

NOTE

The Millennium Dilemma

R B writes :

When the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were first declared, they were met with a sense of promise. A decade later, despite all the official insistence that all is on track, it is increasingly clear that this approach to development was flawed from the onset.

For ten years, numerous committees, international and local organizations and independent researchers have tirelessly mulled over all sorts of indicators, numbers, charts and statistical data relating to extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality, child mortality, and so on.

The conclusions derived from all the data weren't necessarily grim. And the sincerity of the many men and women who have indefatigably worked to ensure that the eight international development goals - agreed to by all 192 UN member states and over 20 international organizations - were fully implemented, cannot in any way be discounted. They were the ones who brought the issue to the fore, and they continue to push forward with resolve and determination.

The problem lies with the concept itself, and with the naive trust that governments and politicians - whether rich or poor, democratic or authoritarian, leading global wars or trying to steer clear from the abyss of famine - could possibly share one common, selfless and unconditional love for humanity, including the poor, the disadvantaged, hungry and the ill. The Utopian scenario might be attainable one day, but it certainly won't be happening anytime soon.

So why commit to such goals, with specific deadlines and regular reports, if a genuine global consensus is not achievable?

Since its inception, the United Nations has been a source of two conflicting agendas. One is undemocratic, and championed by those who wield the veto power at the Security Council (UNSC). The other is egalitarian, and it's embodied in the General Assembly. The latter reflects the global mood and international opinion much more accurately than the former, which is largely dictatorial and caters only to power.

As a result, two conflicting sets of ideas and behaviors have emerged in the last six decades. One imposes sanctions, leads wars and destroys nations, and the other offers a helping hand, builds a school, shelters a refugee. The latter offers assistance, albeit on a relatively small scale. The former spreads devastation and destruction on a grand scale.

The Millennium goals evolved from this very dilemma, which continues to afflict the United Nations and undermine its noble principles. For now, MDGs would have to settle

for being a true reflection of peoples' aspirations, but with little expectation of achievable results.

True, every noble effort should be supported and lauded. But unwarranted optimism can border on folly if one intentionally ignores the dynamic of lasting change, whether at a micro or macro levels. The discussion of MDGs should not come at the expense of realism and truth, and it should certainly not just serve as yet another feel-good moment for the rich, while further humiliating the poor. So long as veto-wielding members of UN Security Council, whose 'opinion' is the only one that truly counts and who regularly go on to prescribe decisive and cruel policies, decide the fate of human kind, no humanitarian programme sponsored by UN would succeed. □□□