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UNDP chief embarks on African tour to promote development goals



Helen Clark

1 May 2010 – The head of the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) begins a four-country visit to Africa today to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), the eight anti-poverty targets agreed upon by world leaders with a 2015 deadline.

“Achieving the MDGs,” [said](#) UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, “means quite simply a better life for billions of people.”

The trip will take her to Mali, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and South Africa, where she hopes to spread the message that it is possible to meet the Goals through proven policies backed by strong partnerships.

Miss Clark's visit to sub-Saharan Africa comes some 150 days before world leaders converge in New York, just prior to the start of the General Assembly's annual General Debate, to identify obstacles to achieving the MDGs.

In Mali, she will tour the historic city of Timbuktu and meet with female mango farmers, while in Burkina Faso, she will stop at a facility which boosts rural women's access to energy and a centre focusing on reintegrating sex workers.

While in Tanzania, she will visit a protected forest and speak with newly-registered voters, and in South Africa, she will take part in a pre-World Cup soccer match in Pretoria.

Sub-Saharan Africa, still the region with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty, has seen its poverty rates plummet since 1990, falling to below 50 per cent in 2008.

But UNDP warned that the global recession has slowed that progress in the past year.

The region has also reduced the number of adults and children newly infected with HIV/AIDS by almost 20 per cent between 2001 and 2008, with access to antiretroviral treatments also expanding in many countries.

Gender parity in primary education will be achieved by most African nations by 2015, while the number of seats held by women in parliaments has risen in dozens of countries.

Despite of these successes and others, sub-Saharan Africa still faces major challenges, including fighting hunger and deforestation, as well as curbing maternal mortality.

"MDG progress suffers when the needs of women and girls are given low priority," the UNDP Administrator said.

The fifth MDG calls for improving maternal health and slashing maternal mortality ratio by three quarters from 1990.

"Yet this is the MDG on which there has been the least progress so far," Miss Clark pointed out, noting that a woman dies every minute in the world from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

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