

”Millenium development goals in India, 2010 – a civil society report”

By Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, September 2010

The report is available online at: <http://www.wadanatodo.net/reports/reports.asp>

The pivot of the report is the UN Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and their implementation and effect in India. The report presents two overall points of criticism:

First, the MDGs are criticized for not articulating the rights perspective containing the right to work, the right to natural resources, to food etc. However, the report acknowledges that although the scope of the MDGs is too limited, the “*MDGs do have a specific and unique role in India’s development*” (MDGs in India – a civil society report, 2010: 5). Second, the focus turns to the Indian Government’s inability (and lack of will) to address the issues that are blocking the prospect of reaching the MDGs by 2015.

References to Dalits and caste issues in the report

p. 13-14:

Context: *With the ambition of increasing gender equality in education and on the labour market, the MDGs seek to increase the number of women working in the non-agricultural sector. According to the report, this goal will be difficult to reach due to the many different social factors – such as caste – affecting women’s participation in employment.*

Writing on this issue Nisha and Ravi Srivastava (EPW July 10, 2010) point out that while economic factors principally determine men’s participation in employment, “forces that influence women’s participation in work are diverse and include demographic, reproductive, social, religious and cultural factors.” Work participation rates (WPR) in rural areas are highest for scheduled tribes and **scheduled caste women** and the lowest for “**other**” **caste women**. These categories are poor and have no choice and no social taboos and hence work, where as the converse is true for women from “**other**” **castes**. As regards levels of education, for male workers education is associated with higher WPR in both urban and rural areas. It is the other way for women because illiterate women have a higher WPR than women with higher levels of school education, a trend reversed only for women with technical or vocational education or graduates.

p. 14:

Context: *The year-long discussion on the special reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha (The Indian Parliament). While some demand that 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha should be reserved for women, others argue that there is a need for an additional reservation for scheduled castes within the reservation in order to ensure the representation of women from all castes and classes in the Lok Sabha.*

There have been several bones of contention in this debate but the chief of them is the demand on the part of a few political parties, mainly regional ones, that such reservation mooted at 33 % of the total number of seats, should also provide for a reservation within this over all reservation for

scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities and other backward classes (OBC). This debate has been so contentious and inconclusive that it has raged over a period of 14 years. Eventually, a Constitution amendment bill to introduce 33 % reservation for women in Parliament and the State legislatures has been introduced in the Rajya Sabha and has also been passed but this has to be passed by the Lok Sabha as well. The bill does not provide for reservation within reservation. There is considerable force in the arguments of both sides – those who want the bill to be passed as introduced and those who want reservations within the 33 % reservation for women.

While the proponents of the bill argue that the 33 % general reservation for women would help break the “patriarchal hold” on the nation’s politics, those who advocate reservation within reservation argue that unless such a provision is made, upper class and **upper caste women** would corner these reserved seats to the detriment of the women of the marginalized classes.

(...)

The right solution, however, appears to be not to leave such a choice to self-serving politicians who decide on “ticket” distribution in political parties but to mandate it in the Constitutional amendment itself by providing for reservations for the **marginalized castes** with in the over all reservation of 33 %.

p. 22:

***Context:** The stigmatization and social exclusion inherent in the caste system and the implication of this with regards to the amount of scheduled caste people living below the poverty line.*

Although poverty among the **Scheduled Castes** has declined from 46 to 38% during 1993-99, **caste** continues to differentiate the experience of poverty, exacerbating its effects for some groups over others. The **caste system** confines those from **lower castes** to a limited number of poorly paid, often socially stigmatized occupational niches from which there is little escape, except by migrating to other regions or to towns where their caste identity is less well known. Acute levels of deprivation combined with greater likelihood of exclusion from social welfare services and poverty reduction measures mean that members of **scheduled caste** groups, particularly children, are more likely than the rest of the population to die prematurely.

s. 26:

***Context:** Critique of the Tendulkar committee’s methods for measuring poverty: The report is criticized for being one-dimensional in it’s depiction of the poverty problem in India. This is evident in the way the methods of measuring poverty do not include variables such as caste.*

While the jury is still out on this report, what is clear is that even though this exercise remedies some of the maladies with previous estimates, it does not push the envelope far enough. The estimation of poverty by the Tendulkar committee does not factor in the multidimensional nature of poverty. The overdependence on money metrics, which rely only on private household consumption expenditure, does not capture the political dimensions of being poor in India. This report, like all such preceding reports, does not take into account significant variables such as **caste**, gender and disability. In that sense, the government has squandered away yet another opportunity to take a multidisciplinary approach to the poverty question in India.

p. 33:

Context: *The Indian Government's budget for 2010-11 is criticised for its lack of focus on the social sector, including the fight against poverty. The funds allocated towards scheduled castes are not proportional with the size of this group of people.*

If the aam aadmi (Editor's note: the average Indian) happens to be a **Dalit** or a tribal, there is even less to cheer. The allocations in the **scheduled caste** sub-plan and the tribal sub-plan should be proportionate to their population—at 16% and 8% respectively. But the Budget allocates 7.19% for the **SCs** and 4.30% for the **STs**. The National Campaign on **Dalit Human Rights** estimates a shortfall of around Rs25,000 crore in the current Budget.

p. 40:

Context: *Discrimination against Dalit children in the educational sector*

Any discussion on quality and performance of the education system would be incomplete without taking a close look at the performance of children from the marginalized sections of society- **Dalits**, Adivasis, Muslims and other groups of persons suffering from discrimination in society. Many of the trends of social discrimination are replicated in the education system as well. Poverty, social discrimination and relatively poorer quality of service reaching out to areas inhabited by these social groups combine into a vicious cycle pushing children out of school and often into child labour. It is essential to remember in this context that 36.5% of **SC groups** in rural areas and 38.5% in urban areas lie below the poverty line. The corresponding figures for **ST groups** are 45.9% and 34.8%. Furthermore, instances of **untouchability** in the school (especially in the context of the provision of the midday meal) are regularly reported and have been referenced to as a problem in the 10JRM as well.

p. 47:

Context: *Discrimination against- and marginalization of Dalit women*

Muslim, Dalit & Adivasi women

The Muslim, **Dalit** and Adivasi women face multiple marginalization due to being discriminated in terms of religion, **caste** and ethnicity and being a woman are oppressed within their own community as well. And gender related oppression cannot ignore the oppression women from minorities, **dalits** and adivasis.

(...)

Key Issues:

(...)

· **Dalit** children are served food in an isolated place in schools and they are subjected to harassments by teachers.

· People in villages still believe that 'drums, idiots, **low caste persons** and animals' deserve to be beaten.

(...)

· Tribal and **Dalit** women are paid less wages than men.

(...)

· The textbooks used in schools use derogatory terms for the **Dalits**.

(...)

· **Dalit** women still practice manual scavenging and are always ill-treated by **non-Dalits**.

(...)

· **Dalit** women are affected not only by **other caste** domination but by the patriarchal values within their own community as well.

(...)

Key recommendations:

(...)

· Change is not possible unless there is a strong link between the three different communities- **Dalits**, Muslims and Tribals and leaders of collectives of these three communities coming together. Members of these three communities should be sensitive and compassionate to the questions and problems of each other, only then can their struggle gain strength.

· Reservations have enabled many women from marginalized community to take part in politics but more needs to be done to ensure they have the decision making power and to ensure they're not forced to become the puppets of **other caste people**.

p.55

Context: *The imbalance of child mortality rates within the caste system. The table on page 55 shows how child mortality is higher for scheduled castes than among other groups. The table includes the following three categories:*

- Neo-natal mortality rate
- Infant mortality rate
- Under-five mortality rate

(See table 5, p. 55)

Where are India's children dying?

Of the 26 million children born in India in a year, nearly 2 million still die before their fifth birthday and half within a month of being born. But these aggregate figures conceal huge inequities in mortality rates across the country, within states and between them, as well as between children in urban and rural areas, from **upper caste and lower caste families** and from tribal and non tribal communities.

(...)

Mortality rates vary considerably in relation to maternal education, wealth, religion, **caste** and tribe. The table below sets out these disparities in detail.

(...)

But inequality in India is not just about income disparities. Large parts of India suffer from deeply entrenched forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender, **caste**, ethnicity and religion.

p. 79:

Context: *Discrimination against Dalits regarding access to water resources*

Social exclusion and access to drinking water

The prevailing **caste system** hinders water access: In fact, water is used as a weapon to perpetuate dominance. A survey of 565 villages across 11 states shows denial of access to water facilities in 45-50% of the villages. Exclusion is also prevalent in schools where **SC children** are not allowed to drink water from common water sources. Teachers and **non-SC students** do not take water from **SC students**. Discrimination gets enhanced in times of disaster and scarcity e.g. floods and drought;

when safe water is at a premium. Water tankers are directed towards **upper castes** hamlets because of the power they wield. There have been examples of the same during the drought in Bundelkhand and the tsunami in South India. In areas where water pollution is high, impact is much worse for excluded communities. Common water sources are rarely 'common': They are instead branded by a divisive line of **caste** as for the prerogative use of the **dominant castes**. This exclusion is maintained by the creation of a meticulous system of checks to circumscribe the **SCs** rights to water through varying **untouchability** practices or outright denial of water, and any steps taken by them to cross this invisible line is swiftly crushed.

Where segregated water supplies are not found, **SCs** often endure the following practices of **untouchability**:

- **SCs and non-SCs** do not stand in the same line to fill water and do not use the same pulley to draw water from the well.
- **SCs** cannot dip their pots in a well or pond when a **non-SC** is drawing water
- **Non-SCs** can draw water from water sources 'allotted' to **SCs** when their own water sources have dried up, but the reverse is not possible
- **SCs** cannot take water from a common water source on their own, and have to request a **non-SC** to pour water into their pots.

When **SCs** complain about lack of drinking water, the response ranges from threats to violence and sometimes death.

p. 83:

Context: *It is concluded that discrimination on the basis of caste plays a significant role in gaining access to hygiene-, water- and sanitation resources.*

Conclusions

(...)

Caste and class play a role in accessing water, sanitation and hygiene. The age-old social hierarchy still defines access to and control of drinking water. Their discrimination gets sharper in times of disasters and stress. Inclusive access thus continues to elude the people who need this the most: the **SCs**, **STs**, the poor, aged and the differently abled. Globally, poverty eradication strategy integrates access to water and sanitation. Most of the people without access to water and sanitation are also world's poorest.