



Young ISSI Professionals' Corner

Pakistan's Experience with the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs)

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Pakistan has maintained its commitment to achieve the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) despite various socio-political and economic challenges, natural disasters and internal and external security issues. The Pakistan Government and the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP) have been working closely to promote this agenda through a number of joint initiatives that reflect the adoption of the MDGs in public policy and their adaptation to the local context. The Planning Commission of Pakistan has played a major role in setting a policy direction for the MDGs, monitoring progress and coordinating the efforts of different stakeholders.

The center for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution (CRPRID) established in the Planning Commission with the UNDP's support has served as a hub of knowledge and policy advice on MDGs through empirical, qualitative and policy-oriented research on key developmental issues. The center has proved instrumental in poverty measurement, research and analysis of public policies on poverty, progress monitoring of the MDGs through the development of the Four (poverty alleviation, primary education, gender equality and global partnership) National MDGs Reports and has provided technical support to the government in pro-poor policies and programs.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), strategic planning documents first formulated in 2000 which identified targeting the poor and the vulnerable as one of the key issues and focused on the MDGs, have significantly influenced the pro-poor policy-making and spending in Pakistan.

A PRSP monitoring unit was created in the Finance Ministry with the UNDP's support which became the Government's core function for the PRSP monitoring at the federal and provincial levels, gender-responsive budgeting and impact assessment of public sector pro-poor programs and has resulted in an increase in the pro-poor expenditure from 3.8 percent in 2001 to 9.86 percent in 2011.

Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms, has said that in the recent budget, there has been an unprecedented increase in fund allocation for the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP), especially for health and education, which reinforces the Government's resolve to achieve the MDGs. "We need to invest in youth, technology and innovation to find quick solutions to some of the constraints in achieving the MDGs," he said. Collective efforts and resources are needed to accelerate progress.

The MDGs report documented with Pakistan's experience in terms of successes and challenges. The federal and provincial governments have also acknowledged the need for accelerated action and have embarked upon a number of initiatives such as the Prime Minister Youth Program.

Since the past two decades, the need to place people rather than economic growth at the center of national and international development efforts has gained wide acknowledgement. Pakistan is also among the 189 nation states which endorsed UN-backed Millennium Declaration in 2000, focusing on eight basic goals to help improve the lives of poor people around the world by the end of 2015. However, two years before the deadline set for accomplishing these MDGs, the ground realities in many developing countries, including Pakistan, were not encouraging.

The Commonwealth Foundation has recently reviewed progress made in terms of achieving MDGs. A report was also prepared for Pakistan based on analysis of several secondary sources including government, UN and other international agencies' assessments as well as consultations with major NGOs. The results indicate that Pakistan is lagging behind its commitments with respect to almost all the MDGs' indicators.

Pakistan's progress on poverty alleviation remains much below the mark. The food inflation is reversing steps being taken to eradicate poverty. Moreover, the global food and fuel price shocks and the global financial crisis have also combined to undermine MDGs' progress across much of the developing world. Major social welfare schemes have limited impact. While literacy rate has been increasing since 2000, it is not commensurate with the MDGs target (88 per cent) by the end of 2015. Similarly, Pakistan is still a long way off from ensuring that all girls and boys in the country complete primary schooling. The task of achieving gender parity within primary and secondary education has also not shown significant progress in terms of health related indicators. While maternal and child (under five years) mortality rates have declined, the progress made so far is not sufficient. Pakistan also lags behind in providing clean drinking water and sanitation to its citizens. They have pledged to protect children, safeguard women's rights and ensure a range of other human rights. Showing the required political will to fulfill these commitments, however, remains problematic. The internal security situation and a spate of natural disasters are repeatedly quoted by officials to explain the disappointing progress.

Conversely, the UN's articulation of MDGs has also implied that the onus of alleviating global deprivations was not only the responsibility of developing countries, but also of the numerous multilateral agencies mandated to work on development issues. The international community's failure

to offer adequate resources and support must also be highlighted while assessing the failure of achieving the MDGs targets.

Pakistan adopted 16 targets and 41 indicators against which progress towards achieving the Eight Goals of the MDG's is measured. Time series data¹ available for 33 of these indicators reveal that Pakistan is on track to achieve the targets on 9 indicators, whereas its progress on 24 indicators is off track. The UNDP Pakistan has also launched an Internet MDGs monitor to make up-to-date information on the country's MDG progress.

Pakistan's Progress by Goal and Current status in accordance with national Government reporting:²

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Possible to achieve if some changes are made.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Possible to achieve if some changes are made.

Net enrolment ratio in primary education is 65.6% of pupils starting Grade 1 and the ones who reach Grade 5 are 69.7%.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Mostly off track.

Gender parity Index in primary level enrolment (ratio of girls to boys) is 0.8%. A literacy rate of 15-24 years old is 70.0%. Seats held by women in national parliament are 21.3%.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Possible to achieve if some changes are made.

Mortality rate of children under 5 years old (per 1,000 live births) is 97%. 1-year-old children immunized against measles are 80%.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Possible to achieve if some changes are made.

Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 births) is 320.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Very likely to be achieved, on track.

People living with HIV, 15-49 years old are 0.1%. Prevalence of tuberculosis is 263 (per 100,000 people).

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Possible to achieve if some changes are made.

Land area covered by forest is 2.5% Carbon dioxide emissions per capita (metric tons): 0.8090 Access to improved drinking water sources is 90%.

Conclusion

The MDGs have focused global attention on the eradication of poverty and only a few countries have reached the MDGs. To make further progress we need to re-design the MDGs. We will need to make targets more realistic and turn our focus from narrowly-defined yardsticks to the long-term inclusive growth. The vision of the MDGs is gradually being turned into reality in Pakistan, cautioning, however, that it is important to recognize that about 1 billion people in the world still live below the poverty line, and hundreds of millions suffer from hunger. Pakistan has also been under pressure in terms of population, resources and the environment, while facing challenges of uneven development between urban and rural areas. Attaining the goals of the MDGs globally remains an uphill task. It is important that Governments give top priority to the eradication of poverty and equal development across all regions. Developed nations should provide enabling conditions to developing nations. The MDGs which are off-track in Pakistan should be included in the post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹ UNDP, Eight Goals for 2015. <http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/mdgoverview.html>

² <http://www.qismat.org.pk/images/pdf/mdg-pk-monitor-30-05-2012.pdf>