

August 19, 2010

Accelerating Achievements on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): A Memorandum from civil society organisations

Respected Manmohan Singh ji,

We duly acknowledge the commitment of the Government of India towards achieving the targets set in the UN Millennium Development Goals. Various flagship programmes and schemes exhibit this commitment to delivering basic services to the people of this country. Our own national development goals as articulated in the Eleventh Five Year Plan are far higher than the MDG targets.

We believe that the time is ripe for the Government and civil society , in India, to work closer to ensure that the upcoming *High Level Plenary of the UN General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals to be held during 20-22 September* delivers clear and concrete implementation plans to accelerate achievement on MDGs over the next five years.

In this spirit, we offer several recommendations to be considered as part of the process for preparation for the High-Level MDGs Summit at the UN from September 20th -22nd, 2010.

On 29th June 2010, Hon'ble Vice President of India, Mr. Hamid Ansari, released the "Millennium Development Goals - India Country Report 2009" that had been prepared by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The report was an effort to evaluate the progress, or the lack thereof that the country has made on the eight internationally set targets of poverty reduction, achieving primary education, promotion of gender equality, reduction of child mortality, improvement in levels of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development, that need to be achieved by the year 2015. The report threw up several interesting statistics that need to be evaluated for the methodology and the data that has been used.

Even though substantial progress has been made in reducing maternal mortality and in increasing the net enrolment rates, on most indicators, India has a long way to go. The response of the State to the meeting of these eight goals has been characterised by either the framing of a new piece of legislation or to argue that it will strengthen already existing ones. Based on our work in the field, across the country and consultations on the MDGs we would like to make the following recommendations:

Process Recommendations:

1. Develop a National Breakthrough Action Plan for accelerated achievements of MDGs

With only five years left to achieve the MDGs, we request the Government of India to systematically strategise for scaling up and sustaining successful small scale initiatives and other innovative approaches to meet the set targets. We request you to frame appropriate, relevant and specific strategies and interventions that address gender inequality, the needs of the people with disabilities, indigenous people, and other traditionally excluded groups such as religious minorities, caste groups, and people in remote geographic regions, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people living in or emerging out of conflict.

2. Set up a Parliamentary Committee on MDGs

Parliamentary Committees have played an important role in creating and monitoring social sector legislations and in ensuring that the arguments and voices of civil society organisations are reflected in these legislations. In the past, the government has taken the initiative to frame several legislations that either directly or indirectly affect the progress that we as a country have made on the achievement of MDGs.

To synergise efforts on MDGs related issues, we request you to propose the setting up of a core Parliamentary Committee/ Ad-hoc Parliamentary Committee to oversee and monitor the implementation of all MDGs related legislations and policies.

3. Consultation with Civil Society Organisations

The Indian government has successfully passed several legislations relating to MDGs and has promised to pass several other Bills. We request you to take on board, civil society, as key stakeholders, in the drafting processes of all future MDGs related Bills and policies so that they can evaluate different provisions of the Bill to ensure that they are in line with demands and aspirations of the people.

Adequate budgetary allocations are key to the successful implementation of any policy or scheme and therefore, projected budgetary allocations must be based on estimations that are as close to the actual costs of the projects as possible. In order to ensure this, we request you to ensure the pre-budgetary participation and consultations with civil society organisations in budget-making processes.

In line with our suggestion for broader civil society consultations, we would request you to consider including civil society representatives in the official delegation of the Government of India to the High-level Plenary Meeting on the MDGs in New York.

Policy Recommendations:

Our experience suggests that to achieve the MDGs by 2015, the Government of India needs to ensure greater governance accountability, enhance budgetary allocations to the social sector and ensuring peoples' access to natural resources, including land, water and forests. In this regard, we would like your consideration for the following:

I. Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty

Enact the National Food Security Act which ensures all the legal entitlements created by the Supreme Court in the Right to Food Case and a Universal Public Distribution System; specific entitlements for the most vulnerable sections; enabling provisions for promoting small-holder agriculture; and a framework for justiciability.

II. Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Ensure inclusion of children belonging to disadvantaged sections under the ambit of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act and enhance the budgetary allocation to 6% of GDP.

We request you to ensure that under the section on children belonging to disadvantaged sections, children without a permanent residence, street children, children in conflict with the law, children with disabilities, and child labourers should be included, and that special provisions be made for them under the Act.

III. Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Enact the Women's Reservation Bill without any further amendments and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill. We would further request that appropriate amendments be made to the latter so as to include the demands of the women workers in the unorganised sector.

IV. Goal 4, 5 and 6: Reduce Child Mortality, Improve Maternal Health and Combat HIV / AIDS, Malaria and other diseases:

Ensure that the budgetary allocation to the public health sector is increased to at least 3% of the GDP. We would also request you to ensure changes in the draft National Health Bill so to provide free, universal, accessible and quality public health care to all residents of India.

V. Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

We urge you to ensure that the National Action Plan on Climate Change is implemented and that in line with the UN resolution (28th July 2010), access to water and sanitation should be made a legal right.

Sincerely Yours,

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