

From 'Air India' to 'Hunger Free India': turning the tide in the interest of 'Millennium Development Goals'

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ABSTRACT

Despite careful formulation of the health care policies, national programme plans and implementation mechanisms, in accordance with the international commitments made and local needs of India, the potential of raising additional funds towards ensuring 'Hunger Free India' can only be achieved through austerity measures at all levels with appropriate adjustments of the funds. These funds presently seem to be wasted by non-performing assets like 'Air India', rather than with

the Universal Health Care (UHC) model based strategic approaches, insightful preferences and decisive commitments. Such reformist approaches shall pave the way to achievement of 'Millennium Development Goals' targeted for the year 2015.

Key words: fiscal deficit, gross domestic product (GDP), millennium development goals (MDGs), universal health care (UHC)

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It is important in the developing world to invoke political, administrative, managerial, programmatic and people's centric movements towards achieving excellence of expertise, resources and results in the field of health care – the core of national development. Thus, the wastage, be it meager or larger, needs to be avoided by timely, innovative and purposeful reprioritized distribution of the funds being wasted due to continued losses, for whatever reason(s), by the public service machinery. For example, the losses incurred due to 'Air India', the national airline, strike running to the bill of Rs. 500 crores, may have changed the lives of millions of poor, under-privileged and hunger stricken rural masses.

At a time when the Indian economy is not performing well, with 5.3% GDP (gross domestic product) growth in the last quarter of the financial year of 2011, the country needs to think about filling the gaps of financial losses due to non-performing organizations. The likely continuity of the euro-zone crisis is going to make the challenges more difficult for the country. The fall of the rupee, rising prices of gold and slow industrial activities have also been contributing to the low mood of economy and thereby do not allow control of the inflation. It is feared that if sustainable and immediate measures are not taken to deal with fiscal deficit and current account deficit, a state of stagflation may be observed, and this disastrous condition shall have far-reaching consequences. The impact of these consequences shall surely come first on the already economically weaker sections of the society, especially regarding access and availability of 'Universal Health Care' and the achievement of 'Millennium Development Goals' [1,2].

In light of the present scenario, it's necessary to evaluate the government organizations, such as 'Air India', for economic viability options as well as usage of the surplus funds available from the government. If we are able to shut down 'Air India' in the national interest and are able to divert those funds, the welfare of the poor, hungry and sick persons of the country will be served. Cash strapped 'Air India' has already suffered losses of around Rs. 500 crores, in terms of revenue losses, due to a 45 day pilots strike. This accounts to more than Rs. 10 crores of losses per day. On April 12, 2012, the central government approved a Rs. 30,000 crore bailout for 'Air India'. This is in addition to an equity infusion of Rs. 3,200 crore that had already been made. 'Air India' is also struggling with loans and dues of more than Rs. 67,500 crores and occurred after the airline ordered 27 Boeing 777s as part of a 111 aircraft deal for 'Air India' (formerly 'Indian Airlines' in 2005) for Rs. 50,000 crores. Even the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on 'Air India' has termed

the massive acquisition purely through debt as a "recipe for disaster" [3]. There is a requirement to reassess the national priorities. Whether such a bailout of the national carrier is necessary at a cost, which the country can't afford, requires careful public scrutiny, political decision making and developmental insight.

Without going into the details of the merits of a pilots' strike, the government's stand or ascertaining whether the 'Air India' would be able to meet the performance parameters (such as aircraft occupancy, on-time performance, fleet utilization and rationalization of the employee pay structure [3]), it is crystal clear that a country like India cannot afford to lose the taxpayers' money like this. Therefore, a strategic long-term approach is required for generating enough funds towards the social sector welfare schemes.

The developing countries of the world are striving hard to achieve the 'Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) [4-6]. However, the fulfillment of the desired status, achievements of the pre-determined targets and synergistically sound approach based on successes can only be ensured, if the concerted, consolidated and convincingly coordinated efforts are put in by the multi-level agencies through visionary leadership supported by interactive mechanisms and systems in place.

It is of primary need to have a larger outlook on the scenario and have a liberal attitude towards dismantling the non-performing assets in the larger interest of the country. The rationale of having a national carrier, now being termed as notional carrier [7], is that when countries such as Italy, Switzerland and Germany have given up on the practice [3], it requires careful national debate. Meanwhile, it must have the visionary approach to prioritize the social development sectors for the desired level and quality of national growth. If we wish to achieve the fulfillment of the much desired 'Millennium Development Goals', especially to ensure 'Hunger Free India', we need to strive hard to generate resources from within the country. This will ensure fast, sustainable and all-inclusive growth in India. And, this can and should be ensured through mobilization of funds from the sick units within the government, semi-government and private sectors.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest.

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