

**Sri Lanka is on its way to achieving the Millennium Development Goals:
The challenge lies at Sub-national level**

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The Millennium Development Goals are a set of time-bound and measurable goals for reducing poverty and improving the human development the world leaders formulated at the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York in September 2000. Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka attended the summit and signed the Millennium Declaration with other 189 countries and thereby committed to reduce poverty by 2015 in many dimensions: low income, hunger, illiteracy, discriminate against women, diseases, environmental degradation, insecurity of shelter and lack of access to safe water and sanitation. There are 8 goals translated into 18 targets to be achieved by 2015 and monitorable through 48 comprehensive indicators, using 1990 as a base year (Table 1).

Table 1. The Millennium Development Goals Frame work

8 Goals	18 Targets
1. Eradicate extreme Poverty and hunger	1.Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
	2.Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education	3.Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	4.Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015
4. Reduce child mortality	5.Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five
5. Improve maternal health	6.Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other Diseases	7.Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
	8.Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	9.Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
	10.Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation
	11.Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020
8.Develop a global partnership for Development	12 to 18 targets

The first seven goals indicate the targets that poor countries need to achieve by way of adopting pro-poor policies. The eighth goal is the commitment from rich countries with more aid, debt relief, fairer trade, access to market and transfer of technology to achieve the

seven goals. To be meaningful, the globally agreed MDG targets must be customized and tailored to the national circumstances.

Achievements in Social Development:

Despite poor economic growth, Sri Lanka has achieved considerable progress in many indicators identified in the Millennium Development Goals. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2003, Sri Lanka is said to have performed well within the South Asian region (Table 2)

Table 2 : Achievement of MDGs – Regional comparison with South Asian Countries

Indicators	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Nepal
1. Population below one dollar a day	6.6%	36%	34.7%	13.4%	37.7%
2. Net Primary Enrolment Ratio	97%	89%	-	66%	72%
3 (a). Ratio of Girls to Boys in primary education	0.94	0.96	0.77	0.55	0.79
3 (b). Seats held by women in parliament	4%	-	9%	22%	6%
4. Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births	17	51	67	84	66
5. Maternal Mortality Rate per 100,000 live births	60	600	440	200	830
6. Malaria cases per 100,000 people	1110	40	7	58	33
7. Land covered by forest	30%	10%	22%	3%	27%

Sri Lanka appears to have fared well when compared to the South Asian neighbours with regard to eradication of extreme poverty (1), access to primary education (2), gender equality in education (3a), child survival (4), maternal health (5) and environmental sustainability measured by forest cover. With regard to combating Malaria and other major diseases (6), and empowerment of women measured by seats held by women in parliament (3b), Sri Lanka appears to have not performed well. Sri Lanka's achievements have been attributed to the welfare programs undertaken by successive governments since independences in 1948. Until the late 1970, free health care (preventive and curative), free education, (including tertiary level) and free food were made available to all citizens. Much more remains to be done on aspects related to MDGs especially with regard to large regional disparities in income and human poverty, disease control, reducing the high malnutrition among children and high anemia among pregnant women, gender empowerment (women mostly in low-skill and low-paid jobs and under represented at professional and managerial levels), relevance, quality and responsiveness of education, addressing issues related to aging population and implementation of environmental regulations.

Regional Disparities and Issues at Sub-National Level

Despite an average annual growth rate of 5% and a per-capita income of US\$ 950, it is noted that income in Sri Lanka is highly concentrated among the top 20% of the population (with a share of income of over 50%) whereas the income has stagnated for the lowest 40% (with a share of income of 13.9%). This is further confirmed by the provincial analysis of Gross

Domestic Production (GDP). The share of GDP from the Western Province alone is 46% whereas Northern, Eastern, Uva and North Central Provinces each contribute to less than 5% of the GDP. There is a significant disparity of GDP among regions. Similarly the GINI-coefficient i.e. a measure of income inequality has increased from 0.43 in 1990/91 to 0.48 in 2002 indicating the widening of income disparity.

Although Sri Lanka has been quite impressive in achieving most national MDG targets at aggregate level, **critical issues** arise from the sub-national level. Progress **bypasses** poor as such there are poverty pockets or hotspots where intervention is needed. National averages are not revealing, as such it is necessary to **disaggregate** data by regions, gender, income group, and ethnicity to get more insights.

Although based on the internationally agreed poverty line of dollar-a-day, only 6.6% of the Sri Lanka population is in poverty, when one takes account of the National Poverty Line about 22% of the people in Sri Lanka are poor. This implies that one out of five persons fall below the poverty line. The following table provides the percentage of population below poverty line at national and sub-national level.

Poverty Headcount Ratio by District

District	1990/91 (%)	1995/96 (%)	2002 (%)
National	26.1	28.8	22.7
Colombo	16	12	6
Gampaha	15	14	11
Kalutara	32	29	20
Kandy	36	37	25
Matale	29	42	30
Nuwara Eliya	20	32	23
Galle	30	32	26
Matara	29	35	27
Hambantota	32	31	32
Kurunegala	27	26	25
Puttalam	22	31	31
Anuradhapura	24	27	20
Polonnaruwa	24	20	24
Badulla	31	41	37
Monaragala	34	56	37
Ratnapura	31	46	34
Kegalle	31	36	32

Source: HIES 1990-91, 1995-96 and 2002

Sri Lanka was able to reduce poverty only by 3% during the last decade despite an average annual GDP growth rate of 4 to 5%. The incidence of poverty is high (30% to 37%) with possibly increasing trends from 1990s in districts such as Badulla, Monaragala, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Hambantota, Puttalam and Matale.

The HIES survey has **not covered the North-East Districts**. The incidence of poverty is estimated to be severe in the North East Districts due to the two decades old conflict. War related displacements, inability to return to normal life due to land mines, minimum access to

services for people living in welfare centres, prevalence of diseases are some of the concerns. Levels of poverty vary widely and there are many pockets where conditions are at unacceptable level.

Economic Isolation: Remote areas and poor regions:

Although about 82% of the country's population has access to safe drinking water, the proportion of population without access to safe drinking water is high in districts such as Ratnapura (41%), Moneragala (36%), Badulla (32%) and Nuwara-Eliya (32%), indicating wide regional disparities (Census, 2001). Although 92% of the Sri Lankan population is said to have access to adequate sanitation, the proportion of population without basic sanitation is alarming in districts such as Ampara (25%), Nuwara Eliya (20%), Puttalam (19%) and Anuradhapura (17%).

The national average for underweight children (under 5 year old) is said to be 29% in Sri Lanka, whereas in districts such as Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Hambantota and Puttalam it was around 40%. Although the national maternal mortality rate reported by FHB in 2001 is 47 per 100,000 live births, it is very high in districts such as Nuwara Eliya (168), Batticaloa (116), Killinochchi (94), Jaffna (94) and Mullaitivu (94).

Although at aggregate level Sri Lanka appears to be on-track in meeting the MDGs, the challenge lies at sub-national level where certain pockets are off-track. The country may not be able to achieve MDGs at sub-national level, if we continue to take a business-as-usual path. It is necessary to identify poverty pockets and target policy, programme and project interventions to eliminate the regional disparities. Although in the past, many programmes and projects were implemented by the successive governments to uplift the quality of life and living conditions of the rural poor, the effectiveness of the programmes have not been up to the expectation. Hence, the need to institutionalize a results-oriented development planning, management, monitoring and evaluation system is fundamental.

Government policy supported by prioritized investment plan is fundamental for achievement of MDGs. Pro-poor growth strategy, scaling-up of investment in human development, (Health, Education, Nutrition, Vocational training, population policies, social safety nets), investment in basic infrastructure (roads, power, port, telecommunication, technology), health systems (clinics, hospitals, access to essential drugs, immunization and vaccination, health personnel), education systems (schools, teachers, curriculum, encouragement for female enrolment), promotion of Small Medium Enterprises through micro-credit, good governance, peace, improved public sector management, empowerment of women, environmental safe-guards and other related **policy measures**, need to be strengthened to ensure achievement of MDGs.

National Ownership: Coordination/Monitoring Arrangements

Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka in her speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2004 stated that the government has made necessary changes to align its plans more closely with the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The government has established an apex body known as National Council for Economic Development (NCED) to coordinate the formulation of national policies and its implementation. Under the NCED an MDG Cluster has been formed with senior policy makers to drive the national MDG initiatives. To mainstream the millennium development goals a nationally owned long-term

MDG framework translated into a medium term MDG-based Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) should become the basis for accelerated country actions through policy reforms, budget restructuring and international support. Such PRS needs to be closely linked to the public investments through Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) or national budgets.

The Monitoring and Progress Review Division (MPRD) of the Presidential Secretariat is the agency responsible for monitoring the MDGs. The National Operations Room (NOR), which is the Development Management Information arm of the MPRD, liaises with the line ministries, sub-national agencies, Department of Census and Statistics and Central Bank to maintain data and information system on MDGs. The establishment of the MDG Cluster to drive the process under the NCED is a major policy initiative to institutionalize MDGs into the national development framework of the government. Also the government has recently established a Strategic Enterprises Management Agency (SEMA) to revitalize the strategically important service delivery areas.

Contextualizing and Localizing

In order to mobilize resources and trigger action the relevant ministries are developing ambitious and challenging localized targets for intermediate years as well as for 2015 through a process of inclusive dialogue, involving academia and civil society organizations. Such localization initiatives are already in progress in the Ministry of Health, Education, Women's Empowerment, Environment and Samurdhi and Poverty. All key ministries have established ministry level working committees to localize the MDGs.

UNDP Supported MDG Project:

The government is implementing a project on "Achieving Millennium Development Goals" with the support of the UNDP to strengthen the MDG monitoring capacity of the government. The project activities include launching campaigns and awareness; strengthening the national monitoring and statistical capacity; baseline studies; linking MDG monitoring to planning, budgeting and policy; and localizing the MDGs. The government has initiated action to prepare an MDG Country Report to provide current status of MDGs, its trends and to identify the challenges.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is well placed to achieve the MDGs by 2015. The government has made necessary changes to align the development policies and plans to eradicate poverty and improve human development. Although Sri Lanka's performance at aggregate level is on-track, much more remains to be done at sub-national level.

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