



Rethinking Development

Background Paper
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It took fifty long years for this conference to happen, but Asia and Africa have finally assembled here again. Today, the sons and daughters of Asia and Africa stand together in this hall as equals. We stand tall, proud and free. ... now that Asia and Africa are free, we must take on the next phase and this is the battle for human dignity.

—*President of Indonesia, Susilo B. Yudhoyono, Second Bandung Conference, 2005*

The 2013 Human Development Report: “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World”—will be launched on March 14, 2013 in Mexico City ... [It] examines the profound shift in global dynamics driven by the fast-rising new powers of the developing world and its long-term implications for human development. China has already overtaken Japan as the world’s second biggest economy while lifting hundreds of millions of its people out of poverty. India is reshaping its future with new entrepreneurial creativity and social policy innovation. Brazil is lifting its living standards through expanding international relationships and antipoverty programs that are emulated worldwide. ... Turkey, Mexico, Thailand, South Africa, Indonesia, and many other developing nations are also becoming leading actors on the world stage. ...

And people throughout the developing world are increasingly demanding to be heard, as they share ideas through new communications channels and seek greater accountability from governments and international institutions. ... The Report calls for far better representation of the South in global governance systems and points to potential new sources of financing within the South for essential public goods.

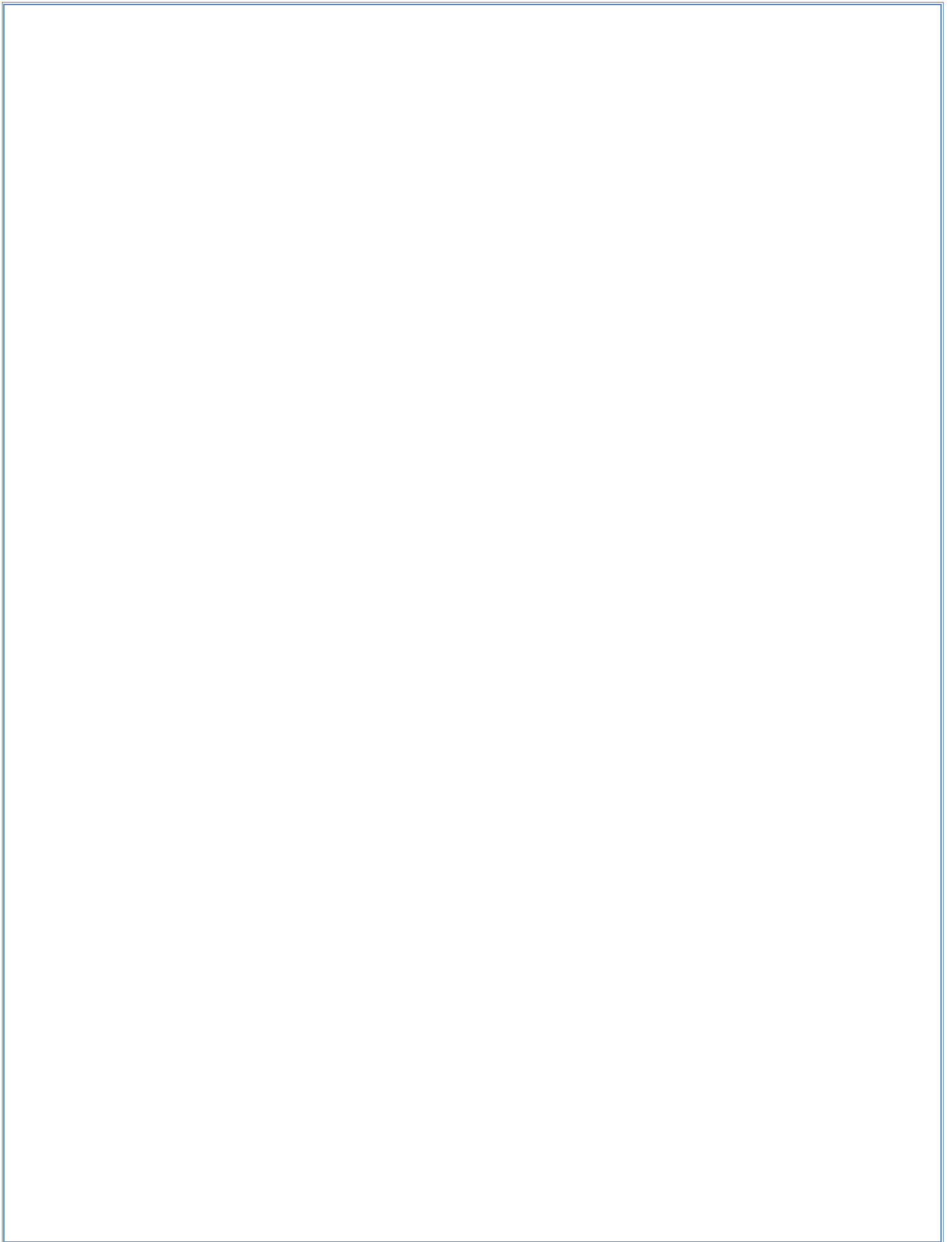
—*UNDP, Human Development Report 2013 Press Release*

The afflicted world in which we live is characterized by a deeply unequal sharing of the burden of adversities between women and men. Gender inequality exists in most parts of the world, from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to the United States. Yet inequality between men and women is not everywhere the same. It can take many different forms. Gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and inter-linked problems. ... The variations entail that inequality between women and men cannot be confronted and overcome by one all-purpose remedy. Over time, moreover, the same country can move from one type of gender inequality to another. ... The different forms of gender inequality may also impose adversities on the lives of men and boys, in addition to those of women and girls.

—*Amartya Sen, The Many Faces of Gender Inequality (2001)*

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1. Why the World Development Forum?

Inequality has emerged as a core concern in developing and developed countries alike. Even as inequalities between the developing and the developed world have come down owing to impressive economic growth during the last two decades in the Global South—with China (2), Brazil (6) and India (10) making it to the elite club of top ten economies—inequalities within countries have been on the rise. Average growth rates in China and India, which were four times higher than in OECD countries during the previous decade, enabled millions to move out of poverty, and millions of others to experience a dramatic rise in living standards, with better access to education, health care, employment, safe drinking water, sanitation, etc.

Yet, while income inequality has narrowed down in Latin American economies since the 1990s—though they still have an average Gini coefficient of 52—it went up from 39 to 46 in developing parts of Asia during the period. Improved public infrastructures and world-class private services in developing nations have largely benefited the select few, leading to increase in inequality of opportunities—that is people’s chances of participating in, and benefitting from, growth and development (ADB 2012).

Discontent has been brewing for long, and one slap on the face of university graduate-turned-street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid not only toppled well-entrenched dictatorships in the Middle East, but sent tremors across parts of the developed world, already reeling under the impact of the 2007-08 financial crisis. Even as CEOs of companies bailed out with taxpayers’ money were enjoying salary hikes, “the 99 percent” were helplessly going through some of the worst hardships of their life. In United States of America, where inequality was not just tolerated but celebrated for a very long time, thousands of demonstrators descended in New York to stand up against the overwhelming influence of Wall Street, and the rising economic and social inequality that it was leading to. Protestors came out in more than one hundred cities in the United States, and in hundreds of others in various parts of the developed world, “to fight back against the system that has allowed the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer”. From the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, from the continuing Naxalite struggle to labor unrest and violence in parts of India and China, as well as more generally in South Africa, the message has been loud and clear—inequalities have become intolerable—and so have existing models of growth and development that have lead the world toward them.

The World Development Forum (WDF) has been established in New Delhi as a platform to discuss the possibilities and contours of an alternative, liberal model of development, which is rooted in equity, justice, and freedoms, and focused on women's equality and empowerment. Its inaugural roundtable, scheduled for March 16, 2013 in New Delhi—one of the important capitals of the emerging Global South—seeks to discuss how can:

- 1) Democracies achieve faster, inclusive, and sustainable development?
- 2) Market, state, and civil society work together to achieve development targets?
- 3) Women's empowerment and equality be made central to development?

To initiate discussion, this background paper tries to make the case for "one" version of what is it that development should seek to equalize, and for whom. It argues for equality of meaningful opportunities or freedoms to pursue what individuals deem meaningful in their lives. Development may have different meanings for different individuals, and they should have the rights and real opportunities to *present* and *pursue* what development means for them. Political parties, all sorts of leaders, governments, and nongovernmental organizations have their own vested interests and strategies of sustaining themselves by claims of "representation". Such representations have proved to be tyrannical throughout human history. Whether it is colonial forces wiping out indigenous peoples in the name of progress; or states suppressing people's freedoms, displacing or sacrificing them at the altar of "national" development or industrialization. Or, NGOs self-righteously imposing their vision of development on marginalized groups to "liberate" them from "oppressive", "backward" and "traditional" ways of life; or trade unions forcing their members to toe the union line for collective benefits.

Development has been conceived by the aggregates—international organizations, governments, NGOs, etc.—and for the aggregates—nations, localities, communities, etc.—even as individual voices have been ignored or crushed. In the proposed liberal model of development, individual voices and interests are supreme; individuals are not just targets, but active agents of development; and development of a human or territorial entity is measured by real opportunities or freedoms citizens enjoy.

Having said that, since no man is an island, these aggregates can play a very critical role in enhancing opportunities and freedoms of vast swathes of populations and enable us to use them for our individual ends. States, markets and civil society organizations can work together to make provisions for common-purpose facilities or services—like roads, education, healthcare, clean water and air, sanitation, employment, etc.—which we as individuals, irrespective of our individual visions of development and goals in life, stand to benefit from. States can establish and maintain rule of law, peace and other congenial conditions that not only allow markets, civil

society, and media to flourish, but enable us to pursue our individual goals and prosper in life. Markets can create opportunities for us to fulfill our needs. Civil society can reach where states and markets cannot, keep an equity watch on them, and help our voices and concerns to be heard when they are not. But in all of this, the role of aggregates has to be enabling rather than disabling as far as **Individual Development Goals** (IDGs) or **“My Development Goals”** (MDGs) are concerned—something which the existing IDG (OECD’s International Development Goals) and MDG (UN’s Millennium Development Goals) frameworks completely miss out on.

2. Proposed Development Vision

Development should primarily aim at eliminating inequities in meaningful opportunities or freedoms that individuals have to lead the kind of life that they consider meaningful. They should be seen as active agents in deciding what development means to them and in carrying out their own development plans. All that the states, markets, and civil society organizations have to do is try their best in creating an enabling environment and make provisions for common-purpose infrastructures and services, which individuals could use to pursue their life-goals. Individuals may have different goals set for themselves, but it is possible to come up with a common list of things for external support that they would all need to achieve them. Leaving individuals to their destiny without such support is not leaving them free, but its opposite. Freedom entails having real and substantive choices or opportunities to pursue the kind of life one has reason to lead. It is only then that we can be held responsible for the choices we make and the consequences we face. Can we hold the poor and the hungry responsible for the situation that they find themselves in? Can we hold children or their parents responsible for early deaths due to malnutrition or lack of basic health services? Real freedom is, therefore, key to the idea of development, for without it, we cannot exercise our agencies or be held responsible for our conditions.

The Centrality of Freedom

Freedom is *the* most central concept and variable in a liberal development framework. For Marx, the “organized suppression” of “individual vitality, freedom, and autonomy” was a central concern (Marx 1982: 638), though, ironically, the systems inspired by his ideas ended up in suppressing exactly these. The predominant developmental paradigm does not touch upon the comprehensive and controversial political, economic, social, cultural, or other forms of freedoms which people across the world yearn for and deserve. True that MDGs represent people’s freedoms—from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, disease and other such human evils—as well as contribute to other freedoms that empower them to pursue values and actions that they might deem rational or desirable. To the extent that is the case, MDGs would be an integral part of a liberal perspective of development. Nevertheless, we cannot reduce the *core* developmental agenda to goals like the MDGs or the IDGs—that place should be reserved for individual freedom, the central concept in designing, monitoring, and assessing development policies, initiatives, administration.

We cannot treat a person hungry out of choice and one without choice in a similar manner. Development would not mean eliminating the hunger of the fasting person, nor would it mean force-feeding a person who has been given real choice to eliminate his hunger, but wishes to persist in it for his own set of reasons. So, the indicator to be monitored and assessed is whether individuals have meaningful freedoms to eliminate their hunger, and not the elimination of hunger itself (as in MDG 1). The central focus is neither on means of freedom nor expected outcomes of freedoms, but on real freedoms that individuals possess. Having said that, there is nothing that prevents us from taking the means and outcomes *as well* into account for assessing development, as indicative variables, which have the potential to tell us about the freedoms individuals possess.

“Many of the terrible deprivations in the world have arisen from a lack of freedom to escape destitution” (Sen 2005: 155), and, therefore, the “expansion of freedom” has to be “the primary end” as well as “the principal means” of development (Sen 2000: 36). Apart from allowing one to pursue his or her own well-being—and also that of others by way of altruism or philanthropy, even if that means sacrificing one’s own (self-sacrifice) at certain times—freedom also directly contributes to one’s well-being, and therefore, the virtue of freedom cannot be reduced to initiatives that it enables us to take to promote our or others’ well-being (Sen 1985). Which is why MDGs or similar development goals cannot be said to constitute freedom directly. Areas covered under MDGs are indicators of underlying “unfreedoms” that people suffer from, and we should therefore be striking at the root, rather than working merely at the top, which is what the extant development paradigm seems to be doing. It is just not addressing those fundamental issues that are keeping underdeveloped and unfree people across the world where they continue to be.

The Concept of Freedom

Nevertheless, although “almost every moralist in human history has praised freedom”, its meaning is “porous” enough to allow every interpretation some sort of plausibility. We have negative freedoms as well as positive freedoms. The former refer to freedoms from “deliberate interference of other human beings” (the sense in which it has been used by classical English political philosophers as well as by libertarians), the latter to “the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master” (to be subject, not object; doer who decides for himself, not one for whom others decide). Although they may seem similar, they have “historically developed in divergent directions” and come into “direct conflict with each other”. The promotion of the latter has assumed various forms of coercion and tyranny in history and clashed with the former view of freedom—though human beings are “rational” in their “true” self, the realization of true self may be hindered by “irrational impulse” or “uncontrolled desires”,

which makes it “justifiable, to coerce men in the name of some goal, which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not, because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt” (Berlin 1958).

This is the kind of positive freedom, which the architects of IDGs and MDGs appear to be holding out to “the wretched of the earth”. Consider the following statement from Prof Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on MDGs: “I think that we are an important voice speaking on behalf of the world’s most voiceless people today—the sick and dying among the poorest of the poor” (WHO 2001). The people Prof Sachs presumes to be representing have a voice—it is just that it is rarely heard. In his *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, he talks about “the stabilization of the world’s population” as one of “the greatest economic and political challenges of our time” (Sachs 2009: 12). Such an expert-driven approach belongs to a class of ideas which inspired the Emergency in India in 1975—one of whose primary goals was “adoption of a bold population policy to slow the runaway population growth” in the country. Indians responded by voting out the party in power, showing that democracy trumps experts! Nevertheless, experts continue to “teach” governments and citizens in the developing world what they feel is in their own interest.

The lack of freedom as the principal means of development design owes a lot to a long-standing assumption that the illiterate and poor masses in developing countries like India aren’t eligible to exercise their freedom in a “responsible”, “rational”, and “efficient” manner, thus “expert” planning and “humanitarian” outreach is required to salvage them from their predicaments. The ruling elite within these countries thinks the same about their “backward” co-citizens. This relates to a fundamental question—whose knowledge “counts” in development (Sumner and Tribe 2008)? The West, especially Europe, has traditionally perceived and presented itself as the flag-bearer of the Enlightenment—as have the ruling elite in the developing countries—entrusted with the “natural mission” to enlighten the rest. A number of German and French social scientists—most notably, Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Michel Foucault—analyzed the symbiotic relationship between power and knowledge, and the ways in which the ruling elite strengthens its economic, political and social powers by imposing its systems of knowledge on the dispossessed. Some of those powers appear to have been shaken, to a degree, with the emergence of certain developing economies at the international level, and of certain marginalized groups within countries like India over the past few decades.

Agency and Well-being Freedom

A very important distinction to be made here is between “agency freedom”—relating to general freedoms individuals have to pursue their life-goals—and “well-being freedom”—or freedoms we have to pursue our well-being objectives (Sen 1985). The latter is a subset of the former, but since societies constrained with resources may not be able to promote all of our agency freedoms, development design as well as initiatives should be primarily concerned with enhancement of well-being freedoms. At times, the exercise of agency freedom may be detrimental to one’s well-being freedom or achievement, but that lies within the domain of individual responsibility, and development has no role to play there. For instance, if a person wants to exercise his agency freedom by engaging in life-threatening adventure sports, it is his concern and responsibility to ensure that he does not end up losing his life, not that of public agencies, though in some countries, authorities will actually prevent him from doing that. A development perspective that is only concerned with well-being achievement—as the MDGs—ends up overlooking individual freedoms as well as individual responsibilities. As an old English proverb goes, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink”. As far as development policy is concerned, we *shouldn’t*—even if we can—make him or her drink.

Individual or Women-centered Development

This brings us to our argument that individuals, in the final reckoning, ought to be units of analysis in evaluating development from a liberal perspective—neither systems nor structures, processes, household, groups nor communities of any sort, or even countries. We know very well now that “there is a third world in every first world, and vice-versa”, as the famous Vietnamese critical theorist, Trinh T Minh-Ha, put it, or that the condition of households does not truly represent the situation of women within them due to intra-household discrimination. The same holds true for any aggregates of human beings (be it biological, social, economic, political, cultural, religious, or any other), or of regions or impersonal structures or processes, etc. Not all Dalits are equally deprived, nor are all members of the so-called upper castes likewise privileged, for instance. Similarly, a country like the United States may be termed as a “full” democracy in The Economist’s Democracy Index 2011, and as a “mostly free” economy in The Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom 2013, but what does that actually mean for many African-Americans in the country is well-known.¹ This holds true for many democracies and free markets in West. The targets of development efforts, monitoring and evaluation should, thus, in final run, be individuals alone—within households, communities, countries, etc.

¹ There are eight states in the United States with photo voter ID laws which contain strict guidelines on what qualifies as a valid identity for elections, disqualifying 25 percent of voting-age African-Americans without a proper photo id.

Within individuals, there has to be a sharper focus on females of all age groups. And it would not perhaps be too much to ask for if one were to argue that the ultimate unit of development analysis should be females, and that all aggregates be broadly categorized “developed”, “developing”, or “underdeveloped” based on the condition of vast majority of women within them. This line of analysis would yield a very interesting ranking of aggregates, and probably some of the economically advanced countries in Asia, for instance, may have to let go of their “developed country” status. However, this does not imply that aggregates cannot, at all, be targets or units of development efforts or analysis. In fact, they have to be, possibly in the first place, in a number of cases. For instance, public health measures, which target whole populations benefit individuals, but maybe not all of them in all cases. This is what we have to look out for and minimize the chances of. And this is precisely what is critically missing in existing development MDG framework—focus on individual equity, especially women’s equality and empowerment.

Can we sacrifice freedoms of certain individuals for the sake of aggregate development, which enhances the freedoms of a lot more many? A liberal development perspective would respond in the negative. Both John Rawls and Robert Nozick—two of the most prominent liberal political philosophers of twentieth century—opened their magnum opus with a categorical support for inviolability of individuals—“each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override” and that “it does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many” (Rawls 1971: 3-4); and, “individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them” (Nozick 1974: ix). In the name of national development, we know how freedoms of tribals in India or that of aboriginals in USA and Australia, for instance, have been violated. Industrialization, rural and urban development, and other large-scale development efforts are critical for aggregate progress, but when we look at them as “means” to individual freedoms, rather than as “ends” in themselves, it has profound implications for our development practice and assessment. We cannot justifiably displace people and destroy their livelihoods just because we want to undertake a large-scale developmental project, which we think is in “national” interest. Those individuals have to agree to it, and be partners in development.

However, this is an argument for a peculiar kind of “normative individualism”—that individuals *ought* to be at the heart of development planning, monitoring and assessment—and not one for “methodological individualism”. Which is that the functioning of the economy, society and polity can be traced to and understood through motivations and actions of individuals alone—or the kind of normative individualism that libertarians derive from such methodological individualism—as free market is a “spontaneous order” based on rational and self-interested

actions of individuals playing the market game, the state should not “interfere” in market processes or outcomes. Governments should not. However, it does not mean that they shouldn’t “monitor” market processes or outcomes, or work towards strengthening individual freedoms and ensuring that *no one* lacks the freedom to participate in the market process in the first place. Governments should work towards creating an enabling environment not just for existing entrepreneurs, but maybe more so for those not in the saddle yet.

At the same time, they should monitor whether specific groups of individuals are at a persistent disadvantage vis-à-vis other groups of individuals as far as market *outcomes* are concerned, because that could be an indicator (although not a sure-shot signal) for certain discriminatory practices at work as far as market processes are concerned. This brings us to the fact that individuals are not always rational or necessarily self-interested—they may be concerned with promoting group interests (ethnic, cultural, religious, etc.), even at expense of individual or rational economic self-interest. Damodaran (2008) has illustrated the ethnic embeddedness of market process in certain parts of India. Markets, in empirical reality, may not be as free as we would like or believe them to be normatively.

Freedoms and Markets

The free market system is the best system that we have at the moment to secure our development goals *in principle*, but various models of the system, as they have evolved under varying political and socioeconomic circumstances, may not always be congenial for individuals’ freedoms and development. The case might be very different *in practice* unless proper safeguards are ensured—the first and foremost being the promotion and preservation of individual freedoms. In principle, “the freedom to enter markets can itself be a significant contribution to development”, and the crucial development challenges in various developing countries today include freedom of labor from bondage that denies access to labor markets (Sen 2000). “Freedom of labor” was also a recurring theme in Marx’s *Das Capital*, and it is largely owing to inability to participate in and benefit from the free market system that inequalities have risen sharply and development hampered.

The aim, therefore, should be to make the market process as free and unprejudiced as possible, rather than abandoning it in pursuit of the alternative system, which has proved to be a historical disaster as far as freedoms are concerned. Many of the imperfections of the market system, and their resultant disasters in terms of development, arise due to undue interventions by the state or monopolistic business interests. The threat to free markets importantly comes from “those who already have an established position in the marketplace and would prefer to see it remain exclusive”, which is why there is a need to save “capitalism from the capitalists”

themselves (Rajan and Zingales 2004: 1-2). Markets should be freed from both in equal measure, only then can they become a means to the development of individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds. However, we need to bear in mind that without free markets, the idea of enhancing well-being or agency freedoms cannot be realized, and, therefore, development policy and assessment has to be closely integrated with the state of market systems and the macroeconomic situation in various countries. We cannot talk of development in isolation from dominant economic, political, and social systems in place. If women are not faring better in terms of MDGs, or more generally worldwide, it is largely due to persistence of systemic biases against them in various aspects of human activity. Free markets can be vitally important in the quest for women's emancipation, empowerment, equity, and freedoms.

Freedoms and Democracy

Democracy is not only instrumentally, but also intrinsically valuable. It is a direct expression of people's political and other freedoms, which is why masses have risen to passionately defend and even die for democracy, which perhaps has never been the case as far as free markets are concerned. The US governments have talked about spreading democracy, which has had more acceptability worldwide, but not so explicitly about spreading the free market system, a task which has largely been left to the IMF and World Bank. When ordinary citizens "clamor for democracy, it is not necessarily because of what democracy may bring them, but because they share a widespread contemporary urge towards self-government" (Kohli 2001: 3-4). This probably explains the "paradox" that Alam (2006) has pointed out to in his book, *Who Wants Democracy?* "How can the governed in India—vulnerable, lacking in basic means of life, looked down upon, with no support—be the source of strength in democracy? Particularly when the successive regimes had done so little to alleviate their poverty, illiteracy, poor health, lack of shelter and absence of opportunities" (xvi). This despite the fact that democracy in India has continued to exist in the shadow of caste (Guru 2011), and historically disadvantaged groups like Dalits see it as "the initial rather than the sufficient condition for the realization of their normative goals" (101). This is despite initial Western skepticism over independent India's ability to sustain a democratic polity in the backdrop of pervasive poverty, illiteracy, and diversity, and continuing assumption of technocratic experts among the ruling elite that poor and illiterate people are unfit to govern their own affairs and stand in need of their support.

If development means freedom, democracy cannot but be an integral part of it. While it is, in a generic sense, an expression of our political freedoms and is valuable for its own sake, it also holds value for helping to promote development and avoiding preventable calamities by allowing the space for public mobilization and pressure, as well as more fundamentally for arriving at the definitions of development and other matters of public interest through public

reasoning and debate. One could even argue that a democracy, which does not allow the enhancement of individual freedoms and alleviation of human suffering is actually not a truly functioning democracy, though it may give semblance of self-determination to its dispossessed members. As in the case of free markets, we have to attach a rider to democracy as well—if certain groups continue to be disadvantaged in a given democracy, there is something deeply problematic with its functioning, which needs to be reviewed. At the same time, it is important to note that there is nothing to causally demonstrate the supposed inconsistency between democratic deepening and development (Sen 2000); rather, democracy in a generic sense is both a means and end of development. Development without democracy is tyranny, even if it lift millions out of poverty, as in China, or allows us to enjoy enhanced lifestyles, as in many Arab countries.

Although there is some sort of democracy in nearly half of the world, *The Economist's Democracy Index 2011* classifies only 25 countries as “full democracies”—53 are “flawed democracies”, 53 authoritarian regimes, and the remaining 36 “hybrid”. Interestingly, not all “full democracies” are in the developed OECD zone—one (Mauritius, rank 24) is in Africa, two (Uruguay, rank 17 and Costa Rica, rank 20) are in Latin America. The world's fastest growing economy, China, is ranked 141 in the authoritarian club, and with it are countries like Egypt (rank 115), Russia (117), Cuba (126), etc. which have done relatively well in terms of human development as well as the MDGs. It is interesting to note that Bahrain and Qatar have authoritarian regimes, as per the Democracy Index 2011, but are categorized as “mostly free” in the Index of Economic Freedom 2011. Hong Kong and Singapore are “free” in the latter, and “hybrid” in the former. What do these facts mean?

Freedoms and development in a given space can co-exist with a lack of them in other spaces. However, for the purpose of assessing development, there is a need to consider various dimensions of freedoms and developments in an integrated way. We cannot simply be content with either of them, be it in the sphere of human development, with which the liberal perspective of development is primarily concerned. Cuba, China and erstwhile USSR—all three communist states have made startling achievements in human development, but have simultaneously suppressed either political or economic freedom or both. This leads us to the issue that a “developmental state” does not necessarily have to be an interventionist, freedom-curbing state (as is the case in communist countries). Similarly, a liberal state does not have to be a “minimalist” state like the US, which finds it difficult to develop a consensus on ensuring basic health care to all of its citizens. Even libertarians like Friedman and Hayek supported state financing of children's education as well as intervention in domains which markets do not find profitable, and recently our own Gurcharan Das has made “a liberal case for a strong state” in his most recent book.

Freedoms and Civil Society

Civil society organizations have a major role to play not only in enhancing our freedoms through positive interventions in various spheres of activity, but also in preserving and promoting them whenever or wherever they are in danger due to negative interventions by the state, market, society, cultures, etc. in the lives of individuals or communities. Had it not been for the persistent struggle of civil society actors, inequality or other pressing issues of the day would not gain the prominence they deserve in public policymaking or discussion. Without an extensive, vibrant civil society, democracy becomes meaningless, and a tool of public manipulation in the hands of the political, economic, and social elite, as it, for instance, is in parts of India like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The problem is actually so entrenched in these states that many civil society organizations and media houses act more as representatives of the elite, rather than of deprived individuals or social groups. In fact, there is an elite capture not only of the state and market in these states, but also of the civil society and the media, which could have otherwise kept the former in check.

On the other hand, whenever the established elite fears its interests may be endangered due to the actions of the civil society, it quickly moves in to restrict or repress it, violently if required, but largely through intricate rules, regulations, and restrictions on its activity.

Therefore, the battle for freedom or development cannot be won without strengthening the institutions of civil society. They ensure that: there is dialogue around key issues that affect ordinary citizens; discussion on existing paradigms and their discontents as well as on possibilities for a better world free of poverty and injustice; there are actions on what has been promised and promises made on the provision of basic entitlements; and that individuals and communities are able to understand and utilize the possibilities that may exist out there for them. Together with states and markets, civil society can significantly enhance and equalize the meaningful opportunities of individuals and freedoms to lead lives they have reason to value. Nevertheless, it is us individuals, in the final run, who are responsible for our development, for ensuring that the institutions that exist to enhance our freedoms and opportunities are actually doing so. Change has to begin from us, and spread to society, polity, and economy. As Gandhi said, "be the change you want to see".

3. Proposed Development Goals

Based on discussion in the preceding section, it is clear that freedom should be the central focal goal and variable of development in a liberal framework, and individuals as units of analysis. There should be a special focus on women, who are the most deprived worldwide in terms of freedom within and across groups, with possible exceptions though, as in the case of certain tribes in India that are headed by women or women-headed households. But exceptions prove the rule. Can we then have, let's say, **Women-oriented Development Goals (WDGs)** that are designed with women—of all ages—at the center, monitored and evaluated primarily based on how women within households, communities, countries, etc. are doing—with a women-audit, so to say, in terms of each and every specific development target and indicator? So, freedoms in terms of WHAT, and women in terms of WHO, ought to be monitored and evaluated in terms of a liberal development model. Since women suffer from deprivation in varying degrees around the world, the WDGs should be universally applicable, in both developing and developed worlds.

Various types of freedoms could be converted into development goals, and we could accordingly come up with a set of specific targets and indicators for each goal to be monitored and evaluated. However, since freedom may not always be measurable in quantitative terms, we have to supplement such methods with qualitative research tools and analysis, which also have grown sophisticated and systematic over the years. Until we have suitable data through future surveys designed accordingly, we can try to make best use of the existing data and supplement it with rapid surveys and appraisals conducted in various pockets. I am not going to go into too much specifics—that is something that needs to be worked out once we have some consensus on the broad contours of the proposed or a different alternative liberal framework of development. In any case, lack of data cannot be an excuse for not pursuing conceptual clarity, while the demand for data collection is driven by dominant underlying concepts. Once we gain conceptual clarity, we can come up with indicators to drive future data collection efforts.

No matter what development goals we come up with, they finally have to be everyone's "**My Development Goals**" (MDGs), with due individual ownership and responsibility, with each one of us being free to prioritize them, add to them whatever we think is desirable, delete from them whatever we think is unwanted or undesirable, and be able to reshuffle them as per our own conceptions of the good. With foreign exchange reserves crossing five trillion-dollar mark in developing countries, double of what affluent economies hold, these countries and individuals within them should come up with their own **My-DGs** and financing mechanisms than wait for new international wisdom for our lives beyond 2015.

4. Received Wisdom From International Agencies

To understand development we must understand the politics that shape it.

—DFID, *The Politics of Poverty*, 2010

International Development Goals (IDGs)

With the end of the Cold War in 1991, international aid agencies were faced with an understandable crisis of identity and funds. In 1995, with a proposal from the EU under the French Presidency, a *Groupe de reflexion* was created to review the future of development aid and the role of OECD in it. The *Groupe* requested the OECD to put together the various UN summit declarations into a coherent list for its discussions, and a year later, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD came out with its report, *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation*, specifying seven International Development Goals (IDGs), focusing on economic well-being, social development and environmental sustainability. Most of them, like MDGs that were to follow, had a 2015 target, with 1990 as the base year. The DAC report further added that not all elements of “sustainable development”—“social integration”, “human rights”, “democratic accountability”, “rule of law”, etc.—are similarly measurable, but affirmed “these qualitative aspects of development are essential to the attainment of the more measurable goals”.

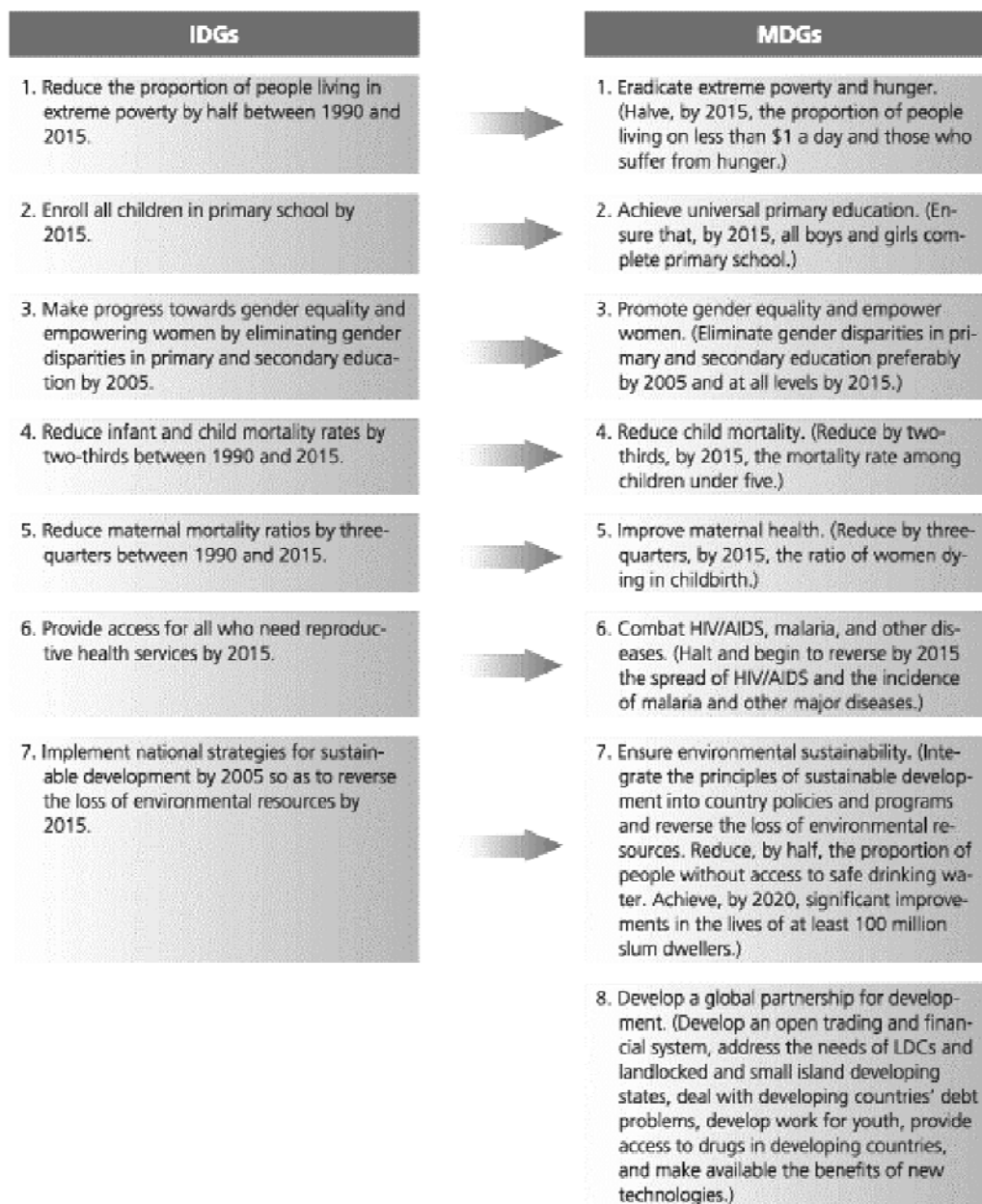
Though the IDGs were endorsed in various OECD meetings, by the G7 in late 1990s, as well as by the UN, the World Bank and the IMF in 2000, they failed to enthuse developing countries as a result of their obvious rich-nation imprint. This, however, did not deter the OECD, or member states like the UK, and some of the related international organizations from pushing them among leaders in developing countries as well as in international forums (OECD 1996; Hulme 2007).

The Politics of MDGs

Despite its numerous conferences and summits in the preceding decades, the UN was conscious of its declining influence vis-à-vis other international organizations as far as development agenda setting was involved. Riding on the wave of structural adjustment programs in such important developing countries like India, the World Bank had, for instance, established itself as the key international player in top development priority areas such as poverty reduction and health. But, with a near-universal membership, the UN was immune to the “rich-nation” tag, at least on paper, which to a great extent also stuck to organizations like the World Bank and the

IMF. To reassert and strengthen its role in the 21st century as the world's leading agency for global policymaking and development agenda setting, the Millennium Summit was its big-ticket hope and Kofi Annan wanted to ensure that there are no attention-distracting disagreements, even as the UN is seen as steering an unprecedented global consensus on a grand development agenda for next millennium.

Figure 1: From IDGs to MDGs



—Source: Japan's ODA White Paper 2002, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

The Millennium Summit did lead to adoption of Millennium Declaration, and received positive news, but the task of coming up with a set of universally agreed development goals wasn't going to be easy, with a set of clearly defined, precise and measurable goals—the IDGs—supported by the rich and the powerful (OECD, G7, World Bank, IMF as well as other international agencies) already in place. The UN had to engage with them, and the final compromise was reached after MDGs 1 to 7, relating to developing countries, were kept time-specific with measurable targets, while MDG 8, related to rich nations, was left without such a tag.

The US continued to behave as “G1”, and even when US President George W. Bush pledged the “soft power” of aid to support his war on terror at the Monterrey UN Finance for Development Conference in March 2002, the US Ambassador to UN (John Bolton) wrote as late as 2005, that his country supports development goals formally ratified in the Millennium Declaration, but not MDGs, which he described as UN “Secretariat product”. The ambivalence of the US allowed the UK to presume a global leadership role on MDGs (Hulme 2007), as is visible in terms of the evolving post-2015 framework as well.

Lack of participation

Although there were several diverse influences that shaped the millennium development agenda, the OECD seems to have exercised tremendous influence in the design of the MDGs, which were “informally approved” at Monterrey Conference, “not formally ratified” (Hulme 2007). The close similarity between IDGs and MDGs (figure 1) is not coincidental. Nelson (2007) has argued that MDGs were “written and institutionalized to mobilize support from the donor countries and their citizens”. As such, they are seen by many NGOs as “product of the OECD governments and the international financial institutions”, “established in donor and elite negotiating rooms, with little local participation or input from poor people themselves, and thus lack the buy-in and legitimacy required to tackle the underlying challenges of the poor” (Aryeetey et al 2012: 15).

A number of governments, too, perceived them “as something “cooked up” by the outside world”, and though some of them “demonstrated a commitment to addressing the MDGs”, it was perhaps largely owing to donor-pressure exerted by the international agencies (Dalal-Clayton 2003: 78). This time around, the UN is trying to address perceptions of lack of participation and ownership by means of national consultations on the development agenda beyond 2015 with a variety of stakeholders. However, local involvement is still not inclusive—for instance, CII was UN's partner for the national industry consultation in India, while other major industry associations like ASSOCHAM, FICCI, and DICCI were neither involved nor represented.

Perhaps, they themselves refused to be, but even in that scenario, the problem continues to remain the same.

Information on these national consultations had been circulating in closed groups, and one really had to be lucky to get to know about them, to know where they were happening, who is sponsoring them, how to participate in them, etc. There were no advertisements in the broader public sphere—one could well imagine how broad-based even these consultations have been and what fate the future development goals are going to meet even if they are officially ratified by all UN member-states! However, one must accept that the UN is perhaps going to be successful this time in assuaging the ego of developing country elite in the civil society, industry, trade unions, etc., and that might help it reach a broader consensus on future development goals.

Lack of ownership

With their strong European origins, the MDGs have not been able to inspire NGOs in the Global South to mobilize grassroots support in their favor, which has meant little or no pressure on governments to achieve targets set under them. As far as emerging countries like India, who have been becoming increasingly resistive of “foreign” pressure and assertive in their attitude vis-à-vis the outside world, international agencies have actually been struggling to maintain their presence in them, let alone be seen as exerting any amount of pressure on them. When aid agencies like the DFID, with one of the highest funding in their India office, are told that their aid is “peanuts”, others are trying to be highly sensitive and cautious in their approach.

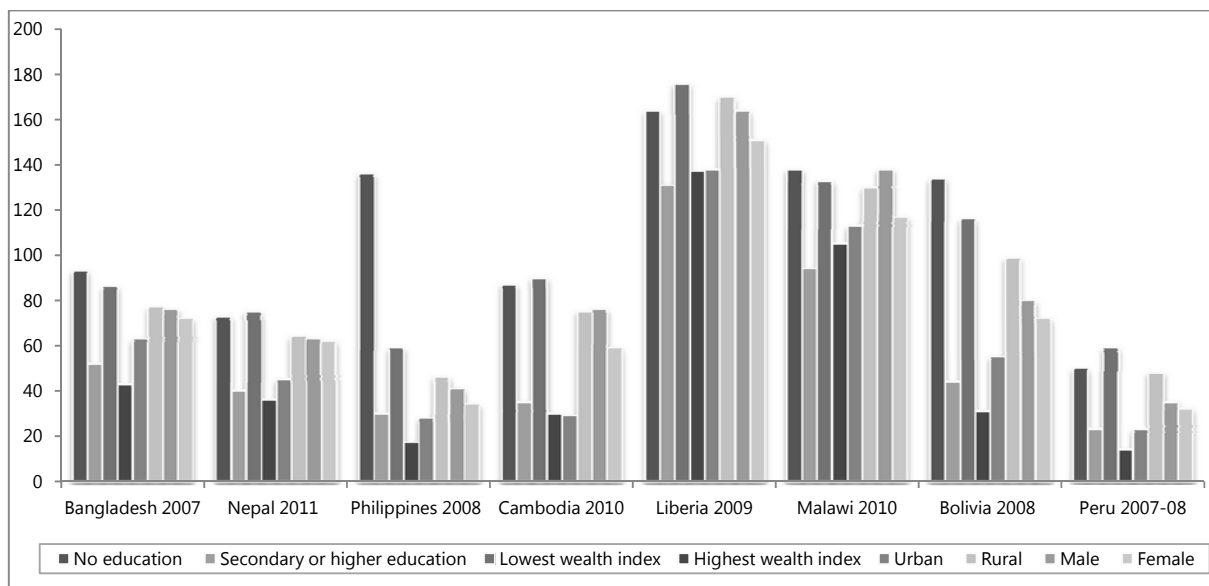
But we do know from the Indian experience that strong pressure from below still works. The anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare and others is a recent, powerful case in point. Nelson (2007) has rightly argued that the “MDGs have not proven to be a motivating force or source of political leverage for such citizen action” (2042). And as it seems, the ownership of MDGs has been missing among the key stakeholders—the public and private sectors, civil society, media, trade unions, health personnel, ordinary citizens, etc.—which largely explains the fate that the MDGs have met, or future goals could probably meet if past trends and present indications are any signal.

Lack of focus on equity

In his recent progress report on MDGs (UN 2012), UN Secretary General acknowledged “the unevenness of progress within countries and regions, and the severe inequalities that exist among populations, especially between rural and urban areas”, and reiterated that “gender

equality and women’s empowerment are key” to the overall success of the MDGs. UNDP’s Regional Advisor on Governance, Human Rights and Justice, Marcus Brand, recently pointed out in Dhaka² that, despite a strong “narrative” on equity and human rights in the Millennium Declaration, focus on these core concerns simply “disappeared in the operational approach of the MDGs”, which are “notably silent” on inequities within countries. Others have argued that MDGs are “equity-blind”, encourage a focus on the “low hanging fruit”, and have a potential to intensify rather than reduce inequalities within MDG achievement themselves (Reidpath et al 2009; Save the Children 2010). One could probably attribute the UN’s overarching concern with consensus over the Millennium Summit and its outcomes, which meant excluding sensitive issues of “discrimination, exclusion, inequality, violence or government repression”, for MDGs’ lack of equity-focus. However, we need to bear in mind that such issues are “defining drivers of poverty, as well as bad development outcomes in themselves” (Aryeetey et al 2012: 10). Inequity is not an issue to be addressed at the top; it lies at the roots of underdevelopment, and that is where it needs to be effectively tackled. This is especially relevant in our quest to address gender-based disparities and disempowerment.

Figure 2: Under-five mortality rate by background characteristics



—Source: Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), ICF International.

Analyzed from the perspective of political philosophy, the design of MDGs seems to be inspired by utilitarian considerations as progress on them is measured at the aggregate national level,

² At the South, Southwest, North and Central Asia Parliamentarians and CSO Forum on MDG Acceleration and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, December 9 and 10, 2012, Dhaka (Bangladesh).

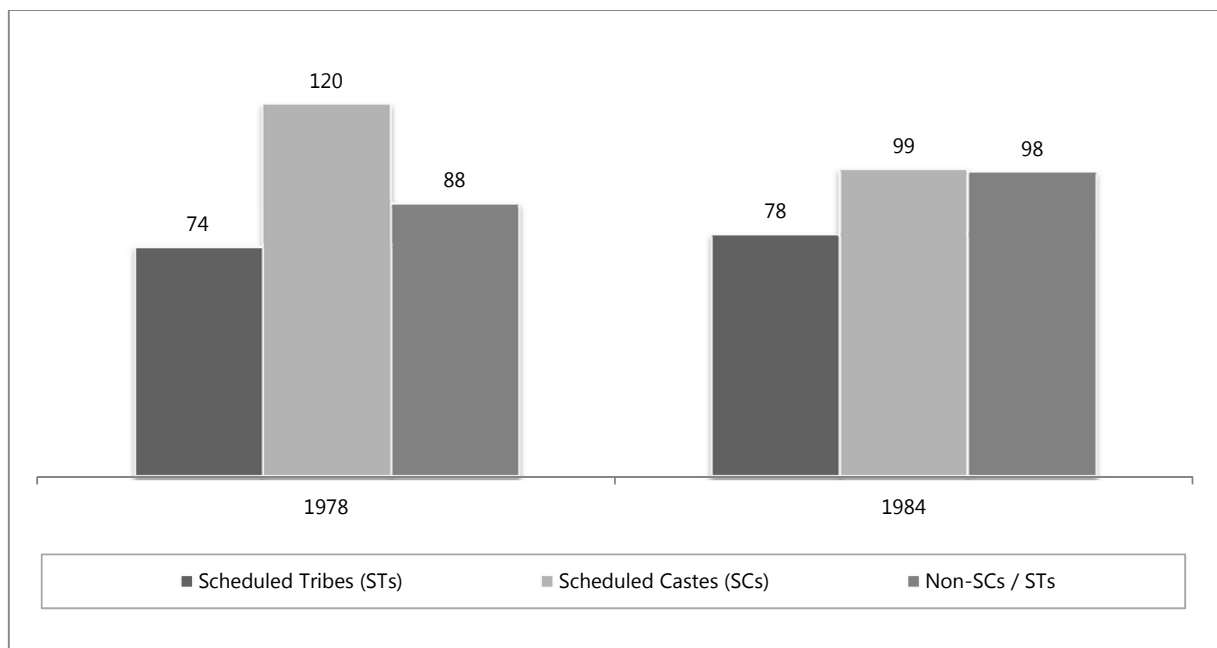
with little consideration for issues of procedural or distributive fairness. Figure 2 below highlights inequalities—substantial in most cases—within two countries each in South and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America on target to achieve MDG 4. It is interesting to note that gender-based inequalities are not that serious as education- and wealth-based inequalities, especially in Philippines, at least as far as the under-five mortality rate is concerned. Target-driven, aggregative approaches, in general, are prone to risk of overlooking distributional aspects to boost their impact assessment or success ratings. Focusing only on outcomes, they tend to neglect issues related to procedural equity and fairness. More than economic growth—as well as for it—human development needs to be inclusive, as also faster, sustainable and, not least, democratic.

Quantitative bias

Closely related to the issue of equity-blind nature of MDG framework is its quantitative bias in terms of targets and monitoring progress. Issues like discrimination, integration, human rights, democratic accountability, rule of law, etc.—“essential to the attainment of the more measurable [development] goals” (OECD 1996), but not always, realistically measurable through them—tend to get left out partly due to an obsessive insistence on *measurable* (read quantitative) goals, targets and indicators. Figure 3, for instance, shows the infant mortality rate (IMR) of scheduled tribes vis-à-vis scheduled castes and the mainstream population in erstwhile rural Bihar. IMR is widely accepted as an important indicator of well-being and overall development of a society or social group. However, if we were to analyze data in figure 3 with this understanding, we could argue that the condition of tribals was relatively better-off than that of other groups, although the historical reality is that tribals in erstwhile Bihar were suffering severe political, social, economic and other types of exclusions much before as well as during these periods. Similarly, under-five mortality rate by gender, as shown in figure 2 above, is not that serious vis-à-vis other facets of inequalities. If we were to confine our analysis to quantitative measurement, we could argue that gender-based inequality is not that worrisome, in this realm at least, if not generally.

But, is that really the case? Child mortality or other quantitative indicators do tell us a lot about development in many cases, but not always and not precisely in all cases. There is, therefore, a case to adopt qualitative methods with quantitative ones in order to reach a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of empirical realities. Like their content, the MDGs appear to have also inherited the exclusive quantitative focus of the IDGs. There is no qualitative assessment for progress on the MDGs, even if within a mixed methods approach.

Figure 3: IMR by caste / tribe in erstwhile rural Bihar, 1978 and 1984



—Source: *Special Sample Registration Surveys, Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.*

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