



## Post -2015 Development Agenda: An Indian Perspective

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### Introduction

The global debate around the finalisation of the Post-2015 development agenda aims to consider how societies could work towards attaining sustainable development in the coming years. We could begin by considering how, over the decades, the discussion on development has gone on in the world. This will, perhaps, give us some clues as to how we could expect this debate to proceed further and to analyse the positions that various groups or countries maybe taking today. If we go back to our ancient traditions and ancient religions, harmony with nature and environment has always been an integral part of these cultures. There are various well documented instances of civilisations collapsing or not doing too well because of changes in their habitat, which could have been natural or manmade.

The industrial revolution that commenced in the west in the 18th century, introduced exponential changes in how societies lived and worked with their habitat. The growing exploitation of natural resources accompanied by increasing populations and rapid urbanisation started to put severe stress on energy and other resources. The basic concerns at that time were about the possible exhaustion of these resources,

how to manage or conserve these resources and how such efforts might put limits to economic growth. Also around the same time as market economies began to develop there were growing debates about individual profit vs. social justice and how to balance these different motives and consequences of the changing nature of economic activity in an industrial society. The era of colonisation, which had commenced a couple of centuries earlier, intensified further as western countries were involved in a race for economic advantages looking for raw materials for the industry and markets for manufactured or processed goods.

### Economic Growth and Environment

When we reach closer to the modern times, especially when we consider the immediate post-war scenario, the UN established the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to look at economic and social issues as distinct from the security issues. At that time, immediately after the Second World War, when a large number of countries were still to gain independence, the focus of the United Nations was on reconstruction of the western countries devastated by War, industrial and economic growth, and not so much on development issues as we understand them today. In 1950s

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and 1960s, the priorities were similar for both – the countries in the West, the former colonial powers, and also the countries that were newly getting independence, who hardly had any advanced industry. Both groups of countries wanted to achieve quick economic growth. But very soon issues relating to pollution and other adverse impacts of economic growth became very visible, especially in the west leading to the origin of the green movement over there.

At the same time the priority in the developing countries was to ‘catch up’ with the West by pursuing rapid economic growth. So there was this fundamental duality between growth and economic environment already visible then in the initial decades after the war. This was time of Marshall Plan through which the US aided reconstruction in Europe. Various UN conferences at the time focused on the need to provide science and technology assistance to the developing countries also. This, however, did not go along as one would have hoped for initially.

Gradually, not only local pollution issues but broader environmental issues, the understanding about them and their impacts became clearer. International community began to be concerned about acid rain, pollution of rivers, ozone depletion and climate change. Scientific understanding of these issues started to improve. The then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was one of the notable participants at the famous 1972 Stockholm Conference, where she described the linkage between poverty and pollution. Thus, we find that India has been quite active on this debate from the very beginning. In the 1970s the concept about the ODA (Official Development Assistance, was also getting crystallised in the western countries. The issues about what is the responsibility of the developed countries towards the state of underdevelopment of the large number of former colonies; what should be the role of the developed countries in assisting developing countries; and what should be the extent of the ODA begun to be raised.

The 1970s also saw the crystallisation of the G-77 movement comprising the developing countries and the growing demands for a ‘new

international economic order’ because the developing countries saw that their interests were not getting addressed as they would have wished. The developing countries argued for better terms of trade and increased development assistance. Even at that time, the priorities for developing countries remained the same - to ‘catch up’ with the West and to focus on how industrial and economic growth could benefit as many people as possible and facilitate the associated demands for technology and financial resources.

## Development and Environment

In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development was established and then the famous Brundtland Report was released in 1987 which gave a definition for sustainable development that really was pointing towards an inter-generational equity. Here was another new emerging concept that was getting clearer and how to balance this with intra-generational equity or even equity across nations. Hence, we already have several substantive concepts that were vying for prominence or for relevance. We are now reaching the end of the Cold War in this short overview. The initial 1990s were a very optimistic phase. The first Earth Summit was held in 1992. Around the same time, as the scientific understanding about climate change grew, the negotiations towards the formulation of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) began shortly after the Montreal Protocol on Elimination of Ozone Depleting Substances was signed in 1987.

This was the time when the Agenda 21 and Rio declaration of 1992 stressed the issues of, for example, ‘Polluter Pays’, the ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (CBDR), additionality of funds and a look at the sustainability of consumption patterns. Thus, all these issues started getting crystallised around that time and they were running simultaneously with the negotiations at the UNFCCC, which also had many of these fundamental issues built in into the convention that came about in 1994. So we can follow both these tracks going together in 1990s. The development and environment protection were getting linked very closely

throughout. There was, under the UN Climate Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, the whole concept of historical responsibility or the historic role of industrialised countries towards global warming through their exploitation of fossil fuels and how that led the industrialised countries to be required to lead the global efforts to combat climate change.

This was also the time of rapid globalisation and the communication technologies interlinking the finances of the countries across the world. There was a hastening of the pace of the development and the growing interlinkages of countries such as through trade, investment, pandemics, terrorism. Developments in one part of the world affected happenings in distant lands. This was clearly visible in the financial crisis that struck the southeast Asian countries and Russia around that time in late 1990s and it really brought home a greater understanding of how policies are being pursued in one part of the world and how they may impact far off places.

The financial crisis also rekindled debates about the necessity for regulation, how good or bad that is, and how much free market is a good thing and for whom. However, the mainstream opinion in the West does not appear to have focused much on such issues at the time.

## **Major Concerns over Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

At the turn of the 20th century, the UN hosted the Millennium Summit and suddenly there was talk about concrete goals regarding the formulation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Unfortunately, some of the criticism about the MDGs was that these were not negotiated by the countries who were supposed to implement them. We are not discussing the intrinsic value of those goals but there was little consideration given to how the MDGs could be achieved and the relative emphasis that the individual governments could have given in accordance with their priorities and capacities.

Nevertheless, the adoption of MDGs helped in focusing the attention of the governments across the world as to what needs to be done in

at least one set of the countries. Although it was a top down non-negotiated process, countries signed on to it in a way and there has been a lot of movement since then on various fields. Perhaps not so much progress was forthcoming on the financing part of the MDGs. This remained one of the main problems associated with the actual achievements of MDGs. At the same time, there was also the parallel track of development financing, termed the Monterey Process, the subsequent meetings at Paris and Busan and this track is still continuing. The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation is also one of the tracks. Another track is the United Nation Development Cooperation Forum (UN DCF) process.

Countries are also discussing at the UN about a major international conference on Financing for Development. It is still not certain as to when it will take place. There has been some controversy on whether it should be after the finalisation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda or before that and how to go about the whole process. India feels that the Financing Conference should be held before the Post-2015 Development Agenda is finalised so as to avoid the funding gaps that were there in the MDG process.

The 2007 or 2008 financial crisis that hit the West derailed a lot of things including the development financing aspect, which always was a very difficult thing. This had an impact on various global processes including the climate change negotiations in terms of how much funding can be made available by the developed countries and in what manner.

## **Post-2015 Development Framework**

In 2010 we had the UN General Assembly event on MDGs which focused the attention towards what happens after 2015 because MDGs were supposed to be achieved or targeted for 2015. In 2012, the UN Secretary-General set up a UN task team to work on these issues. The UNDP undertook national and regional consultations leading upto the Rio+20 in 2012, which was again a very important landmark. The Rio+20 Summit focused on poverty eradication as a central theme to the whole development debate. It called for a balance between the social,

economic and environmental aspects of the development process. The Outcome document also talked about the provision for finance and technology and how that would be done and how a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be considered, which could be part of a broader post-2015 development agenda.

In terms of process, there was also a High level Panel of Eminent Persons that was set up. The co-chairs were from Indonesia, the UK and Liberia and they submitted their report some time in 2013. On the SDGs there is this Open Working Group, a 30 member group, which has held ten sessions so far. India has been participating very actively in this Group. We were part of the troika there and the Group is co-chaired by the PRs from Kenya and Hungary. The co-chairs have come out with a document of 19 focus areas which have since been slightly modified. A further iteration is expected to come out soon. At the same time, there is another process of informal consultations in the context of Post 2015 Development Agenda negotiations, for which co-facilitators are from Denmark and Papua New Guinea and we are yet to see as to how exactly the process will pan out of that particular consultation.

Then we have another high profile series of events which have been called for by the President of the UN General Assembly, a series of six events - three so-called high level events and three thematic debates which are being held right now. All this will now lead upto the next session of the UN General Assembly. There is also some talk of a Synthesis report by the UN Secretary-General. We are not sure as to what that means and how that will provide an input to the process. There is not enough clarity at this stage as to what the future negotiation process will be.

Formally the inter-governmental consultations or negotiations on finalising a Post-2015 Development Agenda have to start in this upcoming session in September. And finally a Post 2015 Agenda has to be finalised by the next year's session. Next year will also hopefully see some sort of an agreement on Post-2020 regime on Climate Change. Thus, all these processes are closely interlinked and both are now reaching their final stages for the next one year.

## Core Issues on the Post-2015 Development Agenda - An Indian Perspective

Here we would discuss about some of the core issues that we see on the Post 2015 Development Agenda from our perspective. It is a very good development that this is being negotiated by the governments. It is an inter-governmental process, which will take into account the concerns and priorities of various participating governments. There is also an issue of universality of this process of the setting up of the goals. We do not think that it should be like last time where a set of goals were prescribed for a set of countries. If we are really reaching a stage of addressing global common concerns and we have an understanding that we are not living in silos; that everything is interlinked these days and whatever happens in one part of the world is intrinsically linked to situations all over, then based on that understanding we are hoping that the next set of SDGs and the Post-2015 Agenda will be universal. It does not mean it has to be uniform but that it has to apply to all countries. And all countries should have a stake or priorities or things to do in that. There has been some confusion on this issue as to what universality means and what uniformity means but the concept of CBDR, which has been there for a long time, encapsulates that very clearly. And it speaks about the complexities of today's development very clearly.

Then there is another issue from India's point of view, which is how do we achieve what we are trying to frame and that is where the debate about financing for development comes in. There are clear indications that the commitment towards providing ODA are not as per expectations. We find that increasingly the talk is about sources of financing other than the ODA. It has to be clearly understood by all parties about what the implications of this may be. There is talk about private sector investment. Whether this is purely investment or what kind of business proposition is being talked about, much more discussion is needed on that.

Then there is a talk to coordinate or to integrate South-South Cooperation (SSC) in this whole debate of development cooperation. There

again we are quite clear that these are different things. The whole concept of SSC is very different from what traditionally has been known as the North-South cooperation. The priorities or the motivations and the way these things are done are very different. Therefore, it will not be very simple, as is being proposed by some, that these should be according to a common rules and common framework. We are not certain what that means and we certainly have a long way to go on that to see how that can possibly be achieved, or whether that is at all achievable. And here India is not alone. India's position is similar to several other countries who have been active participants in the South-South Cooperation including China, Brazil and many others.

Another set of issues is about what to include in the SDGs. As mentioned earlier, the Open Working Group (OWG) Chairs' document containing the 19 focus areas is broadly a balanced document. It encapsulates the debate so far satisfactorily. From our point of view, the so-called enablers, for example, governance or human rights or peace and security, or democracy, are important issues but they should not divert the attention from what we think this Development Agenda has to focus on, which means that we have to focus centrally on poverty eradication. And if we start insisting too much on the set of these concepts then it runs the risk of politicising the debate, which is not really necessary. It somehow diverts the attention towards other issues. It can face complaints of selectivity. In our view this has the potential of undermining the emphasis on what we really need at this stage. It is not to say that India is in anyway less serious about these concepts. Our electoral system is the largest democratic process in the world. We have a remarkable system of the Right To Information (RTI) these days. We are not defensive on these counts at all. The whole issue is about the emphasis that you put on it. We do not want the discussions to get derailed or become politicised because of that. This is another aspect that we have to consider.

Then, of course, the whole question of the details as to what should be the goals themselves. How can they be measurable? Do the various countries which are required to pursue those goals

have that capacity to monitor or to measure those aspects? How good their statistical capacities are? Whether they are able to generate that kind of data? Whether that is at all feasible sometimes in a very large country? So we have to think of these things together instead of keeping it for later. We have to tackle these head on.

On the MDGs itself, there are clear studies on how far India has achieved those goals. It is a mixed record. In some sectors we are quite on track. We have done well. In other places we have not done so well and have a long way to go. There can be various reasons for that. Many of the issues involved in pursuing MDGs are also to be taken up at the state level in our federal structure. Therefore, it is very necessary that all the state governments or state structures are aware of what is expected of them in terms of targets. Many states are aware of these and are working towards it but many others may not be aware specifically of these targets. That may be one of the weaknesses.

There are questions of monitoring. In our case, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation does that, but then it relies on various other ministries and state governments to provide the relevant data to it. Hence, these are some of the issues that we have to improve in terms of monitoring and spreading awareness about these goals so that these various agencies can work in coordination.

Thus, these were some of the core issues that we are looking at right now. To recapitulate, from India's point of view we see the Post 2015 Development Agenda as primarily a development agenda with an emphasis squarely on poverty eradication which is in our context the biggest priority. And that would require a rapid and inclusive economic growth, which in turn requires adequate means of implementation and facilitation of an enabling environment to pursue that.

Broadly the Post 2015 Development Agenda has to be balanced in all its three dimensions as was agreed to at Rio plus 20 at the very highest level. Further, the SDGs should not be a set of prescriptions for only one set of countries. We also have to focus on the sustainability of

consumption patterns themselves. We also have to see that there is a balance in the consumption of natural resources or global resources. And then there is the whole question of a continuing democratic deficit in the global governance institutions themselves.

These are some of the broad themes that are of relevant to us when we look at the development debate. You would have already looked at the OWG document containing the focus areas. It relates to various issues on which delegations have focused so far. These include poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture, food security, nutrition, health, population dynamics, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, energy, economic growth, industrialisation, infrastructure, employment, promoting equality, sustainable cities, sustainable consumption, production, climate, marine resources, oceans, seas, eco-systems, biodiversity, global partnership for sustainable development, and means of implementation. This encapsulates what all the delegations have put forward as their priorities so far. Many of these ideas were already contained in MDGs. There has been work on that. Many others are new in terms of

pointing out as focus areas. The issues relating to climate and resources remain an important aspect here. Countries have agreed that formal negotiations on climate change should remain at the UNFCCC. But climate sustainability can be mainstreamed, to the extent possible, in all the other goals that we come up with and that might be a useful approach. Similarly, we have to think of how the means of implementation will be debated and what all has to be done to clarify that debate also.

This policy brief attempts to provide you with a broad picture. We could also go deeper into individual issues. We are working very closely with other ministries who are looking at these issues in detail. We are also liaising with other countries both in G-77 and at other fora to see how we can get a good balance. A North-South divide on development issues will not be a good thing at all. And by now we ought to have understood that these issues are of global concern, are inter-linked and, therefore, need a cooperative approach in common interest. We are sure that we will be able to come up with a good balanced solution within the set time frame.

### Forum for Indian Development Cooperation

The Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC) is a platform launched to explore various facets of Indian development cooperation policy with its partner countries. The objective is to encourage debate and analytical research on all the broad constituents of India's development partnership spectrum in order to bolster policy making process in this field of critical importance. Thrust of the forum would be to substantially contribute in facilitating an informed debate on policy framework of India and other developing countries.

The FIDC would also try to follow broad trends in South-South cooperation and analyse contributions and impact of Indian policies. The Forum will establish dialogue with the relevant government agencies and academia with a focus on South-South cooperation. The FIDC would also establish linkages and dialogue with international agencies, experts from the partner countries and advanced countries with a view to meet its comprehensive multi-faceted objectives. The FIDC is housed in RIS, New Delhi.

*Strengthening Indian development cooperation policy towards promoting greater South-South cooperation*



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