

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

Debosweta Banik (3rd Year)

The Millennium Development Goals are drawn from the Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 nations at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. For the sake of convenience, these 8 goals have been broken down into 21 targets, which need to be fulfilled by the year 2015. Perhaps this is the best way to bring about development in today's world, where everything is based on data and figures, where even happiness is can be measured in quantifiable terms.

I give top priority to the youth of our country, as I believe that we are the ones who can ultimately bring about much needed changes in society, economy and politics and all spheres of public life. Of course this is not to say that the older generation has lost its significance and is dispensable. The requirement is for the youth to act on the wisdom of our predecessors and strive for a just and fair society. The fulfillment of the MDGs depends on the dynamic, sensitive and innovative group of young people, who are willing to look beyond personal self interest and shoulder the responsibility of bringing their country at par with the world standards.

I have been reading the Mahabharata lately and find myself deeply influenced by it. All of us would agree that the problems faced by our society are the problems of us human beings. I have come to realize, that most of these problems arise out of moral failures in our part. An epic, like the Mahabharata, which is inherently obsessed with morality or *dharma*, makes me ponder over our actions in everyday life.

The first MDG (*see index at the end*) is to “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”. To overcome this particular problem, it is important that we understand why it exists in the first place. The bureaucracy, which is the main executive body of our country, needs lessons in morality. Our politicians, those directly and indirectly elected representatives of our people, need some social and moral accountability, and all of us, as the citizens of our magnificent motherland, need to reawaken our innate sense of duty and humanity. The Government has many schemes running at present, to combat various evils existing on our road to development. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) and Targeted Public Distribution Systems (TPDS) are all in place, *officially*. These are our government's answer to extreme poverty and hunger. But, they are not reaping the benefits they were expected to. Why? Because, a policy change does not signify a change in people's mindsets. So, civil servants continue to fill their coffers with the public money, politicians continue to act like goons and the judiciary continues to turn a blind eye to people's sufferings. All our institutions are run by morally blinded, Duryodhana-like individuals, who believe that anything goes in this world, in order to meet one's personal selfish wants.

“Universal Primary Education”, the second Goal is to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course on primary schooling. This Goal is inseparably connected to Goal

number 3, so I shall discuss them together. Goal number 2 talks of securing primary education to all boys and girls. So, the fulfillment of this goal leads to the fulfillment of the third Goal of “promoting gender equality and empowering women”. If little girls receive good education, they grow up to become responsible and educated women, who are aware of their rights and are not afraid to voice their opinions. With the empowerment of women comes the “improvement of maternal health” which is the fifth MDG.

The Parliament has recently passed the ‘Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2009’. This seems to be an important achievement towards the fulfillment of the second MDG. Poor folks do not send their kids to school for various reasons. They might not have enough money to do so, or they might consider their many children as extra hands of earning money. In this scenario, we have no option but to go back to our first Goal about removal of poverty and hunger. If poverty is diminished to a considerable extent, all other Goals fall into place automatically. It would be appropriate to draw comparisons here with the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ given by the psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1987), which says that a person’s Physiological Needs like hunger, thirst etc. are primary for the fulfillment of all other needs like Safety Needs, Cognitive Needs etc. Thus, each successive Goal carries an answer to the fulfillment of the next Goal.

The proper implementation of the Healthcare measures introduced by the Health Ministry holds the key to the achievement of the fourth, fifth and sixth Goals. As women become educated, assertive and financially independent, they become actively involved in the family planning process. “Child mortality” goes down when there is proper family welfare programs in place and contentious individuals take it upon themselves to bring about a revolution in the healthcare process. Child mortality specially can only be considerably reduced if the issue of maternal health is resolved satisfactorily. In the fulfillment of the sixth MDG, “combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”, the involvement of various social groups and NGOs would ensure speedy progress. These institutions do exist even today, and some of them are doing exemplary work in these fields, but there is huge scope for more services that can be provided by the youth, who are willing to explore the limits of altruism in their nature.

The seventh and the penultimate Goal of “ensuring environmental sustainability” is quite a tricky one to resolve. For me, the solution does not lie in negotiations with the US on the amount of carbon emissions that India is permitted. Of course, we should all strive to cut down on the amount of pollution on our personal levels. But that is easier said than done. Economic growth and environmental sustainability seem to be at loggerheads with each other. Global warming results in the ever rising Delhi temperatures, making us switch on our air conditioners to have some respite from the heat. These ACs in turn excrete harmful greenhouse gasses and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) which lead to global warming and ozone layer depletion. What is most needed, right now, is investment in Research & Development to find out alternative means of energy production and consumption. Also, a moral stand needs to be taken by all of us, to try and conserve what is ours, our mother Earth.

The final and eighth Goal to me seems to be easiest one so far. If a country’s

domestic scenario is peaceful and content, it does not take much to establish one's worth at a global platform. Already, due to globalization, there is sufficient awareness amongst all about the conditions of human life in all parts of the globe. More than on a diplomatic level, between the governments of all countries, such "global partnerships" need to be forged between citizens of the world on a more personal level. This involves something more than sympathy; it is empathy-identifying with other's sorrows and joys.

I am going to conclude with this last Millennium Development Goal, by saying that all of us need to think a little more about others; in fact we need to think of everyone a little less as 'others'. All creatures are God's creation and have one soul. Lord Indra, the king of all Gods in heaven, according to Hindu mythology, told Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava in Mahabharata, "O great king, you weep with all creatures". I believe, all of us need to try and adopt a little of what Yudhishtira practiced. We need to feel the sufferings and joys of every creature on the planet, only then can an individual work for the eradication of grief and propagation of happiness and peace.

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