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UN: Thailand a good model to follow

■ *Angela Cummine*
Jacinta Isaacs
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THE UNITED NATIONS yesterday released a global development report with recommendations for how to halve poverty in a generation.

Lee Yee Cheong, co-author of the report and Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of Malaysia, said Thailand and Malaysia are good models for development, as both have been successful in easing poverty.

The report, "Investing in Development", provides a practical framework for implementing a set of eight goals, outlined in the UN's Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals - or MDGs - range from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger to reducing child mortality, ensuring environmental sustainability and achieving universal primary education.

Specific targets include halving the

portion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day; ensuring that by 2015 all children will be able to complete primary school education and reducing the mortality rate of children aged under five, from 1990 to 2015.

Little progress has been made to meet the MDGs, according to Cheong.

The UN hopes the report will spur progress towards achieving the goals. The report is the "most comprehensive strategy ever put forward for fighting poverty, hunger, disease and environmental problems", said Joana Merlin-Scholtes, the UN Development Programme's representative for Thailand.

"This is a make or break year for the Millennium Development Goals," she said.

Higher income developing countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia were highlighted as successful models for development. Over the past decade, Thailand has halved the proportion of its people living in extreme poverty from 27.2 per cent in

1990 to 9.8 per cent in 2002.

These countries should move towards a donor role within the region, contributing in-kind support, Cheong argued.

Thailand has seen success in its rural development programs and universal primary education is likely to be achieved ahead of the target year of 2015, according to Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, deputy secretary general of the National Economic and Social Development Board.

But there is still gender inequity, he noted. "Women face limitations at work and some face domestic violence," he said.

Cheong called on developing countries to focus their resources on boosting their economies and creating wealth through engineering and technology.

He outlined a two-step approach focusing first on the development of basic infrastructure, and second, on the growth of locally owned small and medium enterprises.