81 suggest that the agricultural sector was the major source of labour force utilization. This picture has radically changed for every country in 2004, however, the changes were prominent for Thailand, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

### 4 Women Labour Force Participation

In recent years the development literature has been flooded by studies on women participation in development in developing countries. The UN declaration of 1993 being the Year of Women has contributed in undertaking

**Table 3 Distribution of population by age and dependence ratio, 1996–2004**

Country	Age group						Dependence ratio	
	1996			2005			1996	2005
	0–14	15–64	65+	0–14	15–64	65+		
China	27.2	66.5	6.3	21.4	71.0	7.6	500	400
Indonesia	32.2	64.0	3.8	28.3	66.2	5.5	560	500
Philippines	38.4	58.1	3.5	35.1	61.0	3.9	720	700
Thailand	26.2	68.2	5.6	23.8	69.1	7.1	470	400
Vietnam	36.0	58.5	5.5	29.5	65.0	5.4	710	600
India	42.3	60.2	4.0	32.1	62.7	5.3	662	600
Pakistan	45.5	51.1	3.4	38.3	57.9	3.8	966	800
Bangladesh	42.3	56.8	0.9	35.5	60.9	3.6	762	700
Nepal	–	–	–	39.0	57.3	3.7	–	800
Sri Lanka	31.7	64.2	4.1	24.1	68.6	7.3	545	500

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Data Base. Internet: <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg> and Hossain, Islam and Kibria (1999)

$$\text{Dependency ratio} = \frac{\text{Persons 0–14+65 \& above}}{\text{Persons 15–64}} \times 1000$$

**Table 4 Labour force participation rates, by sector, 1980–2004**

Country	1979–81		2004	
	Agriculture	Other	Agriculture	Other
China	74	26	65	35
Indonesia	58	42	47	53
Philippines	52	48	38	62
Thailand	71	29	55	45
Vietnam	73	27	67	33
India	62	38	–	–
Pakistan	47	53	50.5	49.5
Bangladesh	59	41	52	48
Nepal	–	–	–	–
Sri Lanka	49	51	36	64

Source: FAOSTAT: World Bank-World Development Indicators, 2004

**Table 5 Female labour force, 1990–2005**

Country	Total labour force (millions)		Female labour force (% of total labour force)	
	1990	2005	1990	2005
China	650	776	44.8	45
Indonesia	75.3	107	38.4	38
Philippines	23.4	37	36.6	40
Thailand	30.4	36	46.6	46
Vietnam	31.3	44	48.3	49
India	335.1	435	29.9	28.4
Pakistan	35.2	56.5	23.3	27.0
Bangladesh	46.9	63.9	40.2	36.9
Nepal	7.1	10.5	37.9	40.5
Sri Lanka	7.3	8.4	34.8	30.4

Source: <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> dated

numerous studies by UN agencies on women and their role in future development of developing countries.

Women's participation in a country's labour force is one of the important indicators which measure the role of women in development. Table 5 presents detailed comparative information on female labour force participation for a sample of ten countries of East and South Asia over 1990 and 2005.

Almost half of the Vietnamese and Thai labour force contributed by women in 2005. China and the Philippines contribute more than 40 per cent. In all the countries in East Asia the female participation has been increasing since 1990 except Thailand. Thailand seem going backward slightly over the last two decades (by few percentage point). In South Asia, the female labour force participation is highest in Nepal (40.5%) and lowest in Pakistan (27%). The participation rate in India is marginally higher than Pakistan. However, like Thailand the Sri-Lankan and Bangladesh's participation rate has experienced a drop between 1990 and 2005.

## 5 Asia's Demographic Challenges

By 2005, East Asia's population has reached more than 1.5 billion as against 1.2 billion in 1975. World Bank (2004) projections suggest that by 2015 the total population of the region will reach close to 2 bil-

**Table 6 Fertility and contraceptive use rates, 2000–05**

Country	Total fertility rate (birth per women)		Contraceptive prevalence (% of women aged 15–49)	
	1990	2005	1995	2000–05
China	2.1	1.8	90	87
Indonesia	3.1	2.3	55	57
Philippines	4.3	3.2	48	69
Thailand	2.2	1.9	72	72
Vietnam	3.6	1.8	75	77
India	3.8	2.8	43	47
Pakistan	5.8	4.1	12	28
Bangladesh	4.3	3.0	46	58
Nepal	5.1	3.5	–	38
Sri Lanka	2.5	1.9	62	70

Source: <http://genderstats.worldbank.org>

\*Source: Global Population Profile, 2002, USAID

Internet sources: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004379.html>

<http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg>

lion. It is a picture which is far less alarming than the other regions of Asia, particularly, when one looks at population densities. In 2005, Vietnam's population density per sq. km reached to almost 300 persons while China had 140, Indonesia 122, the Philippines 240, and Thailand 126. By 2015 South Asia's population will reach 1.7 billion. In terms of density of population in 2005, while Nepal (190 per sq km), Pakistan (202), Sri Lanka (302) and India (368) have tolerable density, Bangladesh is certainly in challenging position (1090).

It is, however, made the policy makers at alarming state that the contraceptive prevalence has not been increasing substantially in the populous nations of the regions. For example, between 1995 and 2005, this has in fact declined from 90 to 87 per cent of women aged between 15 and 49 in China and remained unchanged in Thailand (72 per cent) in the same age group (Table 6). This development certainly would not help in reducing the growth rate of population in the region as predicted by the World Bank to 2015 the cut off year for achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

South Asia's challenges are even great in controlling population in the future. Contraceptive prevalence rate is very low between the age group 15 and 49. In Sri Lanka only this is equal to other East Asian nations. In terms of reduction in fertility rate the South Asia region has a major job in catching up East Asia in the future.

## 6 Achievements in MDGs over 2000 and 2005

In this section an attempt is made, given the population growth positions in East and South Asia, investigate how the countries under study coping with their commitments in achieving MDGs by 2015. The investigation has been carried out by analysing the achievements between 2000 and 2005, the first five years of implementation of the MDG strategy. In terms of eradicating extreme poverty certainly East Asian nations are ahead of South Asia. The headcount ratio suggests that more than one-thirds of the population in Bangladesh and India live with or under US\$ 1 a day. While in this regard, there was an improvement in all the nations under study since 1998, the improvement has been strong in all the nations except Indonesia and Thailand (no change) and India (only 2.5 per cent drop). Certainly, these achievements have been in encouraging pace although in South Asia there yet a huge number of population remains under poverty or

**Table 7 Eradication of extreme poverty**

Region	Poverty (US\$1 a day headcount ratio (%))		Share of consumption to poorest quintile (%)
	1998	2005	2005
East Asia			
China	16.6	9.9	4.7
Indonesia	7.5	7.5	8.4
Philippines	15.5	10.5	5.4
Thailand	<2	<2	6.3
Vietnam	-	-	9.0
South Asia			
Bangladesh	41.3	36.0	9.0
India	36.0	33.5	8.9
Nepal	41.8	24.1	6.0
Pakistan	28.6	17.0	9.3
Sri Lanka	15.0	5.6	8.3

Source: World Bank (2006, 2007)

**Table 8 Achieving universal primary education and promote gender equality**

Region	Primary education completion (%)		Ratio of girls to boys in primary & secondary school (%)
	1991	2005	2005
East Asia			
China	103	98	99
Indonesia	91	101	98
Philippines	86	98	102
Thailand	-	82	98
Vietnam	-	98	103
South Asia			
Bangladesh	49	77	106
India	68	89	88
Nepal	51	76	90
Pakistan	-	63	98
Sri Lanka	97	-	102

Source: World Bank (2006, 2007)

live under US\$1 a day. Taking share of consumption by poor into consideration, China, the Philippines and Thailand's poor are having relatively lowest consumption share compared to Indonesia and Vietnam among East Asian nations. In South Asia, Nepal is placed in this category.

It is disturbing to see that the populous nations of East and South Asia, in terms of population density (China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and India) have been making slow progress in eradicating poverty. In China and the Philippines one-tenths of the population lives in poverty and in Bangladesh and India this is about one-thirds of their population in 2005.

The achievements in universal primary education and promoting gender equality as targets of the MDGs are presented in Table 8. By 2005, the East Asian nations are ahead and have made strong progress

**Table 9 Reducing child mortality and improving maternal health**

Region	Child mortality (under-5 Mortality rate per 1,000)		Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live birth)
	1990	2005	2000
East Asia			
China	49	27	31
Indonesia	91	36	230
Philippines	62	33	200
Thailand	37	21	44
Vietnam	53	19	130
South Asia			
Bangladesh	105	89	380
India	123	74	540
Nepal	145	74	740
Pakistan	130	99	160
Sri Lanka	32	14	92

Source: World Bank (2006, 2007)

since 1991. The progress in South Asia however is moderate. These suggest that Thailand and Pakistan need further investment in primary education sector for catching up with rest of the nations.

Table 9 presents child mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio of the two regions. As far as the child mortality is concerned, there were strong achievements made in all the nations. However, the South Asian nations have been experiencing in absolute terms a high mortality rate except Sri Lanka up to 2005. This is also true in the case of maternal mortality until 2000.

## 7 Conclusions

Among the five targets of MDGs analysed for East and South Asia regions, it is the poverty eradication target which appears to be lagging behind compared to the expectations at the time of Millennium Declaration in 2000. There are many reasons for this, however, the analyses above suggest that the continuing pressure in population remains to be one of the major hurdles in eradicating poverty. The populous nations of these regions have been falling behind the other nations in achieving this target.

China, Indonesia and the Philippines have almost 10 per cent of their population under acute poverty (taking US\$1 a day). In absolute terms this is about 150 million people. This is worse in South Asia. The South Asian populous nations (India and Bangladesh) carrying a burden of more than 35 per cent of their people living in acute poverty. In absolute terms this is about more than 400 million people. If these nations keep growing without taking income distribution issue into consideration, it would be impossible to bring poverty down by half in 2015.

We are now in the middle of examining statistically this hypothesis by estimating first the rate of poverty eradication since the period of 1990 and make projections up to 2015. We are confident this investigation will be completed by the next conference due to be held in the later part of 2009.

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