

Economic Growth and Poverty in the Third World. UN Millennium Development Goals Reveal Mixed Results

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[Middle East & North Africa](#), [sub-Saharan
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Declining oil and commodity prices impact states in Africa and the Middle East

2015 is the year that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were scheduled to reach certain objectives in the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living standards in so-called developing countries.

In 2000 the United Nations drafted a program to achieve income increases, universal education, gender equality and other forms of material advancements. By this year there was supposed to be substantial gains which could be easily measurable through healthier, liberated and happier people throughout Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Latin America.

In an article published by the London-based Guardian it notes that “The millennium development goals have targeted eight key areas – poverty, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, the environment and global partnership. Each goal is supported by 21 specific targets and more than 60 indicators.” (July 6)

Statistics indicate that there have been improvements in raising household incomes and reducing rates of illiteracy and child mortality. In addition, school attendance for girls and women have increased in various regions of Africa and Asia making a profound impact on illiteracy and abject poverty.

With respect to incomes, it was said that in 1990 nearly two billion people lived on less than \$1.25 United States dollars per day. Today the number of people attempting to survive on such an income has decreased by more than half says the UN figures yet any analysis of these statistics must take into account the rising cost of living in various developing states amid increased access to telecommunications, light industrial and mining employment.

With the movement of many people from rural and small town areas to major urban centers, the resources needed to survive inevitably increase. Consequently, in countries like Nigeria, there are thousands living underneath bridges in the commercial capital of Lagos despite the fact that the West African state was designated as having the largest economy on the continent in 2014.

Channel News Asia in a report on the UN assessments of the social status of the world’s

population said “About 800 million people still live in dire poverty and suffer from hunger despite the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) being the most successful anti-poverty push in history.” (July 6)

In a statement issued by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon he claims that “Following profound and consistent gains, we now know that extreme poverty can be eradicated within one more generation. The MDGs have greatly contributed to this progress and have taught us how governments, business and civil society can work together to achieve transformational breakthroughs.” (July 6)

Nonetheless, growth has been an uneven process across the various regions and countries, the UN had to admit. Further reference was made to the fact that any sustainable development agenda must address social disparity so that qualitative improvements can be made in the lives of the poorest and most marginalized people.

Consequently, UN member-states are scheduled to draft and ratify a list of renewed development aims, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will be the focus of a UN summit in September. The new goals aim to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

Moreover, even within those states which have been cited for phenomenal economic growth since 2000, there are deeper levels of class divisions emerging.

For example in West Africa, the states of Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso, are noted for significant levels of growth prompted by foreign exchange earnings due to the escalation in the exploitation of resources such as oil, natural gas and strategic minerals. However, in all of these states unrest has erupted emanating from the sharp divisions among the national bourgeoisie and the working masses of proletarians, students and farmers.

Nigeria is facing one of the worse economic crises since independence 55 years ago. A war of insurgency by the Boko Haram group in the northeast has interrupted economic activity and fostered widespread dislocation extending across its borders into Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

In Ghana, a newly-emerging oil producing state, civil servants, teachers, healthcare workers and petroleum employees have engaged in strikes and mass demonstrations demanding that the government take action against inflation triggered by the declining value of the cedi, the national currency.

Neighboring Burkina Faso witnessed an uprising last October when a military-turned-civilian dictator fled the country after 27 years of plunder and political repression against the people at the aegis of France and the U.S. Unemployment in Burkina Faso is astronomically high despite the growth in the gold producing sector of the economy making it the fourth largest exporter of this valuable mineral on the African continent.

These social problems are a by-product of global capitalism which remains the dominant mode of production throughout the region.

Imperialist War, World Capitalism Prompts Dislocation and Underdevelopment

Any serious observer of international affairs in 2015 would have to acknowledge that in

many regions the situation has worsened due to imperialist war and the decline in oil and commodity prices. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria the conditions have resulted in widespread dislocation and deaths.

The precipitous decline in oil prices during 2014-2015 has created additional difficulties in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan, etc. In Nigeria, the incoming government of President Mahamadou Buhari says that they have inherited a regime which has no money, where state governments have not paid civil servants in months while thousands line up for hours in urban areas to acquire fuel in the largest oil-producing nation in Africa.

Children and women throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia are heavily impacted due to war and the lack of food, water and other essential services.

U.S.-engineered wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen have led to the massive crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Events in the Mediterranean since the beginning of the year has resulted in over two thousand documented deaths.

There are tens of millions of refugees and IDPs throughout the Middle East, South-Central Asia and North Africa in response to the conditions under which people are living in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and other states. The UN Refugee Agency issued a report several months ago documenting that approximately 60 million people have been displaced in recent years, proving to be the worse situation in existence since the conclusion of World War II.

With the gap between rich and poor widening significantly there can be no genuine development for the majority of humanity. The activities of transnational corporation, international finance capital and imperialist regimes such as the U.S. and the European Union (EU), are undermining any efforts on the part of the governments and people of the developing states to improve their social conditions.

Aggressive diplomatic and military actions have not been confined to the developing states. The war in eastern Ukraine is a direct outcome of the concerted campaign by the U.S. to weaken, contain and encircle Russia through destabilization efforts such as sanctions and the expansion of NATO.

On July 4 the foreign ministry of the People's Republic of China accused Washington of unnecessarily raising tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. Xinhua news agency criticized "the Pentagon's latest military report and urged the United States to give up cold-war attitudes."

"We are dissatisfied with and oppose the U.S. report which has played up 'the China threat'," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said at a daily press briefing in Beijing. The official's comments came after the release of the U.S. Defense Department report on July 1, which said "China's actions are adding tension to the Asia-Pacific region," in reference to Beijing's land reclamation in the South China Sea.

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