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Sri Lanka achieves most Millennium Development Goals targets well ahead of schedule - MDG Country report

Published in [Development - Provincial \(/news/business\)](/news/business)

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Print (</news/business/item/6776-sri-lanka-achieves-most-millennium-development-goals-targets-well-ahead-of-schedule-country-report?tmpl=component&print=1>) E

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Sri Lanka's free education and universal health care for more than six decades and more recent policies and programs have helped accelerate progress and achieve some targets well ahead of schedule, a report launched yesterday.

Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2014 was launched yesterday in Colombo with the participation of Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Dr. Harsha De Silva and the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Subinay Nandy.

Speaking at the event Dr. de Silva spoke of the need to integrate the differences within different communities in the country and to achieve further progress in the task.

"The government of Sri Lanka understands the need in building bridges, in integrating our society, and in Sri Lanka being a country that we can make further progress in integrating the differences within communities," he said.

"We have to ensure that in our market framework there is social goodwill and economic justice. That is what we mean by a social justice framework," Silva said.

The 2014 MDG Country Report is the third MDG progress report for Sri Lanka and is the result of a joint collaboration between Sri Lanka, the UN Country Team and the Institute of Policy Studies. It reviews progress towards the goals at both the national and regional levels.

It is also the first report that covers the entire country, allowing comparison across the 25 districts and providing policy makers with information on and support regions lagging behind. It also analyses achievements and thematic areas requiring further attention.

Highlighting Sri Lanka's MDG performance, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Subinay Nanjundesinghe's report make a strong case for Sri Lanka to be a leading and credible actor in the global deliberations around the development agenda.

"Sri Lanka's long history of investment in health, education and poverty alleviation programmes, has translated into robust progress towards the MDGs, and Sri Lanka has many lessons to share," the UN official said.

The MDGs are a set of eight goals agreed by world leaders in 2000 to be achieved before the end date in 2015.

The eight MDGs range from halving extreme poverty rates to promoting gender equality and providing universal primary education. As the end target date in September 2015, governments around the world are reviewing their progress towards achieving the MDGs in 2015.

Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger, Achieve Universal Primary Education, Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, Improve Maternal Health, Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases, Ensure Environmental Sustainability and Develop Sustainable Economic Development are the eight MDGs. Sri Lanka achieved the target of halving poverty at the national level seven years before 2015, achieved universal primary education, and the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 is nearly 100 percent.

While the national unemployment rate has declined to less than 4 percent, there was a tremendous gender gap in employment. While 90 percent of working age males are employed, the ratio for females is low despite the rapid enhancement in female education. Only 30 percent of the female population were employed while 70 percent of the males were in the labor force.

The high proportion of underweight children is still a concern, although Sri Lanka is on track to achieve the target of halving the proportion of underweight children by 2015.

The proportion of people consuming less than the minimum requirement of dietary energy has remained unchanged at around 10 percent since the 1990s.

Sri Lanka has met the target for the proportion of people with access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

In meeting the target to 'Develop a Global Partnership for Development', Sri Lanka faces the challenge of reduced access to official development assistance (ODA) following the transition into middle-income country status.

"With a small, open economy that cannot rely on domestic demand alone, Sri Lanka must focus on export-led development to sustain growth. Healthy earnings from exports of goods and services are essential in insulating the economy from increasing exposure to external shocks. Building up a large volume of non-borrowed official reserves," the MDG Report says.

Looking to the future, the report also highlights certain areas that require additional focus such as Women's Empowerment, and Regional Disparities and these were discussed during a panel discussion on 'Priorities Moving Forward'.

The panel discussion took place with the participation of UNFPA Representative Mr. Alain Sibenaler , Secretary of the Ministr Suren Batagoda , UNICEF Representative Ms. Una McCauley, Director, Nutrition Coordination Division, Ministry of Health Dr. Sr CEO, Viluthu Ms. Shanthi Sachithanandam.

Also during the event, a campaign titled 'Our UN' was launched by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Chitranganee W Nandy.

The year-long campaign carried out by the United Nations in close partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recc importance of the year 2015 in the global development sphere, as this year marks the 70th year since the UN was founded since Sri Lanka became a Member State of the UN on 14 December 1955.

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