

# Preface

United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the stepping stones of developmental efforts in the new millennium. It sets eight goals to be achieved by the end of 2015. Amelioration of extreme poverty comes in the forefront of this declaration. The other goals range from promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS to ensuring environmental sustainability. In these UN Millennium Development Goals, targets were set to achieve each of these goals by 2015.

The increasing inequality in income, wealth, and consumption is a great concern not only for India, but also the entire developing world is afflicted with this problem. The growing inequality often hinders achieving the developmental goals according to its full potentials.

Though there is significant improvement in the poverty reduction in both rural and urban areas, there is a significant rural–urban variation in the achievement across the states. The rural–urban gap in the poverty ratio varied from 1% in UP to 29% in Mizoram during 2011–2012. Also, there is significant variation in male female poverty ratio. We have to search for ways and means to tackle the issues of inequality to improve the welfare across all sections of the society. Lack of entrepreneurship and sluggish manufacturing growth are some of the important obstacles of generating employment and that in many ways lead to social disorder and sectarian movements, which further impedes development activities.

So far as amelioration of poverty is concerned, a significant reduction in the percentage of population living under poverty has already been achieved in India. The incidence of poverty in India came down from about 51% in 1990–1991 to 37% in 2004–2005 and thereafter to an overall figure of 22% in 2011–2012. The head count ratios of rural and urban poverty percentages were about 26 and 14, respectively. Though a remarkable progress in this respect has been achieved so far, there are about 250 million people living below the poverty line of which more than 200 million are in rural areas. Even now about 1 in every 5 persons in India is below the national poverty line.

In the world scenario also, the progress is commendable. According to the most recent estimates, in 2011, about 17% of the people in the developing world lived below \$1.25 a day, which is significantly lower than 43% figure of 1990. This means that, in 2011, just over one billion people lived on less than \$1.25 a day, as compared with 1.91 billion in 1990 in this world. Despite significant progress, we observe hunger, malnutrition, and starvation death in many parts of the world particularly in a number of countries in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is associated with the disturbances in social order including terrorism in West Asia and parts of Africa rendering many people homeless and also suffering from the lack of adequate survival materials and opportunities. This phenomenon is also observed, though in smaller scale, in many parts of India. One may recall the recent past incidences of rampant terrorism in Kokrajhar district of Assam in 2012 and 2014.

Problems are there with the method of identifying the target population. Several methods applied in the estimation of the extent of poverty and its gravity make the authorities confused on the process of eradication mechanism. Defining poverty measure as the percentage of people with income less than US\$ 1.25 a day represents an example of income-focused approach to poverty. In recent past fixing of 32 INR per capita daily in India as poverty line ushered huge debate, which is about half of a USD. The poverty line defined by the Tendulkar Committee did not reflect the changing times and aspirations of the people. Under the growing income, expenditure and the economic structure of the country in the previous decade with consequent changes in people's perspective led to the setting up of the Expert Group headed by Dr. Rangarajan. The committee has re-computed the average requirements of calories, fats, and proteins on the basis of the 2010 ICMR norms, rural-urban gender distribution of population as per 2011 Census and employment distribution status. People's capability to save is also considered. The new poverty lines were worked out as the monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 972 in rural areas and Rs. 1407 in urban areas. Estimation of poverty line by Rangarajan Committee is based on an independent survey of households by CMIE. As per their method, a household is considered to be poor if it is unable to save and this yields results that are remarkably close to those derived using the NSSO data. This provides additional evidence in support of the poverty line derived by them. Health and health care, gender inequality, and environmental sustainability are also the other important issues related to the overall development of a nation.

The aforementioned goals are, however, closely interlinked or interdependent and cannot be tackled only through the development of economic activities. Just addressing issues partially without an integrated approach may lead to imbalances in the development of various dimensions. Simultaneously, the allocation of resources and inclusiveness of all sections of the society and across both the gender are pertinent to the all round progress of the society. Deprivation of people from the growth process, exclusion from the decision-making process even in this decentralized institutional setup, is found to create several bottlenecks for the progress. Some forces always operate in the society to counter such progress and preserve poverty and inequality. Market mechanism and service delivery systems failed to

completely eradicate poverty, reduce inequality even after so many commissions and strategies undertaken by the governments. Various societal and political forces also play important roles in matters of development. For example, superstitions, particularly in the rural areas in many cases, cause social disorder and take societies backward even today. Lack of education gives more chances to such forces to operate successfully. Despite matrilineal systems in some tribal societies of northeast India, women rarely participate in the political decision-making process. Thus it needed a concerted effort to address the sociological, political, anthropological and economic factors related to those issues. It is also needed to identify the relevant issues, suggest possible measures as well as delivery mechanism, etc., by re-examining the earlier measures and delivery systems.

Under these circumstances, we decided to have a fresh look into the matter and see how far the Millennium Development Goals have been achieved by the target year of 2015 in India and its adjoining areas, and more particularly in northeast India. The region has been almost disconnected from the mainland India over decades since Independence and deprived of several opportunities. Despite being the zone of one of the 18 hotspots of biodiversity in the world, and having rich mineral, forests, climate, heavy rainfall, etc., the region is yet to observe noticeable growth of manufacturing industries, tourism, sustainable resource management practices for the removal of poverty and promote the crippled regional economy.

However, there is a recent effort to integrate India with its eastern neighbors, particularly the ASEAN and form a bigger subregional cooperation through better connectivity under India's Look/Act East Policy and provide the region ample scope of socioeconomic development vide social, economic opportunities. Yet, there was a need to see the loop whole in the achievements and suggest measures for meeting the targets and go beyond the Millennium Development Goals.

In the context of climate change, agricultural sector faces serious challenges to meet the sustainable livelihood of the people especially for the vulnerable groups. Due to faulty strategies of single goal in the early stages of planning, farmers in many cases lost their indigenous techniques of production. Indiscriminate use of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and excessive use of groundwater resources are largely responsible for the environmental pollution and worsening of soil quality. There is an urgency to explore the strategies in order to address such burning issues. The initiatives taken by the Government of Sikkim to ban the chemical fertilizers in agricultural sector are no doubt appreciable steps toward environmental sustainability.

Quality of environment is also directly and indirectly linked with the growth process. Thus achieving sustainable progress is another target and remains elusive. In terms of reduction in pollution, carbon dioxide emission, deforestation, etc., India is far behind the expectations. The growth of agricultural production has been decelerated substantially in recent decades and whatever institutional attempts have been undertaken, the benefits do not reach to all sections of the society.

From the above discussion, it is clear that we could not achieve the MDGs in all targets and there are also significant spatial variations. Thus it is high time we review our achievements and lapses incurred in comparison with the targets of the MDGs.

Thus the book discusses the fundamental issues of inequality, development, environment relationship focusing northeast India and we believe that it will be helpful toward policy formulation and further research in various lines. The research outputs presented here will also help the planners, politicians, and the social workers.

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