

**Post-MDG (2015) International Development Goals:  
Perspectives of the Southern Think Tanks  
A Programme Proposal  
Submitted to the Matching Fund Facility of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI)**

**1. The Problematique and Programme Objectives**

*Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) constitute one of the “UN ideas that have changed the world”. While the state of actual delivery of MDG promises continues to remain a matter of intense debate, with the 2015 deadline drawing near, the international development community remains preoccupied with reflecting on ‘MDGs’ future’. Indeed, an implicit understanding seems to have emerged that the MDGs are going to continue beyond 2015 in one form or the other. Consequently, questions are being asked what process will be followed to decide on the substance of *MDG Mark 2*.

The discussions on the future of MDGs are currently taking place globally through a number of channels and in a variety of platforms. The United Nations has initiated an inter-governmental process, complemented by a certain level of regional consultations. The UN Secretary-General has created a High Level Panel to provide guidance in this regard. The development-oriented civil society organisations (CSOs) including issue-based advocacy groups are also meeting up to voice their concerns regarding the disparate achievements of MDGs as well as the future incarnation of the initiative. One may also observe proliferation of scholarly contributions from the academic researchers and policy analysts having demonstrated interest in the concerned areas. One suspects that debates regarding post-MDG framework and targets will definitely underpin the global development discourse over the next couple of years, and possibly beyond. Whatsoever, a close scrutiny of these processes and their interplay reveals that they benefit in a very limited way from inputs of the entities located in the South, in particular from Southern think tanks. Such a shortcoming may not only substantively deprive the articulation of post-2015 MDG framework and targets from an effective access to a very pertinent knowledge base, but may also circumscribe the ownership of the process, undercutting the prevailing broad consensus in this regard.

The spectacular popularity of MDGs is often attributed to the unprecedented political support that the goals have received at the global level. It is also maintained that the concise, concrete and communicable articulation of the 18 time-bound targets helped to capture the imagination of the concerned citizens. MDGs have definitely provided an enhanced profile to issues relating to poverty, particularly in the development assistance programmes. Yet, it is now being frequently mentioned that the narrow target-oriented focus of the MDGs has diminished the development agenda and missed out on a number of critical development dimensions. These missing issues include absence of any reference to economic growth and macroeconomic policy framework, structural change, productive capacity building, and need to contain inequality. It is also argued that new risks such as climate change, food price volatility, fall-outs of global economic and financial crisis, and aspects of human rights and security should find reflection in the next generation of MDGs. One would reckon that, to decide on ‘what to include and what to not’, it will be necessary to consult the appropriate and relevant evidenced-based analyses emanating from the South (particularly from the low-income countries) regarding their enduring development challenges and accumulated rich developmental experiences.

It is by now well recognised that MDGs were delivered through a top-down process. The framework and the targets were developed with little inputs from the member states, and practically with no contribution from the non-government actors. Such a process may have been useful in getting the initiative off the ground in the first instance, but will be quite challenging to get a closure of the discussions this time around. In this context, engaging the policy-oriented researchers from the global South will be particularly important in shaping the next set of targets, informed by local knowledge and experience. The need to incorporate local knowledge and experience becomes all the more pertinent as MDGs were conceived as universal development goals. As a result MDGs suffered from low contextualisation, particularly in terms of their prioritisation by taking note of varying levels of development among the developing countries.

In this connection, it may be pointed out that critiques of MDGs (2015) have often disproportionately focussed on health-related goals (i.e. MDG 4, 5 and 6) and many other social sectors did not receive adequate attention. It is reckoned that, there is a need to put more emphasis on the issues of nutrition, along with poverty alleviation and quality of education, along with enrolment performance. Further, these criticisms frequently did not take explicit account of the inter-linkages and co-determinants which would have streamlined targets without compromising what were to be achieved and measured.

On the other hand, there are the views that want to see *MDG Mark 2* more as ‘*Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs)’ which would be relevant for all countries, irrespective of their level of development. The growing importance of the emerging economies have also added a new dimension to this debate. Indeed, the debate concerning MDGs vs SDGs has less to do with semantics, and more to do with issues of power and ownership of national goals and priorities – within a wider frame of global imperatives. The Southern think tanks may also constructively contribute to this debate.

It may be recalled that no assessment of resource requirement was prepared along with setting the MDG targets. It was only later when such estimates concerning financing of the MDGs were done by target and by country. However, actual availability of resources remained far short of these financial projections. On a similar vein, it may be mentioned that MDG 8 concerning international cooperation lacked measurable indicators and turned out to be the weakest link in the framework. Arguably these have happened because of participation-deficit on the part of competent Southern stakeholders including their concerned researchers and policy analysts. This particular aspect has acquired greater relevance in the current global economic context. The faltering recovery from the ongoing global economic and financial crisis, paralysis of the *WTO Doha Round*, ambivalent follow-ups at the *Busan Forum* on aid effectiveness and modest outcome of the *Rio+20 Conference* all together have created an ecosystem which is going to put enormous adverse pressure on the negotiations for *MDG Mark 2*.

Indeed, global (development) agendas are often developed with little or no inputs from the developing countries. This often happens because of low availability of relevant technical expertise within the government system of the low-income developing countries. Regrettably, the governments of these countries often do not address their capacity shortfall by reaching out to their local institutes and individuals having expertise in the concerned areas. This in-country situation has to be changed as well.

As the international development community and related stakeholders engage themselves in giving shape to *MDG Mark 2*, it is imperative that the think tanks located in the South (particularly from the low-income countries) are purposefully integrated in the process. The think tanks based in global South have a critical role to play, not only in providing evidence

that will feed into the discussion on framework and targets, but will also be crucial in giving shape to the debate itself. This approach may also enhance the quality of international development policy analysis as well as strengthen the global outreach capacity of the Southern think tanks. It may also facilitate the professional linkages of the Southern think tanks with their respective governments.

However, for these to happen, the Southern think tanks would also need to position themselves effectively – at national, regional and international level – in order to maximise their contribution to policy processes. In order to achieve this, these think tanks would also need to be aware of their own organisational capacity and to undertake quality research and influence policy. Therefore, they should also be able to identify ways in which their capacity may be strengthened and locate support which enables them to do this.

In view of the above, a programme is being proposed with the core objective to create a structured initiative to allow the Southern think tanks to channel their inputs into the ongoing global discussions on post-MDGs (2015) framework and targets. This initiative intends to leverage the voice of the knowledge community in the South as it seeks to influence the global development agenda. This initiative will also hopefully address the need to develop the institutional capacity of these think tanks as ‘centres of excellence’. From these perspectives, the proposed programme fully conforms with main objectives of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI), viz. improving research quality, organisational performance and policy linkages of the independent policy research opportunities in the developing countries.

## **2. Programme Design and Activities**

Pursuant to its core objectives, the proposed programme will promote engagements of the Southern think tanks in the following three areas.

- a. Research on issues that may have implications in shaping the next set of MDGs. The undertaken research should be of analytically rigorous and primarily based on secondary materials. Issue-oriented research (as against country-oriented) will get priority. This approach is to strengthen the knowledge base for articulating the *MDGs Mark 2*. These research papers have to meet the publication quality for peer reviewed journals.

It may be mentioned that the participating think tanks may bring together relevant quality works that have been already completed, which may have had greater impact on their own countries, but perhaps has not been noticed sufficiently beyond their national borders. This pooling of existing relevant knowledge will contribute towards filling an important gap in global knowledge.

- b. Policy analysis focusing on issues relating to delivery and implementation of the next set of international development goals. While putting forward policy recommendations, an analytical review of the earlier experience will be necessary. Engagement in frontier aspects of the ongoing policy debates at global level, including those on aid architecture and global economic governance, will be emphasised.
- c. Outreach related activities will entail showcasing of the initiative and its outputs so that the policymakers at the global as well as national (regional) level may take cognisance of these resources. Attempts will be made to link up with the other similar initiatives including the inter-governmental processes. Presentation of the outputs of the initiative may take place in dedicated events as well as in other relevant platforms.

Web-based discussions and on-line publications may be also done. A well thought out communication strategy would be necessary to make this approach effective.

*Outputs* of the programme may, thus, constitute of the following.

- i) Research papers related to the new vision
- ii) Policy briefs on 'hot topics'
- iii) Web-based thematic and issue based discussions
- iv) Book(s) capturing all the quality outputs of the programme

*Modality.* The proposed programme is envisaged as a collaborative initiative of the think tanks (TTI grantees) located in Africa, Latin America and South Asia. During the TTI Exchange Meeting held in Cape Town on 18-20 June 2012, the participants of a roundtable agreed to launch the initiative. It was maintained that a collaborative approach would allow the participatory initiatives to expose themselves to each others' relevant works and experiences as well as to generate synergy in leveraging their voices in global platforms. The Chair of the roundtable, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka was requested to play the role of lead organisation by way of developing a concept note on the proposed initiative, identifying interested think tanks and exploring the funding opportunities.

It was further agreed that the guiding spirit and initiative of the programme will rest with the Southern think tanks, but it will operate as an open platform. To that end, concerned scholars from the non-TTI grantees as well as institutes located in the North may be also invited duly to interact with the programme participants. The programme will also seek collaboration of TTI, particularly for the use of its information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure for running the web-based discussions and online publication of the programme outputs.

*Learning Outcomes.* The proposed programme, once implemented, will improve the research quality of the participating institutions and enhance their capacity to engage in global policy debates. These are also core objectives of the lead organization, the CPD, and thus this initiative will contribute to CPD making progress towards achieving its objectives for institutional strengthening with support from TTI. One of the outcomes of the programme will be the strengthened ability of the senior researchers to locate and exploit virtuous policy linkages of an evolving issue. Being a collaborative initiative, there will be enough scope for peer learning in the process of implementation of the programme. As a whole, the programme will bolster the institutional capacity and profile of the participating institutions. As mentioned earlier, these outcomes will fully correspond to TTI's overall objectives as well as be commensurate with the specific institutional objectives of the participating institutes as TTI grantees.

*Timeframe.* In order to make the contributions useful, the programme outputs have to come on stream at an early date so that the programme activities should start as soon as possible. The anticipated timeframe of the proposed programme will be three years (2012-2015). For practical reasons, its implementation may be conceived in phases.

### **3. Phase I of the Programme**

With a view to consolidating the programme concept as well as to work out the details of the envisaged activities, an expert group meeting (EGM) will be convened soonest, with participation of a select set of experts from the network of participant institutes, interested TTI grantees from South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Experts from institutions having demonstrated expertise on MDG and international economic governance related issues as well as prospective supporters of the programmes may be also invited to the meeting.

CPD will convene the EGM in Dhaka, Bangladesh and will be the coordinating institution. CPD will be applying, on behalf of the participating institutes, for accessing support under TTI's Matching Fund (MF) facility and will be managing the external fund received for Phase I. All participating institutes will be sharing equally the required matching contributions as required by TTI MF facility.

The EGM will take place for two days in early January 2013 which would allow some time to make substantive and logistical preparation for the EGM.

The outcome of the EGM will be an agenda and plan for taking forward the larger set of works as envisaged under the programme. The meeting will also reflect on funding possibilities for supporting the fuller programme on the perspectives of Southern think tanks regarding post-MDG international development goals.

**Contact**

*Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD*  
Distinguished Fellow  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)  
Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Tel: +88 01711568164, +880 2 9134438  
E-mail: debapriya.bh@gmail.com  
Website: www.cpd.org.bd