

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

Afghanistan Country Office, Shah Mehmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul



Afghanistan

Tyranny of averages challenging Afghan development progress

Kabul, Afghanistan, 4 July 2005: A new report launched 1 July warns that in Asia and the Pacific, the rising prosperity and fast growth in populous countries like China and India is hiding widespread extreme poverty in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The result is potentially very debilitating to development efforts in the 14 Asia-Pacific LDCs.

This "tyranny of averages" to which the report refers tends to mask the stark contrast between the Asia-Pacific LDCs' sluggish economies and the success of their far more populous neighbours.

As a result, the report states that development aid and debt relief to the Asia-Pacific LDCs have been disproportionately low and must be increased if these impoverished countries are to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which represent the global framework for fighting poverty.

The report is called *Voices of the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals Through a Global Partnership*.

The 14 Asia-Pacific LDCs have a per-capita income only one-fourth of that in the region overall, and almost half their population lives below national poverty lines. The 14 Asia-Pacific LDCs include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Afghanistan features prominently among many of the disturbing statistics presented in the report. In Afghanistan:

- More than half (56%) of the population lives below the national poverty line, the highest rate in Asia-Pacific LDCs
- GDP per capita in 2003 was US\$167, the lowest among Asia-Pacific LDCs; this compares to an average of US\$513 for Asia-Pacific LDCs as a whole, \$310 in LDCs in other regions
- Progress toward attainment of the MDGs: Afghanistan is an underachiever in proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption [with deteriorating trend]; net enrolment ratio in primary education, under-5 mortality rate; infant mortality rate. Lags behind overall average in Asia-Pacific LDCs on several indicators.
- Cited positively for holding popular elections, a significant achievement that can give donors more confidence in efficient use of their resources
- Afghanistan is also positively cited for preparing a MDG progress report

If current trends persist, in 2015:

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

- Some 2 million children under 5 years of age will die, and 311,000 will die before their first birthday; Cambodia’s situation has worsened, and the situation in Afghanistan seems unlikely to progress;
- Only 87 percent of children in Asia-Pacific LDCs will be enrolled for primary education, and 5 million children – mainly in Afghanistan and Myanmar – will not be
- Afghanistan’s forests will nearly be gone, with perhaps a decade left before total destruction

The report was a collaborative effort by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on behalf of the region’s LDCs. It was prepared under the auspices of the UNDP Asia and Pacific Regional Centre in Colombo, which provides policy research and analysis, strategic policy advice and advocacy services to 37 countries in the region on pro-poor policies, international trade and investment, HIV/AIDS and gender equality.

The full report is available for download at:

http://www.undp.org.af/media_room/archives/key_docs/docs/voices_least_developed_countries_asia.pdf

Alternatively, please contact Emma Sutcliffe to have one emailed to you.

Emma Sutcliffe

emma.sutcliffe@undp.org

070 152874

For more information, please contact Emma Sutcliffe, Communications Associate, emma.sutcliffe@undp.org +93 (0)70152874
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For further information, please contact:

Eliana Escobedo Gonzales – Communication Consultant – UNDP Afghanistan Country Office
Mobile: (+93) 079 23 07 26 – eliana.escobedo@undp.org