What does the Post-2015 Development Agenda mean for India?

By Caroline Asiala

Two conferences have dominated the international dialogue for sustainable development: the Millennium Summit and the Conference on Sustainable Development. With the deadline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fast approaching, there has been much discussion about the post-2015 development agenda. The MDGs proved to be a successful framework for addressing the world's social, economic, and political problems. Goals surrounding poverty and access to water, especially, were effective and now the question is *What next?*

The Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals, established in 2013 by decision 67/555 of the General Assembly, was designed to answer this very question. The group consisted of 30 representatives, each sharing their membership with another country in their geographic region. Colombia shared with Guatemala, Zambia shared with Zimbabwe, India and Pakistan shared with Sri Lanka, and so on. The work of government delegations was supplemented in part by large interest groups, including business and industry, human rights advocacy organizations, and labor unions. They also had technical support from relevant UN agencies including the UN Development Programme and the UN Environment Programme. The 13th and final session took place 14-18 July, after which, the OWG submitted its proposal for a set of Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted by the General Assembly. Seventeen overarching goals with 169 specific targets were submitted, ranging from ending extreme poverty to significantly reducing marine pollution. So, how does a group of high-level government officials from all over the world

deciding goals specifically relate to India?

Here are just a few examples:

Goal 5 attempts to tackle gender discrimination, an issue extremely relevant to India, considering that secondary school participation for girls is nearly 10 percentage points behind boys' (UNICEF) and women's labor force participation is still considerably lower than that of men (ILO). While these disparities still exist, India's political commitment to social inclusion is a great reason for hope and should be used as an example for other Member States.

Goal 11, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, and sustainable", provides targets related to transportation, housing, city planning, and mitigation and adaptation to climate change. India is one of three countries whose urbanization is expected to account for 37 per cent of urban growth between 2014 and 2050. These three—the other two being China and Nigeria—will add 2.5 billion people to the world's cities. The trend of urbanization presents both enormous opportunities and challenges to India's government, industry, and civil society in terms of economic, social, and especially, environmental sustainability.

Goal 16 is promoting peace, inclusion, justice, and accountability. Target 16.5 specifically addresses reducing corruption and bribery. Unfortunately, the United Nations has categorized the Indian government's efforts to fight corruption as disappointing. Corruption delays economic growth and tends to impact the poor disproportionately. As the world's largest democracy, India is in a position of great authority to lead the Global South in this fight against corruption, which will increase many countries' competitiveness in the global market and greatly improve the world's governments' ability to make a transition to a sustainable future.

So, what does the Post-2015 Development Agenda mean for India? It means an opportunity to be an example for the rest of the world in promoting peace, equality, and sustainability for all people.