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## The Millennium Development Goals and Post 2015 Framework- An Indian Experience

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### Abstract

As the world enters the penultimate months before the completion of the 15-year span of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) it is already clear that progress has been rather mixed. The agenda has been cut back to a standard set of statistics, and macroeconomic, sectoral or institutional reforms of a technical nature. Growth has been equated as panacea for all forms of deprivation. However, the MDG agenda failed to bring fundamental transformations in human development and society to make it more inclusive. While it will be futile to see profile and progress of the MDGs through the prism of success or failure, but an objective and impassionate analysis of the past achievement and current trajectories are essential to understand reveal our conceptual, structural and operational deficiencies and the kinds of reorientation needed to ensure that SDGs are much more attainable. Such reorientations would include; prioritizing type of growth, disaggregated regional and local targets rather than global standards, focus on qualitative aspects of human wellbeing over technical 'solutions', and the painstaking work of developing national and sub-national enablement over quick outcome indicators. It further probes into the matter relating to India's recent development experience which shows that achieving the ambitious vision by 2030 will require addressing a wide range of challenges. Agenda of inclusive and holistic growth can accordingly no longer neglect the link between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development which needs long term integrated policy making. Conceptualizing, planning and implementation beyond 2015 must be made integral, normative part of economic, social and environmental objective of the nation.

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## **1.1 Introduction**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an off shoot of Millennium Declaration agreed by 189 countries in September 2000 marks the beginning of a momentous global effort ushering in new method of worldwide mobilization towards achieving a set of vital human and developmental objective. They embody widespread public concern about growing poverty, hunger, malnutrition, dreaded diseases, illiteracy, gender disparity, and environmental degradation. These concerns synthesized into easily explainable set of eight goals, with 21 targets and time lines, the MDGs not only promoted global awareness, but also build public pressure and made accountability of ruling class, improved metrics, social feedback & public pressures.

## **1.2 INDIA'S experience with MDGs: A mixed bag of glories & pitfalls**

The MDGs has been an integral part of development agenda for India. According to the UN Report & India Country Report 2015, though India has made remarkable progress in achieving some of indicators of 4th MDGs targets, achievement in some others indicators has missed the target or unlikely to be achieved. With below poverty line (national) reading of 21.9 per cent of the population as per official estimate, poverty reduction by half target is already achieved. On education indicators, the country is on track to achieve universal primary school enrollment for both boys and girls and according to the report and already abolished gender disparity in primary & secondary and likely to do so in tertiary education by 2015. Goal of reducing hunger by half and maternal mortality by three quarters is likely to be achieved. Trend reversal has been achieved in spread of deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Increment in forest cover is achieved and more than 50% reduction is achieved in number people who do not have access to safe drinking water. The achievement in penetration in telephone and internet connection has been spectacular.

However, the country's performance has been far lagging behind on other indicators. On indicators for 1empowering women through wage employment and political participation(Goal

3), reducing infant and child mortality(Goal 4) and improving access to safe drinking water, 1access to adequate sanitation & eliminate open defecation(Goal 7), the progress is far off the track. It is evident that progress and achievement of MDGs across states is uneven irrespective of the state of economic growth.

### **1.2a The Unfulfilled Agenda**

Despite rapid economic growth and positive human development, Indian remains highly segmented and income inequality is widening. Nearly 50% decline in Poverty Gap Ratio (PGR) both in rural and urban areas during 2004-05 to 2011-12, is a statistical mirage as share of poorest quintile in national consumption which is an indicator of inequality has declined over the period 7.1 % (urban) & 9.1%(rural) in 2011-12 against corresponding figure of 8%(urban) and 9.6%(rural) in 1993-94. Estimate of national poverty line and differences among states in India itself is matter of much debate and contention. A large number of people whose consumption levels are at the threshold of poverty line remain vulnerable and minor shocks—natural disaster, crop failure, illness, indebtedness—can easily push them below the poverty line.

Skewed growth pattern and widening inequality have led to concentration of poverty in poorer and less developed states. Poverty incidence in rural area is almost twice that of urban areas, and more severe among marginalized groups.

Large numbers of school going age children are still out of school and drop-out rate is very high at secondary and higher education level. Quality of education as reported by ASER (Annual Survey of Education Report) of PRATHAM and recent UNESCO study is a major cause of worry. Learning in the area of mathematics and reading are very poor as revealed by direct testing of primary school students.

Gender inequality remains high. Literacy rates among women fall behind that of men, thus evidencing women's poorer participation in learning outcomes and opportunities. Empowering women remains a major development challenge. Economic, political and social empowerment still elude them as reflected in low proportion of women working in non-agricultural jobs (19.3% by 2011-12) and will certainly miss the target of 50% by 2015. With declining share of women in

rural labour force, they suffer lack of land ownership for those engaged in farming; and women are poorly represented in parliament ( only 96, share of 12.2%, out of 784 in national parliament) against target of 50%. This reflects a picture of bad and ugly with respect to the achievement of MDG indicators.

### **1.3 MDG & GROWTH – The debate goes on**

The linkage between economic growth and achievement of MDG Goals has always been a point of debate. Growth can be termed as pro poor if it leads to measure of poverty to fall. An functional definition of pro-poor growth has been provided by Pasha (2007). For growth to meaningfully contribute in poverty- reduction, it should happen in sectors which provides maximum employment to the poor, like agriculture, construction; in sectors whose outputs constitutes major portion of poor's consumption basket, like food, in areas predominantly inhabited by poor - rural and tribal areas and utilize factors of production which the abundant with poor, e.g unskilled labor. The link between pattern of economic growth & its sectoral composition, employment and poverty reduction and what is needed for development beyond economic growth is discussed below.

- **Employment**

Employment is one of the main instrumentality which leads to poverty reduction through growth. Employment being the principal source of income, which in turn is the key measure of poverty, employment generation must be the at the core of poverty reduction agenda, which can be labelled as- 'employment nexus between growth and poverty' and remain unaddressed. The importance of employment growth in influencing the rate of change in the incidence of poverty, after controlling for the effects of economic growth has been established in studies across south Asia.

Sectoral composition of economic growth, the choice and level of technology and effective functioning of the labor market also influence the rate of growth of employment. In line with the above, labor-intensive sectors like agriculture and construction can be identified as pro-poor sectors. Agricultural and allied activities mostly take place in rural areas which accounts for

substantial portion of poor. Hence, structurally, growth to be pro poor, employment intensity sector must lead to expansion in the outputs directly or indirectly induced. The pattern of growth is no less vital than overall growth, for poverty reduction.

- **Beyond Growth & Poverty Reduction**

Growth is not sine qua non for development. Pro poor economic growth, directly contribute towards the poverty reduction target of Goal 1. However, a reduction in income poverty is, to some extent, tautological (Saikia 2007); a person is not considered as poor when his income crosses the poverty line. However, this is not sufficient for attainment of Goals 2 to 7. Availability and consumption of certain minimum goods and services called –MDG goods & services (Saikia,2007) is essential for achievement of other goals. For example, consumption of minimum amount of food is required to reduce somebody’s hunger and a pregnant woman must be under supervision of qualified medical professional for regular check-up for reduction of maternal mortality rate, and birth must be attended by skilled health personnel i.e. – consumption of health services.

Customs, traditions, social norms, lack of awareness are some of the non-income barriers which impediments consumption of “MDG goods and services,”( i.e. nutritious food, safe drinking water & sanitation, health services and education leading to learning) in spite of possessing adequate level of income. Very often, severe supply constraints like absence of health clinic / hospitals in neighbor hood and cost of transport to nearest health centre increases the cost of health services and impede consumption. Similar linkage hold good for safe drinking water, sanitation, education. Apart from agriculture and construction, certain other key sectors of the economy road, transport, energy, water, health, sanitation and education are of critical importance to achieve the MDGs.

In essence, if economic growth along with contributing to income generation to the poor leads to improvements in both physical and social infrastructure, then MDG goods and services become affordable and available for consumption in adequate quantities to the poor. Then that will facilitate achievement of Goals. On the other hand, an expansion in the MDG goods and

services sector can also act as an engine of growth. —pro-MDG growth|| into —pro-growth MDGs||( Saikia'2007).

- **Growth needs to be Inclusive**

Though Cross-country studies indicates that, on average, growth and income of poor people are positively correlated (World Bank, 2005), averages, however, conceal how poor people (poorest quintile) benefit from growth in comparison to the whole population. Robust and persistent economic growth in Asia, Africa region, has not been able to achieve employment related MDGs, due to joblessness of growth. The impact of growth on MDG can not only be through individual and household involvement in labour or agricultural sectors. Redistribution and channelization of the benefits of growth, through social protection schemes, entitlement program is also crucial – both to reduce poverty directly and to allow people to benefit in other human development.

### **1.3 MDG to SDG – Leaving No One behind – Road Ahead for India**

The apparent deficiency in MDGs achievement are a pointer to conceptual and operational failures that should be major cause of worry and learning point for all stakeholders, in both north and south. Too many were left behind, Individuals forgotten in the race to improve statistical averages. In its broadest sense, —Leave No One Behind|| means that all goals, targets and indicators will not be considered met unless they have been met for every person on the planet. While the world community will take few more years to even achieve the unfulfilled basic goals across continents, concerns about climate, environment and sustainability of the present pattern of growth have forced all stakeholders to set new goals to encompass all above concerns.

### **1.4a Why & What of SDG?**

The idea of the Sustainable Development Goals(17 nos. 169 targets) based on the Open Working Group (OWG) deliberations which was mandated by the Rio+20 outcome document 'The Future We Want', has become the rallying point for discourse on development and sustainability beyond 2015. Although specific definitions vary, sustainable development encompasses the triple bottom line approach to human wellbeing which are combination of economic development,

social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Jeffrey Sach, 2013). While poor were the focus of all MDGs; SDGs are envisaged to go much beyond that, with goals touching upon inequality, quality of governance, urbanization, agriculture, infrastructure, and climate change.

Though the developed countries will not have the least difficulty with few SDGs around ending poverty, hunger, health, education, sanitation, many of these which are unfinished MDGs, are the problems that developing countries, on the other hand, will likely struggle with for much more longer period. India along with other middle income emerging economies( BRICSAM) are key protagonists of the SDGs, notwithstanding the fact that they have their own domestic task cut out to fine tune the complex and competing goal of eradication of poverty, maintaining growth and environmental sustainability.

Hence, India's development agenda and its priority programs and policies must be in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recent development experience shows that achieving the ambitious vision by 2030 will require addressing a wide range of challenges as discussed in following points.

- **Broad Based Inclusive Economic Growth**

Structural shift of the Indian economy over the years from agriculture to service sector, thus giving a pass to sustainable manufacturing sector, which had the effect of reducing the role of growth as a channel of poverty reduction needs to be addressed. Adoption of sustainable agriculture practice, foray into high yielding but labour intensive agricultural commodities, to generate employment and economic return; enhancing the backward and forward linkages between the agricultural sector and the non -farm sector in order to create a virtuous cycle of growth of incomes and employment will be key to reduce inequality, remove hunger while putting least pressure on eco- system. Skill building, expanding manufacturing base with productive employment, encouraging small and medium enterprises, implementing the 'Make in India' program by leveraging the large domestic market taking the demographic advantage and huge defence sector can contribute substantially to poverty reduction through employment

generation. Infrastructure development, land reform and labour reform, availability of cheap and easy credit, and enhancing governance and ease of doing business to kick start domestic investment cycle and FDI will unleash the trajectory of growth whose trickle down effect will help in attainment of remaining MDGs. More inclusive growth can be achieved through universalization of the Government's financial inclusion program Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana across the nation, expanding and integrating with micro- finance( MUDRA Bank) and recently launched three social security schemes covering all marginalized sections.

- **Focus on human development**

The sectors in which augmented revenue generated by growth is spent by governments is critical for achieving the SDGs. Among competing need for fund, the investment in human development sectors – such as education, health, livelihood promotion and other basic services, ought to be at the top of the development agenda. In health and education, where India is underperforming must increase spending from 4.05% of its GDP to 8 % to 12% and from present 3% of GDP to 6% respectively as in upper middle and high income countries.

In both health and education, participation of private sector in a massive way in terms of capacity building, technical knowhow, is critical to provide quality, accountable service to the poor and marginalized who can be subsidized through direct cash transfer rather than wasting resources through government run agencies where corruption and poor quality delivery is the norm.

- **Strong design and effective delivery of public goods**

Effective delivery of public goods and services is an area of governance which will be most critical for SDG performance. Effective targeting and delivery of the funds under employment generating MNREGA according to local needs to prepare environmentally sustainable project that would be drought proofing and create basic infrastructure in rural areas and transformation in speed & efficiency of off take of food grains per person through PDS and integration with newly finalized Food Security Program must get priority attention. Another massive

transformational change will be the direct delivery of subsidies, which has been started with LPG cylinders, needs to be extended to every sphere of entitlement based program like – food, fertilizers, education, health, etc which will help target the real needy in a effective way and make huge savings in government spending which can be better utilized towards progressive taxation which in turn will go to benefit the poor and just above poverty line population.

- **Resilient & Sustainable Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is another area of major concern towards sustainable development and leaving no one behind. Though the basic infrastructure like all weather motorable roads, electricity and telecommunications are key to delivery of basic services, the same must not come at the cost of damage to environment, forest cover, bio sphere, marine eco system. Development of national waterway will be a play a vital link in that direction. Rural road connectivity, grid power to all villages and hamlets, massive expansion of renewable energy program like solar, wind, bio fuel are essential towards delivering achieving many of the unfulfilled goals.

- **Macro-economic Policy Stance**

For attainment of unfinished MDGs and to move on the path of Sustainable Development Goals which is more ambitious, massive financing will be required and nothing substantial emerged from Adis Ababa in July 2015. With financial volatility still besieging most of the rich nations, developing nations like India have to raise resources internally. Hence, with in the overall inflation-growth trade off, the policies stance can be tuned towards facilitating accelerated economic growth rather than focus solely on inflation targeting. Public investment with environment friendly and locally adapted practices with participation of stake holders is the key to these goals since it eases supply side constraint, increases capacity, and must be so designed to accrues income gains to the poor while putting least pressure on the environment. With inflation softening to the RBI trajectory for 2016, 2017, a more expansionary counter-cyclical fiscal policy, facilitated by public spending is the need of the hour, combined with appropriate monetary and exchange rate policies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The single biggest achievement for India from the SDGs agreed upon is that the central focus of the vision — the overarching emphasis on eradicating poverty and hunger and inequality in any form — is in sync with the priorities of the Indian government. It is of very vital importance to India's national development agenda as it gives India required flexibility to frame and achieve national development agenda within the broader framework of SDGs. The debate about the post-2015 framework need not be over the relevance of global targets but about their improved architecture, political will, international effort for financing and technological cooperation and facilitation. Having reviewed the good, the bad and the ugly that beset the MDGs since they were created, this article tries to rekindle the debate over challenges and ways towards achieving the post-2015 agenda. Thus, it can be concluded that India should learn from her experiences of MDG-good or bad and as to how to go forward with SDG focusing on its ways and means and national priorities.

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