

Foreword



The past year brought the first signs of recovery from the financial crisis that swept the globe in 1997. It also brought a stronger and more focused commitment to reducing poverty in the world. These are both encouraging signs. Economic growth provides the resources needed to improve people's lives—creating new jobs, increasing productivity, and producing goods and services. But only growth with equity—growth that reaches the poor—can close the gap between the rich and the poor.

Low income is just one of poverty's many dimensions. The poor lack material goods, education, medical care, and information. They also lack security and the means to protect their families. And they suffer the indignity of being displaced and dispossessed, even in their own communities. So we cannot look for a single solution to poverty. Nor can we measure poverty by just one indicator. We must look at a range of indicators.

That is why the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996 selected seven international development goals from the resolutions of UN conferences. Then, in 1998 a joint meeting of the UN, the OECD, and the World Bank proposed 21 indicators to track progress toward those goals.

This year's *World Development Indicators* tells us that achieving those goals will be difficult but still attainable in many countries. Progress in reducing poverty rates stalled, especially in Asia, as a consequence of the financial crisis, and in Europe and Central Asia income distributions worsened. Even so, the goal of reducing poverty rates to half of their 1990 levels can still be achieved in most regions, if growth resumes without further increases in inequality.

Looking at other social indicators, we find that many countries will achieve equal school enrollments for girls and boys in the next five years. Overall, we may fall short of the goal, but the progress toward it will bring benefits that extend beyond the classroom to all society. Reaching full primary school enrolment in the next 15 years will be more difficult. It now appears that 75 million children will be out of school in 2015, two-thirds of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even harder will be reducing child mortality to two-thirds of its 1990 level by 2015. Only 13 countries are on track. Some are falling back. But many more could achieve this goal by increasing health services for the poor and stemming the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

These are only some of the enormous challenges we face in eliminating poverty—challenges we can begin to address only with knowledge, with energy, and with resolve. The beginning point is knowledge—knowledge of how far we have come and how far we have to go. And that is the purpose of the *World Development Indicators*, which we are pleased to offer now in its fourth year of publication.

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