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AHEAD OF G-8, NEW ANALYSIS REVEALS AFRICAN COUNTRIES TOP LIST OF 20 COUNTRIES MAKING MOST OVERALL PROGRESS ON MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Report by Overseas Development Institute and UN Millennium Campaign Reveals Many of the Poorest Countries are Making Most Progress on Millennium Development Goals

June 22, 2010 -- As G-8 and G-20 leaders prepare to gather in Canada, new analysis issued by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the United Nations Millennium Campaign finds that, in absolute terms, many of the world's poorest countries are making the most overall progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – the set of promises world leaders made to significantly reduce extreme poverty, illiteracy and disease by 2015. Particularly relevant for G-8 countries are the findings which underline the importance of open trade and effective and timely aid in driving this success. For poor countries, political leadership, accountability and adequate budgetary allocations for the Goals are cited as key criteria to drive sustained progress.

Eleven of the 20 countries making the most absolute progress on the MDGs are amongst the poorest countries in Africa; half of African countries are on track to meet the target of halving poverty by 2015.

The analysis also finds that most low and middle income countries are making progress on most of the key MDG indicators.

"This study decisively establishes with hard evidence that much of the negative reporting on progress on the Millennium Development Goals is misleading," said Salil Shetty, Director of the United Nations Millennium Campaign. "Instead of lamenting that Africa might miss the MDG targets, we should be celebrating the real changes that have happened in the lives of millions of poor people, not least because of the unified effort between governments and citizens, supported by donors. The leaders and tax-payers of G-8 countries must now keep their aid commitments, with the confidence that their investment is making a tangible and large scale difference."

"This study seeks to broaden the debate about MDG progress. The first findings show that progress is taking place, sometimes in unexpected places," said Overseas Development Institute Director Dr. Alison Evans. "In a world where support for development is under increasing scrutiny, we hope that this work will contribute to a broader appreciation of how we assess progress to date."

The new analysis contrasts national-level progress in **absolute** terms, as distinct from progress **relative** to global MDG targets. Absolute progress measures overall progress countries have made and relative progress measures how close they have come to specific MDG targets. Progress in absolute terms at the national level gives a fuller picture of the reality on the ground because performance against MDG targets hides significant differences between countries at the starting point (baseline year 1990), as well as differences in performance between countries since the MDGs were adopted in 2000. Both measures are needed to tell the full story of progress, particularly in low income countries.

The top 20 countries in absolute terms are:

Benin	Bangladesh
Mali	Honduras
Ethiopia	Mauritania
Gambia	Ghana
Malawi	China
Viet Nam	Burkina Faso
Uganda	Rwanda
Nepal	Nicaragua
India	Guatemala
Cambodia	Togo

The analysis focused on progress on Goal 1, which seeks to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 4, to reduce child mortality; and Goal 5, to improve maternal health – all issues on the agenda of this week’s G-8. Amongst the findings:

- The largest number of reductions of deaths of children under the age of five occurred in regions with the highest initial levels of such deaths, such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- Even though the Goal of reducing maternal mortality has seen the least progress, access to maternal health services has improved in 80 percent of countries.
- Countries making the most relative progress tend to be middle income countries, such as Ecuador, China, Thailand, Brazil and Egypt.

The report identified a number of additional factors that contribute to progress on the MDGs: poor countries must have consistent leadership committed over an extended period of time to reducing poverty. They must make the public sector accountable to citizens and empower local governments and communities. Furthermore, they must prioritize investment in human development and budgets for health and education.

The research was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UN Millennium Campaign. The analysis is based on the MDG database, with the exception of income poverty data for Africa, which are based on the ReSAKSS database. The data on equity – the distribution of progress within a country – are based on household Demographic Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster surveys. Where the available data permit, countries have been compared over the same time period against average annual rates of progress, irrespective of population size.

The analysis previews a fuller report to be released later this year, reviewing development progress over the past two decades, and a detailed score card on MDG performance.

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