Press Release

Access to Technology Key to Address Climate Change and Development under UN's SDGs

Post-2015, the global development agenda for the next 15 years will be preoccupied with the daunting challenge of achieving 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The SDGs follow the millennium development goals (MDGs) which were conceptualized in 2000 as a set of eight goals on diverse development dimensions including poverty alleviation, gender equality, health and environmental sustainability. The Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), in association with NITI Aayog, UN and Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC), Observer Research Foundation (ORF) today held the third round of consultation with stakeholders on SDGs, ahead of the special session of the UN General Assembly to be held in New York on 25-27 September.

The question of access to technology runs across the SDGs. The implications of proprietary knowledge for access to technologies for achieving development goals in developing countries are being seriously considered. Unfortunately, there is no agreement on a technology facilitation mechanism which India strongly supports. This mechanism is one of the most important issues in the aftermath of Rio+20 given that technology is considered central to achieving the goals enshrined in SDGs and dealing with the ravages of climate change. This mechanism ensures developing countries have access to environment-friendly technologies and calls for technology cooperation and transfer, as well as innovations and capacity building.

SDGs, for their part, were first mooted at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (popularly known as the Rio+20). In a significant development on 1 August 2015, UN member states have declared conclusion of the negotiating rounds on this agenda and have
put forward the finalized text of the agenda to be adopted by the UN General Assembly during its special session on 25-27 September 2015. This agenda is now called *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. RIS has collaborated with the UN and was the key partner from academia/research for the first consultation on SDGs and on India’s role in the post-2015 development agenda.

SDGs go beyond MDGs in focusing on global systemic reforms to remove the barriers to sustainable development. While the first set of the SDGs (Nos 1-7) perhaps are an extension of MDGs, the later ones are an extension of the agenda itself. These, in turn, have two distinct characteristics: SDGs (Nos 8, 9 and 10) are referred to as enablers of development covering areas like inclusiveness and jobs, infrastructure and industrialization; and distribution. The final set of goals under the SDGs (Nos 11-17) lays down the framework for sustainability covering areas like urbanization; consumption and production; climate change; resources and environment; peace and justice; and means of implementation and global partnership.

This UN-supported consultation would be followed by a fourth one at the UN Headquarters in New York on 21st September 2015. These two consultations are jointly organized with the NITI Aayog and the key knowledge partners include the Observer Research Foundation and Brookings Institution. At today’s consultation, in his welcome remarks, the DG of RIS Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi stated that there was a “considerable shift in approach from MDGs to SDGs. SDGs now include 5 Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.” He noted that there were three issues for developing countries, notably, resources, capacity and technology.

The UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in India, Mr. Yuri Afanasiev noted that SDGs were complex and raised the question of how to nationalize these goals. We should not forget MDGs and integrate them into the new goals. “For the first time in the history of world there is a universal agenda that is SDGs. It is not the North talking to the South but the world talking to each other”. There is also the need to address issues of inequality and going beyond the metrics of GNI per capita to a conversation on the wealth of nations and inequality within nations. The richest 8 per cent control half the global GDP, he forcefully brought out.

Mr. Shyam Saran, Chairman of RIS, argued that “we are living in a cross-domain world”. The issues are interlinked and entail feedback loops. SDGs are universal in scope and entail diversity of challenges. We need to allow for diversity in approaches to realising SDGs. Mr. Shyam Saran stated that at RIS development and South-South cooperation is at the top of its agenda and this focus entails innovative ways of working with traditional donors and new partners. At this consultation, RIS released a special issue of its journal *Asian Biotechnology and Development Review* on SDGs. The institute also unveiled a new web page dedicated to SDGs.

In her keynote address NITI Aayog’s CEO Mrs. Sindhushree Khullar gave a perspective on how MDGs and SDGs are integral to our development process enshrined in five-year plans. Between now and 2030, at the mid-point of 2022, India would be celebrating 75 years of Independence when the objective of providing health, nutrition and education for all would be fulfilled. We have captured the spirit of SDGs, she argued. However, the challenges are immense in achieving 169 indicators. In the 12th Five-Year Plan, there were only 25 indicators, many of which could not be updated due to data problems. Should we do all 169 indicators, she wondered?
Mr. Puneet Aggarwal of the UNES Division in MEA applauded RIS for holding a very timely and important event. The outcome of the UN Special Session in September 2015 is eagerly awaited, he said. Lastly, in her concluding remarks, Professor Anuradha Chenoy, Chairman of FIDC and Dean, School of International Studies at JNU, raised questions as to why MDGs remained unfulfilled. Was this a problem of resources? Moreover, SDGs are not a new idea but built on the shoulders of the past. SDGs acknowledge civil society partnership, especially women’s movements. India can be a global leader if SDGs are implemented in the country, she felt.

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