

India not on path to achieve UN millennium goals

Halfway into the period timeline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) suggested by the UN, India seems to be slipping on most of the eight goals, as per the latest findings of the international organisation.

The global economic slowdown, climate change and rising food prices will make the task of meeting the goals even more difficult, the UN adds.

Explaining the impact of these causes, UN resident coordinator Maxine Olson said: 'Recent reports warn that the progress made so far in achieving the MDGs is now being undercut. It is estimated that this will result in an estimated one billion people to go hungry while another two billion will be undernourished.'

Regarding the goal to achieve gender parity, she said: 'Within primary schools, gender parity is at 95 percent in six out of 10 regions. In India, however, lack of access to water and sanitation has an adverse effect on girls' attendance at secondary schools. Also the gap between men and women is higher among rural areas and for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.'

"In India, while the target value of maternal mortality is 109, the 2001-2003 figure was 301. By current trends, India is not expected to reach the goal of improving maternal health," Olson added.

The eight MDGs were adopted at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. The following are the eight goals and India's performance in each of them as per information available in recent reports and the MDG website.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

The problem of hunger persists in India with over 200 million people lacking access to enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. Over 50 percent of the children in the country are malnourished and of those, about 20 percent are severely malnourished.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

In India, however, lack of access to water and sanitation has an adverse effect on girls' attendance at secondary schools. Since almost two-thirds of the world's 110 million children out of school are girls, ensuring their education is a top development priority.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

In India, socially debilitating customs and patriarchal mindsets curtail women's basic rights. Fear and shame prevent many women from speaking out against the declining sex ratio, foeticide, infanticide, domestic violence, dowry deaths, rape, sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS vulnerability issues and trafficking in women and children.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

In India, 1.7 million infants die every year and an additional one million die before they reach their

fifth birthday. More than 64 percent of infant deaths occur in the first month of life and a majority of them die in the first week.

The main killers are asphyxia, premature birth, diarrhoea, pneumonia and other respiratory infections. Around 30 percent of newborn babies have low birth weight and therefore face high risk of death.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Reduction of maternal mortality depends on the availability of skilled attendants at birth. Currently in India, skilled providers attend only 42 percent of births.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases

Tuberculosis (TB) is a major public health problem in India; each year over 1.8 million people contract TB and about 450,000 die from it. Also one in 630 people is infected by malaria. According to reports of the National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), India had 2.3 million people infected with HIV.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Around 40 million households in rural areas do not have a safe source for drinking water and over 100 million rural households live without access to sanitation facilities.

The Indian government has recently released the National Action Plan on Climate Change. However, challenges remain. Increasing population, falling water tables, coupled with serious drought conditions have dire consequences for health, nutrition and the overall development, especially of children.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

India in the past few years has seen the initiation of Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative and with recent findings urging developed countries to increase development assistance to meet committed targets by \$18 billion a year till 2010, India may meet its financial aid requirement.

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