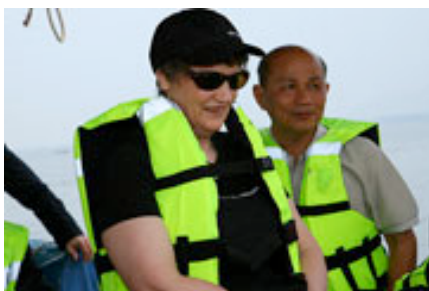


UN must help poor nations meet looming development, climate deadlines – official



UNDP Administrator Helen Clark visiting a project the agency helped to create to improve the lives of Thai fishermen

7 October 2009 – The United Nations development system must quickly build the capacity of national partners to meet the multiple challenges facing them, from achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to fighting climate change, as a host of deadlines loom on these issues, a top UN official said today.

“We are up against timelines – the MDG target dates are scarcely six years away,” UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) Administrator Helen Clark told a regional meeting in Bangkok of her agency’s representatives from Asia and the Pacific, referring to the targets adopted at the UN Millennium summit of 2000 to slash poverty, hunger, maternal and infant mortality and vastly expand access to health care and education, all by 2015.

A person in a developing country is 79 times as likely to experience a climate disaster as a person in the developed world

“On climate change the clock is ticking and the adverse effects are being felt most in developing countries. A person in a developing country is 79 times as likely to experience a climate disaster as a person in the developed world.”

Prior to the global food, fuel, and economic crises, the region was on track to achieve the **MDG** for reducing extreme poverty, with around 500 million people lifted out of it between 1990 and 2005, largely due to dramatic progress in China. In East Asia under 20 per cent of the population was living on less than \$1.25 a day in 2005, down from nearly 80 per cent in 1981.

This region has also been on track to meet the MDGs for providing universal access to primary education and reducing gender inequalities in education, and has also witnessed achievements in stemming the spread of HIV.

“Yet big challenges remain, not least in reducing infant mortality, improving maternal health, and expanding access to clean water and sanitation,” Ms. Clark said. “Keeping momentum on internationally agreed development goals throughout the global recession and the many other crises which have affected our world is in itself a challenge.”

Many countries in the region face significant economic challenges – from reduced domestic revenue to governments this year owing to negative or lower growth; from a slowdown in financial inflows, including remittances; and from reduced demand for goods and services, including tourism.

“The number of unemployed people in Asia increased from 79 million in 2007 to 84 million in 2008, and is projected to increase further to 94 million this year, even with the overall growth outlook for the region on the positive side of the ledger,” Ms. Clark said.

“UNDP, both as a leading development agency, and through our leadership and coordination of other agencies in the UN development system, must work to galvanize support for the MDGs in every country.”

Turning to climate change, she noted that the brunt of the burden is being borne by poor people in developing countries, whether the dry lands of Africa, the deltas of Asia, or the world’s small atoll nations. The Asian Development Bank puts the total cost of lost agricultural production and other negative effects at as high as around 6.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in some South-East Asian countries by the end of the century.

“There is no simple choice to be made between fostering growth and development or protecting our climate and ecosystems – both objectives are necessary, and compatible,” Ms. Clark said. “We [UNDP] can assist countries to develop low carbon growth, energy access, and adaptation strategies – and to place them at the heart of their national development plans.”

During her stay in Bangkok, she also met with Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Foreign Minister Kasi Piromya to discuss climate change in the run-up to the Copenhagen negotiations in December, when it is hoped that countries will agree on a new agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

UN urges donors to boost aid to poor countries despite economic crisis