Achieving the MDGs by 2015

Policy Action for Human Freedoms

A roundtable on *Achieving the MDGs by 2015: Policy Action for Human Freedoms* was organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the 7–8 September 2010 in New Delhi. Policy-makers, practitioners, social scientists, statisticians and representatives of civil-society gathered to deliberate on India's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) report card—with particular focus on the problems of malnutrition, child survival, maternal survival and access to sanitation. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to India's march towards the MDGs were critically examined within a human rights-based framework.

Snapshot of India's Progress on MDGs

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger While India has been moderately successful in reducing poverty, the same cannot be said for combating hunger. The Poverty Headcount Ratio, which is projected to reach 18.6% by 2015, is likely to miss the target by about 3.5 percentage points. The proportion of population with dietary energy consumption below 2,100/2,400 kcal has risen from 64% in 1987-88 to 76% in 2004-05. The proportion of underweight children below three years declined only marginally between 1998-99 and 2005-06, from about 47% to about 46%.

Achieving universal primary education India is on-track or even ahead of targets on nearly all indicators related to universalisation of primary education.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women India missed the 2005 deadline of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. With respect to 2015, the existing trend suggests that India is moderately or almost nearly on track.

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Reducing child mortality India's Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) reduced from 125 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 74.6 per 1,000 live births in 2005-06 and is expected to reach a level of 70 by 2015 as against a target of 42 per 1,000 live births by 2015. Accelerating reduction in the incidence of neo-natal deaths (66% of Infant Mortality Rate or IMR in 2007) can contribute substantially towards achieving U5MR and IMR targets.

Improving maternal health The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in 2006 in India was 254 per 100,000 live births as compared to 327 in 1990. At this rate we are likely to reach MMR of 135 by 2015, falling short of the target by 26 points.

Some other indicators

◆ While prevalence of HIV/AIDS is decelerating, focused attention is needed to combat other diseases.

◆ Tele-density remarkably increased from 0.67 per 100 population in 1991 to 36.98 per 100 population in March 2009.

◆ Overall India's forest cover has increased.

◆ There is a lack of adequate household sanitation and consequent health implications are serious.

The roundtable served as a productive forum for convergence of senior bureaucrats, researchers, policy formulators and analysts and yielded some insightful and incisive recommendations for the road ahead.

Addressing Implementation Challenges

◆ Government programmes must be designed to strengthen and catalyse the local economy rather than create dependency on the state.

◆ Experiences of countries such as Korea and Viet Nam on strengthening local governments may be drawn upon to address implementation issues in the Indian context.

◆ State-wise analytical reports on cross-sectoral issues and bottlenecks hindering programme implementation (reflecting governance challenges) need to be undertaken.

◆ Strong monitoring systems with investment in institutions and capacity development can improve the quality of outcomes per rupee spent on development programmes.

◆ Quick turnaround of data is crucial for concurrent outcome monitoring.

◆ Programme implementation departments need to assess progress through credible data.
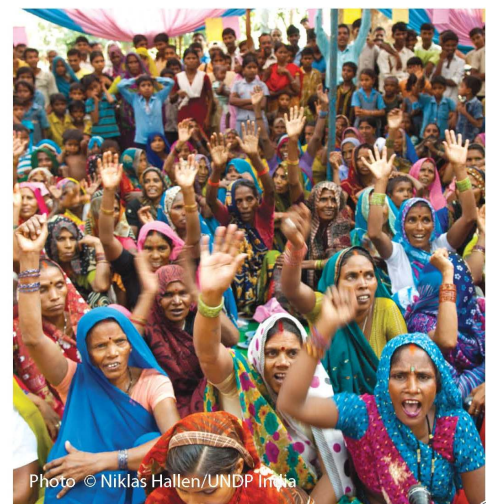
Recommendations from the Roundtable

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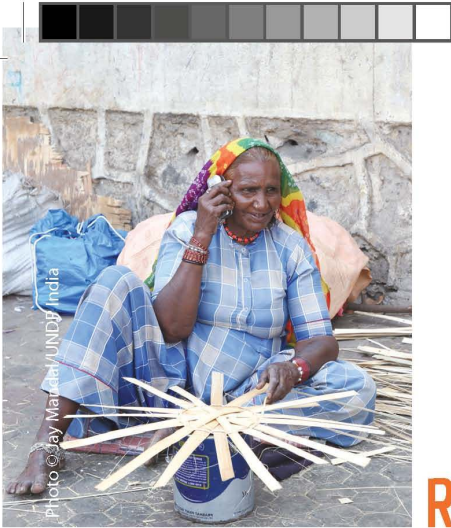

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Monitoring for Outcomes

◆ There is a need for a unified monitoring system at national, state and district levels.

◆ MDGs need to be monitored closely and regularly by indicators at the state level.

◆ Culture of evidence-based planning and evaluation needs to be inculcated and the statistical system needs to be strengthened.

◆ Indicators should be developed and monitored bottom-up.

◆ An independent agency for data generation on MDGs is necessary to avoid conflict of interest where performance of state governments is evaluated based on the data they provide. Independent sample checks and evaluation need to be undertaken to make the data credible.

◆ A nodal agency dedicated to MDG-related issues is required at the state-level to coordinate with different departments to track outcomes.

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Reaching the Unreached

- Democratic governance within an inclusive and rights-based framework is essential for the development process to address entrenched inequities of caste, class and gender.

- People's participation, empowerment and decentralisation hold the key to truly inclusive and sustainable development. A business-as-usual approach will not suffice.

- The contribution of women engaged in home-making and household management activities to societal well-being must be recognised and measured.

- Gendered ownership of assets should be mainstreamed and mapping of assets owned by women should be undertaken to fill in the gaps in the data system.

- Empowerment, education, employment and processes of political representation must be leveraged to address gender gaps.

- Implementation of Tribal Sub-plan and Special Components Plan for the people belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) should be strengthened and information made accessible to the public.

- Policy decisions and implementation plans should be informed on local issues, concerns and compulsions based on disaggregated data on excluded groups—poor women, minorities, SCs and STs.

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