

Millennium to sustainable development goals: A review of India's progress and challenges

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper attempts to review the progress made by India under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in context to its similarity and divergence from MDG.

Methods/Statistical analysis: This paper reviews the performance of India using secondary data as available from the government and other sources. For MDG, Goal wise target and achievement have been studied for India. The post MDG discussion showed maturity and wisdom to have expanded the scope of goals and targets. The new set of goals called Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is socially inclusive and globally exhaustive at the same time. SDG has 17 universally accepted goals which address the current and future concerns of economies.

Findings: The available data shows that India has quite successfully achieved few targets and made positive progress in others. But overall most of the countries failed to exhibit considerable progress by 2015 (when MDG were to expire) and thus Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were launched. The paper also concludes that MDG were skewed and highly focused towards human development. But they were realistic, had universal language and were measurable. SDGs are absolutely global and holistic in nature, covering aspects like poverty reduction, inequality, sustainability & economic growth along with job creation.

Application/Improvements: The success of SDG will depend upon a less bureaucratic and transparent system of monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

1. Introduction

At the start of twenty first century, there was a rush among intellectuals and institutions to identify and underline specific socioeconomic goals and targets to be achieved by the countries. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were a set of eight development goals, adopted by 189 member countries of United Nation at the Millennium Summit held in September, 2000. The countries committed to reduce extreme poverty and fix a time bound targets to be attained by the year 2015. The goals focused on the overall socioeconomic development of the population. The goals throw light upon specific problems pertaining to health, education, economic well-being, environmental degradation, gender discrimination and similar issues that the world population was grappling at the start of the new millennium.

One important aspect to take note of is that though significant progress was made all over the world in terms of increase in income, according to Millennium Project, 2002 the average overall income increased by nearly 21 percent between 1990 and 2002. However the same was not translated in reduction of deprivation of people across the globe [1]. Also the economic progress was uneven and large amount of disparities existed across and within the countries. For example, rural areas, both in developed and developing countries remained undeveloped and many countries in Sub Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America continued to remain deprived of all economic development that the rest of the World witnessed during this period [2].

The foundation of the MDG lies on the fact that every individual, irrespective of any other attribute, is entitled to live a dignified life, has the right to freedom, equality and a standard of living where there is no place for hunger, violence, intolerance and discord.

As far as India is concerned, it has been quite successful in maintaining the progress and efforts are on track, but the fact remains that much needs to be done to achieve the desired targets. According to the UN Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015, India is on-track when it comes to reducing the incidence of poverty [1]. It has successfully halved the extreme poverty ahead of the deadline of 2015. However, the progress of India has been worse than its poorer neighbors like Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan who have fared better than India in poverty reduction. One point worth mentioning here which plays a crucial role and provides a justifiable explanation is that that India's size and its greater diversity somehow act as a hindrance which slows down the pace of its progress.

As per the Report, India is found to be a laggard in the areas like maternal health and sanitation. Also, the Report highlighted that the progress made on education front is quite satisfactory. The enrollment rates are in line with the expectations [1]. However, the quality of the education and the high drop-out rates do represent a hole in the progress story.

India has also performed well when it comes to environmental sustainability as it is one of those few nations who have brought down the carbon dioxide emissions in relation to its GDP. Much more efforts are required in areas such as increasing the share of women in non-agricultural wage employment, raising the proportion of women in the national Parliament, access to improved sanitation and hygiene.

MDG – Targets & Achievements

As per the 2015, Millennium Development Goals: India Country Report (Ministry of Statistics and Implementation, Government of India), the following data pertaining to the goals and targets can be studied[3]. Every Goal has been evaluated through various targets that have to be accomplished in order to achieve the said goal.

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Target 1A: To Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day

- The all India Head Count Poverty Ratio was 47.8 percent in 1990 which came down to 21.9 percent in 2011.
- The target was achieved before time, however the progress remains uneven and the concept of poverty itself has been redefined.

Target 1B: Achieve Decent Employment for Women, Men, and Young People

- A total of 460.18 million people were employed in the year 2010 (Source: Data tables by Planning commission). In the same year, the GDP was US \$1.708 trillion.

Target 1C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

- The proportion of underweight children under five / three years of age was 52%. This has reduced to 40% in 2005-06.
- India needs gigantic efforts to fight the problems of malnourishment and hunger. Obviously, an undernourished child population will transform into an unhealthy nation.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 2A: By 2015, all children, boys and girls can complete a full course of primary schooling.

- The Net Enrollment Ratio in primary education (6-10 years) was 84.5 percent in 2005-06. This increased to 88.08 percent in 2013-14. Although a good jump, much more efforts are required to reach the goal of cent percent enrollment.
- In 2011-12, 86.05 percent of the children completed education from grade 1 to grade 5. This number needs to be stretched till cent per cent.
- It encouraging finding that India is very close to the target.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**Target 3A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015**

- Gender Parity Index (GPI)- No. of females to no. of males – 1.03 in primary education, 1 in secondary education (2013-14) and 0.89 in tertiary education 2012-13.
- The share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was 19.3% (2011-12).
- In 2015, the proportion of seats in the National Parliament held by women was mere 12.25%.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality rates**Target 4A: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate**

- The under-five mortality rate was 125 per 1000 live births. This fell to 49 deaths per 1000 in 2013. This is a significant achievement. This number should be brought down further to ensure longevity of life.
- The under-one infant mortality rate was 40 per 1000 in 2013.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health**Target 5A: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio**

- The Maternal Mortality Ratio was 437 per 100000 in 1990-91 which declined to 167 per 100000 from 2011-13. This is a remarkable progress, but much more needs to be done to drag this number on the lower side.
- One factor which demands attention here is that in spite of achieving a noteworthy fall in the MMR, India is still lagging behind in reaching the goal.

Target 5B: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

- The delivery operated under professional, institutional facilities has increased to 72 percent (2009) from a mere 26 percent (1992-93). This is extremely significant since child birth performed under medical supervision is safe to that performed by untrained hands. Still, this number has to be stretched to 100 percent.
- On the same track, the deliveries performed by skilled medical professionals have gone up from 33 percent to 76.2 percent.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases**Target 6A: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS**

- HIV prevalence among pregnant women aged 15-24 years of age is 0.32 % (2012-13). This was 0.89% in 2005. This needs to be brought down further. This can be done through regular health checkups right from the beginning of the pregnancy.
- The percentage of the population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV / AIDS was 32.9 % (2005). Since awareness about the disease is a good step towards prevention, more and more awareness needs to be spread about it. Scientific knowledge needs to be inculcated so that HIV/AIDS patients do not become the victims of baseless misconceptions.

Target 6B: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it

- Update not available

Target 6C: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

- Malaria has come down to 0.88 per 1000(2014) from 2.12 per 1000(2001).
- The no. of confirmed deaths due to malaria in 2013 was 440 and in 2014, it was 578 deaths. This trend should be reversed.
- TB incidence per lakh population has reduced from 216 in 1990 to 171 in 2013.
- TB mortality per lakh population has reduced from 38 (1990) to 19 (2013).

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**Target 7A: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs; reverse loss of environmental resources****Target 7B: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss**

- The total forests cover of the country is 21.23% of the geographic area of the country (2013). Due to rapid industrialization and unplanned urbanization, there is a negative impact on the forest cover.
- The estimated CO₂ emission for India is 1954 million tones.
- The per capita carbon dioxide emissions was 1.58 metric tons (2014)
- Consumption of ozone-depleting substances : as per the Census 2011, 67.3% of the households are using substances like firewood, crop residue, cow dung cake etc. this number was as high as 74.3% in 2001.
- The ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area was 4.83% (2014).

Target 7C: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

- The overall proportion of the households having access to improved water sources went up from only 68.2 percent (1992-93) to 90.6 percent (2011-12).
- During 2012, 87.8 percent of the households had access to improved drinking water. The numbers for the rural and urban households were 86.9 percent and 90.1 percent respectively.
- 88.95% of the rural households and 95.3 percent of the urban population had an access to improved water source (2010)
- 91.2 percent of the urban population had an access to sanitation while for the rural population, it was 40.6 percent (2012)

Target 7D: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers

- In 2011, the slum population (as a percentage of the total urban population) was 17.36 percent.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

- This goal comprises of six sub targets. The new government taken charge in 2014 has taken several steps to fulfill this goal. The results are positive in the field of reduction in taxes, assistance to neighboring countries, availability of low priced drugs, growth in telecom subscription both in rural and urban areas and increase in digital connectivity through internet penetration

As it can be determined from the above data, India has managed to successfully achieve quite a number of targets. However, reduction in Maternal Mortality Rate and accessibility to pure drinking water and sanitation require more immediate attention. Cleanliness at large requires a focused approach on the part of government and society at large. Open defecation is a problem which has serious externalities like water contamination and spread of waterborne illness. Government's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan aims to provide toilets for all by 2019. Indoor defecation will help in combating the water-borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea, which are responsible for many deaths of children especially in the rural areas.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted a new set of 17 Goals and 169 targets as a successor to the MDG. The new set was identified as 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. The new global goals have been set for yet another 15 year period (starting 2015) and aims to continue the progress made under MDG. The member countries, considering the fast changing socioeconomic conditions, also accepted additional goals to be part of SDG. The definitions of Sustainable Development may differ, yet few elements are unanimously accepted, namely; economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability [4]. These elements help in providing a broad classification of SDG as goals to end poverty, ensure prosperity for all and to protect the planet. Figure 1 depicts all the goals. Each of these has related targets to be achieved [5].

Figure 1. Sustainable development goals



Source: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The selection of these 17 'Global Goals' was done by the United Nations in one of the most exhaustive manner. Forming a post 2015 goals were unanimously accepted proposition at Rio+20 Summit (also known as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or Rio Earth Summit) held in Brazil, 2012. A working group of 70 countries was formed which submitted its draft recommendations of 17 goals in 2014 [6]. Though many countries including UK and Japan believed that the ideal number of goals should have been 10 or 12, but the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on SDG, Amina Mohammed in an interview to Wikina, Ebenezer [7] said that it was a challenge to fix the maximum number of goals to 17, and thus it would not have been possible to bring it down beyond that. However, a larger consensus among the countries prevailed and thus the goals like women empowerment, peace and justice, life under the water and on the land could be incorporated to provide a far reaching impact of SDG.

MDG V/s. SDG

Keeping the number of goals and targets aside, if we attempt to identify the major difference between the two sets of 'Goals', we find that SDG's are truly Global in nature, considering the fact that they have been evolved over a series of consultation efforts with the lower and middle income countries [8] while MDGs were mostly dominated by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. However, it is the essence of sincerity which gets reflected from SDG and was partial in MDG. From zero poverty to global partnerships, the range of SDG is quite wide and inclusive. The targets under SDG are equally appealing to developed and underdeveloped countries.

Another important difference which is apparent is the fact that SDG targets 'Zero Poverty and Zero Hunger' even in case of many other targets the goal is to reach the utmost. MDG called for a half way mark target in most of the cases, and thus prepared the countries. Now, it is the time to finish the job. Similarly, where MDG had considered a reduction in poverty and hunger as one goal, SDG has shown the wisdom to separate both. Over the time it is understood that reduction in hunger does not reduce poverty. Both these targets will now require a different strategy under SDG.

Similarly, the scope of MDG Goal 2 on achieving Universal Primary Education has been expanded in SDG. Goal 4 not only targets education for all but also asks to ensure Life Long Learning Opportunities. SDG Goal 4.4 also recognizes the need for skill and vocational training to support entrepreneurial abilities among youths. It is a fact that the world needs more job creators rather than job seekers.

MDG Goal 3 asked for promoting Gender Equality, while SDG Goal 5 ensures that the goal is well achieved by 2030. In addition, SDG asks for recognition and value to pay for all sorts of jobs done by women starting from domestic help to leadership roles. Goal 5 c under SDG clearly asks member countries to adopt policies and enforce necessary legislations to promote equality and women empowerment at all levels.

In a major change, three important MDG's Goal 4, 5 and 6 on Child Mortality, Maternal Health and Combat Life threatening diseases have been merged into one SDG; Goal 3, Ensure Healthy lives and the promotion of well being for all ages is a comprehensive goal incorporating all three MDG's and in addition, to halve deaths due to accidents

and consumption of alcohol and other drugs. SDG also extends support to include targets to support WHO (World Health Organization).

SDG stands out and scores ahead of MDG for well recognizing the global challenge associated with drinking water and sanitation. What was just a target under MDG (Goal 7, Target 10) has been stated as a complete Goal under SDG. Goal 6, asks for ensuring safe and universal access to drinking water and adequate and equitable sanitation facilities for all by 2030. In order to compete with the challenges related to water, SDG clearly demands for international cooperation as well as involvement of local communities in improving water management.

Several other relevant issues like energy and employment have been given the status of specific goals under SDG. Several contemporary issues like innovation, infrastructure, human settlements, water resources among others, have been included as specific goals under SDG. This shows the maturity in SDG over MDG.

Lastly, unlike MDG which were silent on monitoring and evaluation of the goals and targets, SDG Goal 17, target 18 clearly specifies that the states should collect qualitative and reliable data. It further insists that data so collected should be filtered on the basis of a number of demographic and other relevant characteristics like gender, age, disability, residential etc.

India and SDG

In July this year, UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Germany's Bertelsmann Stiftung came together and constructed a Sustainable Development Goal Index, which acts as a report card to review and measure the progress and ensure accountability for countries in achieving the goals. According to SDSN 'all countries will face major challenges in achieving these ambitious goals by 2030' [9].

Surprisingly, not big, but small countries like Sweden, Denmark and Norway have secured the top three ranks in the list. According to table 1, Germany and UK rank six and tenth respectively. Other developed countries like USA, Russia and China rank 25th, 47th and 76th respectively. Most of the poor and underdeveloped countries have scored lower. India ranks 110 in the list of 149 countries.

However, the future path for India is both an opportunity and a challenge. Opportunity because a lot of work as far as the previous targets is concern is already done. Thus the intention and directions to achieve and complete them already exist.

Table 1. Sustainable development goal index

Country Name	SDGI Rank	SDGI Score	Country Name	SDGI Rank	SDGI Score
Sweden	1	84.53	Singapore	19	74.61
Denmark	2	83.88	Australia	20	74.53
Norway	3	82.31	United States	25	72.71
Finland	4	81.00	Russia	47	66.36
Switzerland	5	80.87	Brazil	52	64.44
Germany	6	80.52	UAE	55	63.58
Austria	7	79.07	China	76	59.07
Netherlands	8	78.94	Sri Lanka	97	54.80
United Kingdom	10	78.14	Nepal	103	51.53
Japan	18	74.96	India	110	48.39

Source: <http://sdgindex.org>

But challenges to successfully achieve SDG are too many. First and foremost, India's policy approach towards many of these targets lack defining indicators. For example, how to measure quality of education, quantity and quality of drinking water, and availability of electricity in terms of time and voltage among others.

Another important challenge is about spending. In reference to table 2, currently Social Sector Spending under India's Union Budget is around 1, 30,000 crores [10]. This amount will be required to increase substantially in order to finance SDG.

Table 2. Social sector spending – union budget (in Rs Cr)

heme	2015-16 BE	2015-16 RE	2016-17 BE	% change between 2015-16 BE to 2016-17 BE	% change between 2015-16 RE to 2016-17 BE
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan	22000	22015.42	22500	2%	2%
Midday Meal Scheme	9236.4	9236.4	9700	5%	5%
National Health Mission	18875	19135.37	19,437	3%	2%
MNREGA	34699	36967	38500	11%	4%
Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana	14291	18297	19000	33%	4%
Swachh Bharat Mission	3625	6525	9000	148%	38%
Integrated Child Development Scheme	8371.77	15502.27	14000	67%	-10%
Total	111098.17	127678.46	132137	18.94	3.49
<i>Source: https://thewire.in/23210/social-sector-investments-in-budget-2016-no-different-than-previous-year/</i>					

Considering the rate at which government funding increases, there is going to be a major funding gap in financing SDG. In such condition, inviting private funding in the social sector will be inevitable. The road for private funding in financing many of SDG targets is already clear. According to Section 135 of the New Companies Act, 2013 Companies are required to spend at least 2% of net profit (average of the previous three years) on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. If utilized wisely, this could be a special vehicle which government can use to fund SDG.

Another challenge which is clearly visible, is in terms of ownership. With the recommendation of the 14th Finance Commission being implemented from fiscal year 2015-16, nearly 42% of total direct tax revenue is now transferred to state governments, thus the states have now been enabled to spend more than before. Moreover, as per government reports NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog has been given the task to monitor the progress of SDG. It is going to be a challenge for the Central government and NITI Aayog in particular to coordinate with the respective departments at the state and local level for the purpose of monitoring.

According to Sindhushree Khullar, former Chief Executive Officer at NITI Aayog, Year 2022, the 75th Year of India's Independence is being marked as the year for achieving many of SDG targets [11]. The Government is confident of achieving housing, electricity, drinking water and roads for all targets by 2022 itself. However, coming back to the challenge of coordination, government will find it tough working at local level with Gram Panchayats, municipal corporations and civil society at large.

In addition to monitoring and coordination, measuring the progress of SDG is an equally difficult task for the governments at all the levels [12]. Due to a chain of bureaucratic hierarchy between the centre and local institutions, getting periodic data on the implementation of policies and achievements of targets is looking quite difficult. However, with Digital India movement getting more and more support, the challenges related to monitoring and measuring SDG do not appear to be impossible.

2. Conclusion

The Goals, whether MDG or SDG are rested on one common objective, i.e. ensuring the welfare for all and creating an environment which is free from deprivation. Every person has the basic right to live with dignity, respect and non-discrimination and the SDG is the right step towards this. After the introduction of the SDGs, the path towards the goals has become pretty clear. One of the features that separate the MDGs from SDGs is their basic nature. SDGs are absolutely global and holistic in nature, covering aspects like poverty reduction, inequality, sustainability & economic growth along with job creation. They have been designed after deliberations with lower and middle income countries. This gives them a special touch which was lacking in MDGs, which have focused more on the OECD countries.

It may be true as per the common understanding that the income levels always commensurate with a better living standard. However, it can be noted that in spite of a significant boost in incomes, the overall welfare has not improved much. Hence, the rise in incomes have not been reflected in the rise in living standards. This will continue to remain a major challenge for the government.

The grave issue of regional disparities is still existent and this exposes a major loophole in the disbursing mechanism. The fruits of development have been distributed unequally as they have failed to reach the deprived strata of the rural population. Not to ignore, rising income inequality which also remains a serious issue which even the developed countries are fighting with.

As far as India is concerned, we have kick started the process in full swing and are heading with a satisfactory pace towards the attainment of the goals. India is found to be "on-track" with the desired speed and direction for the achievement of the desired targets. In most of the MDG targets, India has successfully performed well. In fact, it has achieved the targets like reducing the poverty level and reversing the trend of HIV – AIDS infected women. This is remarkable. While it is true that India will reach the goal in many indicators very soon, it remains a truth that we are lagging much behind in attaining targets like reducing the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) and improving accessibility to basic needs to pure drinking water and sanitation amenities. These areas need immediate attention.

The population should be provided with clean and potable water, so as to bring down the rate of waterborne diseases like cholera which is spread from contaminated water. A related area of concern is open defecation in India. To overcome this, efforts are needed in the areas of basic sanitation amenities where every household is having one fully-functioning washroom and every family member is using the same. Only then, the problem of lack of basic sanitation will be sorted out.

There is deterioration in the area of deaths due to malaria. Instead of reduction, the deaths have shown an increasing trend. This has to be reversed by efforts like boosting cleanliness and spreading awareness about it.

India has flared well in areas like boosting the Net Enrollment Ratio, reducing the Gender Disparity, integrating the principle of sustainable development in the country's policies. However, the minor accomplishments are not the reasons to rejoice since it remains a fact that India is lagging behind many peer-nations of similar level of development.

The journey that lies ahead is brimming with thrilling opportunities as well as deadly challenges. There are ample of opportunities because India has already proven its mettle in putting the first step forward and achieving the significant portion of the targets. This explains for itself that India is having the desired quantum of intention and dedication.

However, there are a host of challenges that may act as roadblocks in the way. The primary roadblock is the lack of proper way of defining the targets for the indicators such as the quality of education, drinking water, power and electricity etc. Another hurdle which demands spotlight attention is the spending on the social sector. According to the Union Budget allocations, the trend of spending is found to be a bit disappointing. The funding has to go up in the priority areas like education, health, sanitation if needs of billions of people have to be met. Obviously, the quantum of funds required to take care of the gigantic population will be enormous. No doubt the larger chunk should come from the Government but the participation from the private corporate sector can be considered as a viable option. To nurture this further, the profitable corporate houses have been asked to compulsorily involve themselves in social work in the form of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) by allocating at least 2% of their profits.

Another challenge that may pose in the way is the ownership and distribution mechanism of the funds. The issues relating to the allocation of the funds to the States from the Centre will be of crucial nature. Going by the Government reports, the task of monitoring the SDGs has been left upon NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog. This will be a challenge for it since continuous monitoring and evaluation will demand interdepartmental co-operation and co-ordination.

Additionally, the infamous bureaucratic environment of India will create a pile of issues like delayed decision-making and time mismanagement. Obtaining authentic, reliable data regularly pertaining to the Government policies and their implementation will too act as a challenge.

To conclude, India is definitely on the right path towards the destination. It will surely surpass the other nations provided it focuses on the strengths and improves on the weaknesses. It needs a strong political commitment and active co-operative participation of the population to wipe out the socioeconomic monsters from the country. The investment towards public health, especially the female health must be a top-notch concern. Further, the system of monitoring, evaluation and accountability needs to be less bureaucratic and more transparent.

SDGs have the potential to take a great leap in the direction of a world in which no one will be left behind.

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