

Sustaining Sustainable Development

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Abbreviations

CSR	:	Corporate Social Responsibility
FSD	:	Financing Sustainable Development
MDGs	:	Millennium Development Goals
OWG	:	Open Working Group
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	:	United Nations
UNDG	:	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programme

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“We recognize that people are at the centre of sustainable development and, in this regard, we strive for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and we commit to work together to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection and thereby to benefit all.”

Rio+20 Outcome Document, ‘The Future We Want’

I. Background

The year 2015 marks an important date in the global agenda setting for the future of sustainable development. The Rio+20 Summit in 2012 resolved to ending extreme poverty and hunger as well as achieving sustainable development as a matter of urgency. The summit's final outcome document, "The Future We Want", called for new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and led to the launch of an intergovernmental Open Working Group to make recommendations to the UN General Assembly on the goals.

The new goals will aim to provide a comprehensive and holistic framework on eradicating poverty and deprivation, improving our economies, protecting our environment and promoting peace and good governance in all countries around the world. In July 2014, the Open Working Group (OWG) concluded its deliberations and recommended 17 global sustainable development goals and 169 accompanying targets. The OWG's recommendations were informed by a variety of inputs, from several sectors and agencies. The goals have been endorsed in the UN Secretary General's synthesis report, 'The Road to Dignity By 2030'.

In 2015, an Inter-governmental Committee was established to finalize the negotiations of the Post 2015 Development Agenda that includes the SDGs. This Committee has commenced a full intergovernmental negotiation in January 2015. Over the course of 6 months, they will focus on stocktaking (January 19-21), the declaration (February 17-20), the sustainable development goals and targets (March 23-27), means of implementation and global partnerships (April 20-24), follow up and review (May 18-22) and intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document (June 22-25, July 20-24, and July 27-31). The final outcome document from this negotiation will form the basis of an SDG Declaration, to be endorsed by Heads of State at a Summit in September 2015 during the United Nations General Assembly.

This year will also be witness to three high-level events that are set to take place between July and December. In July, world leaders will meet in Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia to agree to a financing plan for sustainable development. And in December, they will meet in Paris to adopt a global agreement to head off the growing dangers of human-induced climate change. Together, these events offer a unique opportunity to direct the global development agenda onto a path of equitable and sustainable growth.

II. Learning from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

It is but true that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were designed and adopted during the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 with limited participation of wide array of stakeholders and with limitations in forecasting the need for a range of targets and indicators to be used by member states to measure and report progress. Also, the MDG framework did not come up with a specially supported financing component and implementation was largely supported by the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG).

It is true that the MDGs provided much needed framework for galvanizing support to achieve the Goals in fifteen years (2015), in a manner never seen in the history of development practice. While there is an agreement that we still have islands of success with regard to achieving the Goals, one cannot negate the fact that political, financial and implementation will favored indispensable action on a range of issues such as reducing poverty, malnutrition, child mortality and disease while increasing access to water and sanitation¹. Goals seven on environment and eight on partnerships for development were some that did not receive the kind of support to realize them as with other Goals².

The Report on Progress in Achieving the MDGs for Africa in 2013 indicate that progress towards achieving the MDGs is mixed with many Goals and

¹ Balakrishna Pisupati 20 Rewriting the SDGs: Options (in press)

² United Nations Development Group (UNDG) 2010 Thematic paper on MDG 7: Environmental sustainability. UNDG and MDG Task Force, New York

Targets not achieved twelve years after the adoption of the MDGs³. For example this report prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Council Economic Commission for Africa does not even mention Target 7 B of the MDGs that focus on reducing rate of loss of biodiversity. India's Report on achieving the MDGs, similarly, does not indicate any action related to Target 7 B and merely mentions that the Ministry of Environment and Forests is responsible for MDG 7 on issues of national afforestation⁴ while the World Bank reports that there has been 58% increase in protected areas since 1990⁵. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014 of the United Nations indicates that species decline continues in groups such as pollinators, birds and mammals⁶.

Review of experiences in achieving the MDGs indicate the following key challenges for countries.

1. The socio-political and economic situation of a country largely determines the ability of the country to invest in development⁷.
2. Such situations also provide opportunities for attracting support to achieving development⁸ as well as challenges to use the support sought in an appropriate manner⁹.
3. Availability of bench marks and data form the core for monitoring and evaluation of actions to achieve sustainability. For many countries,

³ E/ECA/COE/32/3 AU/CAMEF/EXP/3(VIII)

⁴ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2013 Towards achieving Millennium Development Goals, India, 2013. New Delhi

⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/environment.html> (accessed on 10 July 2014)

⁶ <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/environment.html> (accessed on 10 July 2014)

⁷ Eric Eboh 2010 MDGs based planning in Africa: Lessons, experiences and challenges. Case Study of Nigeria. UNECA

⁸ UNDP 2014 Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Country Report - 2013. UNDP, Dhaka.

⁹ Waituru, Mwangi (2013) 'Lessons from the Implementation of MDGs in Kenya: Options for a Post-2015 Framework', IDS Bulletin, 44.5-6, pp. 30-33.

availability of information and data and that too in a consistent and long-term basis is still a challenge¹⁰

4. Coordination and exchange of information and data amongst key agencies relevant to deal with MDGs have been weak and many times absent resulting in inconsistent or no reporting mechanisms of national implementation of actions¹¹.
5. Tops down approach to development planning and execution would not always work for local people. It is important to consider priorities and interests of local people while deciding on interventions.

Given the above, it is critical for countries participating in the negotiations to consider the national and local conditions to implement actions and bank on the possibilities of institutional information based support systems to achieve the SDGs.

III. Responding to Development Needs

As detailed in the Secretary General's synthesis report¹², the following could be summed up as the guide-posts for arriving at the draft SDGs with 17 Goals and 169 Targets.

1. A Million Voices: The World We Want, Delivering on the Post 2015 Agenda: Opportunities at the National and Local Level and MY World

¹⁰ <http://www.scidev.net/global/mdgs/news/frustration-over-old-or-missing-data-in-mdgs-report.html> (accessed 26 January 2015)

¹¹ <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/MainReportChapter7-lowres.pdf> (accessed on 10 October 2014)

¹² United Nations 2014 The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet: Synthesis report of the Secretary General on post 2015 agenda

Survey that considered views of large section of people around the world¹³

2. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development Agenda Report that called for five “transformative shifts” that leave no one behind by a) ending extreme poverty, b) placing sustainable development at the core, c) transforming economies for decent jobs and inclusive growth, d) building peaceful societies as well as open, transparent, accountable governance, and e) forging a new global partnership for sustainable development¹⁴.
3. The recommendations from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network calling for the adoption of a science-based and action oriented agenda, integrating four interdependent dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental, and governance)¹⁵.
4. The Reports of Regional Commissions on priorities from the regions
5. The Report of Global Compact on how businesses could contribute to development¹⁶
6. The Report of the UN System Task Team¹⁷, and
7. The guidance from the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

In addition, a range of consultations and reports have also contributed to the discussions to arrive at the draft SDGs that are now being subject to inter-governmental negotiations^{18, 19}.

¹³ <http://www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/un-development-group-report.pdf> (accessed on 05 January 2015)

¹⁴ http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf (accessed on 5 January 2015)

¹⁵ <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/an-action-agenda-for-sustainable-development/> (accessed on 5 January 2015)

¹⁶ https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/news_events/9.6/Post2015_WhitePaper_2July14.pdf (accessed on 5 January 2015)

While some discussions continue on the ability of countries to respond to 17 Goals and 169 targets in manner that each of them are supported by a set of indicators, it is evident that there is a general consensus to keep all the Goals and targets in tact to further negotiations. Only time and implementation experience could tell if the concerns on implementation and monitoring difficulties of the large number of Goals and targets are genuine. However, some countries have voiced their reservations regarding some of the Goals and targets²⁰.

In an attempt to suggest consolidation of the Goals and targets, the Secretary General in his synthesis report suggested “*six essential elements would help frame and reinforce the universal, integrated and transformative nature of a sustainable development agenda and ensure that the ambition expressed by Member States in the outcome of the Open Working Group translates, communicates and is delivered at the country level*”²¹ (See Fig. below). The draft SDGs can be roughly mapped against each of these six elements as indicated in the table.



(Source: www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

¹⁷ http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/untt_report.pdf (accessed on 5th January 2015)

¹⁸ http://www.unep.org/post2015/Portals/50240/Documents/UNEP_Post_2015_Note8_Towards_new.pdf

¹⁹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18290406tstisuesedcult.pdf> (accessed on 10 January 2015)

²⁰ UN General Assembly, 2014 Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. Addendum Explanations of position and reservations on the report. Document A/68/970/Add.1

²¹ Ibid

Mapping Draft Goals against the Six Elements

Sl.No	Element	Goal(s)
1	Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities	Goal 1, 2
2	People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and Children	Goal 3, 4, 5
3	Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy	Goal 8
4	Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children	Goal 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15
5	Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions	Goal 9, 10, 11, 16
6	Partnership: to catalyze global solidarity for sustainable development	Goal 17

IV. The Road Ahead

Review of outcomes of the first intergovernmental negotiations on the Post 2015 development agenda held between 19 and 21 January 2015 indicate that in addition to issues of finalizing the Goals, targets and indicators, countries would also discuss the Global Declaration, means for implementing the development agenda and review mechanism(s).

It is clear from the discussions during the first Intergovernmental meeting that consensus is still needed on issues of review of the targets and means of implementation by technical experts of the United Nations system as well as setting global indicators to monitor progress of implementation.

Going by experiences of other processes in setting global targets and achieving results at national level such as through the Convention on Biological

Diversity (CBD) biodiversity targets – both 2002-2010 and the subsequent post 2010 targets (Aichi Biodiversity Targets)²², it is correct to believe that there are certain merits to having global targets and indicators but having supportive national targets and indicators would be important. Such combination of global and national targets strengthens national ownership and prioritization of relevant actions at local and national levels.

V. Preparing India to Achieve SDGs

India's development interests and priorities seem to be going through a renewed phase of policy prescriptions directed by the new political environment in the country. The diversity of issues to be addressed, challenges to coordination, options to monitor and evaluate progress, partnerships to be created across strata of the society, emerging dimensions of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and effectiveness of resource deployment form the core of issues that India need to address to move forward national debates related to adoption and subsequent implementation of SDGs at national level.

To support kick-starting such actions and prioritization, the following may be not just relevant but important considerations.

5.1 Dealing with Data and Information

One of the critical needs to assess progress in implementing national actions to achieve the SDGs is to collate data and information related to agreed targets and indicators.

Given the diversity of Goals and related targets, it can be safely assumed that there will be more than a hundred indicators that will be needed for monitoring implementation. These indicators could range from production statistics of food to

²² <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/> (accessed 5 January 2015)

percentage of nitrogen in the air to status of threatened species to measuring progress on how equitable spread of income in the country has been.

Such diversity of data and information need to be collected and collated from a wide range of actors, including civil society to effectively use the data for measuring progress. Current experiences from India on such consolidating reporting using the MDG framework indicate that either data on indicators are not available and/or they are not being assessed appropriately by various agencies. The example cited on lack of reporting by India on Goal 7 is a case in point²³.

India would need to look at the option of creating a special unit within its Statistics and Programme Implementation Department of the Government that will be mandated to work on identifying data and information gaps, suggesting options and indicators for measuring progress aligning with the global indicators, create a network of ministries, institutions and civil society organizations to generate data and assess the same.

Given the expertise available in India on a range of issues relevant to the SDGs, such an approach could benefit planning and monitoring national and local action.

5.2 Achieving National Development as an Aggregate of State level Development

Sustainable development in India needs to be measured using metrics available at state and national levels. Several components of the Goals currently being negotiated can only be achieved if there is concerted collaboration and consolidation of actions at national and state levels.

For this to happen, it is important to inform and facilitate effective participation of all states in India in deciding on implementation of the SDGs. In addition to

²³ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2013 Towards achieving Millennium Development Goals, India, 2013. New Delhi

dealing with effective local realization of Goals such as food security, education, sanitation, energy needs, environmental management and economic empowerment, States in India offer a spread-out platform for effective and speedy realization of the SDGs and related targets.

It may be appropriate for the new planning body created in India, NITI Aayog to focus on this issue.

5.3 *Financing Development*

In July 2015, governments will convene for the Third Conference on Financing for Development Addis Ababa, which will focus on Financing Sustainable Development (FSD). In preparation for this meeting a series of consultations and reports are being prepared to outline the options and approaches to raise adequate finances to deal with SDG implementation^{24 25 26}.

Key pre-requisites on rising finances for achieving the SDGs include need for innovative approaches, stronger public-private investments, needs based support, transparent decision making in deploying the resources and tools to monitor performances.

Given the diversity of needs and challenges India face it is important not only to identify additional and new ways of rising finances but also ensuring appropriate and timely deployment of finances. In an unpublished study by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) in 2012 it was estimated that the amount of money spent, annually, in support of biodiversity conservation action in India is to the tune of Rs. 11,000 – 15,000 crores – both as direct and indirect support. However, the impact of this investment is hardly felt since the investments are dissipated, unavailable in timely manner for prioritized action.

²⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/10/16/financing-the-post-2015-agenda-toward-a-shared-vision> (accessed on 26 January 2015).

²⁵ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/315&Lang=E (accessed on 26 January 2015)

The role and relevance of private sector funding as well as resources raised through civil society groups is yet to be seriously assessed in India. In order to achieve inclusive results in sustainable development it is important to forge long term partnerships with private sector and civil society groups in India. Specific and predictable guidelines should be made available under the newly enacted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) law to ensure part of the proceeds from the revenue collections should be earmarked for a specially created trust fund aimed to support SDG implementation at local levels.

5.4 Institutions and Infrastructure

One big advantage of India is the diversity and number of institutions – both public and private – that could contribute to providing the knowledge, implementation and impact assessment base for actions related to sustainable development.

With its inclusive development agenda, the Government seems to be making right moves to strengthen the institutions at different levels and seem to empower stakeholder groups to join issues related to policy making and implementation.

With its current policy focus on initiatives such as ‘Make in India’ and the ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ India is well poised to make needed leaps in making development inclusive and impactful.

It will be prudent to ensure that new and innovative initiatives such as the ‘Smart Cities’ could also focus on sustainable development options in addition to making Cities with better infrastructure and futuristic.

²⁶ UNGA 2014 Report of the Intergovernmental committee of experts on sustainable development financing. A/69/315.

5.5 Delivering as One but at Multiple Levels

The advantage as well as challenge for a country like India in dealing with sustainable development is the need for outreach at various levels and using diverse set of approaches. While a national framework on SDGs is needed to channel investments, finances, expertise and outreach, it will be very important to design differential approaches to deliver the actions for impactful results.

The role of people-centered approaches to sustainable development action can only be strengthened using multiple interventions at multiple levels. For example, in health care sector, India needs integrative approaches to health care at primary and secondary levels with combination of traditional health care systems operating in tandem with modern curative health care systems. It is also important that in addition to public funded primary and secondary health care services, India needs a second round of revolution in affordable health care. Appropriate policy interventions through insurance coverage systems that are designed to suit the specific needs of the country, innovative approaches on access to drugs and medicines would be the need of the hour.

5.6 Leading from Behind

India has the uncommon opportunity to support developing countries on a range of issues related to sustainable development. Such support range from provision of know-how to offering capacity building and human resource development actions.

Current focus on the Government seems to be rightly placed on ‘taking people along’ approach, where the domestic and foreign policy of the Government is to look for partnerships with both developed and developing countries.

With its knowledge, technical, scientific, financial and delivery skills of large scale development programmes over the year, India is better placed to deal with

a ‘learning by doing’ approach in supporting developing countries on issues of sustainable development.

It is time that India uses its diplomatic skills and strength to forge a ‘Sustainable Development Compact’ with developing countries to offer and seek support in realizing the objectives of Post 2015 development agenda that will be conferred in September 2015.

Such cooperation would certainly benefit India in strengthening its role as an inclusive partner who is keen to invest in actions that provide a win- win option for balanced, equitable development across continents. Such successes will amply India’s resolve in emerging both as a regional and international player with consideration and compassion for the human society at large.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

India has tremendous potential to lead international implementation and realization of SDGs and the Post 2015 Development Agenda process. For this to be realized, it is important that India consolidates its strengths and institutional networks along with prudent decisions on deploying finances.

While all efforts are to be made to have informed participation in the inter-governmental negotiations related to finalizing the elements of Post 2015 development agenda, India could provide leadership on issues of financing development and identifying appropriate means for implementing the Post 2015 development agenda.

Current levels of awareness and participation in prioritizing India’s interests in the inter-governmental negotiation process is rather limited. Relevant agencies including Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India need to organize a series of consultations with various stakeholder groups in deciding on India’s inputs into the implementation of Post 2015 development agenda.

Efforts also are needed to begin consolidating sources of data and information to monitor and review progress of development priorities that align with the SDGs. Information and data gaps and short-comings need to be addressed on a priority.

It may be prudent for India to develop relevant national indicators that align with the SDGs, given the priorities and peculiarities of India's development interests.

With emerging interests of India in using international diplomacy as an anchor for national development, India could put in place a stronger South-South Cooperation programme related to achieving the Post 2015 development agenda.

Sustaining Sustainable Development

This Report provides an update on the current status of discussions related to post 2015 development agenda as agreed through the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) in June 2012. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being negotiated under the post 2015 development agenda, through the intergovernmental negotiation process, is expected to finalize the Goals, identify options for financing and implementation of the same by September 2015 for formal adoption by the member states during the United Nations General Assembly.

The Report identifies for some options for India to prepare participating on the negotiations besides implementation of actions to achieve the SDGs, once adopted.

About the Author

Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati has more than 22 years of experience participating in intergovernmental negotiations with focus on issues related to environment and development. He is the past Chairman of National Biodiversity Authority, Government of India, Chief of Biodiversity, Land Law and Governance Unit at UNEP and Coordinator of Biodiplomacy Programme at United Nations University.

