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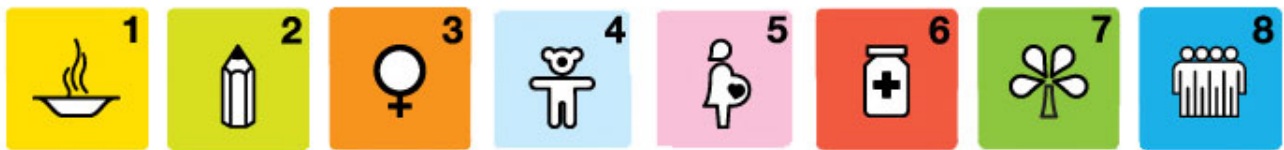
Misdirected Development a Threat to Security – Analysis of Southeast Asia

Under-performance on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and conflicts are connected such that the former can catalyse or prolong the latter. This Insight looks at Southeast Asia, where intrastate conflicts and violence have plagued countries for years. Three socially vulnerable groups experiencing inequality in access to outcomes of projects on the MDGs are identified – women and youth in rural areas and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The propensity for such inequality to incite and prolong conflict is examined.

By Manpavan Joth Kaur and Lina Gong.



Working globally to achieve the Millennium Development Goals



Credit: UN Photo/Martine Perret (photo), UNDP (graphic).

Southeast Asian Inertia on the Millennium Development Goals Preserves Intrastate Conflict and Violence

In Southeast Asia, for the last five years, the incidence of conflict or violence has not been significantly reduced nor have the targets set for the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) been adequately achieved. This Insight analyses the interconnectivity between unsatisfactory progress on the MDGs and the prevalence of conflicts in the Southeast Asian region. It approaches the analysis from the perspective that consequences of misdirected development such as horizontal inequalities in peace time or following peace settlements can fuel or re-ignite conflicts or violence. Development is essential for long-term stability within a country as much as security and stability are essential for development. This connection has been recognised since 2003 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its joint analysis with the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Analysis on conflict-related development (UNDP/BCPR, 2003). Similar analysis on the conflict situation in the Philippines was undertaken in 2004, revealing that the failure of successive Filipino governments to address the 'highly skewed distribution of land-ownership and control in southern Philippines' underpins the continuing war and

emergence of insurgents (Gutierrez and Borrás Jr, 2004). Progress reports on the MDGs should specify efforts taken to address intranational inequalities. Through this approach, the MDGs can contribute to alleviating inequalities, and reduce the risks or tensions of conflict and violence.

The High Incidence of Conflict

Asia is home to a high number of intrastate armed conflicts. Between the years 2000 and 2009, nine major armed conflicts were recorded for Asia, with only the armed conflict between India and Pakistan being interstate (SIPRI, 2010:63). The number of conflicts in Asia has remained constant throughout the period except for a marked drop in 2004 from the previous year, unlike in Africa where the incidence of conflict has been decreasing (see Table 1). In 2009, Asia recorded seven major armed conflicts, leading to the region being identified as the area with the highest number of armed conflicts for the seventh consecutive year (SIPRI, 2010:62). In Southeast Asia, all conflicts are intrastate with the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar and Indonesia in continued tensions with internal armed opposition groups (Ploughshares, 2009a, 2009b and 2009c).

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Locations with At Least One Major Armed Conflict, 1999–2009

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Africa	10	8	7	6	5	3	3	3	1	3	4
Asia	6	6	6	5	6	3	6	6	5	6	6
Total (World)	21	18	19	16	16	12	15	15	13	15	16

Source: SIPRI (2010:62).

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Uneven Progress on the Millennium Development Goals

According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the share of people in the developing world who subsist on less than US\$1.25 a day, that is, those in extreme poverty as defined under Goal 1 of the MDGs, dropped from 46 per cent to 27 per cent between 1990 and 2005. This was due to the progress made in part in Southeast Asia (UN DESA, 2010). Although the UN expressed optimism that the Asia-Pacific region can achieve the MDGs by 2015 (Aprilianto, 2010), there is uneven progress thus far on the MDGs in Southeast Asia (ODI, 2008). Amongst ASEAN member states, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam have more than 10 per cent of their populations living in extreme poverty, that is, on less than US\$1.25 a day. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that Lao PDR and the Philippines are making 'slow progress' on the MDGs, which indicates that they may not reach the targets for 2015 unless they make better progress (ADB, 2010:66).

It is seen from the above that progress at regional or national levels do not necessarily depict a similar trend at sub-regional or sub-national levels. The propensity of conflict and violence to hinder development progress is known. A lack of focus on intrastate poverty and inequalities leads to the risk factors of conflict and violence being understudied. These factors include power inequalities, unequal access to resources and disparities between rural and urban living conditions. Intranational inequalities are not habitually represented in national reports on progress on the MDGs. This lack of focus contributes to the misdirection of development which can underpin potential conflict or violence within or amongst societies.

Table 2: Southeast Asia's Progress on Selected MDGs

Millennium Development Goals	Progress	2015 Target
Goal 1: Poverty & hunger (%)	Proportion under poverty line (US\$1.25/day): down to 19 in 2005 from 39 in 1990	Met
	Employment rate: stable at 66 from 1998–2008	Not specified
	Youth unemployment trend (1998–2008): labour participation down to 51.4 from 54.5; unemployment rate up from 12.2 to 14.5 ¹	Not specified
	Proportion of undernourished people: down to 14 between 2005–	Not met

2007 from 24 between 1990–1992		
Goal 2: Primary education (%)	Net enrolment: slightly up from 93 in 1999 to 95 in 2008	Not met
	Reaching last grade: uneven, with five countries on slow, no, or regressing progress	Not specified
Goal 3: Gender equality (%)	Girls' enrolment in relation to boys' (1999–2008): primary level, up from 96 to 97; secondary, from 95 to 107; tertiary, from 95 to 107	Met (primary); exceeded (secondary/tertiary)
	Proportion of waged female employees in non-agricultural sector (1990–2008): up from around 35 to 38.1	Not specified
	Women's participation in politics: up from 10 in 2000 to 19 in 2010	Not specified

Source: Compiled from UN DESA (2010), ILO (2010) and UN ESCAP et al. (2010).

Whilst Southeast Asia has managed to reduce absolute poverty levels, there is rising inequality in almost every country, enhancing social tensions (Chhibber, 2010). The relative neglect of agricultural sectors and preference for skilled over unskilled labour have been noted to underlie these inequalities between the rural and urban populations, or generally amongst the rich and the poor (Chhibber, 2010). Overall, the region has not satisfactorily met its targets thus far and unless it pushes itself to accelerate efforts, the 2015 targets will not be easily met.

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Persistent Horizontal Inequalities Risk Conflict and Violence

As stated above, progress at regional or national levels may not be replicated at sub-regional or sub-national levels. Horizontal inequalities at the intranational level are multi-dimensional with economic, social, political and cultural aspects (Stewart, 2008:5). They include unequal access to or distribution of: resources, and social services such as education and health services, resulting in the exclusion of individuals from outcomes of human indicators such as literacy or employment (Stewart, 2008:5) and intranational power inequalities (GPPAC, 2005:1). There is a lack of data on the extent, trends and specific causes of conflict and violence in Asia at the intranational level (UNDP and Small Arms Survey, 2008:4). Nevertheless, horizontal inequalities such as persistent poverty are prevalent and significant in contributing to the mainly communal, territorial and governance disputes. These factors also precipitate migration amongst the poor in search of better conditions. As a result many people within states become detached from their places of origin and may be internally displaced.

The conflicts in the Philippines and Thailand are representative of the link between prolonged inequalities and internal conflict. In the Philippines, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has clashed with the central government for more than a decade over failures to address unequal access to land. It may be that the tensions between the two sides have contributed significantly to the impoverishment of the Mindanao region. However, persistent underdevelopment of a group is a source of violent conflict (Stewart, 2008:6). Group grievances fuel individual insecurities because relative impoverishment of the group increases perceptions of members that they are likely to be trapped in a poor position (Stewart, 2008:6). Group inequality supports efforts to mobilise people to protest (Stewart, 2008:6). Accessible data indicates that the vulnerability of Sulu, Mindanao to conflict may be linked to the persistent low level of human development and high incidence of poverty in that region. This can be seen from the Human Development Index which is a composite statistic referred to for an indication on the social and economic development of individuals (UNDP, n.d.), while the MDGs are derived from the human development framework. However, the latter remains more comprehensive. The recent Philippines Human Development Report 2009 based on 2006 figures reveals that ARMM provinces experience inequality relative to other regions in the Philippines (HDN et al., 2009:117). The populations within ARMM provinces experience the shortcomings of development equally amongst themselves (HDN et al., 2009:117). Therefore, the widespread poverty in the ARMM relative to the rest of the country undoubtedly sustains the base for continued conflict and violence.

Table 3: Sulu (Southern Philippines)² – Prolonged Underdevelopment and Conflict

Year	2000	2003	2006
Human Development Index	0.311	0.301	0.326
Incidence of Poverty (%)	91.5	89.0	93.8

Source: Compiled from Stewart (2008:19), HDN et al. (2005:103; 2009:111 and 158).

Inequalities in Thailand exist amongst rural populations and Islamic communities. Both hold grievances, as demonstrated by the insurgents concentrated in Muslim-dominated southern Thailand and the recent protests in Bangkok in March 2010 by the 'Red Shirts' that represent the rural poor. According to the latest report by Thailand's Ministry of Social Development and the UNDP (2009:xii, 69–73), Thailand's development has neglected the rural areas. Evidently, the report indicates that poverty is concentrated in Thailand's rural northern, northeastern and southern regions. According to the report, there is a deepening divide between the rich and poor. Although absolute poverty levels have declined from 21 to 8.5 per cent between 2000 and 2007, one in ten people in rural areas remain in poverty (Thailand's Ministry and UNDP, 2009:ix). The Muslim-concentrated rural far south experiences a double burden as it is the area hosting the highest number of rural poor (Thailand's Ministry and UNDP, 2009:12).

Horizontal inequalities need to be addressed because prolonged neglect accumulates grievances, which over time become popular perceptions, underpinning tensions. Authorities need to identify marginalised sections of society and target resources effectively to ensure equal access and representation in outcomes of development indicators (Deputy Secretary-General, 2010). Therefore, MDG reports ought to reflect efforts and progress made on addressing intranational horizontal inequalities. Indirectly, such reporting highlights the extent to which the risks of conflict and violence are being reduced, in addition to contributing to the reduction of human vulnerability to conflict.

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Factors Contributing to Horizontal Inequalities: Some Indicators

The following highlights factors that have been paid the least attention to during the implementation of the MDGs. Failing to address these have inhibited the opportunities to mitigate the prevalence of situations of conflict or violence.

Regionally, the rapid population growth in Asia has contributed to dense living spaces and competition for employment opportunities (UNDP, 2008:14). The ADB has highlighted the link between urban violence, poverty and ineffective governance (UNDP and Small Arms Survey, 2008:19). Asia Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works extensively in certain countries within Southeast Asia has undertaken an analysis of the drivers of conflict (Asia Foundation, 2008:1). It reports that in southern Thailand the disenfranchisement and tendencies toward violence amongst the Muslim youth are due to limited opportunities for economic advancement such as sustainable employment, as well as lack of opportunity to integrate into Thai society. Similarly in the Philippines, the report endorses the fact that unequal access and power inequalities experienced by its minorities underpin their dissatisfaction with the central government. In Cambodia, 85 per cent of its poor live in rural areas with limited access to resources as natural resources deplete. The means to alternative income generation and effective communication with the central government are also limited (Asia Foundation, 2009:10).

Gender equality – that is, Goal 3 of the MDGs: empowering and ensuring equality for women – across Southeast Asia has made insufficient progress. The Bougainville conflict in Papua New Guinea revealed that women usually experience the most acute impact of negative socioeconomic situations and that they are becoming more politically aware and organised, no longer averse to staging unrest in the midst of dissatisfaction (Scheyvens and Leonard, 1998:66). Similarly, failure in Southeast Asia to address women's needs can compromise the long-term strength of social frameworks and structures since the resilience, and economic, logistical and social support role of women are not developed (UNDP, 2003:14). Increased involvement will allow their sentiments to serve as a 'barometer' for underlying social or community disruption (Scheyvens and Leonard, 1998:66). These areas lack significant monitoring which causes horizontal inequalities to increase unnoticed.

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Addressing Horizontal Inequalities

There is a need to monitor, evaluate and address structural problems leading to inequalities within societies and amongst women at the intranational level (UNDP/BCPR, 2003:24). Failure to do so by development agencies and actors has been shown to inadvertently exacerbate tensions (UNDP/BCPR, 2003:14). This has to involve civil society and community-based groups (UNDP and Small Arms Survey, 2008:18). The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) has highlighted the instrumental role of civil society organisations in mediating the conflicts in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, highlighting their special skills and strategic proximity to local communities (GPPAC, 2005:4). Monitoring mechanisms ought to measure progress over time, in order to tailor future policies and reports (Community of Practice, 2010).

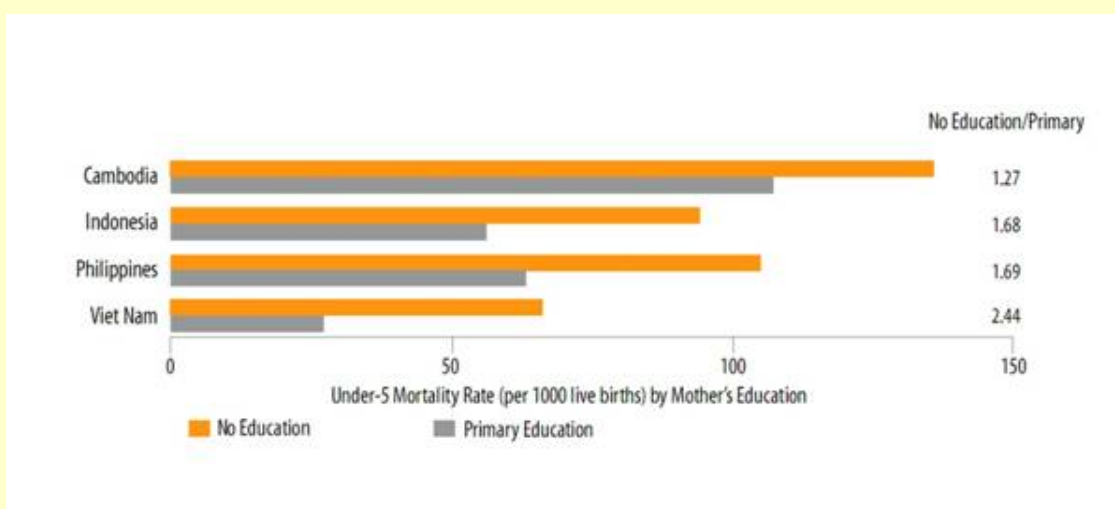
In policymaking, NGOs' foresight is beneficial for national authorities. For example, the Asia Foundation, by way of extensive engagement in Southeast Asia, has embarked on initiatives to break cycles of conflict and assist fragile states by using their networks to strategise innovative and relevant peacebuilding strategies (Asia Foundation, 2009:8). The Foundation works with vulnerable sections of society, such as women, by encouraging their involvement and empowerment (Asia Foundation, 2009:8). If the Foundation makes the MDGs its focus, it could potentially serve as a vital resource towards bridging development and conflict prevention. Its experiences can inform policies at the national level.

The following discusses sections of societies vulnerable to the negative end of horizontal inequalities. The analysis contemplates specific efforts needed for greater effectiveness of frameworks for MDGs.

Women in Rural Areas

Gender equality holds the key to achieving the MDGs, because it is not only a goal in its own right but also a prerequisite for the achievement of other development goals, such as universal primary education and improvement of maternal and child health (UN DESA, 2010). Since women account for approximately half of the world's total population, the effort to reduce poverty and hunger would not be deemed successful unless women enjoy equal access to decent jobs and food security. As women take the primary responsibility of taking care of the family, the level of their empowerment and education have a direct impact on the education and health of their children. The higher the level of the mother's education, the more likely the baby will survive to the age of five, as indicated in Table 4. However, despite the importance of women's empowerment in the realisation of the MDGs, gender equality is making the least progress amongst the eight goals. Rural women are in a particularly underprivileged position compared to their urban counterparts due to the inadequate attention to their plight in the development agenda. Poverty is especially acute for rural women (UN, 1995).

Table 4: The Relationship between a Mother's Education and Child Survival



Source: UN ESCAP et al. (2010:27)

The overall outcome of efforts to close gender disparities is mixed. According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, Southeast Asia met the 2015 targets for all three levels of education for women and girls. However, the progress is uneven between rural and urban areas and among different ethnic groups. In Lao PDR, the primary school enrolment for urban Sino-Tibetan girls is 100 per cent while that for rural girls from the same ethnic group is just 32.7 per cent (United Nations and the Government of Lao PDR, 2008:41). With regard to the narrowing gender wage gap and increasing number of women in parliament, the performance is less impressive. Women's share of waged non-agricultural jobs remains very small. In terms of non-agricultural paid jobs the ratio of women to men is one to four. Women's participation in politics is slowly on the rise, but the increase is more often boosted by compulsory measures implemented by the government rather than a result of a genuine advancement of women's political status. In the Asia-Pacific region, the proportion of women in parliament is only 11 per cent, indicating that this region is unlikely to reach the target of 30 per cent by 2015 (UN et al., 2010).



Credit: UN Photo/Martine Perret

It is noteworthy that the MDGs address the issue of wage disparity in the non-agricultural sector but make no reference to the particular economic needs of women in the rural areas and agricultural sector who play a vital role in household and rural production systems (FAO/UNDP 2003). In Asia, women do 50 to 90 per cent of the work in rice fields (UN Millennium Project, 2005:77). As the income gap between urban and rural areas widens, more and more men leave for higher-paid jobs in cities and women increasingly become the primary agricultural labour force. Despite their substantial contribution to agricultural production, rural women's work is usually unrecognised and unpaid because traditional beliefs and cultural biases tend to undervalue women's work. As a consequence, rural women often lack equal access to the essential productive asset – land. In many Asian countries, land ownership is often associated with access to credit and agricultural extension services, and the

lack of access to land creates a vicious cycle that hampers the economic emancipation of rural women.

Rural women's poverty is rooted in the asymmetric relation between their contribution and gain. If rural women continue to be excluded from the benefits from progress made in the realisation of the MDGs, they are more likely to resort to violent measures to strive for their rights. In April and May this year, the Red Shirt campaign in Thailand staged protests against the government, calling for the dissolution of parliament and elections. The majority of the protestors were farmers from the rural northeast – a considerable proportion of whom were women. They have been marginalised in the country's economic development and thus were discontented with the elite-led government. The protests later escalated into violent confrontations and resulted in scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries. The rural poor from nine villages in Northeast Thailand gathered at Thung Phra from July 2009 till March 2010 and set up a protest village within a eucalyptus plantation to contest their land rights. In Thailand, it has become a protest strategy for the rural poor to block roads and highways to vent their discontent and demand for government concern. Rural women constitute a strong force in these campaigns.

The absence of specific targets and disaggregated statistics for the economic empowerment of rural women creates the risk that progress in gender equality may not necessarily translate into poverty reduction in this group. In view of the importance of the role of rural women in agricultural production and the disparities between women in rural and urban areas, it is advisable that statistics on poverty reduction concerning rural women be disaggregated from those of urban women. In this way, progress made by each group could be better monitored, and accordingly, governments and development agencies would be able to make plans tailored to rural women to support their economic emancipation.

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Rural Youth

On the whole, Southeast Asia has an ageing population, but sub-regionally, in Lao PDR and Cambodia, youth represent 20 per cent of their population (Yap, 2005:39–40). 55.7 per cent of the global youth labour force is in Asia (UN, 2007:1) and in 2009, Southeast Asia housed some 36.4 million unemployed youth (Macan-Markar, 2010). The International Labour Office (ILO) reveals discouraging trends in youth unemployment rates over time (ILO, 2010:4). This will be relatively more severe for girls, since unemployment figures for girls often exceed that for boys. In 2009, the global unemployment figure is 13.2 per cent for girls and 12.9 per cent for boys (ILO, 2010:5).

According to a joint study on poverty amongst rural youth in the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam in 2009, primary education is fairly accessible. However, dropout rates are significant at higher levels of education due to financial constraints and family pressure informed by concerns of the opportunity cost of study, that is, time away from farming (UNESCO et al., 2009:7). The ILO revealed in its recent study that the youth 'working poor'³ were mainly from rural areas, with higher labour participation in agriculture. Reliance on agricultural and farm income for their livelihood is not a sustainable option for rural populations. To address this, some youth find access to training but the training lacks quality, relevance and sustainability. It was found that rural youth normally could find work but finding decent work, which offers good pay, good working conditions, is not temporary and is not informal, was difficult (UNESCO et al., 2009:18). In areas prone to situations of extreme conflict and violence, the chances for youth to be recruited as 'combatants' increase (UNGA and UNSC, 2001: Recommendation 21). Agricultural transformation, which results in developing countries producing enough agricultural products to meet their domestic needs as well as a surplus for export, will enhance rural employment opportunities and increase the attractiveness of the agricultural industry. However, this is a difficult goal to achieve.

The above factors cumulatively decrease incentives for rural youth to remain in rural areas. Due to poverty and limited opportunities, they migrate to cities or urban areas which are perceived to offer better opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. However, the rural to urban migration of youth will strain the trends highlighted above. If the quality of training and consequently skills of rural youth are not improved, they would have a greater tendency to fall behind youth in cities or urban areas, and be absorbed into informal and unregulated employment, thereby enhancing their vulnerabilities to cyclical poverty.



Credit: Thierry Falise / onasia.com

The lack of decent work if experienced at an early age threatens a person's future employment prospects and frequently leads to unsuitable labour behaviour patterns (ILO, 2010:6). The link between youth unemployment and social exclusion, increased crime, violence, conflicts and drug-taking was highlighted by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) in 2007, and repeated by the ILO in 2010.

Internally Displaced Persons

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are another vulnerable group that needs particular attention under the millennium development project. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates that the total number of IDPs in the world was 27.1 million in 2009. Among the regions, South and Southeast Asia have witnessed the largest relative increase, where 4.3 million people were internally displaced by the end of 2009. In the Philippines, up to 400,000 people fled their homes in the south as the fight between government forces and elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) escalated. In view of the large number of IDPs, the MDG strategy would not be complete without giving due consideration to the situation of IDPs.

The well-being of IDPs has been a concern to the millennium development project from the beginning. The Millennium Declaration explicitly calls on states to '... help all refugees and displaced persons to return voluntarily to their homes, in safety and dignity, and to be smoothly reintegrated into their societies'. However, despite the recognition that IDPs are within the state's remit, national strategies under the millennium development project seldom refer to displaced persons. In some cases, for example Myanmar and Papua in Indonesia, the national authorities have barely recognised the existence or severity of internal displacement (IDMC/NRC, 2010:74) and refused to let other national or international actors engage with IDPs. The plight of IDPs is aggravated by the fact that the issues of IDPs are technically a domestic issue of the State. Without the permission of the government, international aid groups are unable to reach and help these people. In addition to insufficient efforts on the country's part, international organisations and aid agencies have yet to properly link relief efforts to the MDGs (UN, 2005). The UN MDGs Report 2010 barely reflects how displaced people are progressing in terms of the MDGs.

As their normal livelihoods are disrupted by displacement, IDPs are particularly vulnerable in terms of income and food security. According to a 1986 World Bank study, 50 per cent of displaced families were living below the poverty line and 20 per cent below the subsistence level (IDMC/NRC, 2006:26). In fact, most displaced persons lived below the poverty line even before the displacement and suffered the loss of stable livelihoods and further impoverishment as a result of displacement. The Philippine Department of Health (DOH), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in Central Mindanao conducted a joint emergency nutrition and food security assessment in early 2009. The report revealed that more than 80 per cent of IDPs were food insecure five months after having been displaced. Most displaced households were deep in debt (IDMC/NRC, 2010). According to the Global Overview 2005 of the World Health Organization (WHO), malnutrition that results from food insecurity among IDPs is very high. In 2008, the percentage of global acute malnutrition in Myanmar was three times higher than the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) standard (UNHCR, 2009).

Without sufficient access to food and employment opportunities, IDPs could become vulnerable to recruitment by either government or rebel forces in exchange for food or other living necessities. In this case, the recruited IDPs change from victims of conflict to perpetrators of harm. In addition, the under-achievement of the MDGs forces IDPs to leave for places that provide better opportunities, which leads to the discontentment of local residents due to reduced resources and employment opportunities available to them. In summary, if the national progress towards the realisation of the MDGs is not translated into the improvement of living conditions and life prospects of IDPs, the issue of IDPs can turn from being the result of conflicts to becoming a cause.

As IDPs face more difficulties in achieving the MDGs than persons in the non-displaced group, their specific needs should be attended to. For instance, people who are from rural areas but who are now displaced in cities usually do not have the necessary skills to generate enough income. The provision of skilled training is thus one way for national authorities to contribute to the reduction of hunger and poverty of IDPs.

Conclusion

This Insight seeks to prioritise the connection between development and conflict prevention, noting that under-achievement of the MDGs contributes to prolonged situations of conflict and violence in the Southeast Asian region. Even where national progress seems positive, intranational trends point to the contrary. Hence, the importance of disaggregated monitoring of the MDGs in Southeast Asian countries at the intranational level should be emphasised, for the long-term sustainability of development, peace and stability within each country. This is especially needed for goals related to women, youth and IDPs. Authorities in the region need to develop their understanding of and capacity to deal with IDPs through the MDGs. It is suggested that certain NGOs, such as the Asia Foundation, are able to collect data and information at the sub-national levels – such as the provincial or communal levels – which can then inform the national levels. These efforts will make national reporting on the MDGs more comprehensive and future policymaking more targeted. Comprehensive reports highlighting efforts to address the needs of marginalised sections of societies can be collated at the regional level. These resources are vital to enable regional mechanisms to assess the prevalence and risk factors of intrastate conflict and violence.

Footnotes

1. The region covered is Southeast Asia and the Pacific.
2. Figures for Sulu are used as it is the worst performing province on almost all MDG indicators.
3. This refers to persons employed but subsisting below US\$1.25 a day, that is, living in extreme poverty.

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