Social Change

MDGs and Post-2015 Development Agenda: Prospects for Indian Civil Society

Yogesh Kumar and Shyam Singh

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What is This?

MDGs and Post-2015 Development Agenda: Prospects for Indian Civil Society

Yogesh Kumar

Samarthan Centre for Development Support,
Bhopal, India
yogesh@samarthan.org

Shyam Singh

Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), Anand, Gujarat, India
shyamready@gmail.com

Abstract

The deadline of attaining first set of Millennium Development Goals is ending in 2015. Irrespective of mixed results perceived so far, the negotiations have started to discuss the agenda to be adopted post-2015. United Nations-led deliberations are focusing over the issues and developmental priorities to be taken for the task post-2015. The civil society has received prominent space in these deliberations. This has triggered the debate as to what role civil society should play in the post-2015 development process, given that the leading agenda of the development will be framed as per the wish of the state, and that the relations between civil society and state have historically been combative. This paper analyses this question in the Indian context considering the country-specific developmental needs and priorities.

Keywords

MDGs, civil society, NGOs, development, governance

Background

The world has started pondering over as to what should be the dimensions and prospects of development after 2015. Recently held discussions on post-2015

development agenda by the United Nations (UN) and high-level panel with civil society in Bonn during 20–22 March 2013 and in Bali during 25–27 March 2013 establish the importance of civil society in the development process. The year of 2015 is the deadline to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), along with 22 socio-economic indicators, set by the UN in the UN Millennium Declaration in 2000. All 193 member countries have agreed to achieve these goals by 2015. A cautious look at the progress of MDGs across the world reveals that MDGs do not represent the entire gamut of social development. While substantial attention is being paid towards achieving the MDGs by hustling the statistics, it has diverted the focus from other important areas of concerns. This contradiction suits the Indian story where development has to be brought at various levels in various social settings. India has witnessed two different phenomena at the same time. One is the impressive economic growth for a longer time and another is the lethargic progress on social development fronts. While the world is set to move forward post-2015, India still has to look back and complete the left-out tasks. Therefore, the role of civil society becomes important in helping the country in clearing its backlog.

An important epoch of deliberation is in progress to set the agenda of the development for the future. This agenda does not carry only geopolitical importance for the global political and economic actors, but also has the potential to change political and economic equations within the country. It would also lay down a playfield for politics, economy, market and civil society to decide their rules of the game and to reset their places within the wider developmental debates. The politics and market have their preset goal, that is, acquiring power and making benefits respectively, and thus guiding the developmental agenda is much easier for both of them. Civil society has to reset its strategies and framework with both the actors in working out that the wider interests of citizens are not evicted from any of the developmental policies that are to be offered post-2015. Knowing the fact that the major role of the civil society is to mediate between different actors, especially between the state and social groups and individuals, it is important to see what prospects could be available for civil society organisations (CSOs), especially in India, within the ongoing post-2015 development debates.

Progress of India on MDGs

India has nearly one and half years to go before the deadline for achieving MDGs, and its progress across the pre-decided indicators remains selective and uneven in meeting majority of targets. The progress of India on MDGs is satisfactory on around 10 indicators out of total 22 indicators selected globally under eight MDGs. Poverty rate, as per the new estimates, has declined substantially and the target is expected to be achieved by 2015. However, there have been concerns on the data produced to support the progress on different indicators, including

poverty. But this progress is not evenly distributed across Indian states. States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan are closer to acheiveing the target, but Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra are likely to fall short of the target substantially.[1] In terms of full-term and productive employment opportunities, Indian youths do not have enough opportunities to acquire independent employment. The Global Millennium Development Goal Report 2012 states that a total of 35 per cent youth contribute as family workers in their family businesses and farms (p. 11). Due to obstacles to employment in the formal economy and a need to supplement family income, especially during a period of crisis, women more often than men work in the informal sector or in informal employment. More than 80 per cent of women in India are working outside the agriculture (p. 23).[2] While it seems that due to reshuffling made in the poverty line of 2009–10 by the Planning Commission the country might achieve poverty reduction target, but hunger remains a key challenge. The proportion of the population that has a dietary energy consumption of below the permissible standards of 2,100–2,400 kcal has risen from 64 per cent in 1987–88 to 76 per cent in 2004–05.[3] According to the Indian State Hunger Index (ISHI) 2008, all 17 states, covered in the report, score significantly worse than the 'low' and 'moderate' hunger categories. Twelve of the 17 states fall into the 'alarming' category, and one—Madhya Pradesh—falls into the 'extremely alarming' category.[4] This situation is verified by the percentage of malnourished children under the age group of 5 (see Table 1).

On education front, India's progress on the second MDG, India's progress is on track. India has already achieved the target on primary education. According to the District Information System on Education (DISE), net enrolment ratio in the primary education in 2009–10 reached to the level of 98 per cent, and it is expected that it will achieve 100 percentile well before the deadline. However, this does not suggest that all enrolled children will complete the primary education. DISE 2009–10 statistics indicate that the survival rate in 2008–09 was 76 per cent.[5] Therefore, India still has to work hard on keeping children inside the school. The literacy rate among 15–24 age group was 86 per cent in 2007–08, which is more than the national average. As far as the gender parity is concerned, it has already been achieved at the primary education level and is expected to be achieved at the secondary level by 2015. However, gender parity in tertiary education level is still to be dealt with seriousness. The gender parity index for tertiary education was 0.73 in 2010. Participation of women in non-agricultural employment is very low and has marginally increased from 13 to 18 per cent from 1990 to 2004–05. Dominant non-agricultural employment sectors such as services, industry and labour market are not openly accessible to women in India. Therefore, gender parity in employment is not likely to be achieved by 2015.

Health seems to be one of the areas where India has grossly failed. The fourth MDG aims to reduce child mortality by 42 per 1000 live births. Currently, this remains to 61 per 1000 live births and is expected to reach 54 per 1000 live births by 2015, falling short by 12 points to the target. Same

Table 1. Progress of India on MDGs

SN	MDGs	Target by 2015	Status
1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	• Poverty headcount ratio reduces to 18.6% • Malnourishment declines to 28.6%	• 32.7% population is living under 1$ per day income (2010) • 29.8% population living below national poverty line (2010) • 43.5% children under 5 yrs are malnourished (2006) • 17.5% population is undernourished (2011)
2	Achieve universal primary education	• All boys and girls complete primary education	• 98.2% net enrolment ratio in primary education (2008) • 97.6% net enrolment ratio among girls in primary education (2008) • 95.7% completion rate primary education (2008) • 95.1% completion rate primary education among girls (2008) • 74% literacy rate, 65.5% female literacy (2011)
3	Promote gender equality and empower women	• Eliminate gender parity in primary and secondary level by 2005 and at all levels by 2015	• Gender parity index in primary level enrolment (2008): 1.0 • Gender parity index in secondary level enrolment (2010): 0.92 • Gender parity index in tertiary level enrolment (2010): 0.73 • Share of women in wage employment in non-agri sector (2005): 18.1 • Seats held by women in national parliament: 11%
4	Reduce child mortality	• Reduce under-5 mortality rate by two third (42 per 1000)	• Under-5 mortality rate (2011): 61.3 per 1000 • Infant mortality rate (2011): 47.2 per 1000 • 74% children of 1 year immunised against measles
5	Improve maternal health	• MMR- 109 per lakh • 62% birth attended by skilled personnel	• Maternal mortality ratio (2010): 200 per lakh live births • 52.7% births attended by skilled health personnel (2007) • Adolescent birth rate (2009): 38.5 per 1000 women • Antenatal care at least four visits (2008)- 51.1%

No.	Goal	Target	Indicator
6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	• HIV/AIDS halted by 2015, and begun to reverse • Malaria and other deceases halted by 2015, and begun to reverse	• 0.3 % people of 15–49 old living with HIV (2009) • AIDS deaths (2009): 1.7 lakhs • Condom used to overall contraceptives among married women of 15–49 old (2007–08): 10% • Population aged 15–24 having correct knowledge about HIV (2006): men (36.1%), women (19.9%) • Notified cases of malaria (2010): 1124 per lakh • Death from malaria (2010): 2 per lakh • Tuberculosis prevalence rate (2010): 256 per lakh • Tuberculosis death rate (2010): 26 per lakh per year • Tuberculosis detection rate under DOTS (2010):59% • Tuberculosis treatment success rate under DOTS (2009): 88 %
7	Ensure environmental sustainability	• Integrate the principles of sustainable development into the policies and reverse the loss of environmental resources • People without access to safe drinking water and sanitation reduced by half • Significant improvements in the lives of 100 million people living in slums	• Land area covered by forest (2010): 23% • Total water resources used: 39.8% • Population using improved drinking water source (2010): 92% • Population using improved sanitation facility (2010): 34% • Population living in urban slums (2009):29.4 %
8	Develop a global partnership for development	• In collaboration with private sectors, make available the benefits of new technologies	• Debt services percentage of exports of goods and services (2010): 1.7% • Mobile subscription (2011):72% • Fixed telephone lines (2011): 2.63% • Internet user (2011): 10.07%

Source: For progress—UN official MDG database for India, http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx (last accessed 27 February 2013).

apprehension also lies with the infant mortality rate, which is expected to fall short of 18 points (45 against 26.6 per 1000 live births).[6] A wide divide of performance on health front exists among the Indian states. In the view of better results, the Indian health system is needed to be revamped with better reproductive and child health services. If the better neonatal facilities and healthy nutrition are provided to pregnant mothers, the risk of under-5 mortality reduces. India is required to reduce Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) by 109 in 2015 and is expected to fall short of 26 point.[7] The major reason of higher MMR is the lack of institutional delivery by skilled personnel. In India, currently, only 53 per cent of births are being attended by skilled personnel. However, on other health related fronts, India has been able to significantly reduce the prevalence of the cases of HIV AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The seventh MDG is environmental sustainability. India drafted its National Environmental Policy in 2006 in order to mainstream environmental concerns in the ongoing development process. India has also managed to increase the forest cover to 23 per cent. MDG target of access to safe drinking water is also on track (92%). The Global Millennium Development Goals Report 2012 estimates that China and India alone recorded almost half of the global progress in using safe drinking water, with increase of 457 million and 522 million, respectively (p. 52). However, open defecation is still a key challenge for India to attain clean and hygienic profile. According to the Global Report, in the countries with rapidly growing economies, large numbers of people still must resort to this practice: 626 million in India, 14 million in China and 7 million in Brazil. Nearly 60 per cent of those practicing open defecation live in India (p. 55).[8] Rural–urban divide in India in using sanitation facilities is very high. Sixty-six per cent of rural households do not have access to toilet facilities as against 19 per cent of urban households in 2007–08.[9] The last MDG is about establishing cooperation with private sector and harnessing new technologies. India has emerged as a world leader in developing softwares and using mobile technologies. Tele-density (mobile users) in India is very high. Internet users are still less (10 per cent), but continue to grow.

While summing up the MDGs' progress in India, except primary and secondary education, India has brought mixed results on many MDGs and remained worst on the few. None of the MDG has been achieved completely. Within a particular MDG, while India has been able to tap one indicator well, but lagging behind on others has made the progress faded. Evidences reflect that poverty, as per the government estimates, is reducing but the occurrence of hunger is increasing. Slum population is also increasing and the impact of recent slums development programmes has been very poor.[10] On the challenges regarding health and sanitation, government has to facilitate affordable access to technologies to poor, especially telemedicine, affordable sanitation models with low-cost technology, so that poor people can make use of the same to improve their quality of life. In the 22-year period from 1987–88 to 2009–10, real monthly per capita expenditure measured by the Uniform Reference Period method was estimated to have grown by only 19 per cent in rural India, but by as much as 42 per cent in urban India.[11]

Therefore, India's quality of life would much depend on enhancing the quality of the life of rural India, and reducing the inequality in urban India.

How Has Civil Society Reacted to the Issues Related to the Current Development Agenda?

Indian civil society has primarily been engaged with the issues related to governance, planning, service delivery, protecting rights and empowering deprived and marginalised communities. These efforts have been subsumed with the broader developmental agenda of the country. Acceptability of civil society doing planning and service delivery for the government is a significant development in the relationship between the state and civil society. In the past two decades, two major streams of civil society have emerged in India. One works with the government directly on the planning, implementation and monitoring issues, by developing tools such as participatory rural appraisal and participatory leaning methods. Such efforts are supported either by the government or by external donors. The other stream of civil society mobilises community against the government on the issues of constitutional rights, corruption and social and economic exclusion. The former ones have promoted multilateralism by reducing the malfunctioning and deepening bureaucratic nature of the state, while the latter ones have shown discontent with the development and argued for alternatives. However, both streams cut across in a range of MDGs.

CSOs got organised since the time of the announcement of the MDGs. At the World Social Summit, organised in 2004 in Mumbai, a meeting of CSOs was organised to discuss the strategy of addressing the MDGs in India. It was realised that there is a need for the CSOs to come together to make the state realise the global commitments to attain minimalist goals also in India. It was also realised that the goals will not be met unless sufficient demand is generated by the citizens for whom the goals matter the most. In 2005, then prime minister declared, while taking an oath, that enough promises had been made and the government would try to fulfill them. The CSOs got organised around the MDGs as well as National Development Goals as declared in the 11th Five Year Plan to launch a campaign called 'Wada Na Todo'. The purpose of the campaign was to demand governments at the local, state and national level to achieve the MDGs, which are far less aspirational than the national development goals. The bottomline of the campaign was that the governance and development are intertwined; therefore, demanding accountability and transparency in the allocations of resources for the MDGs, favourable policies and effective implementation of the programmes should be monitored by the CSOs.

There were many campaigns that worked on the issues of land rights for the tribals and dalits, health for all, right to food, specific campaigns on dalit rights, women rights, etc., joined hands to strengthen the campaign. The event was called as 'Make Poverty History' and was organised with more than 14,000 people

coming from various parts of the country. It was the first large demonstration of the civil society orgnisations to demonstrate their collective strength. There are several such events organised at the national level as well as at the state level where serious dialogues with the policy makers were organised, either to enhance allocations for the attainment of the goals or present the performance of the MDGs from the perspective of poor people. The campaign 'Nine is Mine' was designed to ask the government to allocate 9 per cent of the GDP for health and education. Social Watch India was also providing the monitoring results on the performance of the goals from the citizens' perspective to build pressure on the government for improving the service delivery mechanism of most of the national flagship programmes which had direct bearing on the attainment of MDGs.

There were several examples of state-level monitoring of the MDGs as an attempt to localise the relevance of the goals and to disaggregate the challenges related to the attainment of goals from the perspectives of the dalits, tribals, women and minorities. The functions of citizen oversights remain important in recognising the efforts made by CSOs in the realisation of MDGs at the local level, which more often come across as criticising the government in failing the equitable distribution of the fruits of the development. Civil society criticised the conventional patterns of development and used the language of 'self-help', 'social capital' and 'micro-planning' with the loud call for decentralisation (Roy, 2003: 85).

The efforts made by the civil society did not go unnoticed, especially after 2005 when the Indian government realised that it was lagging far behind the targets. The National Planning Commission and various government departments and UN agencies got engaged with the campaign groups and established constructive dialogue between the civil society on the 12th Five Year Plan, and the government. Several state- and national-level consultations were organised on 12th Five Year Plan by the civil society on the 12th Five Year Plan, and Planning Commission also participated in such consultations. For the first time, the Planning Commission has adopted these consultations and used them in preparing strategy documents for the 12th Five Year Plan.[12] States have also adopted same strategies in finalising their forthcoming five year plans. This resulted in several improvements in the planned documents. However, it has been observed that the majority of recommendations coming out of such consultations have not been included in the plan documents. While an initiative from the planning agencies to organise such consultations is appreciable, more committed response from the planning agencies towards the outcomes of such interactions is needed.

Civil society's 'mingling' and 'alienating' with the state produces two counterviews. One view advocates that civil society should be financially independent from the government. A CSO (or NGO) cannot take money from the government and yet try to influence the policy much (Kumar, 2012: 44). This trend has been noticed in the campaigns against the state on the issues of environmental protection and sustainable development. Civil society has rather used judiciary using Public Interest Litigations to deal with such issues. The majority

of CSOs working on the issues of hunger and poverty are also in confrontation with the state. Right to shelter in urban areas has attracted enormous attention from civil society. The Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP), a component of the national flagship programme—JNNURM, remained at the centre of such interventions. The discontent over the issue of land title for urban poor, especially slum dwellers, made a point that MDGs must be inclusive towards the rights of the poor and deprived people.

A contrary argument put forward is that most viable and tenable changes can only be brought if civil society works with the government by supplementing government efforts in delivering the services and building capacities of different stakeholders. On health and education related schemes and programmes, the government has established more synergic cooperation and collaboration with the civil society in delivering the outputs and raising the awareness, and also in monitoring the redistribution of policy benefits. But these collaborations are possible only if government provides resources to civil society, or international donors support them. Substantial decentralised planning is being done by those CSOs who have acquired relevant capacities and skills in decentralised planning. Decentralised planning under government-instituted Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF), aiming at filling the critical gaps in local infrastructure and other development efforts, is a prominent example in this regard.

The contribution of international development organisations towards achieving MDGs is also acknowledged immensely. It is not always the government that provides opportunity to CSOs to participate in the development process, international development organisations also collaborate with the CSOs by funding them on several social development issues. Such collaborations are realised either directly with local CSOs, or through the government. The Department for International Development (DFID) and UN agencies are prominent examples of such collaborations with local CSOs channelized through the state and central governments. These agencies not only provide monetary help to the government, but also technical and capacity support in implementing various programmes. DFID—supported Madhya Pradesh Urban Services for Poor (MPUSP) programme is a similar intervention.

Building evidences on existing social development programmes has also been acknowledged as one of the important areas where civil society has contributed immensely (Dubochet, 2011: 21). A set of CSOs has worked on the transparency and accountability side of implementation of development programmes that influence MDGs directly by building evidences and data. Such efforts can easily be observed with the CSOs who are monitoring the progress of the implementation of national flagship programmes such as Mahatama Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), through the social audits in the villages. Experiences of these social audits, along with the data and information, are provided to local administration as well as the respective state governments.[13]

There are a few areas where less attention has been given by the civil society. Most of the CSOs got involved with the service delivery and governance issues

in the social sectors; however, the unconventional areas in health such as HIV AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis found less support from the popular civil society movements. Gender parity has been dealt with more seriousness in education as girls' education received paramount attention from CSOs. However, gender parity in health and employment has been ignored. This happened because two major national-level programmes, National Rural Health Mission and MGNREGS do not suggest specific measures, except maternal facilities under health, for girls or women. Also, much less attention has been given by CSOs on the technology front. A part of digital divide is gender divide. The tele-density and internet usability are significantly gender biased.

Prospects for Civil Society in the Post-2015 Development Process

The United Nations is set to adopt further a set of developmental goals in post-2015, as many of the MDGs have not been met by most of the under-developed and developing countries of African and Asian regions. Post-2015 agenda would accommodate lessons learned from the implementation of MDGs worldwide that would end in 2015. Global discussions on post-2015 development agenda are taking place around eleven different themes that are not very similar to current MDGs, and incorporating the learnings coming out from the implementation of current MDGs across the globe however, the post-2015 agenda is expected to incorporate the experiences coming out of implementation of current MDGs. These themes are: inequalities, population, health, education, energy, water, growth and employment, food security and nutrition, conflict and fragility, governance and environment sustainability. Population, governance and conflict and fragility are new entrants, while inequalities, food security and nutrition and growth and employment are the modified form of current MDGs.

Global discussions reflect that new developmental agenda would deal with inequalities with priority and adopt a framework of 'getting to zero' on poverty, violence, malnutrition and service delivery.[14] Inequality and conflict are needed to be dealt at the sub-national level within a country. Governance is not part of the ongoing MDGs; however, it is coming across through the discussions that better governance should also be included as one of the targets as it affects the process of development. Overall experience indicates that the responsibility of slowing down on MDGs goes much to the complex and less-transparent governance system, social inequalities and internal conflicts. Therefore, much attention is due to be given to these new areas. On health front, broader indicators like promoting survival and lowering the risk are expected to guide the post-2015 scenario,[15] without getting into the subtle targets at the global level which could best be addressed by each country. Though inequality has replaced poverty and hunger from the agenda of global discussions on post-2015 development framework, India still have to deal with these issues. Hunger has emerged an alarm for the

Indian policy makers and no matter post-2015 development agenda hesitates to recognise it as a matter of urgency, India, including many Sub-Saharan countries, have to take on it with the outmost priority.

To deal with such broader and complex issues, civil society may need to change its strategies, if not the ideologies. It is being observed carefully that the international support available to India in terms of financial support to CSOs is gradually being withdrawn and more likely to be diverted to conflict affected or post-conflict regions (PRIA, 2012: 14). In this case, funding and logistic constraints would be more severe for Indian CSOs. A growing demand of CSOs having particular expertise on planning, monitoring and service delivery has brought civil society more closer to the state on developmental issues. Even for the monitoring of government programmes that has a risk of revealing malpractices prevailing within the government system, governments are more willing to get the real feedback by associating with the CSOs. Therefore, two important areas where civil society can collaborate with the government is the capacity building of government functionaries and developing systems of feedback on developmental programmes. In order to carry out these tasks, civil society also has to develop its own capacities. Use of technology, such as use of GIS in developmental planning, updated software based MIS system, etc., has become an urgent need for the CSOs to develop their own capacities.

The challenges that emerged from the interventions of the CSOs have important learnings for the designing of the post-2015 agenda. One, it was realised by a large number of CSOs that the MDGs are reductionist in approach, insensitive towards the needs of the women, dalits, minorities and tribals. Therefore, it is pertinent that the indicators measuring the performance of the MDGs should be disaggregated and analysis on the basis of such indicators should be formally recognised. Secondly, the MDGs should not be seen as merely development goals to be achieved rather they should be framed under the preview of the Human Rights so that poor people have a statuary guarantee that they cannot be cornered in the process. Thirdly, the framework of the MDGs should be broader, and indicators should be developed by placing inclusive governance and sustainability at the core. Such indicators can be developed at the sub-national levels, which can best provide a clear scenario of what has been achieved and what is left out.

The challenge for the civil society in India in the post-2015 is to transform the campaign of the CSOs into the campaign of the people and community organisations. Over the past 15 years, there are several community organisations which have become vibrant by demonstrating strong leadership, articulated positions over the issues concerning to them and sufficient representation in numbers. There are disabled peoples' organisations, federations of women run self-help groups, associations of urban slum dwellers, street vendors, etc. Voices and the leadership of such groups in the next round of the campaign will be crucial to provide more localized dimensions to the dialogue and to help in the attainment of the goals.

To conclude, Indian civil society possesses a herculean task to make the development process inclusive so that every citizen can take benefits from it. Although the discussions on post-2015 international agenda of development are glossing over serious issues like poverty and hunger, and instead forcing on growth and employment, the issues do not lose their seriousness. In the wake of new challenges and new targets, civil society has to be equipped with better capacities to keep tab on the race that is set to be held among countries in achieving the targets, which potentially may ignore crucial problems that India is afflicted with. Given the directions of ongoing discussions and observing the past experiences of MDGs, especially after 2005, post-2015 prospects for civil society deem less combative, but more collaborative, so that a better synergy can be established among all important actors of development. However, this does not deny the role of the civil society which keeps checks on the state. Civil society needs to perform oversight functions in the implementation of MDGs. Many CSOs that see MDGs as an instrument of realism in international politics need to observe the relevance and discontents of MDGs in the national context, which would provide more specific feedback for the government as well as other CSOs.

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