Pursuing the fruit within the promise

Exploring India's implementation of UN Global Goals

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Narendra Modi was elected as the 15th Prime Minister of India in 2014, vowing "sab ka saath, sab ka vikas" (development with all and for all). This promise comes as the Indian government submitted its progress report on one set of global goals and considers the adoption of another. In December 2015, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a set of eight global goals and 18 targets – will expire and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 goals and 169 targets – will be launched. Incorporated into the stated objectives of both the MDGs and the SDGs is gender equality as a fundamental facet of international development. In the past four years, increasingly-visible cases of sexual violence in India have put gender equality on an even plane with economic growth in national and international discussions of Indian development.

However, there is danger that discussion will be all that emerges from these events, making successful use of tools like the MDGs and SDGs particularly important. They allow India and the international community to monitor and evaluate the state's efforts and outcomes in addressing globally-recognized development needs. How India chose to address Goal 3 of the MDGs (promote gender equality and empower women) and how it will choose to address Goal 5 of the SDGs (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), will be quite different due to the very nature of the MDGs versus the SDGs. Let us first look at how the MDGs were created, the objective of Goal 3, and how India performed on the target's indicators. Then we will contrast the formulation of the SDGs, discuss what the change in the targets for Goal 5 will mean for future implementation, and explore the suggested approach to future challenges to meeting the proposed SDGs.

THE MDGS: WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT & GENDER EQUALITY

> MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
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> MDG 3 Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015

The year 2000 marked the start of the MDGs initiative. The MDGs were originally the International Development Goals created by the OECD. Critics have noted that there was "a clear shift…in [favor] of a narrower frame [focusing] essentially on absolute poverty and deprivation, and away from a

4

broader, more essentialist rights-based approach." This, along with the understandable drive to simplify the goals for easier implementation, led to a very narrow set of indicators for each of the small number of goals.

In the case of MDG 3, the four indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment were the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; the ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old; the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. India released a country report on their MDG progress. Overall, it stated that India has made significant advancements while at the same time falling behind on some targets. For example, although they cut poverty rates by more than half, India has fallen short of improving access to sanitation. And while about 87% of households have access to improved sources of drinking water, they are still behind on reducing the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. In the particular case of MDG 3, the report noted that the goal is on track for fulfillment. India partially met one indicator (ratio of girls to boys in primary education is 1.03; secondary education is 1; tertiary education is 0.89), nearly met another (ratio of female to male literacy is 0.91), and fell short of two others (19.3% share of women in wage employment of non-agricultural sector; 12.24% proportion of seats in the National Parliament are held by women).

Although the MDGs' gender equality goal addressed some educational, economic, and political concerns relating to women, its creators failed to significantly address societal factors. The MDGs, being goals for human development, should have reflected the pressing human development issues that nations face, like the root causes and the manifestations of women's rights violation. These concerns should have warranted indicators; measuring education was a decent beginning to this but does not touch on the societal attitudes that allow, for example, violence against women. The need for such indicators is evidenced by the domestic violence leading to the formation of the Gulabi Gang and similar groups, widespread outrage sparked by the initial ruling on the homicide case of Jessica Lal, and national protests following the 2012 gang rape. These occurrences put violence against Indian women and their pursuit of justice on the international stage. They led to a discussion of the societal attitudes that have fostered gross disregard for women's rights in the first place.

"Women in India remain severely deprived, compared to other developing countries including several of India's [neighbors], and this is one of the crucial constraints to India's future development." The Gender Inequality Index ranks India as 127 of 187 (maternal mortality ratio, adolescent birth rate, share of seats in parliament, female percentage of population with at least some secondary education, percentage of females aged 15 and older in the labor force) and the Gender Development Index places them at 132 of 187 (life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling, estimated GNI per capita). Pursuing the SDGs, with their rights-focused targets that promise to encourage more fruitful achievements for women's rights, will address gaps left by the MDGs.

GOAL 5: THE SDG'S WOMEN'S RIGHTS APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

As opposed to the exclusive group of nations and international organizations that created the MDGs, several UN member states as well as many non-state stakeholders, including civil society groups, formulated the SDGs. The new goals reach into issues of human rights that face every nation and encourage an approach to development that fosters rights-based processes.

The long list of goals and their respective targets are critiqued for being too unruly and unrealistic. As can be seen in the list of targets above for SDG 5, the scope is indeed wider than the MDGs. It expands on not only the economic, political, and educational aspects of women's empowerment, it also draws attention to matters of health (combining MDG 5 of maternal health with MDG 3), discrimination, and violence. "[If] development is to be inclusive and just, and leave no one behind, it must be rooted strongly in

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

SDG 5 Targets:

o End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

o Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

o Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

o Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

o Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

o Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

o Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

o Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

o Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

human rights principles and standards. The MDGs and much mainstream development policy has failed to give adequate priority to challenging systemic patterns of discrimination and disadvantage – violations of rights – that keep many people in poverty." The SDG gender equality targets open pathways for India's government to address the societal attitudes that allow for the marginalization of Indian women.

They also provide the opportunity for civil society engagement. The government needs to entrust civil society (grassroots organizations in particular) with a great deal of responsibility in fulfilling this new set of global goals. Because it is in the best position to inform the success of the SDGs, civil society will be able to address those targets that require monitoring which the public may not trust the government to adequately do, for instance. This is exemplified by the Jessica Lal trial. People took to the streets in protest after Manu Sharma, who went several years before going to trial in part because he came from a wealth family, was acquitted. There was outcry against the faulty law system of India and the miscarriage of justice. It was the actions of civil society that encouraged the police to file a petition for the High Court to review the case. This resulted in a new ruling of guilty.

Confronting the Challenges of Implementation

There are many issues that India will have in reaching the SDGs between now and 2030. In particular, they will face three key challenges in fulfilling SDG 5, and the broader SDG framework:

Accessing reliable data: In their report on the MDGs, the Government of India indicated that reliable statistics are difficult to come by when tracking the global goals. Without proper data, the government will not be able to adequately measure how much effort needs to be dedicated to each indicator, leading to inefficiency. In order to address this, there needs to be an increase in incentives (monetary and otherwise) from the federal and/or state governments for statistical offices to increase the periodicity of surveys and regulate the methodology.

Funding the SDGs: There is always a question of how the global goals will be funded. The Modi government focuses on economic growth by cutting social welfare spending and redirecting it toward an infrastructure stimulus plan meant to push supply-side growth. With the Government of India already cutting social welfare spending, there is an increased need for funding from non-state actors to supplement government budgets for human development goals like SDG 5.

Integrating SDGs into actionable plans: The federal government already includes social development into the Five-Year-Plans (FYPs), the latest one being for 2012-2017. These FYPs are intricate, strategic action plans on which the Indian government already expends effort. Folding the SDGs into future FYPs will help focus the implementation process over the course of the 15 years of the SDG lifespan. Incorporating the input from civil society to these broad, federal government plans and encouraging their inclusion in the creation and implementation of plans from state governments will allow relevant understanding of the people to shape effective, actionable steps. The SDGs hold promise for stimulating new processes in pursuing women's rights in India. It will take a joint effort between the government, civil society, and other non-state stakeholders in order for the promise to manifest fruit. If India does not let this opportunity pass it by, it will be able to draw even closer to the goal of gender equality.