

FROM MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN in the year 2000 completed its first cycle of 15 years last year. We are now in the threshold of the next cycle under the UN's New Development Agenda (NDA) 2016-2030. The NDA encapsulates two dimensions both integral to each other namely "development" and "sustainability." Thus a shift from Millennium Development Goals to a stress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.) The concept of sustainable development was first raised at the World Conference on the Environment and Development 1992 in Rio de Janeiro prompted by environmental concerns and depletion of natural resources. This was the declared intention of the UN Sustainable Development Summit of 25th September 2015 when Heads of State and Government High Representatives met to review the progress made in implementing the MDGs.

What are the MDGs?

The term "millennium" heralded a new era. Certainly, both the declaration and adoption of the MDGs at the World Conference in 2000 reflected an expectation that the advent of the new century would usher in real peace and economic progress globally. Furthermore, the ending of the "cold war" threat resulting from the ideological tussle between the US and the former USSR generated optimism in UN circles. The removal of the political shackles that have nullified the UN's work would now enable it to develop its potentials to the fullest extent for the benefit of all. However, as will be seen, the effective implementation of the MDGs in the first cycle as well as the SDGs envisaged for the second cycle would need the political will and sense of moral responsibility to overcome problematic political, social and economic factors that underpin it.

The MDGs when they were first adopted by the majority of UN member states was couched largely in human development terms. The eight goals identified include (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (b) achieve universal primary education (c) promote gender equality and empower women (d) reduce child mortality (e) improve maternal health (f) combat HIV/Aids, Malaria and others (g) ensure environmental sustainability and (h) develop a global partnership in development. The seventh and eight MDGs were to assume prominence under the New Development Agenda or NDA. OVERALL THE MDGS HAD REPRESENTED THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLES IN THE MOST UNDERDEVELOPED REGIONS OF THE WORLD. Such needs are also defended as human rights. To ensure that member states apply concrete strategies, policies and programs, the UN has stressed that the MDGs represent “a quantitative, time bound framework of accountability” in attaining the developmental goals aimed at. This means that success of the MDGs should show evidence of concrete outcomes, meet accounting procedures, transparent and measurable on different time frames.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE MDGs, 2000 – 2015

1. Despite many successes, the poorest and most vulnerable people are still being left behind. Progress is uneven across regions and countries leaving significant gaps in terms of sex, age, disability, ethnic and geographic location. 800 million still live in poverty and over 160 million children under the age of 5 have inadequate height. 57 million are not in school.
2. In Gender inequality, there remains significant discrimination in access to work, economic assets and participation in private and public decision making.
3. Big gaps exist between poorest and richest households, and between urban and rural areas. Wealth distribution among countries has widened. 2% of the rich owns 60% of the world's wealth. 50% of the rural poor lack sanitation and accessibility to portable water'
4. Climate change and environmental depredation undermine progress achieved with the poor suffering most. Carbon dioxide emissions have increased by 50% since 1990. Others include altered eco-systems, weather extremes, floods and desertification.
5. Conflicts and their impact on human security remain the biggest threat to human development and well-being. Conflicts have forced 60 million people to be displaced with children making half the number

6. Increase in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has increased marginally. The economic slow down since 2008 has reduced the GNI (Gross National Income) of the developed industrialized states especially the G-7, thus affecting the quantum of ODA available. Pledges by members of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) to international development assistance remain at 0.56% of GNI.

TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The SDGs declared and adopted at the UN Summit for Sustainable Development in 2015 points to the need and urgency to re-order and expand the scope of the MDGs of 2000 – 2015. In this the Summit adopted 17 SDGs which it believed will transform the world to “end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change.” The SDGs as adopted include:

1. Ending Poverty
2. Achieve Zero Hunger
3. Achieve Good health and Well-Being
4. Provide Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Make available Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Make available Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Provide Decent Work and generate Economic Growth
9. Develop Industries, Foster Innovation and Build Infrastructures
10. Reduce Inequalities
11. Create Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Maintain Life below Water
15. Maintain Life on Land
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals.

This broader Sustainability Agenda is a comprehensive listing of the major threats and challenges facing the world. It is aimed at “completing the job” in achieving development, eradicate poverty, securing peace and preserving the planet for future generations. One may term it a “master plan” or a “road map” upon which rests the fate of mankind and the planet. Or is Sustainable Development mainly a convenient catch phrase that hides numerous political, social and economic forces and barriers that calls for resolution and settlement. Is the term Sustainable Development understood as meeting the

needs of the “most vulnerable” as in the case of the MDGs? Or is it more inclusive?

FINANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

To be sure, needs are growing, some exponentially whilst the resources of the earth is shrinking. The global population continues to increase and is expected to surpass 9 billion by 2030. At the same time demand for an ever rising standard of living especially among the teeming millions in the developing and less developed countries cannot be denied given their struggle to improve their lives.

The 17 SDGs no doubt captures the major problem areas. They are pivoted on the concept of Human Development and will remain development challenges far into the future. Human Development as against conventional notions of economic development is holistic and encapsulates economic, political and social inputs as well as rights. At the same time it would be a great help to planning and deliberation to explicate the relationship between say, sustainable development and human development, between poverty eradication and environmental protection; between corporate social responsibility and sustainability; between population growth and sustainability; between equitable resource distribution and sharing and sustainability, between international trade and sustainability, between a taxation regime and sustainability and last but not least between urban growth and sustainable development. As it is, much of the concept of sustainability is left to the interpretation of the member states which could mean any or all of the following: protection, maintenance and repair of the environment, avoiding waste, re-cycling and adoption of scientific and technologically advanced processes and techniques that reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption, mitigating the evils of poverty, illiteracy and disease, promoting and protecting human rights and gender equality. Human Development and Sustainable Development call for resources and different strategies. Therefore, clarity is needed to explicate the relationship between the terms “sustainability” and “human development.” To be sure, the urgent challenge to meeting the SDGs refers to the most vulnerable groups in the 46 so called Least Developed Countries of the world. They are vulnerable not only because they are poor but because their chances of economic improvement depends so much on external conditions that surround their lives.

Furthermore, the success in achieving the SDGs hinges on larger challenges beyond the means of the poor member states of the UN in

particular issues pertaining to forest conservation and regeneration, preserving biological diversity, the operation of the world economy, extensive degradation of farmlands, shortage of water, natural disasters and climate change, rising sea levels, protection of the global commons including eco-systems.

The relatively small increase of Overseas Development Assistance in recent years since the economic depression of 2008 has been mentioned. This has led to cut backs in promoting economic growth. Also the GNI of OECD countries has also remained stagnant resulting in less funds being given in support of development in poor countries. Aid commitments made have also not been met in some cases. Appropriate technology to deal with the adverse effects of climate change with wider funding support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in this respect would be crucial.

If anything that can be done to make a real difference is to cut back drastically on global military expenditures. Doing so would reduce the extent of death and destruction resulting from large scale warfare. In 2010, world military expenditures amounted to US\$1.63 trillion (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) of which the US spent US\$698 billion; China US\$119.00 billion; UK US\$59.6 billion; France US\$59.3 billion and the Russian Federation US\$58.7 billion. These represent the 5 Permanent Members of the UN Security Council.

The World Bank has estimated that to achieve the MDGs, one need to set aside not more that 4% of the US\$1.63 trillion spent on military expenditures. The UN has also noted that "the US\$1.60 trillion spent on global military expenditures in one year would fund the United Nations regular budget at 2010 price levels for more than 700 years." No wonder that the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon has darkly commented that "The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded."

Hence financial back-up remains a major factor in securing the SDGs. It has been suggested that to mitigate the problem, procedures should be adopted to tax the rich more given the fact that a tiny minority now owns most of the world's wealth. The narrowing of the great divide between rich and poor stands at the very centre of the commitments made in support of the SDGs. Elsewhere, the least developed member states of the UN need to explore innovative ways of seeking sustainable financial resources on top of foreign investments and borrowing.

How can the mind-set of global powers in particular be changed so that resources are channeled to productive ends and purposes rather than war? What needs to be done to bring them to their senses? How can the distribution of wealth be made more equitable in the wake of extreme poverty?

To be sure, the implementation of the SDGs will demand political will, sustained efforts and clear moral directions. Significant investments in infrastructural development will have to be made with ready access to scientific-technical expertise and knowledge. The UN's declared mission to promote and secure the well-fare of the peoples of the world rests squarely on the extent of success in meeting the targets as declared in the New Development Agenda or SDGs.