Last week Prime Minister David Cameron was here along with a huge business delegation to drum up trade for his country and its companies with Shining India. This was a big news and hit all the media. What did not hit the media was the fact that during his visit, David Cameron also took time out to focus on the other India, the Bharat in darkness and what that India would want to look like in 2030. He did this in his capacity as the co-chair, along with Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, of a 27 member High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP) to make “recommendations regarding the vision and shape of a post-2015 development agenda”. The Panel was set up by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, and has now met three times, most recently in Monrovia on 1st February, 2013. The Panel will present its recommendations at the end of May 2013. The inter-governmental process of negotiating and adopting a new set of goals will start with the UN General Assembly in September 2013 and will carry on till the new goals are adopted in 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out in 2000 have been effective in helping countries across the world to focus their minds on reducing poverty and improving their level of human development. The MDGs have been a great force for good. Global poverty has been halved, maternal deaths reduced by a third, and malaria deaths reduced by a quarter. However, significant challenges remain. Globally, 1.3bn remain in extreme poverty, 740 women per day die in childbirth and 6.9m children under the age of 5 years die each year. India still has a way to go to meet the MDGs.

This time around, the process is much better than the last time when the MDGs were adopted with very little consultation with anyone. Inclusive broad-based consultations have started in over 100 countries, including India. India will have a key role to play on the agreement of a relevant development framework for post-2015. Although Indian views on the issue are still evolving, the public debate on the likely new agenda has gained prominence in recent months. At the recent Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, India’s External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid made a statement on the importance of the current MDGs framework, what the new framework might look like, and the challenges that are likely to arise in setting up the new framework.

Prime Minister David Cameron also expressed his views on the MDGs:

The MDGs were a brilliant innovation that got the world to focus on really important things. With three years to go before the 2015 deadline we can’t take our foot off the gas. After 2015 we need to finish the job and eradicate extreme poverty. This is the most urgent moral problem facing the world today, and an exciting goal for the world to unite behind.

Based on extensive consultations held in India, what is emerging is that the new set of goals would need to take into account a few key principles that are relevant in today’s context:

**IN THIS ISSUE**

- David Cameron’s Visit and the Other India 01
- CLOSE THE GAP: A Campaign against Inequality 02
- A Seat on the Board! 03
- Donors Speaks 04

Globally, 1.3bn remain in extreme poverty, 740 women per day die in childbirth and 6.9m children under the age of 5 years die each year. India still has a way to go to meet the MDGs.
• **Universal, rights based goals**—There should be a universal set of goals based on principles of human rights that should be applicable to all countries. The world is no longer divided into north-south, east-west. There is a new world order where we have moved from a 67 world to a 620 world with the poor now largely living in middle income rather than low income countries, with aid no longer being the main way out of poverty. In such a world, we cannot have one set of goals for the developing world and another one for the developed world, whose only responsibility in the old world order was to provide aid. We all need to ensure that we live in a more equal and sustainable world and need to adopt principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities to attain that.

• **Tackling social exclusion**—In addition to targeting the eradication of extreme poverty, which would mean focusing on the 456 million people in India (42 percent of the population) that lives below the poverty line of $1.25 a day, we need to focus in particular on the bottom 20 percent of the population and look at the root causes of poverty and inequality. In India, as well as in the other countries, this group would consist of the socially excluded groups that are there because of reasons such as discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity or gender and would need to be tackled with different policies than just those focusing on economic growth as the way to eliminate poverty.

• **Tackling inequality**—In addition to looking at extreme poverty, we need to look at inequality and the relationship between the rich and the poor, say the ratio of the income and wealth of the top 20 percent of the population and the bottom 20 percent. This would focus on correcting a pattern of development during the last decade that has led to growing inequalities around the world with the rich capturing a large proportion of the gains from development, leading to very slow progress in poverty reduction in India and other countries of the world.

• **Promoting gender equality and women’s rights**—We need a much stronger goal on gender equality compared to the last round of MDGs. A strong goal, building on the commitments already made under the Beijing Platform in 1995 and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ensuring women’s economic, social and political rights is essential. This could be translated into targets on women and an equal ownership of land property, a violence free life, and equal representation in parliament, for example.

• **Bringing inclusiveness and sustainability under one set of post 2015 goals**—The Rio + 20 Conference in June 2012 established an Open Working Group of 30 members to develop a proposal for sustainable development goals (SDGs) for presentation to the UN General Assembly. The new MDGs and the SDGs need to be combined into one set of goals that tackle both inclusiveness and sustainability.

• **Introducing a monitoring and accountability framework**—The current set of MDGs have no monitoring mechanism and therefore no accountability. Once the new goals are adopted, each country needs to set up a tripartite mechanism—including the government, civil society, and the private sector—to monitor progress in the attainment of the new MDGs.

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CLOSE the GAP: A CAMPAIGN AGAINST INEQUALITY

CLOSE the GAP Campaign is an attempt to bring about change in attitudes, behaviours and required policy spaces that will help the country realise its vision of a more equal, just, and sustainable nation providing the “right to life with dignity for all”.

The campaign is being launched on the 8th of March, coinciding with the International Women’s Day at Delhi this year with a first in a series of public facing events on existing gap between men and women. It will focus on the representation of women in key institutions of governance like the Parliament, Judiciary, the Police Force, and the Corporate Sector. Women and men from various walks of life will come together to launch this campaign.

The subsequent public facing events will focus on other critical facets of inequality such as property rights, health, and education, right to food and nutrition, and budgetary allocations for the marginalised groups.

CLOSE the GAP Campaign will combine a best of strategies and technologies to create a unique public conversation on existing gaps. A phone line will be promoted through billboard advertising, offline events such as creative installations in public spaces and face-to-face engagements and signup by youth in the colleges and other sites, an online portal and social media like Facebook and Twitter would be used to seeking the public to join the conversation. Oxfam India will analyse and combine public opinion and take them to senior decision makers in the political, social and corporate spheres.

Oxfam India works in partnership with over 130 grassroots NGOs to address root causes of poverty and injustice in the four areas of 1) Economic Justice, 2) Essential Services, 3) Gender Justice and 4), Humanitarian Response and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Recognizing the structural and systemic inequality, this Campaign will influence the policy makers in bringing policy level changes to close the gap. Come, help us to close the gaps.

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The recent rape and subsequent death of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi has shocked all of us into realizing that violence against women has reached epidemic proportions in the Indian society. While the middle class has united, rallying for new laws for protecting victims, better policing and quicker justice, Corporate India has been strangely quiet. There is a collective wall of silence in the media from India’s corporate leaders. If anything, Indian companies should take this opportunity to bring about societal change by initiating change within their own organizations.

A primary cause of violence against women is that from an early age, boys are taught to devalue women. “If it would destroy a 12-year-old boy to be called a girl, what are we then teaching him about girls?” asks Tony Porter, co-founder of a non-profit organization, ‘A Call to Men: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence against Women’. This is a particularly pronounced problem in India where not just men, but women devalue women. Right from the killing of the female fetus in rural and urban India, discrimination against girls begins at home.

How can Corporate India play a role in valuing women more? As the legendary royal advisor and chief economist of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya 300 years before Christ, said to his king, “be ready for action and lead by example”. Corporate India can change the dynamics of Indian society by including a higher number of women at the board level and at senior management positions. When women are seen in powerful positions they will be valued more by society and will also act as role models.

The Indian Parliament recently passed the Companies Act 2012, effectively mandating at least one woman board member on corporate boards. This is a very good start for increasing the presence of women in leadership positions in India. Having women on the boards can bring gender balance within organizations. It can also be profitable for companies and will bring up opportunities and perspectives that all-male boards never thought of. Women are key decision makers in a larger number of product purchases from cars to insurance policies. A recent study by Deloitte shows that women consumers already control roughly US$20 trillion of total consumer spending globally and influence up to 80 percent of buying decisions.

Studies undertaken by SAIS, a global think tank, have shown that companies having three or more women on the board actually have an average of 53 percent higher return on equity, 42 percent higher return on sales and 66 percent higher return on invested capital. When I recently wrote to 40 CEOs of top companies in India, most agreed that they would like to include women on their boards. Several of them asked me for suggestions and a roster of qualified women candidates. We need more women to come forward and fill these positions.

A Goldman Sachs study of 2007 reported that different regions of the world could drastically increase GDP simply by reducing the gap in employment rates between men and women; the major economies would add 9 percent to 16 percent to their GDPs. India Inc is ignoring a tremendous economic opportunity by failing to address the needs of female employees and failing to create women friendly workplace. Companies should be able to provide mentoring programs targeting women, flexible working hours, strict sexual harassment policies and secure transportation for late night employees. Large companies can set up women’s cell to provide guidance.

Instead of looking at the government for action, Corporate India should play a much larger role in bringing about attitudinal change. For one, they would be more agile and effective. They would not need to set up “standing committees” and engage in bureaucratic turf wars to do what is necessary. Simply put, Corporate India would be better at implementing policy changes quickly.

As someone very aptly wrote, every so often it makes sense to come out of the trenches we dig ourselves into and take a 30,000 feet view to see that we are an intricately connected whole. India’s corporate leaders need to step out of their trenches and act against the scourge of violence against women.

A poster from Oxfam India’s Close the Gap Campaign to be launched on March 8, 2013

A recent study by Deloitte shows that women consumers already control roughly US$20 trillion of total consumer spending globally and influence up to 80 percent of buying decisions.
Enclosed is my first donation of 
Rs. 6000/- towards providing learning material for 5 children.
Rs. 4000/- towards empowerment of 5 women belonging to poor and marginalised communities and to ensure a violence free lives for them.
Rs. 3000/- to provide emergency survival material and rehabilitation to 3 families affected by a natural calamity.

I wish to donate by Credit Card

[ ] Visa [ ] Master Card [ ] Other ......................................................
Name of the Bank ........................................................................
... 
Card No. ........................................................................................
Date of Birth ............... / ............... / ............... 
Card Expiry Date ............... / ............... / ............... 

I wish to donate by Cheque/DD (favouring Oxfam India) 
Enclosed is my cheque/DD for Rs. ..............................................

All donations are exempted from income tax under 80G of IT Act

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