

**High-level dialogue on
Linking Istanbul Plan of Action with Post-2015
Development Framework**

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**Southern Voice Initiative on Post-MDG Development Framework
*Perspectives from the LDCs***

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I: The Importance of SAWTEE's Initiative

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent one of the UN ideas that have **changed the world**. By setting measurable goal posts in a number of key areas of concern to developing countries (8 Goals, 21 Targets and 60 Indicators) and by challenging the global community of nations to undertake concrete actions to achieve these targets, the **MDGs have refocused our attention** to addressing some of the major concerns facing the developing world, through global partnerships, including poverty and hunger, and health and education.
- We have by now a fairly good idea about what have worked, and what haven't in the context of MDG 1.0.
- This experience, along with our understanding about the emerging needs and developmental demands once again challenges the global community as the deadline of 2015 approaches and we get on with the task of designing MDG 2.0.
- Hence, SAWTEE's initiative to organise this important High Level Dialogue is extremely timely and a highly worthwhile exercise.
- The overriding need for giving close attention to the concerns and issues of vulnerable countries, particularly the LDCs in the design of MDG 2.0 makes this initiative of SAWTEE specially important and pertinent.
- We have the IPoA in the background, MC-9 in near-term future and on ongoing discourse on MDG 2.0. SAWTEE must be congratulated in choosing this appropriate moment for this dialogue.

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The Rationale

- Looking back, we feel that LDCs and low-income countries were not adequately consulted in designing the MDGs.
- In low income countries, improvements in the context of MDG 1.0 have taken place in an incremental manner, without the needed **structural transformation of the economies**. MDG 2.0 have to keep this in the perspective.
- Inequitable distribution of assets; unequal participation in markets; unjust access to education and healthcare; undemocratic process of governance. Southern Voice must raise concern as regards these, and search for solutions within the framework of MDG 2.0.
- In view of the accelerating pace of changes, **the world of 2015 and beyond will be significantly different from what the world** appeared to be in 2000 when MDG 1.0 was set. Demographic dynamics and rising expectation of the young people, addressing the digital divide, tackling adverse impact of climate change, urbanisation, the emerging knowledge economy, the fast pace of globalisation, increasing role of the services sector in our economies – all these will define the post-2015 world. MDG 2.0 must be informed by these changing dynamics.

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- All these new features and dynamics call for the **voice of the least developed countries** and that of the South to be raised and heard **in the discourse on post-MDGs, something that was lacking in the discourse on MDG 1.0.**
- From the above perspectives, the **“Southern Voice”** is a unique initiative supported by 48 think tanks from Global South (including ISET-N from Nepal). The initiative is hosted by the CPD, under the able leadership of Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD who served as Bangladesh’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative in Geneva, and was UNCTAD Secretary General’s Special Advisor on the LDCs.
- The initiative aims to **contribute to the ongoing discourse and shape the debate** on the design of the post-MDGs, through evidence-based research and analyses carried out by some of the leading think tanks of global South.
- In partnership with other initiatives, and we are very happy to collaborate with SAWTEE in this, Southern Voice’s ambition is **to contribute to the design of framework, goals and targets** of MDG 2.0 which meet the aspirations of vulnerable and low income countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh.

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3.1 Framework Issues

- **The unfinished agendas of MDG 1.0 ought not to be forgotten** – their attainment should set the benchmark for MDG 2.0.
- One of the major attractiveness and as well as strengths of MDGs has been its ability to communicate to broader audience the complex issues of development through **a simple framework with a set of limited goals.** Abstract ideas were translated into easily understandable goals, and these goals were then flashed out through quantifiable and measurable (in most cases) targets and indicators. The MDG 2.0 should retain these features, **without overloading it.** A set of contingent indicators may be considered to accommodate concerns not explicitly addressed within the core agenda.
- By any count, **every additional percentage of reduction envisaged in MDG 2.0 will be more challenging to realise** compared to MDG 1.0. This is because in terms of poverty reduction it will be now reducing the population in the ‘hard-core group’; in giving access to health sanitation, it will be the population that live in more remote and isolated places. MDG 2.0 framework ought to take this into account in designing the appropriate programmes.
- Post-2015 development agenda needs to retain **the focus on accelerated poverty eradication,** must strengthen the focus by drawing on recent research by emphasizing the issue of distribute justice in developing and low income countries by way of (a) ending poverty, (b) promoting greater equity and (iii) empowering and encouraging participation of resource-poor.
- Post-2015 agenda must contribute towards promoting **a more just world order.** The new framework should contain effective mechanisms to enhance voices of the South and marginalised population. Accountability mechanism of the new framework will be strengthened if Southern Voices are given prominence and South-South partnerships are promoted.

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- Yet another framework issue should be promoting inclusive and sustainable growth in the South though **structural transformation of Southern economies** that lead to convergence in development by reducing inter-country disparity.
- Southern Voice takes note of the recent moves to articulate a set of Universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the relevance of incorporating an environmental agenda into the future framework is recognized, an attempt to universalise the international development goals should not obscure the **particular development challenges of low-income countries**. This specifically relates to the need to address the unfinished agenda of the MDGs and highlights the importance of the principle of differentiated responsibility in pursuing common goals.
- Relevant and real time data are key to monitoring the outcomes of MDGs. Southern think tanks must play a major role in generating the needed data, and interpreting these in a manner that helps monitor the targets of MDG 2.0.
- This time around a resource framework must be integrated into the post-MDGs agenda. This needs to be reemphasised in the backdrop of the economic and financial crises of the recent past and their implications for resource flows. The resource framework could include domestic and external, concessional as well as non-concessional flows, but ought to be clearly spelt out.
- Post-MDG framework should **take cognisance of the IPoA**. *LDC-IV Monitor*, another initiative of the CPD, and the *Southern Voice Initiative* will work in tandem in view of contributing to MDG 2.0 discourse.

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3.2 Reflections on the Unfinished Agenda

- Both in terms of global and national targets, MDGs can claim justified credit. However, the magnitude of such accomplishments varies significantly across indicators, countries and regions, and population groups. Moreover, country studies have established that progress towards the MDGs has slowed since 2007 in the wake of the **multiple global crises**. Thus, the post-MDG international development goals **will inherit a large set of unfinished business**.
- While the eradication of extreme poverty is considered to be a prime area of success for the MDGs, a closer look at the data reveals a significant lack of progress in achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all; this is particularly true for women and young people. Indeed, the reduction of the proportion of the population living below \$1 (PPP) a day has not been accompanied by a commensurate reduction in the share of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. **Malnourishment of children under five years of age remains pervasive**.
- Regarding the achievement of **universal primary education**, despite achieving a high net enrolment rate, a high incidence of drop-outs has affected the completion rate. Moreover, because students in primary schools often receive low quality education, particularly in rural areas, the competency level of students is very low.

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- Lack of progress in **closing the gender gap** remains the most visible in tertiary education dropout of girl students remains endemic. In the area of employment, while one observes some increase in women's participation in the labour force, jobs going to women are usually the least remunerative ones. It is also observed that violence against women is a major impediment to achieving gender parity.
- Targets set for the **reduction of infant mortality** as well as under-five mortality have tended to be off the mark. Progress is particularly unimpressive in the area of reducing neonatal deaths. In the case of **reducing maternal mortality**, there has been some improvement, although it is modest. Adolescent childbearing remains an area of concern. The critical area of deficiency in this regard had been a serious lack of availability of skilled health personnel attending births. The attainment of targets relating to reproductive health has also been rather weak.
- With regards to **combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases** such as tuberculosis, there has been some improvement. However, progress has not been even across countries and regions. The target of universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it by 2010 was not reached.

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- The goals and targets related to **ensuring environmental sustainability** are one of the areas of highest underachievement. Critical performance indicators such as the proportion of land area covered by forest, keeping fish stocks within safe biological limits, and limiting the share of total water resources used did not see sufficient progress. The proportion of the urban population living in slums has seen notable growth over the last decade. Some advancement may be noted in the case of access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. However, a large part of whatever progress has been achieved towards the environmental sustainability indicators remains under threat due to the adverse consequences of climate change brought about by carbon emissions in developed countries.
- As is widely maintained, **Goal 8 concerning the strengthening of a global partnership** for development remains the weakest link in the implementation of the MDGs. For example, the development of an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading system remains stalled by the deadlock in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Doha Round negotiations and undermined by the proliferation of regional trading arrangements. Full implementation of the **Duty-Free Quota-Free** regime for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is yet to occur. Flows of official development assistance (ODA) **remain underachieved**, barring some exceptions, and they are set to decline further in the coming years. The distribution of ODA has also been skewed, and concerns have been raised over policies of aid for trade in support of the LDCs.
- Accelerated and targeted efforts need to be set in motion for the remaining period of the MDGs so that countries in the Global South can embark upon the post-2015 phase with improved benchmarks. National governments have to play a lead role in this regard, reinforced by meaningful support from international development partners.

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3.3 Identification of Issues for the Future

- The think tanks that make up Southern Voice are uniquely positioned to draw useful lessons and meaningful insights about what works and what does not work in the context of delivering on the MDGs. Building on their assessments of the progress toward the MDGs and their identification of emerging issues affecting national development efforts, the think tanks have identified a number of elements for consideration during the design phase of the post-MDG goals and targets.
- While continuing with a strengthened poverty elimination focus, the post-MDG development goals must revise upward the poverty threshold. Extreme poverty has to be redefined in terms of income **equivalent to less than \$2 (PPP) per day**.
- An integral part of the poverty focus of the post-MDG framework must be on the reduction of **vulnerability of the poor**. It is critical to address the needs of the groups that are systematically excluded from the development processes, **including minorities, women, and youth**. Targets related to the reduction of **growing inequalities** – particularly in the area of income and consumption – must be incorporated.

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- The reduction of **hunger and malnutrition should be separated out from the poverty goal**. The critical issue in the area of education for the post-MDG goals is improving the quality of education. Indicators concerning **completion rates and gender parity** must be strengthened, and targets have to be set for universal secondary education. While revisiting the targets regarding the attainment of gender parity, inclusion of the reduction of **gender violence** has to be considered.
- The need to improve the **quality of healthcare services** should also be given a prominent place in the post-MDG goals and targets. Emphasis on reproductive health needs to be strengthened.
- Along with an explicit reference to the attainment of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the generation of **more gainful employment opportunities** should receive separate mention. This is more so because of the demographic transition and **'demographic dividend'** The creation of productive capacity should be delineated as a stand-alone target with a view to accelerate the structural transformation of developing economies.
- Given the increase in the number of **fragile states and states in conflict**, the next set of international development goals should make a special mention of these countries.
- Issues concerning the **labour markets, including migration and migrants' rights**, should be considered in the next phase of MDGs.

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- Indicators related to **building capacity in science, technology, and innovation** should be reflected in the post-2015 agenda.
- Addressing the development challenges emanating from **climate change** should find a prominent place in the next set of international development goals. Targets relating to environmental sustainability should include a number of measureable indicators related to **GHS emission, renewable and low carbon energy sources**, the reduction of chemicals and hazardous waste, and **improved air quality**.
- Concerns about **participation and representation** as well as **transparency and accountability** should be embedded in the post-2015 development agenda. This is pertinent to both **domestic and international domains of governance**.
- At the end of the day, **not all new issues can be accommodated, and a prioritisation has to be made**. In this process the voice of the South and the initiatives such as the Southern Voice ought to be given a space and need to be listened to.

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3.4 Partnership and Resource Mobilisation

- The post-2015 international development agenda will be framed within a global partnership agreement. Thus, there is a need to **delineate the boundaries of national and international actions** in the context of implementing the new goals and targets. This aspect becomes particularly pertinent in the context of the very weak delivery on Goal 8 of the MDGs.
- The post-MDG consultation is just one process currently in motion within the UN system in the broad field of international development; others include **financing for development, aid effectiveness, and climate change**. The **Istanbul Programme of Action** for the LDCs is also on the table, as are WTO trade talks and discussions on global financial architecture. The post-2015 international development agenda needs to create a basis for a **development-oriented synergy between** all of these processes that could be leveraged by developing countries.
- One can foresee a future challenge regarding integration of the concepts and processes concerning the post-2015 MDGs and SDGs. It remains to be seen how the global community will agree on a set of SDGs, in view of the absence of any demonstrated progress at the Rio+20 Conference. **As the SDG formulation process undergoes a reality check, an agreement on post- 2015 MDGs may be considered as an autonomous option**.

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- The implementation process for the post-2015 development agenda must receive **adequate support based on credible estimates of resource requirements**. With this in mind, a target relating to **domestic resource mobilisation** in developing countries through the expansion of the tax base should be incorporated in the post-2015 goals. The reduction of **illicit financial flows** from developing countries must equally be considered. The existence of such targets would contribute towards enhancing ownership by developing countries of the new set of international development goals.
- Compliance with the commitment of **allocating 0.7 per cent of the GNI of Development Assistance Committee countries to ODA** must be strongly emphasised in the new agenda (the current level is **0.32 per cent**). Currently, **only five donors** are on track to reach that level and only three bilateral donors have enhanced this aid flow in the face of the global economic and financial crisis. Concurrently, measures have to be incorporated to reduce the gap between aid commitment and disbursement, to improve the skewed distribution of aid flow among countries, and to enhance the quality of sectoral aid allocation. **Financing related to climate change** must be considered as an **additional allocation**. **Debt conversion and debt swaps** should not be counted as **additional flows**. Finally, the quality of aid must improve.

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- While some progress may be noted under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (**HIPC**) initiative and the **Multilateral Debt Reduction Initiative**, debt overhang continues to remain a development challenge for many low income economies in the South. Many HIPC beneficiaries **have fallen back into debt-trap**. A large number of LDCs countries often spend more on debt servicing than on the development of their health or education services. Thus, the new document should contain credible measures to reduce the foreign debt of these countries to a sustainable level.
- Because of the paralysis of the WTO Doha Round, not many **market access-related** benefits have accrued to the low income countries of the Global South in the recent past. For example the average tariffs on textiles and clothing have not declined and the level of **trade distorting subsidies** for agricultural products in OECD countries has not been reduced by any notable extent. These have affected the export performance of developing countries, including the LDCs. **Accordingly, the post-2015 agenda should contain deliverable commitments in the area of trade**.
- New interventions have to be devised to tap innovative sources of financial resources for the implementation of post-2015 development goals. These may include **carbon taxes, taxes on financial transactions**, the creation of **vertical funds, global philanthropy, and Corporate Social Responsibility expenditures**.

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- One of the important elements of the future international partnership framework has to be **South-South cooperation**. This arrangement may include concessional financial assistance, preferential market access, investment promotion, transfer of technology, and other capacity building measures. **The emerging economies of the South** should participate actively in the concessional fund replenishment exercises of the international and regional financial institutions. A large number of think tanks in the Global South are already engaged in designing a framework for the evolving South-South relationship.

IV: Concluding Remarks

- Important synergies can be drawn if initiatives of the Southern Voice type are given voice in post-2015 discourse. Indeed, more meaningful participation of the Southern think tanks in the consultation process, through constructive criticism and structured critique, may contribute **towards reframing the current debates on the post-MDG development goals**.
- The consultative process should include a space for identifying and customizing goals and indicators relating to national priorities. The challenge of **implementing global goals while being mindful of national priorities** can be adequately addressed by the Southern Voice think tanks because of their professional exposure to both national and international contexts.
- **Networking and partnerships** are critical in the run-up to 2015 and beyond, so that citizen and community voices can be optimally and effectively leveraged. **Synergies among stakeholders** will be necessary to provide an institutional foundation for defining, designing, and delivering on the post-MDG goals and targets.

IV: Concluding Remarks

- **Inclusiveness of the national consultation process** is of paramount importance for reflecting the aspirations of marginalised stakeholders. Southern Voice and other non-state actors may strive to fill in any participation deficits with outreach activities to these stakeholders. At the same time, given the capacity deficit afflicting many state agencies, **national governments may fruitfully collaborate with their local think tanks** in preparing their country reports on the post-2015 international development agenda. Indeed, these think tanks can be a formidable independent source of analysis in this regard.
- The on-going consultation process on the post-2015 development agenda presents a unique opportunity for Southern think tanks to inform national policy from the global perspective and, at the same time, **to feed local-level knowledge into global discussions and debates.**

Thank You