

“Making Sustainability the Next Metric: the Post-2015 Development Agenda”

The South Asian Consultation

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Rationale

Since the adoption in 2000, the MDGs have become a universal official framework for national and international development efforts and cooperation, policymaking and resource mobilisation. As the expiry date of the MDGs is drawing nearer, different quarters are discussing the post 2015 development agenda and framework. Accounts of these discussions project a considerable degree of skepticism about the extent to which the current economic growth centered development models address the alleviation of extreme poverty. In this sense, South Asia presents a depressing paradox. It is among the fastest growing regions in the world, but it is also home to the largest concentration of people living in debilitating poverty, conflict and human misery. While South Asia is far more developed than Sub-Saharan Africa, and India (the largest country in the region) and Sri Lanka have achieved lower middle-income status, South Asia has many more poor people than Sub-Saharan Africa. This raises the crucial question of whether the best escape from poverty comes from general economic growth.

In the debate about poverty reduction, which is integral to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the question of sustainability has emerged to the forefront and is currently gaining momentum in international and regional discussions. There is more scientific agreement, evidence and lived experiences that highlight the threats of environmental degradation on human wellbeing. These changes are no more a possibility in the next century or in 200 years but changes that we will experience in the next few decades. Climate scientists predict that South Asia will be one of the worst affected regions with more extreme heat, floods, droughts and rising sea levels threatening coastal and urban populations, food production and trapping people in poverty. The World Bank estimates that 44% of the developing worlds' poor (571 million people) live in South Asia and that climate change will reduce the impact of poverty alleviation efforts.

Poverty reduction is the first casualty of unsustainability, with poor people disproportionately reliant on natural assets and vulnerable to climate and scarcity risks. Current models of development are also the main *driver* of unsustainability. Hence there is a growing lobby for a new set of development goals – that go beyond the economic and look to integrate social and environmental needs. This has become the crux of the debate gathering momentum since the Rio+20 summit's declaration of the need for sustainable development goals (SDG), and the post 2015 discussion on the next round of millennium development goals (MDGs). So far, the input to the on-going discussions on the post-2015 development

agenda so far have been provided mainly by the “Northern” institutions, carving out a need for more voices from the global South to infuse evidence-based policy perspectives in the ongoing discourse.

To this end, the Centre for Poverty Analysis, in collaboration and shared ownership with the Centre for Policy Dialogue (Bangladesh) and Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Pakistan), and Practical Action (Sri Lanka) aims to advance and compliment the **Southern Voice Initiative** (Centre for Policy Dialogue) that has spearheaded the effort to increase southern think tank perspectives and ideas with a strong potential to influence the high-level discussions on the post-2015 development framework. The Southern Voice Initiative is already engaging with many international forums communicating concerns of the ‘global South’ related to the post-2015 development framework, and CEPA’s symposium will add to the knowledge hub that is driving the ongoing international conversations on post-2015 goals. As such, the purpose of this event is to acquaint ourselves with the discussions that are underway and formulate informed proposals addressing Southern concerns and interests in relation to development.

Objectives

The concept for this initiative came from a sense that key global environmental indicators are now deteriorating with frightening rapidity and if the post-2015 agenda does not focus on the need for growth and development to take place *in a fundamentally different way*, then it will only perpetuate the existing problems and will also not meet some of the key goals of poverty reduction. In this sense, the proposed event is envisioned first and foremost as an opportunity to bring to the fore, the issues of environmental concerns and resource limits that are directly related to poverty reduction and development in South Asia. Second, it is hoped that the symposium will serve as a forum to relay post-2015 discourse stemming from various international fora; the learning that is being acquired by the Southern Voice Initiative will be particularly useful to gain a deeper understanding of issues that are being highlighted at the global level. Staying abreast of latest developments in the post-2015 agenda will allow us to gauge the feasibility of our regional proposals.

It is also hoped that by bringing together participants from South Asian countries, that we consolidate development concerns of our region and seek concrete ways in which we can address them in a sustainable manner. From this regional deliberation, we aim to feed synthesized proposals that present South Asian development interests into the international-level panels on Post-2015 development framework. The post-symposium activities are aimed at disseminating information at the international- and regional levels to state-level audiences in a way that the learning can influence national agendas. For example, development ideas stemming from this exchange (i.e. development goals, issues, measurements, proposed governance mechanisms) will be presented at the Commonwealth People’s Forum (held in Sri Lanka, 11-15 November, 2013) of which the theme is “inclusive growth and equitable development”, other interactions related to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), and post-CHOGM policy forums (both national and regional) related to post-2015

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development agenda. As such, there is a continuous information loop from state- to regional- to international-level discussions about the Post-2015 development framework.

Description of Planned Activity

The pre-event activities will involve the identification and generation of information on MDGs and sustainability. This includes a several roundtable discussions and focus groups carried out by participating South Asian countries. These deliberations will include representatives from government, private sector and civil society. This information will add value to the ideas already emerging from the work done by the southern voice initiative; CEPA's development reimagined initiative and on-going discussions on sustainability carried out by SDPI. This information will be consolidated into position papers that along with other solicited papers from the region will be discussed and presented at the main event – the CEPA symposium on poverty.

The CEPA symposium on poverty will take place in Colombo, Sri Lanka over two days - November 6th and 7th. These sessions will bring together key South Asian resource people and invited participants to discuss the position papers and other solicited inputs through 6 key sessions structured as interactive discussions with panelists and selected group of invitees. The session outcomes will be collated into South Asia's suggestions for sustainable development goals, processes and measurements.

Content of the Planned Discussion

There is acceptance that a convergence of the SDGs and MDGs is needed. While this is a much welcome development, there are concerns about the ways in which a sustainable development framework needs to maintain the right balance of the three pillars of sustainable development – economy, environment, and the socio-political wellbeing. Currently there are propositions made by various groups on what the overarching principles should be, what the goals should contain, and how they should be implemented and internalised by countries. The setting of goals is a complicated exercise, as decisions are dependent on the ambitions and interests of sovereign states, their political leadership, and lobby groups with diverse vested agendas. If endorsed and adopted by the world – as in the case of the current MDGs, sustainable post-2015 goals can impact aid architecture, trade policies, technology development and transfer, and international cooperation, as well as shape domestic development policies of individual states.

Given South Asia is one of the fastest growing regions and one that will be severely confronted by climate change, the future development orientation will have impacts on South Asia and for each country in the region. Furthermore, it is crucial to question whether a “universal” framework can address the critical development concerns of the South Asian and other vulnerable economies, and the practical realities of the willingness of developed countries to adhere to limits of sustainable production and consumption. Hence it is critical that we focus on the on-going global debates in the context of

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post-2015, and ensure that the concerns, development priorities, and aspirations of South Asian countries are also given greater voice and are included into this debate. The themes of this symposium are driven by this thought process. The two themes guiding the content of this symposium are 1) the nature of development goals that address issues that are crucial to the South Asia region and 2) the process of incorporating these goals into the post-2015 development framework.

Inaugural session
<p>Objective: To set the overall focus of the deliberations</p> <p>Focus of the input/key information shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes emerging from post-2015 discussions • Key development challenges for South Asian countries • The need to reposition the development pathway to one that is more sustainable
THEME I: “Our issues; our solutions; our development”: Issues that are crucial to South Asia and development goals that address region-specific problems
Equity and Sustainability
<p>Objective: To bring into the debate the issues to be addressed to achieve equitable development that does not discount concerns of women, elderly, poor, or the next generation, and does not create new inequities– leaving no one behind.</p> <p>Focus of the input/key information shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving rights and access of common property • Dealing with Poverty, Prosperity and the environment
Economic growth within natural limits
<p>Objective: To explore new concepts arising from the debate on economic growth within natural limits and explore what it would mean for developing countries and for the rich, the poor, and the marginalized in concrete terms.</p> <p>Focus of the input/key information shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibilities of growth within natural limits and its social and political acceptance
The role of Technology in achieving sustainable development
<p>Objective: Understand how and what types of technology could contribute to sustainable development.</p> <p>Focus of the input/key information shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal consequences of technological developments, technological requirements for economically under/less developed countries, • Alternative paradigm for technology for development
THEME II: Exploring Institutional processes for change
Governance and participation for sustainable development
<p>Objective To discuss the issues relating to building ownership for sustainability as a key pillar of development by different stakeholders (politicians, bureaucrats, private sector, civil society) and their roles in changing the development pathway.</p> <p>Focus of the input/key information shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder perceptions on what they are doing and future directions • Building partnerships and synergies and creating interest and ownership