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Young ISSI Professionals' Corner

Pakistan's Contribution Towards the Achievement of Post-2015 Development Agenda

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The post-2015 development agenda builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that included eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015. Enormous progress has been made on the MDGs, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Yet despite this success, the menace of poverty has not been eliminated for all. The members of the United Nations are now in the process of defining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of a new agenda to further the aim of the MDGs, and leave no one behind. This agenda would be adopted by Member States at the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

Pakistan has failed to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where progress on 25 out of 33 indicators is off track. Speakers at a roundtable discussion on "Consultations on Post 2015 Development Agenda from Pakistani Perspective," jointly organized by UNDP and SDPI in Islamabad stated that Pakistan needs to put its act together to improve the situation.

According to the UNDP report, around 1 billion people across the world are undernourished; more than 205 million are unemployed and 1.4 billion people lack access to modern energy services. Only 28% of global population is covered by social protection schemes. Experts say that the implementation of the MDGs framework has lifted almost 600 million people out of poverty. In most of the cases governments were the implementing partners.

President of Pakistan on the occasion of Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI's) 17th Annual Sustainable Development Conference in December, emphasized upon the imperativeness of post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to Pakistan. While stating that the SDGs would address inequalities and bring a balance to economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection. SDGs would also seek to strengthen the resilience of the people, particularly the poor and marginalized sections of society. Like the MDGs, the SDGs would provide useful benchmark to the Government for its national development strategy and plan of action.

In the last twelve years, income disparities have increased drastically, which has diluted the achievement of early years regarding alleviation of poverty. This has stalled overall progress on social development and put pressure on the efforts to protect environment. During the same period, Pakistan was made to bear a loss of \$10 billion on annual basis, due to environmental degradation. In addition to this, the country is losing about 3% of its Gross Domestic Produce every year in its fight against

eradication of terrorism. Experts say volatile economic growth, climate change, natural disasters, militancy and volatile global prices are the major challenges that Pakistan face today.

Pakistan has already taken a significant step by preparing a roadmap for achievement of SDGs through its Vision 2025. The Vision has been prepared in close consultation with broader civil society, academia, and private sector and hence in true sense can be termed as citizen vision for development. While reflecting the ongoing global debate on SDGs, the Vision recognizes the imperative of people centered inclusive growth through democratic governance and active public-private partnership. It aims to achieve the urgent goals of energy, water and food security which are the essential pre-requisites for the wellbeing of the people of Pakistan. The nation-wide stakeholder consultations have identified 7 priority areas or pillars in the Vision 2025. Each of these finds resonance with one or more of the latest proposals for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Pillars 1-4 with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Vision 2025 process builds upon the largely successful pursuit of the MDGs, and is a launching pad for the complete fulfillment of the SDGs before their target date of 2030.

Pillar 1: People First: Developing social and human capital and empowering women.

Links with MDGs: This pillar encompasses poverty eradication (MDG1), access to health and education services (MDGs 2, 4, 5, and 6), and gender empowerment (MDG 3).

Links with SDGs: SDGs 1 (poverty), 3, (health) 4 (education), and 5 (gender).

Pillar 2: Growth: Sustained, indigenous, and inclusive growth

Links with MDGs: While this was not an explicit goal, it was a key driver of MDGs, as well as being implicit in MDG 1 (equity, decent work), and MDG 6 (environmental sustainability).

Links with SDGs: The target is virtually identical to SDG 8, and also to SDGs 10, 12, 13, 14, 15.

Pillar 3: Governance: Democratic governance: institutional reform and modernization of the public sector

Links with MDGs: Again, while not an explicit goal, there is abundant evidence that shows the positive impact of good governance on the human development goals.

Links with SDGs: Again, the language is similar to that of SDG 16.

Pillar 4: Security: Energy, water, and food security.

Links with MDGs: These are incorporated in MDG 1 (hunger), and MDG 6 (water).

Links with SDGs: Linked to SDG 2 (zero hunger), 6 (water security), 7 (energy security), and 11 (urban)

Pillar 5: Entrepreneurship; Private Sector and entrepreneurship-led growth

Links with SDGs: This is linked to SDG 9 (foster innovation)

Pillar 6: Knowledge Economy; Developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition

Links with SDGs: SDG 9(innovation), and 4 (education)

Pillar 7: Connectivity; Modernizing transport infrastructure and regional connectivity

Links with SDGs: SDG 9 (infrastructure), and 17 (global partnership)

SDPI has been providing research based policy recommendations to the Government of Pakistan on issues of food security, energy, economy, social sector development, climate change and Vision 2025. This engagement highlights the willingness of Government of Pakistan to provide wider space to independent policy research institutes. The development policies which are prepared on the basis of solid evidence would foster equitable and balanced socio-economic growth.

It is encouraging to note the successes made by South Asian countries in achieving impressive macro-economic growth. However, income inequality and poverty have grown in all countries of the region. Over 40% of the world's poor live in South Asia. Special efforts, therefore, are needed to alleviate poverty and inequality in South Asia, in order to achieve the global development goals and the emergence of Asia as the epicenter of growth and prosperity in the 21st century. Pakistan has all along supported efforts to promote regional cooperation and integration. This policy is based on the conviction that South Asia will be able to realize its full potential for rapid and inclusive growth through collaborative efforts to tackle all socio-economic challenges and the emerging threat of negative consequences of climate change.

Pakistan's progress on the MDGs along with post-2015 Development Agenda has been influenced by both external and internal developments in the region. These include natural disasters, man-made

conflicts, institutional, administrative and political changes, weak commitments to hardcore structural economic reforms, reductions in international aid by development partners due to the global economic crisis of 2007, and limited localization of the MDGs' agenda at the provincial level.

Sustainable development in Pakistan and South Asia will require a lot more than ad-hoc short term remedial measures. What needs to be ensured is that public sector's expenditure is directed towards the well-being of people. To promote human and social development, it is imperative that pro-poor interventions are sufficiently aligned with people's long term needs in health, education, women empowerment and a cleaner environment.

Pakistan on behalf of Troika of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Third Meeting of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG-SDG) stressed upon the importance of implementing the proposed MDGs and the SDGs, by improving working methods and increased collaboration amongst various stakeholders. The use of panelists must continue and this process could be extended to bring in regional and global development perspectives, by making use of the experience of Regional Development Banks, UN Regional Setup, and National Development Banks. It was further emphasized that focus on fully implementing MDGs must remain the overarching objective in the near term while SDGs should provide a long term perspective with intervening midterm benchmarks for the global community. MDGs should cascade into SDGs seamlessly. Vast majority of the developing countries have highlighted structural impediments in pursuing sustainable agriculture, food security and achieving water secure environment across the globe and at the national levels. Most notably, the question of agricultural subsidies and how they are negatively impacting upon the sustainable development prospects must be clearly understood and addressed. Poverty alleviation remains the predominant challenge in promoting sustainable agriculture as well as food security and nutrition. A credible goal towards rural development would be critical in this regard. Enhancing the role of women and gender equality is equally important. Enhancing food security is not just a question of equitable distribution of resources within a society and a country but also amongst countries. To this end, framework of sustainable production and consumption is highly relevant. All efforts must take into account the fundamental Rio Principles, the varying circumstances and capacities of the countries in pursuing goals, particularly the principle of the common but differentiated responsibilities.

Pakistan needs to address issues like social injustice, excessive poverty and ongoing violence, before it can pay attention to the remaining part of MDGs, and frame a response for the post 2015 period.

Experts say, for achieving these targets economic growth should be inclusive and friendly to environment; and for that continuation of the long-term policy implementation is a pre requisite. Government of Pakistan has so far adopted only 16 targets and 41 indicators of the MDGs. Time series data is available for only 34 indicators and it reveals that Pakistan is on track to achieve the targets on 11 indicators, whereas its progress on 23 indicators is off track. The recently held National Parliamentary Conference on MDGs is a ray of hope that shows accelerated actions will be taken by legislators and constituents holder to help the government in this regard.

Development practitioners and stakeholders must reassess need to analyze that what went wrong in these entire 13 years that have contributed towards the country's inability to achieve its MDG targets and even produce the accurate data to track them. The whole development paradigm shift is required to have transformative thinking and a framework needs to be applied to achieve sustainable development. Out of the usual mental blocks, is the dire need of time to have critical approach towards sustainable development to avoid Pakistan from being in this situation, before the post-2015 goals reach their deadline by the year 2025.

Approach is required to see inter-relationships that underlie complex situations and interactions rather than looking at mere simplistic linear cause-effect chains. Therefore to unravel the often hidden subtleties, influences, leverage points and intended/unintended consequences of changed plans and programs and it leads to deeper, more complete awareness of the interconnections responsible for changing any system. But the question that remains is what we have learned from the MDGs to date? And also, how we can have mutual decision-making based on consensus on a top-to-bottom or via a bottom-up approach? Development sector needs to work more closely with private and corporate sector within the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility. Of course, the unforeseen disastrous events (including disasters, conflicts, and displacements) which occurred during this time have to be factored in as they have significantly contributed in the country's inability to meet its goals. However, to really make a difference in the lives of the poor people, the government needs to be prepared well in advance as only an effective planning to meet developmental goals can safeguard nations from future losses.

Additionally, aid dependence of the country also needs to be re-strategized in order to engage in more compact oriented actions which can show effective results. Inequality in accessing services and service

delivery needs to be examined through the lens of reducing social disparities, which can ultimately improve the access of the poor to treatment, care and support services.

It goes without saying that the MDGs triggered a global vision as have the SDGs, but what is required now is action at local, national and global levels on the deeply entwined health, education, economic, social and environmental challenges that confront the next generation. However, prosperity of any nation relies heavily on the health of its people. There is a need to make early investments in all those disease in which Pakistan is at least on track, specifically HIV and AIDS. The post-2015 agenda should include a commitment to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2025 (by using technological aspects and research) provisionally defined as reducing new HIV infections, discrimination and AIDS-related deaths to 10% of 2010 levels such that AIDS no longer represents a major threat to any population or country.

Human rights based approach should be integral to all health issues. Inclusive accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to enable broad participation and ownership in implementing and monitoring the post-2015 agenda. Ending AIDS will benefit from and serve as a catalyst for achieving a shared vision of social, economic and environmental justice. The AIDS epidemics interacts with poverty, conflicts, marginalization, exclusion, culture, law, gender dynamics, religion, unemployment, taboos and more has demanded that the response directly confront the political and social determinants of people's risk-taking behaviors and vulnerability to HIV. This whole approach needs to have multi-sectorial approach rather than just health only. Business as usual is no longer an option for sustainable development.

This bold new agenda of sustainable development goals features transformative objectives for the next 15 years: eradicating extreme poverty; ensuring environmental sustainability and conservation; advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls; and building peaceful, well-governed, and economically prosperous societies to ensure that no one is left behind. This agenda reflects the evolving understanding of how development works, beginning with local empowerment, ownership, and leadership, and made real through strong partnerships among governments, multinational institutions, nonprofit organizations, private companies, and individual citizens, which will instill accountability and drive inclusive economic growth. This is a vision of a better world that provides opportunities for the most vulnerable, and puts our planet on a sustainable path.