

Assessing India's National Policy Framework for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT:

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) were crafted through extensive involvement of stakeholders and global consensus. While there were significant commitments made, member states are becoming increasingly worried about whether the SDGs effectively address the genuine challenges faced by nations, particularly those in the developing world. This study explores the key concerns raised by developing countries in relation to the SDGs. It presents a case study on India and incorporates the opinions of SDG experts regarding its implications and future. The objective of this study, along with its findings and policy recommendations, is to support the implementation and planning of SDGs at the national and sub-national levels in India and other developing countries. The aim is to assist these nations in revamping and evaluating their national SDG implementation strategies, similar to India, to enhance their reach and effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

India plays a pivotal role in determining the global success of the SDGs. During the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized the significance of sustainable development for one-sixth of the world's population. He stated, "The sustainable development of such a significant portion of humanity will have a profound impact on our beautiful planet, reducing challenges, fostering hope, and increasing confidence in its success." NITI Aayog, the Indian government's premier think tank, is responsible for coordinating the SDGs, mapping out schemes related to the SDGs and their targets, and identifying lead and supporting ministries for each target. Additionally, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has been leading discussions on developing national indicators for the SDGs. State governments play a crucial role in India's progress towards the SDGs, as they are best positioned to prioritize the welfare of their citizens and ensure that no one is left behind. The UN Country Team in India collaborates with NITI Aayog, Union ministries, and state governments to address the interconnectedness of the SDGs and advocate for adequate financing to achieve them.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged as a successor to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs, a set of eight development objectives established in the year 2000 with a deadline of 2015, marked the first global effort to set measurable goals and targets to address critical global challenges. Over a span of 15 years, from 2000 to 2015, the world witnessed significant political and economic changes. In order to sustain the progress initiated by the MDGs and advance the global development agenda, efforts to formulate the SDGs commenced in 2012. These efforts were primarily based on the Outcome Document of the Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

To ensure a comprehensive consultation process for the creation of the SDGs, an innovative and constituency-based system of representation was adopted. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) established a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) in 2013 to develop a proposal for the SDGs, with India being a part of the OWG. After thirteen sessions held by the OWG from March 2013 to July 2014, the final report it submitted was endorsed by the UNGA during its 69th Session in September 2014. The world leaders formally embraced the Resolution titled "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development," which outlines 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets, during a special UN Summit held in New York from September 25 to 27, 2015.

The 17 SDGs and 169 targets constitute a transformative agenda known as the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," which was adopted by 193 Member States during the UN General Assembly Summit in September 2015 and took effect on January 1, 2016. At the heart of this global agenda for 2030 is the principle of universality, emphasizing the commitment to "Leave No One Behind." It emphasizes that development in all its dimensions should include every person, everywhere, and should be built through the participation of all, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized. This comprehensive agenda recognizes that focusing solely on economic growth is no longer sufficient, and calls for fairer and more equitable societies, as well as a safer and more prosperous planet.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth an exceptionally ambitious and comprehensive agenda for global development to be achieved by 2030. NITI Aayog serves as the central institution responsible for realizing the SDGs within the country, leading the 2030 Agenda with a commitment to cooperative and competitive federalism. It oversees the progress at both national and sub-national levels through various mechanisms, including the SDG India Index and Dashboard, Multidimensional Poverty Index: Progress review 2023, North Eastern Region Index and Dashboard, and similar tools. Localizing the SDGs is of utmost importance to prioritize the most marginalized communities, and it is a critical aspect of NITI Aayog's mission. These endeavors have enhanced the statistical systems and established a monitoring framework encompassing all 17 Goals and over 100 indicators across the country. With this improved and comprehensive edition, our goal is to solidify India's position as a pioneer in achieving the SDGs.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is a government department responsible for gathering and analyzing statistical data and overseeing the implementation of various government programs in India. It plays a crucial role in collecting, organizing, and disseminating statistical information for the purpose of policy formulation, planning, and evaluation of development programs. Additionally, MoSPI is involved in developing and maintaining a framework of indicators and statistics to monitor progress toward national and international development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This ministry is integral to ensuring evidence-based decision-making and effective program implementation in the country.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is another significant contributor to SDG implementation. Given the pivotal role of indicators in measuring progress and the extent to which the targets and Goals are met in India, MoSPI has developed 306 national indicators aligned with the 169 SDG targets and the Global Indicators Framework. Among these 306 indicators, 62 priority indicators have been identified to track the most crucial developmental objectives in India.

Voluntary National Review 2020

India, a nation that houses one-sixth of the world's population, holds the key to the success of the 2030 Agenda. In its second Voluntary National Review (VNR), India has adopted a transformative "whole-of-society" approach, where the Government of India collaborates with sub-national and local governments, civil society organizations, local communities, individuals in vulnerable situations, and the private sector.

India's unwavering commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is evident in its alignment with the national development agenda, encapsulated by the motto "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas" (Collective Efforts for Inclusive Growth). Drawing from the insights provided by the SDG India Index, which assesses progress at the subnational level, India has established a robust SDG localization model centered on the adoption, implementation, and monitoring of these goals at the state and district levels.

The following narrative further summarizes India's advancements across the SDGs.

"Sashakt Bharat - Sabal Bharat" (Empowered and Resilient India): India has effectively elevated more than 271 million individuals out of multidimensional poverty through economic growth and empowerment. Improved access to nutrition, child health, education, sanitation, clean drinking water, electricity, and housing has led to a notable reduction in inequalities, especially among vulnerable populations.

"Swachh Bharat - Swasth Bharat" (Clean and Healthy India): Through a nationwide initiative triggered by the Clean India Campaign and the National Nutrition Mission, India has achieved 100% rural sanitation and witnessed a substantial decrease in stunting, child mortality, and maternal mortality rates. The institutionalization of universal health coverage through Ayushman Bharat, the world's largest health protection scheme, has provided annual coverage of USD 7,000 to 100 million families, encompassing nearly 500 million individuals.

India has taken a prominent role in advocating for global cooperation in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has extended medical assistance to several nations and established the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund with an initial contribution of USD 10 million. At the domestic level, India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic encompasses an initial economic stimulus package of USD 22.5 billion, comprehensive healthcare support for frontline workers, and direct financial assistance to the most vulnerable segments of the population.

"Saksham Bharat - Samagra Bharat" (Entrepreneurial and Inclusive India): India is actively promoting social inclusion by ensuring universal access to nutrition, healthcare, education, and social protection while empowering individuals for entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. The Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity, which encompasses nearly universal access to bank accounts through the Jan Dhan Yojana (National Financial Inclusion Scheme), Aadhaar cards (National unique identity numbers) for over 90% of the population, and widespread mobile phone access, has opened up new avenues for credit, insurance, and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) to the underprivileged, including more than 200 million women, thereby accelerating their economic empowerment.

"Sanatan Bharat - Satat Bharat" (Sustainable India): India's climate action strategies focus on clean and efficient energy systems, resilient infrastructure in the face of disasters, and planned ecological restoration. Committed to its nationally-determined contributions, India has achieved 100% electrification of its villages, reduced annual CO₂ emissions by 38 million tonnes through energy-efficient appliances, provided clean cooking fuel to 80 million disadvantaged households, and set a target to install 450GW of renewable energy capacity and restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. Globally, India ranks third in renewable power, fourth in wind power, and fifth in solar power. India has also launched the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the International Solar Alliance to harness international partnerships for climate action and disaster resilience.

"Samridh Bharat - Sampanna Bharat" (Vibrant and Prosperous India): As one of the world's fastest-growing emerging market economies with a young population and a burgeoning ecosystem of innovation and business, India is striving to achieve a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025, building on its GDP of USD 2.72 trillion in 2018-19. The country aims to pursue an inclusive and sustainable growth path by promoting manufacturing, infrastructure development, increased investments, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial ventures.

In the spirit of South-South Cooperation, India is committed to supporting developing nations in achieving the 2030 Agenda through the USD 150 million India-UN Development Partnership Fund. Embracing regional and global partnerships and upholding the principle of 'leave no one behind,' India enters the Decade of Action with confidence drawn from its experience in addressing challenges. The Government of

India will continue to collaborate with domestic and international stakeholders to expedite efforts aimed at ensuring a sustainable planet for future generations.

Performance on sustainable development goals

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

To assess India's progress in achieving the Clean Water and Sanitation Goal, five national-level indicators have been identified, which address three of the eight SDG targets for 2030. These five indicators encompass: (i) Ensuring Safe and Adequate Drinking Water in Rural Areas; (ii) Promoting Individual Toilets in Rural Households; (iii) Attaining Open Defecation Free Districts; (iv) Expanding Sewage Treatment Capacity; and (v) Annual Groundwater Withdrawal. Using these national indicators, India's SDG Index Score for Goal 6 stands at 63. The scores range between 31 and 100 for the states and between 45 and 100 for the union territories. Among the states, Gujarat has achieved a perfect score of 100. Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Lakshadweep also share this top score among the union territories.

India has actively undertaken a multi-sectoral approach in this domain, implementing various significant programs such as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRWDP), the National Water Quality Sub-Mission, and the Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin, among others. Additionally, India is committed to achieving nationwide Open Defecation Free (ODF) status by 2019.

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

To evaluate India's progress towards Affordable and Clean Energy, three national-level indicators have been identified, covering two of the five SDG targets for 2030. These indicators encompass: (i) Percentage of Electrified Households; (ii) Households Using Clean Cooking Fuel; and (iii) Renewable Energy. The SDG Index Score for Goal 7 in India is 51 based on these three national indicators. Among the states, Tamil Nadu, Mizoram, and Karnataka are the top performers for this goal, scoring 89, 78, and 77, respectively. Chandigarh leads the union territories with a score of 96.

India aims to achieve the twin objectives of providing affordable and clean energy to all. Key initiatives such as the National Electricity Plan, the National Energy Policy, the National Solar Mission, and various other schemes have been launched to facilitate this.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

To assess India's progress in achieving Decent Work and Economic Growth, four national-level indicators have been identified, covering three of the twelve SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Annual Growth Rate of GDP; (ii) Unemployment Rate; (iii) Bank Access; and (iv) ATM Coverage. The SDG Index Score for Goal 8 in India is 65, with scores ranging from 33 to 90 for the states and between 60 and 91 for the union territories. Among the states, Goa ranks as the top performer, and Daman and Diu leads among the union territories.

By 2030, India aims to ensure that every citizen, irrespective of gender or ability, has access to decent work that contributes to the country's GDP. To achieve this, the government has initiated several programs, including the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Start-up India, Skill India, and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, among others.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

To measure India's progress in Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, four national-level indicators have been identified, covering two of the eight SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Road Connectivity; (ii) Mobile Tele-density; (iii) Internet Density; and (iv) Gram Panchayats covered under 'Bharat Net'. The SDG Index Score for Goal 9 in India is 44, with scores ranging from 0 to 72 for the states and between 0 and 100 for the union territories. Delhi and Puducherry are the top achievers for this goal, scoring a perfect 100 on the Index.

The Government of India has launched various initiatives to bolster the infrastructure sector, such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Bharatmala, and Sagarmala, while promoting innovation and industry development through flagship programs like Make in India and Digital India.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

To evaluate India's progress in Reducing Inequality, five national-level indicators have been identified, encompassing three of the ten SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Urban Inequality; (ii) Rural Inequality; (iii) Transgender Labor Force Participation Rate Ratio; (iv) Scheduled Caste Fund Utilization; and (v) Scheduled Tribe Fund Utilization. The SDG Index Score for Goal 10 in India is 71, with scores ranging from 38 to 100 for the states and between 52 and 100 for the union territories. Among the states, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Telangana have achieved a perfect score of 100, as have Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, and Lakshadweep among the union territories.

Several government schemes and initiatives, including Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), and Stand-Up India Scheme, have been designed to address inequalities.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

To evaluate India's progress in Sustainable Cities and Communities, four national-level indicators have been identified, covering two of the ten SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Houses completed under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY); (ii) Percentage of Urban Households living in Slums; (iii) Door-to-door Waste Collection; and (iv) Percentage of Waste Processed. The SDG Index Score for Goal 11 in India stands at 39 based on these four national indicators, with scores ranging from 23 to 71 for states and between 6 and 64 for union territories. Among the states, Goa leads in performance, while Andaman and Nicobar Islands lead among the union territories.

Various government schemes and strategies, including Atal Mission For Rejuvenation And Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban, and Smart Cities Mission, have been formulated to achieve the targets under SDG11.

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Sustainable Consumption and Production, focusing on "doing more with less" to meet present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. It emphasizes resource efficiency, green economies, sustainable infrastructure, and reducing degradation, pollution, and waste.

India, as the second most populous country globally, is home to approximately 17.5% of the world's population but occupies only 2.4% of the world's land area. This underscores the necessity for a comprehensive policy framework that promotes resource efficiency, waste reduction, and activities minimizing pollutants, with an emphasis on renewable technologies.

Goal 13: Climate Action

Focuses on Climate Change and aims to integrate climate change measures into national policies and strategies, as well as raise capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management. India, with its diverse geography and various climate regimes, is vulnerable to climate change. This vulnerability is manifested in events such as floods, droughts, tsunamis, and cyclones in coastal areas.

Goal 14: Life below water

Commits countries to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas, and marine resources, while also addressing marine pollution, illegal and destructive fishing practices, and the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. It also emphasizes enhancing scientific knowledge and technology transfer for marine health. India has undertaken several measures to protect and enhance coastal and marine ecosystems.

Goal 15: Life on Land

To assess India's progress on SDG 15, Life on Land, four national-level indicators have been identified, covering three of the twelve SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Percentage of total land area covered by forests; (ii) Decadal change in the extent of water bodies within forests; (iii) Change in forest area; and (iv) Population of wild elephants. India's SDG Index Score for Goal 15 is 90, with scores ranging from 43 to 100 for states and between 50 and 100 for union territories. States such as Assam, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Manipur, Odisha, and Uttarakhand have achieved the top score of 100, as have Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Lakshadweep among the union territories.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

To evaluate India's progress on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, six national-level indicators have been identified, addressing five of the twelve SDG targets for 2030. These indicators include: (i) Reported Murders (per 1 lakh population); (ii) Crimes Against Children (per 1 lakh population); (iii) Court Density; (iv) Corruption Crime Rate; (v) Births Registered; and (vi) Aadhaar Coverage. The SDG Index Score for Goal 16 in India is 71, with scores ranging from 53 to 91 for states and between 63 and 92 for union territories. Himachal Pradesh leads the states with a score of 91, and Puducherry tops the union territories with a score of 92.

India aims to foster an environment of peace, justice, and good governance, facilitated by transparent and accountable institutions at all levels. Initiatives such as the Right to Information Act, 2005, the Aadhaar project, and other rights-based legislation empower citizens, ensuring transparency and accountability in institutions.

Goal 17: Partnerships

Focuses on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development. It emphasizes key enablers to support the successful implementation and achievement of SDGs, including financing for development, technology access, capacity-building, trade facilitation for global growth, institutional coherence and policy convergence, multi-stakeholder involvement, and regular monitoring for accountability.

CONCLUSION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to address the most pressing challenges facing humanity and our planet. These goals were born out of an inclusive and collaborative process, with nations coming together to create a shared vision for a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous world. India, as a significant contributor to the global population, plays a pivotal role in the success of the SDGs.

Through comprehensive assessments of its progress across various goals, we have seen that India has made significant strides in several key areas. Whether it's providing clean water and sanitation, expanding access to affordable and clean energy, promoting decent work and economic growth, fostering innovation and infrastructure development, reducing inequalities, or creating sustainable cities and communities, India is actively working towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

India's commitment to the SDGs is evident not only at the national level but also at the sub-national and local levels. The localization of these goals is critical to prioritize marginalized communities and ensure that no one is left behind. As we move forward, India's leadership in achieving these goals can serve as an inspiration for other developing nations.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not just a set of goals but a promise to create a more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable world for current and future generations. As we enter the Decade of Action, India's experience and efforts in addressing challenges, fostering innovation, and promoting social inclusion exemplify the spirit of the SDGs. India's commitment to regional and global partnerships reflects the nation's understanding of the interconnectedness of the world's challenges and the need for collaborative solutions.

The journey towards achieving the SDGs is long and challenging, but it is also a collective endeavor that involves governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals. India's dedication to leave no one behind, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized, serves as a beacon of hope for the world as we collectively strive to build a more sustainable planet for future generations. Through continued cooperation and a commitment to the principles of the 2030 Agenda, we can work together to make the vision of a better world a reality.

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