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Nitya Mohan Khemka and Suraj Kumar

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) spurred a global campaign from 2000 to 2015 to tackle poverty's many dimensions and ushered a new phase of global development cooperation. The goals catalysed innovative partnerships, set ambitious targets and galvanised public opinion. South Asia made considerable headway in achieving the MDGs. It reduced extreme poverty by half, enabled near-universal primary education and gender parity in education, halved the proportion of the population without access to drinking water, and made steps towards ending malnutrition, child/maternal mortality, and hunger (United Nations [UN], 2015a).

However, the progress in South Asia regarding the MDGs has been uneven, revealing broad disparities and country-level bottlenecks in the achievement of specific targets across regions and themes. This is because countries adopted a fragmented approach to tackling the goals, choosing only to engage with a few of them. Furthermore, even though the MDGs applied only to the global South, they had been marginal players in setting the MDG agenda. There was very little ownership of the goals in the developing world, which viewed them as being "externally imposed" or donor-driven.

In 2012, the United Nations convened the Rio+20 Summit to craft the post-2015 development agenda, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Extending beyond the largely social focus of the MDGs, the SDGs set global priorities around social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In addition to the five social goals, the SDGs include five environmental goals, five economic goals, and two new goals on partnerships and peace, justice, and building strong institutions. Being universal, they reflect the