

What next after MDG?

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IT is almost certain that the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) will not be achieved fully by the year 2015. However, goals like "halving extreme poverty," "reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters," "achieving universal primary schooling" and "combating the spread of HIV/AIDS" are already on track to achievement, or are likely to be achieved, by the developing countries within the deadline. What will happen to the other goals? What will replace the MDGs after their expiry date in 2015? Are there any global efforts to set up a new development agenda? These questions are intensifying in line with the approach of the deadline of MDGs.

Apparently, we can think about three main options for setting a global development agenda after 2015. The easy solution is to simply extend the deadline for attaining MDGs; we could build on the present goals, making improvements based on existing research and consultations, or we could try something absolutely different than MDGs. Some experts argue that we do not even need a global effort to convince developing countries to do what is good for them. Poverty reduction and human development should be the first order of business for governments in these countries, with or without the MDGs.

However, the MDGs have created a global incentive amongst the developing countries to overcome extreme poverty and bring positive changes in the lives of millions of poor people. So it is very unlikely that the UN and the developing nations would give up the idea of having compact development goals like MDGs in coming days. But it took about 10 years to develop MDGs and agree on a global stage. We will need to build substantial political momentum from now to deliver a post-2015 development framework under the guidance of the United Nations.

The United Nations, of course, has already started to work on post-2015 global development agenda. A high-level panel backed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is working to flesh out post-Millennium Development Goals agenda. President Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President E. Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom are co-chairs of the 27-member panel made up of civil society, private sector and government leaders.

In line with the secretary-general's call for independence, transparency and inclusiveness, panelists have already conducted a wide variety of consultations on the sidelines of plenary meetings during the last general assembly of UN. The panel will also consult with the open working group of experts tasked to design Sustainable Development Goals, as agreed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June. It is clearly important

that the Rio+20 and post-2015 processes are closely interlinked to avoid duplication. The panel is working under a Terms of Reference (ToR) and will submit a report to the secretary-general on May 31, 2013.

The report will serve as a key input to the secretary-general's report to the special event to follow upon efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to discuss the possible contours of the post-2015 development agenda to be organised by the president of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly in September 2013. We have not seen anything concrete that can be termed as post-MDGs global development agenda yet. However, Jeffrey Sachs, director at Columbia University's Earth Institute

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and special advisor to Ban Ki-moon on the MDGs, suggests creating new targets -- "ending extreme poverty," "social inclusion," "environmental sustainability" and "good governance" in any new global development agenda.

It is evident that current concerns of environment, women's rights, gender equality, health and education will remain valid after 2015. There is a growing consensus amongst development experts to shift the global development agenda from poverty to sustainable development. Because, in the current global scenario, issues of sustainability, resilience and climate change are likely to dominate in any post 2015 agenda. However, the key challenge for the UN will be translating the new development framework into an effective action plan both globally and country by country so that progress can be measured and tracked with appropriate benchmarks.

No matter what the future global development agenda will be, it is very important to include the voice of millions of the poor. At this initial stage in global thinking, it is important for civil society to speak with one voice, and essential for us all to work together, to think together, to plan strategy together and, most important, to persuade together. It is time for national governments to pay attention to the calls from civil society, to consult their citi-

zens and come up with their positions. It is time for the UN to set in place a participatory process to create a framework that is wider than global summits, and includes the voices of those directly affected by poverty.

It is expected that the appointment of co-chairs will provide a starting point for dialogue with civil society organisations, which should contribute to making the discussion more participatory. Many INGOs are also advocating the UN to address any new international development agenda. For example, ActionAid international underscored the need for addressing environmental issues and focusing human rights approach to development.

The poor countries promised to refocus on their development efforts while the rich countries pledged to support them with finance, technology, and access to their markets as part of current MDGs. So, the importance of focusing more directly on rich countries' responsibilities is an obvious direction for the next iteration of the goals like MDGs. Nevertheless, the nations should also learn from the current economic downturn and food crisis. These unexpected situations threaten to derail even the modest progress that has been made on the MDGs thus far. Development in some countries is going backwards because of these global problems.

One of the key lessons from both finance and food crises are how fragile some of the development gains of the last twenty years or so actually are. While the pursuit of a specific growth strategy that is resilient to external shocks is largely a job for national governments, an international strategy for development which contributes to this effort should be a key aim of the diplomats who sit round the UN table to start negotiating the next generation of MDGs. Many development economists and experts argue that significant improvements in governance and political institutions are required in the developing countries before goals like MDGs can be achieved. Imposing any set of new goals will merely escalate the poor performances of the developing countries.

There are still three years to go before the end of 2015. The developing nations all need to stay focused on maximising progress towards the current goals. But it is sure that not all the MDGs will be achieved fully by the all nations within the deadline. There will be some unattained goals that must be carried forward in any new global development agenda. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly important to pay more attention to climate change issues and sustainability in developing and rich countries. The new set of development goals must also ensure commitment from the rich countries to assist the poor countries in coping with any unexpected global crisis.

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SHIFTING IMAGES

Is it really a dog's life?



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IT'S never a good idea to offer an apology before stating one's case. However, given the sensitivity surrounding today's topic, I will do exactly that to dispel any misconception this column might create in the minds of animal lovers and activists. In fact, I greatly

admire people who are attached to animals and spend substantive time and effort tending to them. It really is a demonstration of the kinder, softer side of human nature. It's also true that human beings and their pets can bond in ways that two humans cannot.

An acquaintance in Romania once told me that during Ceausescu's era, when there was a sense of fear and mistrust in the society; she would often talk to her dog to vent her feelings. She felt secure in the knowledge that the dog could not report her to the secret service!

I, for one, have never been much of a "pet person" because I sincerely believe that animals are best left to dwell in their natural habitat. My appreciation for this view was sharply heightened

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when I visited the game parks in Kenya. What amazed me most was the sight of a diverse range of animals grazing carefree and uninhibited. I realised for the first time that by trying to tame or confine animals we actually disturb their harmonious existence. The Kenyan safari left me with a lasting impression of a world where all living things coexist without trampling on each other's space.

My question, however, is: in our quest to protect animal rights must we overindulge our pets and neglect our fellow human beings? Let me elaborate the point with an example. On my recent trip to London, I accidentally walked into the pet section of Harrods Department Store. I was astonished to see the diverse array of pet accessories and food items on sale: crystal-studded collars, designer jackets and blankets, pillows, perfumed shampoos, clippers, cup cakes, biscuits -- you name it and it was available. Besides, dogs were being shampooed and blow-dried in a special glassed-in segment of the store. Actually, you may be amazed to learn that in the United States the annual expenditure for gifts for pets is about \$5 billion, and this Halloween \$370 million will be spent on pet costumes alone!

Of course, pet owners would contend that if they wish to splurge on their pets, who am I to judge their actions? After all, it's a way of appreciating the emotional boost that people get from their interaction with pets. But, how can we be so passionate about animals and their comforts and fail to empathise with the one billion people in the world who suffer some form of hunger? It's like taking up the cudgel to save the whales while not protesting against the millions of humans who die of starvation and whose rights are being violated every day.

Animal rights activists may well make the argument that there is a difference between pampering a pet and fighting against cruelty to animals. And, I would totally agree. I have to admit that in many parts of the world animals, including domestic ones, are ill-treated and there is an urgent need to raise awareness on animal rights. I presume the issue is one of finding a balance between caring for animals and feeling for human suffering, including challenges of obtaining basic subsistence.

Before concluding, let me share with you my favourite "dog story" which illustrates the issue of balance that I am trying to highlight. A friend, arriving at a US airport, was sent for secondary interrogation by the immigration authorities. Among others waiting with him was a man with his dog -- apparently the dog's papers had to be verified before entry.

Due to the high volume of people there was a long wait of more than three hours. When the dog owner's turn came my friend overheard the officer say apologetically: "I am so sorry. Your dog has been without food or drink for so long -- it must be hungry!" The irony is that there were at least fifteen people waiting, also without food or drink, but that seemed to be less important!

My friend, who has a great sense of humour, said that the incident helped him truly understand what George Orwell meant when he wrote: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others!" Orwell, of course, was referring satirically to class and social stratification, but in my friend's case the quote seems to have acquired an entirely new connotation!

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Why jewelers in Bangladesh glitter more than gold

ABDUL MATIN

THE jewelry industry in Bangladesh has been flourishing unabated. Smaller shops are expanding in size. Fashionable new showrooms are being opened in posh shopping malls. Customers are being entertained lavishly in showrooms. This is happening in spite of the fact that the price of gold has been rising steadily. How is it possible?

If you ask a jeweler, he will tell you with a smile of satisfaction that some people in our country have plenty of money and they buy gold irrespective of its price. It is also said that some people are stockpiling gold as an investment because of the steady rise in price.

I am surprised to observe that the trading of gold in Bangladesh is guided by rules made by the jewelers themselves. The government has no control either on the quality of the ornaments or on the rules of the business. It is obvious that when the rules are made by the jewelers they always gain, no matter whether they buy or sell gold.

Most of the buyers of gold jewelry have no idea about the weights, quality or costing methods of the gold ornaments. As a result, the customers can be easily deceived. When I check the memos in jewelry shops, occasionally I detect "mistakes" which, unfortunately, always favour the shop owners.

Jewelry shops in Bangladesh now sell what they call KDM gold. This is different from old or *sanatan* gold. The term KDM is a misnomer. At one time, gold jewelry was soldered with cadmium, also called kadium in some places. Cadmium soldered jewelry was known as KDM gold. Use of cadmium has now been banned in most countries as the fume of molten cadmium is toxic and harmful to people engaged in jewelry making. Jewelers in most parts of the world, including Bangladesh, now use gold for soldering jewelry but still call it KDM gold.

The quality of gold is expressed in karat. 24 karat gold is the purest form of the metal available in the market. It is supposed to be 99.9% pure. This gold is relatively soft and easily malleable. 22 karat gold is less pure than 24 karat gold. The measure of 22

karat means that out of 24 parts, 22 parts are 99.9% pure and the remaining 2 parts are other metals or impurities mixed with it to make it harder. 22 karat gold is therefore 99.9x 22/24=91.575% pure. Similarly, 21 karat gold is 87.41% pure. One should not confuse karat with carat, which is a measure for precious stones and gems.

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owners of jewelry shops. They fix the price of gold and frame the rules of business. Neither the government nor the consumers have any say in this matter. They are very prompt in increasing the price of gold when it rises in the international market but very slow in decreasing the price when it falls. Why? It is advantageous to them.

If you exchange an old 22 karat KDM gold jewelry for a new one, the shop will deduct 10% from the value as loss if it was purchased from the same shop and 20% if purchased from any other shop. Had there been any control on quality, KDM gold would have the same quality no matter from where you buy it. The difference in the calculation losses indicates that there is no control in quality.

I exchanged old gold in Saudi Arabia, where the market is governed by state regulations. I exchanged 22 karat gold in Jeddah at the full market value without any deduction as losses, and paid only the making charge for the new ornament. If gold ornaments

could be exchanged in Saudi Arabia without any deductions, why can't we do so in Bangladesh? The reduction in value due to the so-called loss is a net profit to the shop owner.

The situation is worse if we exchange old or *sanatan* gold. The price of 21 karat old gold is 35% less than the current price of KDM gold and, in addition, 10% is deducted as loss. This means we get 42% less price compared with the current KDM value. Why? The jeweler will argue that the old ornament has about 65% pure gold and 35% other metals as impurities. In other words, what we bought as 21 karat gold was, in fact, 14 karat gold! This means that we were cheated when we bought the old jewelry and now we are paying the price for it. Why should the customers be penalised for the unethical business done by the jewelers?

This explains why the jewelry shops in Bangladesh are thriving in spite of the rising price of gold. It is interesting to note that they are now spreading a news or rumour that they will soon stop buying old gold from customers. Some people are, therefore, rushing to sell old gold at a loss of more than 40%.

It is obvious that the customers in Bangladesh are being deceived by the jewelers in absence of any government regulations or control. Surprisingly, the Consumers Association of Bangladesh is also silent on this matter. Is it not time to stop this shady business and bring some discipline to gold trading through legislation in order to protect the interest of the consumers?

Such regulations should ensure that all jewelers must guarantee the quality of gold and they must buy back the same at the existing market price without any deductions, like in Saudi Arabia. The jewelers should also be obliged to buy back their old gold ornaments, sold as 21 or 22 karat gold, at the current market price of 21 or 22 karat gold without any deductions as they made undue profits by selling 14 karat gold at the price of 21 or 22 karat gold.

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