

Parliamentarians' Group on the Millennium Development Goals (PG-MDGs)

Statement on Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in India

22 October 2008, New Delhi (India)



The year 2008 marks the mid-point for the achievement of a historic agreement - an agreement which can rewrite the destinies of more than half of humanity who continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty. The Millennium Declaration was adopted at the turn of the century and is the first agreement to be ratified by all member states in the history of the United Nations.

On 25 Sep 2008, the member states came together once again to review the progress that the world has made in meeting and exceeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The discussions at the UN High Level Event on the MDGs have reinforced that while India has made remarkable progress on several fronts, it also faces crucial challenges in meeting key development targets.

The responsibility that we hold to ourselves and to the global community has been emphasized by the Global Director of the UN Millennium Campaign, New York, who announced this year that "India's progress on critical indicators will determine if the world as a whole will achieve the MDGs. Today the country has all the resources required to end extreme poverty and social exclusion. The people of India must act together to ensure that the political will to put these resources to action is harnessed."

Unfortunately, India's present status on critical indicators of development presents a bleak picture. With one-third of our total population living below the global poverty line, India continues to be home to nearly a quarter of the world's poor. The presence of more than 200 million malnourished people and half the world's malnourished children in India makes it evident that hunger is indeed one of the most pressing issues of human security in our sub-continent.

Whilst culturally we have accorded children and mothers a status on a par with divinity, the tragic reality is that one out of every ten Indian children will not reach the age of five, and that our country accounts for the largest number of maternal deaths in the world. Currently, India has the lowest child immunization rate in South Asia and amongst the lowest

expenditure on public health (by percentage of GDP) in the world. In this context, the effective implementation of initiatives such as the National Rural Health Mission is an essential step in the effort to remedy neglect of public health. Increased investment in public healthcare can also play a crucial role in universalizing sanitation facilities and curbing the detrimental effects of TB, polio and HIV-AIDS.

The sex ratio of 927 girls under the age of six for every 1000 boys (a further decline from an average of 945 girls in the last decade) exposes the discrimination that women face even before birth. India ranks in the bottom ten of an international list on women's participation in the economy and fares badly at the highest policy making level, with only eight per cent representation of women in the Parliament.

On the other hand, India has the distinction of the largest number of women represented in local government in the world, as a result of the provision for one-third reservation of seats for women introduced by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. In the last decade, we have also made notable progress on important agenda such as school enrollment and access to water, and, as the world's largest producer of generic medicines, we have played a crucial role in helping ordinary people across the world deal with the scourge of HIV-AIDS.

Recent initiatives such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act are being seen as important measures to help India meet its goal of eradicating extreme poverty through targeted interventions to ensure employment, along with the creation of long term social and economic assets for the socially excluded.

Our efforts to meet the MDGs must also be directed at changing the developmental profile of the South Asian region as a whole. The simple fact that intra-regional trade makes up less than 2 per cent of GDP in South Asia, as compared to more than 20 per cent for East Asia, relays the need for greater efforts to establish a strong framework for regional co-operation.

Climate change is another agenda that demands a robust regional strategy for the management of natural resources and the protection of communities who are vulnerable to natural disasters.

Civil society groups who have been tracking India's progress on the MDGs have pointed out that women and socially excluded groups must be at the centre of our efforts, if India is to not only meet but also sustain its developmental gains. It is important for all sections of society to contribute to the creation of a dynamic movement to eradicate poverty in India which recognizes people who live in poverty as agents of lasting social change. Their direct empowerment must be the focus of our efforts.

We, the Members of the Parliamentarians' Group on the MDGs in India, represent a forum that brings together elected representatives across party lines to strengthen the effort to end poverty and social exclusion through the achievement of the MDGs. We are committed to take action and support ongoing efforts for the realization of the MDGs by 2015.

We are aware that India has an all-important role to play in ensuring that the world is on track to achieve the MDGs. We call on our fellow parliamentarians, legislators and the people of India to stand unified in the resolve to put the country on track to meet and exceed the Millennium Development Goals. We believe that this should be the most important priority of every leader and policy maker in the world, and call on the global community to reinforce the task of achieving all the MDGs for all humanity.

Signed:

- Supriya Sule, MP (Chairperson, PG-MDGs)
- Prof. Alka Balram Kshatriya, MP
- Dr. R Senthil, MP

(22 October 2008, New Delhi, India)