

India's Roadmap to SDGs



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On Friday, September 25th, world leaders approved an ambitious plan "Transforming the World: The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development" at the United Nations General Assembly to be implemented over the next 15 years. With 17 broad goals and 169 specific targets, this is a collective fight against poverty, inequality and climate change with the concept "no one should be left behind".

The transformative agenda of the SDGs cannot be achieved unless women, children and adolescents are at its centre helping drive the comprehensive change these goals envisage. In recognition of this fact the UN Secretary General started the "Every Woman Every Child" campaign in 2010. The UNSG's 2015 progress report estimates that lives of 2.4 million women and children have been saved since 2010 – impressive but well short of the 16 million target. So much work is yet to be done!

As a member of the "Every Woman Every Child" movement I have spent the last few days in New York at the launch of the SDGs attending several meetings on the sidelines of the UNGA on the post 2015 agenda. What struck me was how several sub-Saharan countries were represented at all levels of interactions – their frontline workers, heads of NGOs, civil society, government representatives all making passionate pleas for both funding and program interventions to save the lives of their women, children and adolescents.

In contrast, India was conspicuous by its absence with very few representatives at all levels. Despite the fact that we have had the fastest rate of economic growth in the country in the last 15 years, one in every 3 Indian still lives below the poverty line. While the UN itself has recognised the progress India has made by reducing child mortality by 50% and maternal mortality by 65% since 1990, India still accounts for the world's highest number of maternal deaths and 'below 5' child deaths; also, more than 50% of our population defecate in the open. Rapid improvement in social parameters is necessary for holistic sustainable development and growth; and it is going to take a lot more than just about 1% of GDP that is currently allocated to spending on health.

Given the unfortunate statistics of our development parameters, it is clear that India is a country with contradictions. We should therefore not be in denial about our position on the development index. While the Prime Minister has made sanitation, hygiene and educating the girl child important national issues, interventions are still needed in various areas and implementation of programmes needs to be improved. Engaging with diverse stakeholders is not just about financial support as we can also benefit from innovative programmes and implementation frameworks besides validating our

commitment to SDGs. The need of the hour is to introspect and build a roadmap for our success on the SDGs through strategic interventions.

It is imperative that we build alliances amongst Government, Private Sector, INGOs, NGOs, CBO and civil society to make rapid strides towards the SDGs. Sustained effort to bridge the trust deficit between all stakeholders should be at the core and State Governments must especially take ownership as health is a state issue. By playing a leadership role the government can connect the dots for creating a larger framework (multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder) which will then allow all partners to work out of their silos in a collective manner.

The private sector must contribute with a long term outlook of doing good and doing well at the same time. The development challenge calls for greater investment including greater number of investors from SMEs contributing in terms of cleaning up the supply chain, impact investment, application of managerial tools for implementations and, most importantly, innovation through technology.

Finally, the last piece of the puzzle is the NGOs, CBOs, Civil society and communities who must play their part with utmost transparency and accountability.

The measure of success is when we can say “little girls born today in Nigeria, New York and India stand together in 15 years time enjoying the same good health and with no discernable differences in the opportunity open to them to build very bright futures”.