



**Remarks by Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme,
at Symposium on:
“Millennium Development Goals and Human Development in India;
Achievement and Challenges”
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I am pleased to be part of this discussion on human development and India’s role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Since the human development approach involves inclusive and participatory debates, I am especially glad that we have amongst us tonight distinguished representatives from government, academia, civil society, and development agencies.

Over the past few days I have had the opportunity to witness first-hand some of the impressive progress being made in tackling India’s development challenges.

Over the weekend I was in Rajasthan, where, in Bhilwara, I visited participants in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. This initiative is of considerable international interest in the development community.

UNDP has been able to support the programme’s design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

As I have been emphasizing in my meetings this week, UNDP stands ready to continue working closely with India in meeting its national development objectives and achieving the MDGs.

We also look forward to working with India to support other countries to do the same, taking our collaboration to a new level of engagement. India is a significant actor in development globally – sharing experiences and technologies, and influencing global development debates and dialogue. Its trade and investment outreach also forms part of the larger picture of Indian engagement in the global North and South.

Reaching the Millennium Development Goals

On my visit here this week, as in my visits to all countries, I am advocating for renewed attention on the Millennium Development Goals. Each of them highlights a critical indicator of development - from the reduction of poverty and hunger, to improved health status and educational opportunity, access to clean water and sanitation, and the empowerment of women.

The target date of 2015 for the MDGs is now so close that it greatly concentrates the mind on the need to accelerate progress. As one who went to New York as a Head of Government in 2000 and signed the Millennium Declaration, I feel this acutely.

Across all regions in our world, development stakeholders are paying close attention to which MDGs are being achieved, which are not, and what could be done differently to speed up progress. These issues will be the focus of the high level review summit on the MDGs at the UN in New York in September. This summit is a major opportunity to generate renewed commitment to reach the MDGs.

In preparation for the summit, UNDP is working on identifying success factors in MDG achievement and on helping to share those experiences. If we focus on what has worked, we will find a rich menu of policy interventions which – adapted to national contexts – could accelerate progress.

At the global level the MDGs can be achieved, not least that on reducing by half the numbers living in extreme poverty.

There has also been progress on the Goal of providing universal primary education, although not yet fast enough to get there by 2015. Child mortality is down a lot, but needs to fall faster to meet the global targets. The number of new HIV infections in 2008 was thirty per cent lower than during the peak in 1996.

The Asia-Pacific region as a whole has achieved targets such as reducing gender disparities in primary and tertiary school enrolment, and halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. It is also on track to halve extreme poverty and provide universal access to primary school.

At the same time, progress has been uneven between and within countries, globally and regionally, and significant challenges remain to meet the MDGs by 2015.

In the Asia-Pacific region alone, there are an estimated 1.3 billion people without access to sanitation, and an estimated 98 million children under the age of five suffering from malnutrition. Globally, 870 million people were believed to be living in chronic hunger in the 2004-2006 time period prior to the food crisis. FAO estimates that last year that figure stood at over a billion.

The goal towards which there has been the least progress is that of reducing maternal mortality. Between 1990 and 2005, maternal mortality declined only marginally from 480 deaths per 100,000 live births to 450. At this rate, the target of dropping to 120 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015 would not be achieved.

In general, the MDGs struggle where women do not enjoy equal opportunity and rights. UNDP's Asia Pacific Human Development Report on gender, which I launched here in Delhi yesterday, argues for public policy change across economics, politics, and the law to achieve gender equality and enable women to be a full part of the progress their countries are making.

Responding to Multiple Crises

Keeping momentum on internationally agreed development goals during a global recession and the many other crises which have affected our world has been a challenge.

While food prices are down from the peaks of 2008, they remain high in historical terms. This has been a major concern here in India, where the Government has made food security a high priority.

The effects of climate change are also a serious threat to development prospects. Overall, it is predicted to cause even more droughts, heat waves, cyclones, floodings and landslides. The impact is being felt in India too.

During the economic crisis, growth slowed or disappeared entirely in many countries in the Asia-Pacific, with exports, foreign direct investment, and revenues in decline.

India, however, has defied the pattern with the recent Union Budget reporting 2008/9 GDP growth at 6.7 per cent, and with predictions of growth over seven per cent for the 2009/10 year.

In addition to having prudent financial regulation, part of the story behind this resilience and recovery is that India was one of the first countries to implement a broad-based countercyclical set of monetary and fiscal stimulus policies in response to the economic crisis.

Economic growth is a powerful driver of change, and has opened up new opportunities for many of India's people. But on its own, growth is not a strategy for reaching the MDGs. Conscious public policy which directs the fruits of growth into human development is also required.

Inclusive growth and Human Development

I commend the Government of India for striving to achieve inclusive growth through its Eleventh Five Year Plan.

India's Finance Minister said on 26 February this year, when announcing the Union Budget for 2010-2011, "growth is only as important as what it enables us to do and be".

This is in line with the human development paradigm championed by UNDP for two decades, and very much inspired by India's Nobel Laureate, Professor Amartya Sen. Human development is about placing people at the centre of development, enlarging their capabilities, and expanding their opportunities and freedom to lead lives which they value.

Few countries have embraced the human development approach as strongly as India. I note that the Government of India's economic survey presented just prior to the Union Budget has a chapter entitled "human development, poverty, and public programmes".

India has produced a series of influential national, state, district, and municipal-level human development reports.

I was very impressed to learn that several thousand village level reports were drawn upon to inform the findings of the human development report produced in 2005 in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Local governments, like that in Mumbai, are now using disaggregated human development indices to allocate local budgets to address disparities in human development.

Efforts like these to localize development goals are especially important in a country as large and diverse as India, where challenges and opportunities vary sharply across geographic areas and communities.

Between 1980 and 2007, UNDP's Human Development Report shows an increase from 0.427 to 0.612 in the value of India's human development index. The HDI ranks countries according to their GDP per capita, life expectancy at birth, and education as measured by the adult literacy rate and gross enrolment ratio.

India's gain is significant. At the same time, and as is the case in many countries, the full potential for human development in India remains unrealized.

India and the MDGs

I understand that India's third national MDG report will be released shortly and is likely to report gains in recent years.

The 2007 MDG report showed advances on the roll out of universal primary education, with an increased net enrolment ratio in primary education. The ratio of girls to boys in primary education had increased from 0.71 in 1990 to 0.88 by 2005; and the proportion of the population with an improved drinking water source had also increased.

The Government's Tenth Five Year Plan set development targets which were more ambitious than the MDGs. I understand the Eleventh Five Year Plan has national and state level targets.

Many challenges to MDG achievement in India do remain. They include reducing infant and maternal mortality and child under-nutrition, and accelerating the rate of poverty reduction for a growing population. There is also a need for more access to basic sanitation, and to address disparities, such as those between rich and poor, urban and rural, men and women, social groups, and ethnic communities.

In accelerating human development gains and advances towards the MDGs, India has significant fiscal resources and human capital.

UNDP will continue to work closely with India as it seeks to promote its own human development and meet the MDGs.

Issues which are central to the human development approach – equity, participation, and empowerment - are especially important as part of bringing development closer to those who need opportunity the most.

Promoting Gender Equality

That certainly means prioritizing the needs of women and girls. Gender equality is not only a Millennium Development Goal in its own right, but is essential for achieving the other MDGs too.

Yesterday, here in Delhi, I launched the Asia-Pacific Human Development Report on gender equality. It outlines how, even as many women in this region have benefited from their countries' improved education, health, and prosperity, they continue to struggle for gender equality.

India has a strong tradition of impressive women leaders and NGOs campaigning for women's rights.

One third of the local government seats in India are reserved for women, boosting women's empowerment at that level. India's government has committed to a bill to achieve the same for Parliament and the state assemblies.

UNDP makes a special effort to emphasise gender concerns in all its programmes. In this country, we have been assisting national authorities with gender budgeting, and supporting women's participation in local government.

Climate change financing is Integral to Development

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment is another priority area for UNDP.

Urgent action is needed to adapt to those climate changes which are already inevitable, and to adopt lower carbon pathways to growth and development worldwide.

We have been working closely with India on issues of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and efforts to combat land degradation and deforestation.

All these issues need to be well integrated into national development strategies in the 21st century. We will not achieve sustainable human development for all if we destroy the very basis on which life on this planet exists.

UNDP and India – A 21st Century Partnership

UNDP's partnership with India in the 21st century should also have a global dimension. This country has so many experiences to share and technologies available to assist others to meet their development challenges.

India's partnerships with developing countries see it extending concessional lines of credit to countries in Africa, providing technical assistance and educational opportunity, and promoting regional integration. India's companies are major foreign investors.

For its part, UNDP is present in 166 countries through a network of 135 country offices. It is important to note that India is the largest developing country contributor to UNDP's core resources.

As a global development network with a focus on capacity development, UNDP facilitates the exchange of development experience and ideas across the South to where they can be most useful. For example :

- With support from UNDP, Rwanda is engaging with India to learn from its experience of the Green Revolution.
- The Government of India is introducing solar power for rural electrification in Guinea Bissau with assistance from UNDP.
- UNDP has supported the sharing of lessons between India and Brazil to expand access to low-cost HIV/AIDS treatment.
- UNDP helped to organize a conference here in Delhi which shared practical experience from Latin America with Asian countries already undertaking or considering cash transfer programmes.

Building on these experiences, UNDP looks forward to taking its relationship with India to a new level of engagement, reflecting India's role in international relations and development co-operation.

We are already a significant partner with India in delivering development initiatives in Afghanistan. We should work on identifying other places and sectors where together we can support others to overcome their development challenges, achieve the MDGs, and bring about the transformational change they seek.

With those few words, I look forward to hearing the insights of this distinguished panel on human development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals in India.
