The Future of MDGs: Bangladesh as a Case Study

Binayak Sen
Research Director
Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

Presentation made at the UN Expert Group Meeting on MDGs beyond 2015, New York, Feb 27th, 2012
PAST SUCCESSES
Successes to Celebrate, Failures to Remember

- A “Test Case” of Development?
- Different Times, Different Theories?
  - Example: Kissinger on Bangladesh
- Seven Pillars of Pessimism
  - Population
  - Female empowerment
  - Agrarian
  - Export
  - Urban
  - Governance
  - Climate change
- Echoes of “Dysfunctional State” can be heard even in the 2000s
  - Minus-Two Solutions were sought through Military-Driven Transition
Successes to Celebrate, Failures to Remember (2)

• Turn-Around in 2000s
  ◦ Growth accelerated with structural change in successive decades
  ◦ On-track on a number of MDGs or MDG related targets:
    • poverty
    • MMR
    • IMR/CMR
    • Gender parity on child mortality
    • Primary and secondary education enrollment
    • Improvement in sex-ratios
Sustained Growth Acceleration

- For growth, a necessary precondition is good long-term growth performance sustained and accelerated over decades. **It is difficult to be inclusive when growth is faltering.** Per capita GDP has more than doubled in during 1991-2011. Bangladesh thus passes this initial screening on “necessary condition”

![Per capita GDP growth rate chart]

Binayak Sen: EGM Presentation at New York 26-02-2012
Sustained Poverty Reduction

Binayak Sen: EGM Presentation at New York 26-02-2012
Successes to Celebrate, Failures to Remember (3)

- Two Neglected Factors in Explaining MDG Outcomes
  - Role of High Population Density (faster spread of technology by “learning by doing” or “seeing”)
  - Pre-existing role of social, cultural and political movements

- All Routes Mattered: Causes of Turn-Arounds
  - Role of public policy at a relatively low level of fiscal deficit and inflation
  - Role of private income growth
  - Role of institutions promoting gender-friendly norms and inclusive development
  - “Latent demand” for higher human development
  - GO-NGO collaboration
  - MDG ownership by political elites (example of girl’s education, social protection, and current discussion on health insurance)
Addressing Differences in Development: Persistent Divides in MDGs

- Regional gaps, often not in predictable directions
  - Chittagong and Sylhet lag on social MDGs
  - East-west divide in the pace of poverty reduction is fast disappearing
- Rich-poor divide in basic education, health, and child nutrition is still persistent
- Gender gaps in non-MDG social targets such as post-secondary education as well as workforce participation
- Ethnic minorities lag behind and face social discrimination
Moving Up the Ladder on MDGs

- From “Quantity” to “Quality”
  - Participation in internationally comparable competence tests in English and computer literacy, math and science skills
  - More emphasis on quality education at all levels

- From “First Generation” to “Second Generation” MDGs
  - Primary → Secondary and technical/vocational education
  - Preventative → Curative (especially health insurance for the poor to prevent health shocks of breadwinners)
  - This would require different kinds of policy support
    - From “microcredit” to “microenterprise”—from self-employment to wage-employment
    - Migration financing for the poor (including overseas migration, as the latter explains 70% increase in rural income inequality)
    - Blending traditional, modern and post-modern (example: safe delivery in institutions; scaling up of BRAC non-formal primary education at secondary level; assessment of quality of tertiary educational institutions through centralized competence tests)
Incorporating New Concerns

- Everything has consequences for society. MDGs are no exception to this rule.
- MDGs foster social transformation, but also create linkages for other sectoral priorities which cannot be ignored any more on the policy front
- Three examples: (i) job creation, (ii) social cohesion, (iii) democratic governance
  - Educating girls with primary and secondary education is part of MDGs, but to follow-through these measures with job creation is not part of MDGs.
  - The same applies for the educated youth to ensure social cohesion.
Incorporating New Concerns (2)

- Spread of education via MDGs creates higher demand for **transparency, accountability** and **citizen rights** – currently not part of MDGs (the government needs to be more fiscally responsive to such citizen demands)

- The MDG effects on the “language of rights” is also connected to rising democratic/civic aspirations:
  - Greater intolerance for wealth inequality
  - Freedom of media
  - Better quality of political candidates (the puzzle of regime instability)
  - Pro-poorest social protection
  - Environmental governance

- These concerns merit consideration in the formulation of “New” MDGs beyond 2015
CONCLUDING REMARKS: ADDRESSING GAPS IN “OLD” AND INCLUDE “NEW” SOCIAL CONCERNS
Need for Blending “Old” and “New” MDGs

- MDGs are important in themselves, but also as factors influencing faster growth, better social cohesion, and greater demands for democratic governance.
- Equality concerns within “old” MDGs (spatial, gender, ethnic, rich/poor).
- Mobility concerns within MDGs (from “quantity” to “quality”; integrating preventative with curative; primary with secondary and technical/ vocational, etc.)
Need for Blending “Old” and “New” MDGs (2)

- Inclusive citizenship concerns demanding new MDGs
  - Jobs for female stipend recipients
  - Towards a more democratic and accountable governance
  - Greater tax-financed re-distributive allocations to address growing awareness of citizen rights
  - Environmental governance
  - Addressing inequality for better social cohesion
  - Better political candidates
References

References


Thanks for listening!

QUESTIONS?