



Millennium Development Goals: A Distant Dream

Naseer Memon

(A selection of articles on Millennium Development Goals)

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Millennium Development Goals: A Distant Dream

By Naseer Memon

The Planning Commission of Pakistan recently released the fourth national report on progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). This document has been released after a long wait, with the last one appearing for 2006. While it is informative in terms of the dismal progress on almost all major MDG indicators, it conceals inter-provincial and intra-provincial disparities that were presented in the last report.

The period covered by the latest reports — 2006 to present — was marked by terrorist attacks, anti-terrorist operations and the displacement of several thousand people. Further, these years also saw a global recession, nose-diving foreign direct investment in the country (from \$5.13bn in 2006-07 to \$2.21bn in 2009-10), the GDP growth going into a tailspin (from seven per cent in 2006-07 to 2.1 per cent in 2008-09) and skyrocketing inflation (from 7.9 per cent in 2006-07 to 13.1 per cent in 2008-09). This was also a period of tumultuous political transition. Now, Pakistan is poised to miss almost all the MDG targets.

The primary MDG relates to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The consumer-based economic growth model of the Musharraf era was presented as the Pakistani economy's golden period. However, it is riddled with sharply rising economic inequalities. A higher GDP growth rate during the Musharraf era created a smokescreen of wellbeing. However, there is strong evidence that economic disparities actually increased.

The Musharraf government conjured up figures to claim that poverty had declined from 34.5 per cent in 2001-02 to 22.3 per cent in 2005-06, with a too-good-to-be-true 12.3 per cent decline in just five years. These figures were disputed by the then chief economist. And even if this miracle is postulated, the recession in the subsequent years and the recent floods have pushed more people below the poverty line. Halving poverty from 26 per cent in 1990 to 13 per cent by 2015 appears next to impossible.

The second MDG was to achieve universal primary education. Pakistan has the lowest adult literacy rate in the region and is second only to Nigeria in out-of-school children. The current net enrolment rate is less than 60 per cent, which implies that the target of 100 per cent enrolment requires an increase of more than 40 per cent points by 2015. Given that during the past 10 years Pakistan barely achieved 16 per cent points, it is unrealistic to hope for target achievement. Furthermore, nearly half the enrolled students do not complete their education, and achieving a survival rate of 88 per cent in the years remaining is practically impossible.

Pakistan was supposed to establish gender parity at the primary and secondary education levels by 2005. This target has already been missed. True, there has been a steady improvement; for example the proportion of 15-24 year old literate females as compared to boys has increased from 0.51 in 1990-91 to 0.78 in 2008-09. Yet achieving parity needs further serious effort. Women's representation in legislative forums has increased tremendously, but the journey from representation to real empowerment will have to traverse much rocky terrain.

The mortality rate of children under five has declined from 117 per 1,000 live births in 1990-91 to 94 per 1,000 in 2006-07, against an MDG target of 52 by 2015. The infant mortality

rate declined from 102 to 75 per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2007, against the MDG target of 65. However, the proportion of fully immunised children of 12 to 23 months in age indicates a stagnant trend. It increased marginally from 75 per cent in 1990-91 to 78 per cent in 2008-09, against the target of over 90 per cent by 2015.

The number of mothers dying due to pregnancy and delivery-related complications per 100,000 live births has declined significantly from 533 in 1990-91 to 276 in 2006-07, but the rate is still much higher than the target of 140 by 2015. Similarly, the proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants increased from 18 per cent in 1990-91 to 41 per cent in 2008-09. Yet it remains much lower than the targeted 90 per cent by 2015. Pakistan's current total fertility rate is still 3.75, and needs to be lowered to 2.1 by 2015.

Meanwhile, several reports by independent sources suggest that Pakistan does not put in the desired efforts towards environmental sustainability. The forest cover increased marginally from 4.8 per cent of the land mass in 1990-91 to 5.02 per cent in 2008-09. The MDG target is six per cent. Conservation organisations consider even these figures to be exaggerated.

While Pakistan has surpassed the target of CNG-run vehicles from a targeted 920,000 to 2,220,000; but the population with sustainable access to safe drinking water is at 65 per cent against the targeted 93 per cent, and the quality of this drinking water is questionable. Similarly, access to sanitation is available to only 63 per cent, against the MDG target of 90 per cent.

Pakistan is a long way off from achieving the Millennium Development Goals. More than monetary resources, what is required is the political will to prioritise human development in the country. Regretfully, as matters stand, Pakistan remains the embodiment of a security state where human development barely attracts attention from decision makers. An analysis of the national budgets reveals how the wellbeing of the citizens has been ignored. Pakistan's first national budget of 1948 allocated more than 70 per cent of the total resources to defence. This skewed perspective has never been reversed. Even in today's world of knowledge-based societies, our allocation for education and health is, shamefully, the lowest in the region.

Courtesy: Daily Dawn

Development Disparities and MDG Targets

By Naseer Memon

The second millennium has ended leaving several questions unanswered regarding human development needs. Wars, poverty, diseases, deaths, environmental disasters are only a few of the long list of challenges gifted to the world by the outgoing millennium. With unprecedented developments in the field of science and technology hundreds of problems were addressed, but many more were created. The huge gap between the privileged and marginalized societies raised serious questions about the development paradigm in vogue. It was acutely realized that the situation calls for a more strategic approach and commitment to reduce this gap through well defined and measurable targets in the key areas of human development.

This realization prompted an important initiative, and the United Nations in a session held from 6 to 8 Sept. 2000 at the New York headquarters, adopted a strong declaration on human development. Heads of states and governments adopted it with the promise to address development needs in their respective countries. The declaration is now known as the Millennium Development Goals, and has become an important yardstick for measuring sustainable development. The goals focused on the areas of poverty reduction, universal primary education, gender equality, infant and mother mortality, environmental sustainability, and building partnerships for human development.

Pakistan also made a commitment to make efforts for achieving the specified development goals in the country. Since the last three years, the Government of Pakistan issues an annual update on the progress made against the promised development indicators. The report for 2006 was produced in the current year. It provides information on the state of human development indicators up to the year 2005. The elaborate document also provides revealing information on development gaps between different parts of the country. A total of 98 districts have been ranked against various development indicators.

The report confirms the fact that a politically skewed development paradigm has left the underprivileged areas less developed as compared to the privileged areas. Development disparities among the provinces can easily be judged from the district-wise ranking given in the document. Sindh and Balochistan provinces indicate a relatively poor state of human development; whereas Punjab has emerged as the leading province in almost all areas. An analysis of district-wise ranking of various MDG indicators would be helpful in understanding this complex challenge to fairness in development.

Net Primary Enrolment Ratio: According to the Report, the Net Primary Enrolment Ratio has increased from 33 percent in 1998 to 48 percent in 2005. Likewise, the Literacy Rate has increased from 45 percent in 2001 to 53 percent in 2005. This shows significant improvement on this important front. However, the provincial distribution unmasks grim disparities. The top 10 districts include 9 from Punjab and the remaining 1 from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), previously known as NWFP or North West Frontier Province. These districts are: Sialkot, Narowal, Jehlum, Chakwal, Gujrat, Rawalpindi, Abbotabad, Attock, Lahore and Gujranwala. The first district from Sindh is Karachi, which stands at number eleven. The first district from rural Sindh is Sukkur, which is in 30th position. The first district from Balochistan is Kech, at 18th position. Among the bottom ten districts, 7 belong to Balochistan and 3 to KP.

Literacy Rate: The top 10 districts under this indicator also show a similar trend. Seven districts belong to Punjab, and the remaining provinces share 1 district each. These districts include: Karachi, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Chakwal, Gujranwala, Jehlum, Gujrat, Quetta, Abbotabad and Sialkot. The first district from Rural Sindh is Sukkur, which stands at number 11, and the first district from Balochistan is Pishin at number 16. The bottom 10 districts include 8 from Balochistan and 2 from KP.

Gender Equality: Gender disparities are visibly prevalent throughout the country. These can be measured through several indicators, but this report has focused on Net Primary Enrolment. In terms of greater gender equality the top 10 districts include 8 from Punjab and 2 from NWFP. The districts are: Toba Tek Singh, Narowal, Lahore, Gujranwala, Jehlum, Sialkot, Abbotabad, Mansehra, Sargodha and Mandi Bahauddin. The first district from Sindh is Karachi, which stood at 13th position, while the first district from rural Sindh is Sukkur at 31st position. The first district from Balochistan is Sibi, which is 27th on the list. The bottom 10 districts include 6 from Balochistan, 3 from KP and 1 from Sindh.

Youth Literacy: Ranking of 98 districts shows no less than 9 districts from Punjab among the top 10 districts, while the remaining 1 is from Sindh. Sialkot, Lahore, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Karachi, Jehlum, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh and Chakwal are among the top performing districts. The first district from rural Sindh is Sukkur, which is ranked at 18th, and that from Balochistan is Quetta ranked at 29th. Balochistan and KP share 7 and 3 districts respectively in the bottom 10 districts.

Immunization to Reduce Child Mortality: Pakistan is among the poorest performers on this important indicator. The trend of local disparities is not too different in this regard too. Eight out of the 10 top ranked districts are in Punjab, while Balochistan and KP share 1 each. These top 10 districts include: Chitral, Jehlum, Sialkot, Gwadar, Khushab, Attock, Chakwal, Gujrat, Mianwali and Bahawalnagar. The first district from Sindh, i.e. Hyderabad, is ranked at number 23. Zhob, the first district from Balochistan, is 21st on the list. The bottom 10 districts include 7 from Balochistan, 2 from Sindh and 1 from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Access to Clean Drinking Water: This is generally believed to be a fundamental human right for all citizens, but is unfortunately a rare commodity in the remote rural areas as well as in some mainstream urban areas. According to the ranking of 98 districts, out of the top 10 districts 8 are in Punjab, and 2 are in Sindh. These districts are; Shaikhupura, Narowal, Layyah, Gujranwala, Bakhhar, Lahore, Kasur, Shikarpur, Ghotki and Sialkot. The first district from Balochistan is Quetta, which is ranked poorly at 47th. Among the bottom 10 districts 6 are in Balochistan, 3 in KP and only 1 in Sindh.

Sanitation: The trend is somewhat different for this indicator. Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan share 3 districts each among the top 10 districts, with only 1 district being in Punjab. The top 10 districts are placed in sequence: Quetta, Charsadda, Kohat, Nosheero Feroz, Mardan, Pishin, Larkana, Nawabshah, Chaghi and Lahore. Among the bottom 10 districts Balochistan has 6, Sindh and Punjab 1 each, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa 2.

Conclusions: A closure scrutiny of the aforementioned data indicates that Balochistan and Sindh received less attention in the key areas of human development. Even within Punjab, which ranks highest for all indicators except Sanitation, almost all the districts belong to Central Punjab, indicating the poorer state of human development in South Punjab.

The following table of 10 top districts clearly shows the disproportional trends of human development between the provinces.

Development Indicator	Share among the top Ten Districts			
	Punjab	KPK/NWFP	Sindh	Balochistan
Net Primary Enrolment	9	1	0	0
Literacy Rate	7	1	1	1
Gender Equality	8	2	0	0
Youth Literacy	9	0	1	0
Reducing Child Mortality Rate	8	1	0	1
Access to clean drinking water	8	0	2	0
Sanitation	1	3	3	3
Total	50	8	7	5
Percent share	71%	11%	10%	7%

Similarly, if the bottom 10 districts are analyzed the trend gets reversed. Balochistan has the highest number, i.e. 47 out of 70 least developed districts, whereas only 1 of these is in Punjab.

This trend shows that equal opportunities for development are not being provided to all citizens, and the politically marginalized provinces of Sindh and Balochistan (especially their rural areas) are receiving less than the required share in development. Ironically, these are the richest districts in terms of natural resources that are fueling the economic engine of the country.

It would be pertinent to highlight here that the Declaration of the United Nations on the Millennium Development Goals stresses equal development opportunities in clause six as part of fundamental values. It says: “No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development”.

Interestingly, the preface to the Pakistan MDG Report 2006 claims that “Pakistan is well set on the track to achieve MDGs by 2015”. However, an analysis of the achievements shows that the development trend is skewed and resources are unevenly distributed. In the presence of such wide gaps in development between the provinces, and between rural and urban areas, the dream of achieving MDG targets will remain unfulfilled unless equal development opportunities are provided to all citizens of the country.

These facts however do not negate the efforts being taken for human development in the country. It however requires a more balanced pro-neglected populations approach that can create development-equilibrium among all parts of the country.

It would be pertinent to recommend that the government should also set province-wise and, if possible, district-wise MDG targets, and MDG indicators should serve as an important basis for resource allocation to provinces, which currently are allocated unfairly on the basis of population only. If government is serious in providing equal development opportunities to all citizens, it should create a special MDG fund for the provinces/districts to improve their human development indicators. If a balanced approach towards development opportunities is not adopted, the prevailing socio-political tensions in the under developed areas will be further aggravated. In such a situation even if the country achieves the overall goals identified by the MDGs, internal disparities will serve to negate and blunt the satisfaction of the achievement.

Courtesy: Daily Dawn

Human Development: A Forsaken Priority

By Naseer Memon

Human Development Report-2010 of UNDP indicates an encouraging improvement in ranking of Pakistan from 141 in 2009 to 125 in 2010. Hence the country has moved from the club of “Low Human Development” to “Medium Human Development” countries. However there is little to cherish mainly for two reasons. In the list of 169 countries ranked on Human Development Index (HDI), 125th position is still closer to the bottom of pyramid and our neighboring SAARC countries Sri Lanka (91st), India (119th), and Maldives (107th) still managed to perform better than Pakistan. The country is marked poor on other important human development indices too. For example American CIA’s World Fact Book places Pakistan on 46th number among 174 countries ranked on military expenditure but it ranks Pakistan 153rd among 186 countries measured against expenditure on education. Similarly Pakistan is ranked at 166 among 224 locations when the Fact Book measures life expectancy. World Health Organization marked Pakistan at 171 among 185 countries ranked on health expenditure and placed the country at 122 while measuring health system efficiency of 191 countries.

HDI is not just a measure of vital development signs but it also fathoms political will for human development on the part of fate-managers of any country. With the end of the lunacy of cold war that eclipsed human development for several decades, world community revisited the paradigm of human security. The sanity suggested that the world can only be made a secure place to live by veering resources and focus on human development. Millennium Declaration of United Nations became a watershed event in our history that first time brought human development on top of the agenda of global politics and markets. During past two decades several indices of human development were introduced to fathom political commitment of states towards real development of their citizens. A vibrant civil society both in developed and developing countries is now equipped with this popular agenda and the governments are subjected to this new atmospheric pressure.

Pakistan has a checkered history of moving from a development state in its formative years to a security state in latter half of its current age. Unfortunately it failed to maintain its development gains of earlier years-mired with yawning social inequities though-after the Zia regime that skirted human development goals with callous perfection. Although security needs always outshined the development allocations in our history, yet there were brief intervals of investment in human development particularly in 70s. Pakistan’s annual budget ritual is marked by three Ds i.e. Defence, Debt Servicing and Development (PSDP). The former two are considered sacrosanct and the latter one is frequently scuttled to feed the other two.

‘Truncated or mutilated and moth-eaten’ as Jinnah-apprehensive of partition of Bengal and Punjab- termed Pakistan on 13th April 1947, inherited baggage of conflicts and security appetite. The ruling military and civil oligarchy fully exploited this heaven-sent opportunity and the spook of the border enemy justified everything in the garb of securing illusive ideological and porous physical borders of the country. The sacred journey started with the very first national budget presented on 28th February 1948 that allocated more than 70% of total revenues of central government for defence. The trend dominated the subsequent years and the country spent 71 and 73 percent of the total government expenditure in 1948-49 and

1949-50 respectively. The paradox of human development and security needs can be judged from a telegram of British Embassy in Washington addressed to the Foreign Office on 28th July 1952. In an astounding disclosure it revealed that while the country was reeling under grain scarcity, our representatives were purchasing arms in USA. In one hand Pakistani representative had an appeal for a grant of one million ton wheat and in the other hand they carried a shopping list of military equipment of worth 45 million dollars. This trend prevailed and was interrupted by ZA Bhutto when development allocation took strides from 1973-74 till early years of Zia regime. In his last year 1977-78, Bhutto allocated 43.5% of the budget to development comparing with 22% to defence. Zia gradually reversed the allocations and after 1982 the snowballing defence allocation closely chased the development allocation. In the fag-end of his rule, defence dwarfed the development allocation in 1986-87 and 1987-88, first time after 1958-59. In spite of bruised economy due to 1971 war and oil shocks, Bhutto diverted significant resources towards development. However all these short-living gains were tormented by despotic Zia martial law and the country was degenerated from a potentially progressive development state to a retrogressive security state.

Foreign and Domestic debt had been another resource guzzler. By June 2010 the country was compressed by a huge foreign debt of 55.6 billion US\$ and a domestic debt of almost equivalent size of Rs. 4.3 trillion. Public debt repayment had been second largest resource drain after defence since very first year of the country. Debt repayment kept rivaling defence budget since then but with the culmination of Afghan war and demise of bi-polar world in early 90s when Pakistan lost its strategic enticement and became a redundant entity for internal powers, the debt repayment obscured the defence budget.

How much priority is assigned to defence and debt servicing compared to development could be judged from some recent developments. The Federal Minister for Finance informed the National Assembly on 1st October 2010 that in the current financial year Pakistan will pay a whopping sum of Rs 902.8 billion to service both domestic and external loans. The amount makes staggering 50% of the targeted revenue collection and 32.6% of the total outlay of the year. This can be compared with the size of annual public sector development allocation of Rs. 663 billion, later curtailed by 73 billion to 590 billion as reported by Dawn on 23rd September 2010. According to the same news report the initial allocation for Defence budget Rs. 442.2 has inflated by Rs. 110 billion to Rs. 552 billion. This does not include Rs. 72 billion for paying pension to former personnel of the armed forces as stated by the Federal Finance Secretary Salman Siddique before Public Accounts Committee (Dawn-22nd September 2010). The climax of the episode is that in the very same days teachers of universities closed all varsities across country because government expressed its inability to provide only Rs. 10 billion to meet expenses on 50% salary increase by the government itself and development needs including scholarships for those who are already studying abroad on scholarships (Dawn-23rd September 2010). These news reports adequately reflect on our misplaced priorities and labyrinth of political decision making.

Pakistan at this critical juncture needs to redefine its priorities and embrace the emerging paradigm of security where citizens are placed at the centre and not at periphery while taking decisions and making policies.