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# LATIN AMERICA: Patchy MDGs record could deteriorate

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## Abstract

Outlook for meeting development targets.

According to a September 9 report by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), released ahead of the September 25-27 UN Sustainable Development Summit, the region has met several key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, on some, leads emerging regions. However, it also has important pending challenges in areas including maternal mortality, women's participation in the labour force and greenhouse gas emissions.

## Full Text

SUBJECT: Outlook for meeting development targets.

SIGNIFICANCE: According to a September 9 report by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), released ahead of the September 25-27 UN Sustainable Development Summit, the region has met several key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, on some, leads emerging regions. However, it also has important pending challenges in areas including maternal mortality, women's participation in the labour force and greenhouse gas emissions.

ANALYSIS: Impacts.

Progress on poverty is likely to continue to slow, given the region's sluggish economic growth.

Once coverage is achieved in education, the more complex issue of quality will arise.

Most LAC governments have yet to include environmental criteria in sectoral policies.

In its report, 'Latin America and the Caribbean: looking ahead after the Millennium Development Goals', ECLAC examines the region's performance on the eight MDGs approved by the UN member states in September 2000, with targets for 2015.

The picture that emerges is very mixed, with important differences both within the region -- particularly between South America and the Caribbean -- and across the different MDG targets.

However, two main conclusions can tentatively be drawn.

Many of LAC's successes (such as poverty reduction), and one of the areas in which it has lagged most (the environment), are directly related to the recent commodity price boom and its impact on household income and fiscal revenues, principally in South America.

Although government management and policies have improved significantly in most of LAC since 2000, targeting of social spending and its effectiveness need to improve further, particularly in the present context of slower growth and tighter fiscal resources.

Basic needs.

This is one of the fields where LAC has achieved most, helped by the commodity price boom:

Poverty .

It has more than achieved the MDG target of halving the percentage of the population living on less than 1.25 dollars a day (at purchasing power parity). By 2012, this was running at 4.6%, down from 12.6% in 1990 (the baseline for MDG targets).

However, other ECLAC studies show that poverty reduction has since stalled, while extreme poverty actually increased slightly between 2012 and 2014 (see LATIN AMERICA: Austerity may risk poverty progress - February 4, 2015).

This is also a field where differences within LAC are particularly marked, with the percentage of the population living on less than 1.25 dollars in 2012 reaching 16.5% in Honduras and 13.7% in Guatemala, but only 0.3% in Uruguay and 0.8% in Chile.

Progress has also been very uneven across the region; on this measure, extreme poverty actually increased in Bolivia and Paraguay between 1990 and 2012.

Hunger .

Similarly, LAC has more than met the MDG target of halving the percentage of people suffering hunger. Indeed, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), it is the first region to achieve the more ambitious World Food Summit target of halving their absolute number ( see LATIN AMERICA: Slower growth may mar hunger advances - July 13, 2015).

However, most of this progress has been in South America; neither Central America nor, particularly, the Caribbean has achieved the MDG target.

Healthcare.

On the MDG goals related to healthcare, LAC's performance has varied:

Child mortality .

Based on 2013 figures, it is, along with East Asia, one of only two regions to have met the MDG target of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds.

Its drop to 18.0 deaths per 1,000 live births, down from 54.0 in 1990, is attributed principally to improved primary care (including mass vaccination programmes) and increased coverage of basic services (particularly drinking water).

High mortality rates, however, persist in some countries, led by Haiti (72.8 deaths per 1,000 live births), Bolivia (39.1) and Guatemala (31.0), as compared to Cuba (6.2) and Chile (8.2).

Infectious diseases.

LAC has also performed well on halting the spread of HIV. Its prevalence among adults in Latin America has remained low and stable in recent decades and, at 0.4% in 2014, was below the world average.

In the Caribbean, however, it reached 1.1%, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), but incidence dropped by 50% between 2000-14, more than any other region.

Similarly, LAC has achieved important progress against other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria.

Maternal health .

However, LAC is far from achieving the MDG target of a 75% reduction in maternal mortality. At 85 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013, this represented a drop of only 39% on 1990.

This was despite generally high rates of ante-natal care and births attended by qualified personnel, suggesting that the quality and/or targeting of this care needs to be improved.

In another issue, probably also related partly to targeting, LAC has the world's second-highest rate of adolescent maternity (75.5 live births to 15-19 year-olds per 1,000 girls in the age group), after SSA (117.8).

Education .

At 93.6% in 2015, enrolment in primary education not only falls short of the MDG target of universality (defined as 98.0%) but has been stalled at around this level for the past 15 years. Indeed in some countries, including Bolivia and Paraguay, it is closer to 80%.

Moreover, completion of primary education among 15-19 year-olds, although averaging 92%, reflects the region's inequalities, dropping to 85% in the poorest quintile and 82% in rural areas.

Enrolment in pre-school education, the level at which the social return tends to be highest, reached only 66% in 2013.

Gender equality.

Although slightly lower for girls than boys, access to primary education in LAC is within the range considered to represent the parity called for under the MDGs (see LATIN AMERICA: Education ills threaten social

progress - April 29, 2014).

Albeit with large differences between countries, girls have, on average, better access to secondary and higher education than boys.

Nonetheless, gender inequality remains a key feature of the region's labour market, both in participation and earnings (see LATIN AMERICA: Female employment gains salience - October 1, 2013).

Although with wide differences between countries, LAC is close to the target of 30% of seats in national parliaments held by women.

Environment.

On the MDG goal of ensuring environmental sustainability, which comprises targets that range from the incorporation of sustainability criteria into public policies and the reduction of biodiversity loss, to access to safe drinking water, LAC has, except for the last, generally made very limited progress.

Greenhouse gas emissions have, for example, increased steadily and, at 7.7 tonnes per capita in 2012, exceeded the world average of 6.7 tonnes. Moreover, according to ECLAC, there are scant signs of the structural changes in energy production and consumption and land use that would be required to reverse this trend.

CONCLUSION: The report looks ahead at how Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) may fare in addressing the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years. As well as more numerous, they are broader in scope than the MDGs. The two key LAC challenges are expected to be equality -- despite success in reducing poverty, it remains the world's most unequal region and has made very slow progress -- and the environment, where it is likely to remain hampered by its economic dependence on extraction of non-renewable resources.

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