



THE POST-2015 AGENDA: FROM MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

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ABSTRACT

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight Goals, eighteen targets, and 48 indicators that aim to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, promote gender equality and empower women, combat malaria, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development. The MDGs have an achievement deadline of 2015. The United Nations has developed a comprehensive Post-2015 Development Agenda that hinges around sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will replace the MDGs, and are expected to build upon the achievements of the MDGs. This article outlines the progress towards achieving MDGs, the background behind SDGs, and some of the challenges faced by SDGs.

Key Words: Millennium development goals, Post-2015 development agenda, Sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

On 6th September 2000, 149 Heads of State and Government and high-ranking officials from more than 40 other countries converged at the Millennium Summit in New York. Over the next three days, they declared their commitment to reduce extreme poverty, and established a series of time-bound targets to be achieved by 2015- the Millennium Development Goals.¹

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

The Millennium Declaration was the main document at the Millennium Summit. Unanimously adopted by the delegates, it established 8 Goals, 18 Targets, and 48 Indicators with a deadline of 2015 for their achievement.² Popularly known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), these are listed in Table 1.

Considerable progress has been made towards the achievement of the MDGs:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Progress made/ current situation:

By 2010, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty declined by half at the global level- five years ahead of the deadline.

However, at the global level, 1.2 billion people are still living in extreme poverty- one-third of this number living in India alone.

Globally, the proportion of undernourished people declined from 23.2% (1990-92) to 14.9% (2010-12).

However, 870 million people (one in eight globally) are still going hungry.^{4,5}

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Progress made/ current situation:

Literacy rates among adults and youths are increasing and gender gaps are narrowing.

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However, at the global level, 123 million youth aged 15-24 years lack basic reading and writing skills- 61% of them are women. In addition, international aid to basic education has fallen, bringing progress to a standstill.⁶

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Progress made/ current situation:

Globally, the share of women employed in non-agricultural sectors rose to 40%; the share of women in parliament reached 20% in 2012.

However, disparities persist, and women tend to hold less secure jobs in developing regions. The greater representation of women in parliaments is largely the result of quota systems, rather than true empowerment.⁷

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Progress made/ current situation:

Worldwide, the under-five mortality rate declined from 90 deaths/ 1000 live births in 1990 to 48 deaths/ 1000 live births in 2012- a reduction of 47%.

However, about 18,000 children still die each day, mostly from preventable causes.⁸

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Progress made/ current situation:

Maternal mortality ratio has declined from 400 maternal deaths/ 100,000 live births in 1990, to 210 maternal deaths/ 100,000 live births in 2010- a reduction of 47% globally.

However, only 50% of pregnant women in developing regions receive the recommended minimum of four antenatal care visits. About 140 million married women worldwide have an unmet need for family planning/ contraception.⁹

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Progress made/ current situation:

The MDG target of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV has been met. Globally, there was a 26% fall in estimated malaria deaths between 2000 and 2010. Mortality due to tuberculosis (TB) decreased by 41% between 1991 and 2011, saving an estimated 20 million lives between 1995 and 2011.

However, 23 million people are still getting newly infected with HIV each year at the global level. Multi-Drug resistant TB (MDR TB) is a major global challenge, and threatens to jeopardize the progress made so far.¹⁰

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Progress made/ current situation:

With more than 2.1 billion people gaining access to improved drinking water sources since 1990, the MDG target regarding safe drinking water has been exceeded. 1.9 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation facilities between 1990 and 2011. The MDG slum target has been achieved.

However, 2.5 billion people still do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. Due to rapid urbanization, the absolute number of slum dwellers in developing regions has increased to 863 million. Despite an increase in protected areas, more species are at risk of extinction. Forests are disappearing at an alarming rate- especially in South America and Africa.¹¹

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Progress made/ current situation:

The share of developing countries in world trade stood at 44.4% in 2012, and continues to improve. Mobile-cellular penetration had reached 96% by the end of 2013. Developing countries continue to outpace developed countries in terms of internet user growth rate- 12% in developing countries compared to 5% in developed countries.

However, only 31% of the population in developing countries uses the internet, compared to 77% in the developed world. Increasingly, aid is being concentrated in a small number of countries.¹²

MDGs: What went wrong?

The MDGs have received a fair amount of criticism. Some of the key issues with MDGs are listed in Table 2 below:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS(SDGs)

Background

The most widely quoted definition of the term 'sustainable development' is that given by the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations in 1987:

“sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”^{15,16}

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held from 20th to 22nd June 2012 at Rio de Janeiro (henceforth referred to as Rio+20), world leaders renewed their commitment to the achievement of MDGs, sustainable development and eradication of poverty.

The Outcome Document of Rio+20 first described Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means to furthering the focus and achievements of MDGs in line with the United Nations' post-2015 development agenda. These goals were to be formulated after extensive discussions with various stakeholders, and a report submitted to the 68th session of the United Nations Assembly, with a proposal for consideration and appropriate action.

It was proposed that the SDGs should be action-oriented, easy to communicate, concise, aspirational, limited in number, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries.^{17,18}

Description of SDGs

In all 17, SDGs have been proposed for achievement by 2030. At present, the 17 Goals are accompanied by 169 Targets. The Goals are listed in Table 3.

SDGs aim to finish the job of ending poverty in all its forms by building on the success of the MDGs.

Challenges

1. The single most important challenge to the success of SDGs may well be political commitment and good governance. The experience with MDG8 is an indicator of how progress can be impeded by lack of political will.
2. Linked to the issue of political commitment is the problem of communicating the Goals in a language that is simple and easily comprehensible. Failing radical rewording, some of the Goals risk coming across as unduly verbose and complicated. Part of the success of MDGs may be attributed to the simplicity and ease of communication. The MDGs- their flaws notwithstanding, lent themselves to catchy campaigns and rapid dissemination across populations. Inherent in the difficulty to communicate is the aversion that will likely develop amongst policy and decision makers and grassroots workers alike.²¹
3. Some targets linked to the Goals are vague.
4. There is a lack of consensus regarding implementation, monitoring and evaluation at present. Monitoring requires the development or identification of relevant data points that can be used as indicators. There seems to be little agreement on this matter at present. This includes agreement on which agencies will undertake these tasks.
5. Although an improvement over the MDGs, the SDGs could benefit with some sort of incentivisation.
6. Funding and technical assistance by developed countries.^{13,21}
7. It is challenging to incorporate all pillars of sustainable development within each Goal, as reflected in the corresponding Targets and Indicators.¹³
8. Data systems will need to be developed to address the needs generated by the SDGs.
9. The convergence of MDGs and SDGs within the post 2015 development agenda is another area of concern.
10. Monitoring framework for the Goals.²¹

DISCUSSION

The provision of Universal Health Coverage²² is an aspiration that has been reflected in both the Alma-Ata Declaration and the Millennium Declaration.

While the Health For All by 2000 AD campaign galvanized countries to action, the lack of a coherent strategy ensured that the campaign did not translate into global success.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) sought to correct the mistakes of the preceding campaign, and continue the progress towards achieving Universal Health Coverage.

In itself, the MDG campaign sought to achieve significant improvements in eight key areas within 15 years- a laudable but improbable goal, considering the HFA-2000 campaign gave itself 20 years.

With the commercial and political interests of major players at stake, little progress has been made towards achieving Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for development.

Financing the Goals has also been a matter of concern- some countries have reduced public spending on health.

In view of the global economic downturn, the SDGs will likely face greater challenges in funding and implementation.

CONCLUSION

The Sustainable Development Goals form a major commitment to the eradication of poverty in all its forms. At present, the SDGs face many challenges. However, many (if not all) challenges may be resolved before the United Nations Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda from 25-27 September 2015, in New York. The SDGs present a shift in thinking and approach from the MDGs. Whether this will translate into better outcomes and achievements remains to be seen.

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Table 1: Millennium Development Goals and Targets to be achieved by 2015^{2,3}

Goals	Targets
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty	Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling
Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality	Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015
Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health	Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases	Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio
	Target 7: Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
	Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Table 1: (Continued)

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	<p>Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources</p> <p>Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p> <p>Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</p> <p>Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</p> <p>Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries</p> <p>Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states</p>
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development	<p>Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term</p> <p>Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth</p> <p>Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p> <p>Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies</p>

Table 2: Selected deficiencies in the MDGs^{13,14}

Structural issues	Problems with the Goals	Weaknesses
Assumed 'one size fits all' characteristics	Focus on meeting specific, absolute, and measurable aspects of poverty and underdevelopment, such as hunger, or infant mortality	Lack of consultations at conception led to lack of ownership and perception of donor-centric agenda
No goals or commitments for developed countries	Failed to tackle the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment	Excluded some important issues outlined in the Millennium Declaration (peace, governance, human rights)
No compulsion for members to follow the MDGs	Little progress with MDG8: Develop a global partnership for development	Inadequate incorporation of other important issues
No indication of what happens if goals are unmet at the end of the target period	Lack of accountability in the global partnership under MDG8	Defined human development outcomes, rather than opportunities to overcome poverty
Goals decided through closed door discussions, left out many critical issues		The three dimensions of sustainable development were poorly integrated and interlinkages not acknowledged

Table 3: The 17 proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)^{19,20}

Goal	Description
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development