

# ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

## CULTIVATING PROSPERITY THAT ENDS POVERTY

Asia's vibrant industry has flickered into a flame that has helped ignite the global economy over the past three decades. It has already reduced poverty at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world and is on track to halve it by 2015, as well as being on schedule for several of the other MDGs. A number of countries have already achieved the poverty goal. Still, the fact remains: Asia is home to 800 million of the 1.2 billion people in the world living on less than \$1 a day. Economies across the region face vulnerabilities from external shocks, and natural disasters extract a disproportionately high toll.

In many countries, while economic stability continues steadily growing, and governance becomes more open and flexible, the challenge now is to ensure

Accelerating urbanization has swept many Bangladeshis into urban slums, where municipalities cannot maintain basic services. After five years of intermittent water supplies, families in a Dhaka slum approached a UNDP-supported NGO to get a better connection. The group secured a loan for a water point, and an association of users formed to manage it. Diseases rates have dropped, and women monitor usage rates rather than transporting heavy buckets over long distances.



longer-term sustainability by extending the benefits that result across the board. In 25 countries across Asia and the Pacific, UNDP supports governments to take this essential next step in their development, concentrating on helping nations achieve more equitable economies, address links between poverty and the environment, and strengthen the mechanisms of democratic governance.

We focus on some of the fundamentals, such as expanding opportunities for the poor. Viet Nam's 2003 Enterprise Law, which will revolutionize its economy, benefited from UNDP's drafting expertise: it has already spawned over a million new jobs. In the Maldives, UNDP partnered with grassroots groups on a micro-finance programme that has generated local resources for schools. We supported the expansion of electricity grids to 14 Pacific islands, and the findings of a regional human development report on gaps in information and communication technology in nine Asian countries were debated at the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society.

Assisting the region on sustainable development often involves striking a better balance between the needs of its large populations and an environment struggling to keep pace. A project in Pakistan, jointly supported by UNDP and the Australian Government, has reclaimed 25,000 acres of salinic and waterlogged farmland. In the process, it spun a \$3 million investment into \$30 million in local assets, revived the fertility of the land, and provided sustainable livelihoods for the families of 17 villages.

Democratic governance initiatives have included efforts to encourage more responsive public institutions, increase participation in policy-making, protect human rights and promote gender equality. As Afghanistan moved on from its crisis, UNDP supported the government in completing the *Loya Jirga* and finalizing a new Constitution through a highly participatory process. The registration of voters began as a lead up to forthcoming elections.

### PINPOINTING DISPARITIES WITH THE MDGS

In Asia, the MDGs will be particularly important in defining those parts of the region or individual countries that the economic boom leaves behind. UNDP's Asia Pacific regional programme and country offices are carrying out a number of advocacy campaigns

## UNDP PRACTICES AT WORK

**China:** Helped speed up customs clearances from 22 days to two minutes. (1)

**India:** Backed state human development reports to pinpoint social and economic gaps. (2)

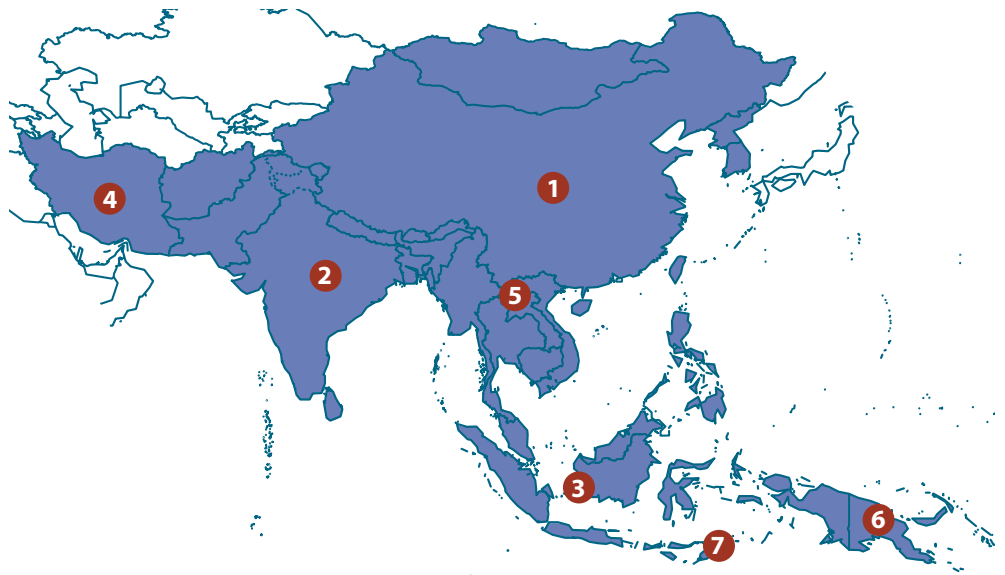
**Indonesia:** Supported traditional learning institutions on HIV/AIDS advocacy. (3)

**Iran:** Worked with the GEF to help communities manage mountain environments. (4)

**Laos:** Deployed UNVs to assist communities in improving local services. (5)

**Papua New Guinea:** Trained groundnut farmers on business skills for micro-enterprises. (6)

**Timor-Leste:** Assisted in the establishment of a judiciary system. (7)



around the goals, starting with the release of a comprehensive regional report that highlights some of the disparities. A regional project has begun, in partnership with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to build the statistical capacity of countries to monitor the goals.

Some countries are already putting systems in place. Viet Nam has achieved the first MDG on poverty reduction, but is using UNDP support to disaggregate data on the provincial level to map and confront rising disparities in health care and education. In Cambodia, UNDP led the UN Country Team, in partnership with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, to help Cambodians understand

how they could use the MDGs, an important first step in a society long marginalized from the outside world. National and local officials as well as NGOs took part in public discussions across 24 provinces. As consensus grew around priorities, the national government took these on board in 2003 by starting to use the MDGs for tracking the progress of its poverty reduction strategy. Already, expenditures have shifted from defense to education and health.

The countries of Asia and the Pacific have traveled a far distance, fast. In targeting the gaps that remain, UNDP assistance works towards a future where the benefits of growing economies will be available to all.

## UNIFEM: MY AFGHANI SISTERS' RIGHTS

"Women's participation in the *Loya Jirga* is extremely important for us and we hope that women delegates will succeed in securing their sisters' rights." The high hopes of Shirin Gol, a schoolteacher in Paktya, Afghanistan, were not disappointed. In December 2003, the *Loya Jirga* enshrined equality between men and women in the nation's new Constitution.

This achievement required broad-based alliances and ongoing advocacy. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which is administered by UNDP, and many of its national and international partners

played key roles. A UNIFEM-facilitated Gender and Law Working Group—comprised of the Office of the State Minister for Women, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Supreme Court judges and women's NGOs—reviewed the draft Constitution.

It later submitted recommendations to the President, the Constitutional Commission and the media, as well as to women delegates of the *Loya Jirga*. UNIFEM also sent three staff members to support these delegates, who helped to ensure that at least two women per province were elected to the Lower House.

Around the world, UNIFEM supports women's political participation, promotes women's human rights and strengthens their economic security and rights—assisting in making the MDGs a reality for women everywhere. Our flagship publication, *Progress of the World's Women: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*, issued in early 2003, assessed improvements in women's empowerment in the context of the goals. A new Web portal, MDGender.net, provides resources and tools to enlarge understanding of gender equality.