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Poverty in the Commonwealth

86. This section focuses on poverty in the Commonwealth and the progress of Commonwealth countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It highlights the severe deprivation that exists in the Commonwealth that requires urgent action by Commonwealth Heads of Government and the international community.

87. The problem of global poverty hardly needs restating. The statistics are all too clear and the personal stories overwhelming. With around 1.2 billion people living on less than one dollar a day and 2.8 billion on under two dollars a day, there are no grounds for complacency.¹⁷ And global income inequality is rising. According to the World Bank's *World Development Report 2003*: "average income in the wealthiest 20 countries is 37 times that in the poorest 20 countries – twice the ratio in 1970".¹⁸ Moreover, 60 countries finished the decade of the 1990s with lower per capita incomes than at its beginning.¹⁹ But what do such general facts and statements mean for the Commonwealth?

88. A recent report vividly demonstrates the importance of reducing poverty in the Commonwealth and of action by Commonwealth member states both individually and collectively:²⁰

- One third of the Commonwealth's two billion people live on less than one dollar a day and 64 per cent on less than two dollars a day.
- Around 60 per cent of global HIV cases are in the Commonwealth, and four of the nine most affected countries are Commonwealth members. Nearly 60 per cent of Commonwealth citizens lack access to essential drugs and adequate sanitation facilities.
- Some 270 million people in the Commonwealth lack access to improved water supplies.
- Women constitute around 70 per cent of those living in poverty in the Commonwealth. Women are discriminated against in much of the Commonwealth in areas ranging from unequal pay for equal work to customary inheritance and marriage regimes, in addition to suffering domestic violence.

- Around half of the world's 300 million indigenous peoples live in the Commonwealth, and they frequently suffer discrimination, intolerance, prejudice and violation of their land rights.²¹
- Around half of the world's 115 million children without access to primary school live in the Commonwealth.
- Young people constitute over 50 per cent of the Commonwealth population. A large percentage of them are adversely affected by unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy.

89. This list could go on and detail particular cases and stories in Commonwealth countries of, for instance, exploitative child labour or comparatively low life expectancy among indigenous peoples. It could also highlight the special problems facing those living in the 32 small states of the Commonwealth. The message should by now be clear: Poverty in all its dimensions is a special challenge throughout the countries of the Commonwealth and for the Commonwealth as a whole.

90. Another way of thinking about poverty in the Commonwealth is to assess members' likelihood of achieving the MDGs, adopted by world leaders at the UN General Assembly in September 2000. Each of the eight Goals is accompanied by targets to be achieved by 2015 (see Appendix B). The Goals are to: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development.

91. The UNDP's *Human Development Report 2003* reviews progress towards the MDGs and provides an assessment of which countries require priority attention with respect to the achievement of each Goal and to the Goals overall. Progress is classified as slow, moderate or fast, and priority status as top priority, high priority or low priority. Top priority countries for each Goal have extreme human poverty in that Goal combined with slow or even reversing progress towards it. It is on such countries, argues UNDP, that the world's attention and resources must be focused. A country is designated high priority for a Goal if it has both extreme human poverty in that Goal and moderate progress towards it or if it has medium human poverty in that Goal and slow progress towards it.

92. Table 1 shows those Commonwealth countries that are designated top priority and high priority for each of the MDGs. Table 2 depicts which Commonwealth countries are top priority, high priority and low priority across all the Goals.²² It is clear that progress towards the MDGs for Commonwealth countries is extremely mixed:

Table 1: Priority Status for Specific Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth Countries

Goal	Target	Indicator	Top priority countries	High priority countries
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Halve the proportion of people living on under \$1 a day	Population living below \$1 a day (%)	Cameroon, The Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Jamaica, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Swaziland
	Halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger	Undernourished people (% population)	Bangladesh, Kenya, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia	Botswana, The Gambia, India, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that all children can complete primary education	Net primary enrolment ratio (%)	Mozambique, United Republic of Tanzania	The Bahamas, Botswana, The Gambia, Namibia, South Africa
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2005	Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (%)	Mozambique, Sierra Leone	Cameroon, India
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	Reduce under-five infant mortality rates by two thirds	Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Gambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Uganda
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	Halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water	People with access to improved water sources (%)	Papua New Guinea	Cameroon, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda
	Achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100m slum dwellers	People with access to adequate sanitation (%)	Cameroon, Nigeria	Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Malawi, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Zimbabwe

Table 2: Priority Status across all the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth Countries

Priority status	Country	Number of Commonwealth countries in category out of world total
Top priority	Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe	9 out of 31
High priority	The Bahamas, Botswana, The Gambia, India, Malawi, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Swaziland	9 out of 28
Low priority	Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji Islands, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Pakistan, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom, Vanuatu	23 out of 78
Insufficient data	Antigua and Barbuda, Brunei Darussalam, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Maldives, Nauru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu	13 out of 32
<p>Note: <i>Top priority</i> countries across the Goals means that they are top priority countries for at least three Goals or for at least half of the Goals for which they have data, with a minimum of three data points. If data are available for only two Goals they are top priority for both. <i>High priority</i> countries across the Goals do not fall into the top priority category but are top or high priority for at least three Goals, are top priority for two Goals, or are top or high priority for at least half of the Goals for which they have data, with a minimum of three data points. If data are available for only two Goals, they are top or high priority in both. <i>Low priority</i> countries are those with sufficient data to be assessed and that do not fall into either the top or high priority categories.</p>		

- Of the 31 overall top priority countries, nine are from the Commonwealth: Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- 10 Commonwealth countries are designated top priority with respect to the target of halving the proportion of people living on under \$1 a day.
- 17 Commonwealth countries are classified as either top or high priority for the Goal of reducing child mortality.

- Several Commonwealth countries have made significant progress towards the MDGs. For instance, 11 countries in the Commonwealth have made fast progress towards the goal of halving the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015.

93. The lack of progress of many Commonwealth countries towards achieving the MDGs is extremely worrying. It would undoubtedly appear even worse were it possible to obtain data for the full range of Goals and for all Commonwealth member states. There are not sufficient data to make reliable progress assessments respecting the targets for Goals 5 and 6. Additionally, the indicators used for other targets are variable in their country coverage. In particular, for 13 small Commonwealth states there are insufficient data to assess their overall priority status across all the MDGs (Table 2). It is clearly important to build greater statistical capacity in these states.²³