

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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With a view to realise the SDGs, it is crucial that the Village/Gram Panchayats develop their own action plan to improve living conditions. There is a need to be more inclusive in addressing the problems of people from different sections.

The expression 'Sabka Sath-Sabka Vikas' which translates as 'Collective Effort-Inclusive Growth' and has been popularised by the Prime Minister, forms the corner stone of India's National Development Agenda. To fast track this agenda, especially to address the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in rural India through Panchayati Raj Institutions, Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an expert group to provide recommendations and way forward for localisation of SDGs through PRIs. The report, undoubtedly proved to be a welcome initiative to better understand how the SDGs can be localised to engage PRIs and all stakeholders in rural India. It also elaborates on the need for greater coordination across governments and for multi-level governance to mainstream SDGs at the local level.

To kick off, let us understand the concept of Sustainable Development-the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. So, what are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - these are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that 193 countries in the world have jointly set. The Government of India has played a leadership role in defining the SDG agenda. Starting January 2016, countries are expected to frame their agendas and policies to end poverty, protect the planet, enjoy peace and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The linchpin of this Agenda are People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnerships and the Planet.

In a country like India where about 65 per cent of population lives in rural areas, Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) have been a critical



component of local self-governance. These institutions have achieved last-mile connectivity in execution of various schemes of different line departments/ministries. In this backdrop, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have signed a joint statement of understanding on localisation of Sustainable Development Goals. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) 2018-19 to 2021-22 and revamped scheme, approved for implementation from 2022-23 to 2025-26 mandates to capacitate elected representatives and functionaries of PRIs to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through participatory local planning at the Gram Panchayat level. The scheme is demand-

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The twin objectives of Panchayati Raj System as envisaged by the Indian Constitution are to ensure local economic development and social justice. They are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Many SDG targets fall within the purview of these subjects.

driven and funds are released to states and union territories on the basis of their Annual Action Plans as approved by the Central Empowered Committee of RGSA. There is no fixed target for the scheme. The PRIs provide research and education and facilitates collaboration to help investors align their responsible investment practices with the broader sustainable objectives of society- as currently best defined by the SDGs.

The twin objectives of Panchayati Raj System as envisaged by the Indian Constitution are to ensure local economic development and social justice. They are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Many SDG targets fall within the purview of these subjects. Hence, the Gram panchayats (GPs) across the country have a highly significant role in the attainment of SDGs and so under people's plan Campaign (PPC) rolled out from 2nd October 2021 up to 31st January, 2022 for preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) for 2022-23, Panchayats were advised to mandatorily integrate the Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRPs) into GPDP, with a view to synchronise them with SDGs. Resources from various centrally and state sponsored schemes are being leveraged and converged at the GP level. Here, the most important is to set GP-level targets with measurable indicators that will have vertical and horizontal linkages, convergence possibilities, resource mobilisation potential and feasible action plan for the Gram Panchayats.

As per the latest figures from Ministry of Panchayati Raj, there are nearly 2.65 lakh elected Panchayats and 30 lakh Elected Representatives

in our country. The total number of Elected Representatives is more than 3.1 million out of which around 46 per cent are women. In this perspective, building capacities at the local level is critical to drive the agenda for SDGs/outcome based local planning. The role of Gram Panchayats /Rural Local Bodies in attainment of SDGs has been found invaluable owing to its position as a link to reduce socio-economic as well as urban rural divide so far as local economic development and social justice is concerned. SDG by itself would be a distant reality if the idea and the possibility it represents is not integrated into all manners of rural-centric socio-economic interventions being implemented with and through Gram Panchayats. To ensure that the essence of SDGs is mainstreamed into GPDP to deliver tangible, measurable and enduring state of well-being to the last mile and the last citizen, development of an effective capacity building strategy at the state level is crucial. Substantial resources have been devolved to the Gram Panchayats - Rs. 4.36 lakh crore for the period 2021-2026 under 15th Finance Commission award.

It is highly relevant here to delve deep into the concept of Localisation of SDGs. It is a convergence point between local and regional governments and their associations, national governments, businesses, community-based organisations and other local actors and the United Nations system. Local: 2030 supports local leaders in collaboratively incubating and sharing solutions, unlocking bottlenecks and implementing strategies that advance the SDGs at the local level. Sustainable Development Goals are a global effort that has one major objective- achieving a better future for all and to achieve these global and national targets, localisation is a crucial lever. If India is to achieve its goals by 2030, it must build a mechanism for effectively localising the SDGs - one that leverages and integrates the social capital that exists in women's collectives and with the local self-governance of the Panchayati Raj system. Localising the SDGs at the rural level will not only challenge existing unequal relations but also provide an institutional framework that is in sync with national and global priorities.

The role of panchayats in the attainment of SDGs, is summed up in the following ways

1. Convergent Implementation of the Schemes

Ensure effective implementation of flagship programmes pertaining to livelihood like NRLM, MGNREGS, SBM etc.

- Focus on Swachh Bharat Mission.
- Take leadership for behaviour change management for sanitation and hygiene.
- Plan and implement drinking water and sanitation projects in panchayats. Focus on poverty reduction through convergent planning integrating MGNREGS and NRLM.
- Set local development targets for eradication of poverty and mobilise people's participation and resources for the same.
- Have equitable systems for management of common property resources-develop resource mapping based planning.

2. Participatory Outcome Based Planning for Local Development

- Prepare local development plans that touch on economic, social and environmental concerns through participatory processes, integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values.
- Effective functioning of the Gram Sabha as participatory discussion and decision making forum for local development.
- Ensure coordinated functioning in tandem with SHGs and their collectives.
- Institute outcome based planning that sets baselines and monitors advancement in development indices.
- Ensure equitable provision of basic services to citizens through the allocated resources.

3. Specific Governance Interventions in Panchayats

- Effective functioning of Standing Committees and Functional Committees of the panchayats.
- Strengthening different fora for community participation.
- Institution of clear community based monitoring and tracking mechanisms and

information feedback to the community.

- Universal birth registration ensured in all States where panchayats are birth registration authorities. In others, panchayats to track birth registration and function as reporting authority.
- Preparation and management of local biodiversity registers by panchayats.
- Institution of environment audit into social audit of the local planning and implementation process.
- Improvement in revenue generation by the panchayat for finding resources for service delivery.
- Improved budgetary and record keeping practices so that performance and achievement of panchayats can be monitored.
- Digitisation to support governance at panchayat level.

4. Interventions across Tiers of Panchayats

- Effect convergent planning between the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj.
- Effective functioning of the District Planning Committees which link rural and urban planning.
- Coordination for service delivery and implementation of flagship schemes.

The 2030 Agenda also puts the principles of equality and non-discrimination at its heart, with a commitment to "leave no one behind" and "reach those farthest behind first", special attention to marginalised groups and two dedicated goals on combatting discrimination and inequalities (SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 10 on inequalities within and between countries), as well as a cross-cutting commitment to data disaggregation, inclusive participatory approaches and accountability for the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review indicate that the entire Agenda was developed using a human rights-based approach, which is also crucial for its effective implementation. Actually, there is no 'one size fits all' approach for localisation, but India can certainly share experiences with other countries and learn from them. The overall coordination

for implementation of SDGs in India is handled by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), which is driven by the mandate to work in a spirit of cooperative and competitive federalism and has been extensively engaging with governments at national and local levels as well as civil society organisations. The fact that our Government has given a pride of place to digital governance, especially to make them people centric, has paved the way for citizen friendly localisation. Institutional structures at the state and local levels, such as nodal SDG department, dedicated SDG teams and district level structures, help dissolve a silo based functioning. After the fiscal decentralisation, the government took forward in 2015-16 the implementation of local development plans integrating SDGs into them. 'SDG India Index', spearheaded by NITI Aayog since 2018 and published annually since then, plays a pivotal role in SDG localisation by measuring performance by using globally-accepted methodology and ranking them accordingly.

The 2022 edition of SDG Index covers all 17 Goals and 120 indicators. It offers valuable insights to policymakers on the remaining distance to travel, gaps and data and statistical challenges. The utility of the Index extends beyond progress monitoring it has implemented cooperative and competitive federalism in the true spirit of democracy and good governance. India's second VNR (Voluntary National Review) entitled, "Decade of Action: Taking SDGs from Global to Local", at the 2020 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), adopted a "whole of-society" approach. SDG localisation process is not limited only to government interventions but also includes civil society organisations. In spite of the pandemic, there has been remarkable progress witnessed in some crucial goals, for example in Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

If we take stock of the current progress, we find, India being home to one-sixth of humanity and the world's largest youth population, its progress is central to the global achievement of 2030 Agenda. The Government of India has

demonstrated its consistent commitment to attaining the SDGs by seeking to ensure access to basic services and empowerment of the most vulnerable communities while simultaneously fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Driven by flagship schemes, significant achievements have come in areas such as scaled up access to electricity, sanitation and housing. Equally noteworthy are efforts towards ensuring food security; a vision of Universal Health Coverage; ensuring that all children receive quality education; improving youth skills and employment and demonstrating that sustainable growth can go hand-in-hand with addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis. Its world-class digital governance systems increasingly drive India's efforts to strengthen service delivery systems for the most marginalised. India's extensive response to COVID-19 pandemic illustrated this approach, combining some of the world's largest social protection and food security programmes with States and UTs playing a central role; policy reforms and economic packages to protect the economy and also India's leadership in developing and supplying COVID-19 vaccines, not only for its population but also for other countries in need through generous donations to the COVAX Facility.

If we analyse the status of July 2022, India slipped spots from last year's 117 to rank 121 on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted as a part of the 2030 agenda. India's recent overall SDG score was 66 out of 100. Comparing with South Asian Nations: With the latest rankings, India is now behind all south Asian nations except Pakistan. The south Asian countries ahead of India are Bhutan ranked 75, Sri Lanka at 87, Nepal at 96 and Bangladesh at 109. Jharkhand and Bihar are the least prepared to meet the SDGs by the target year 2030. Kerala ranked first, followed by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh in the second position. The reasons behind it are:-

COVID-19– The pandemic put a severe brake on the progress. It pushed the countries to impose lockdowns that brought all progressive work towards SDG attainment to a standstill.

Climate Change– As per SDG 2022 report, global temperatures have been rising unabated. The world is facing a major climate catastrophe due to increased heatwaves, drought and apocalyptic

wildfires and floods which are affecting billions of people around the globe

Geopolitical Conflicts– The Russia-Ukraine crisis has caused food, fuel and fertiliser prices to skyrocket. It also disturbed global trade supplies and caused the financial markets to tumble

Data Gaps– The Report also notes that despite some progress, serious data gaps exist in SDG monitoring. This includes data in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and level of disaggregation.

Hence, with a view to realise the SDGs, it is crucial that the Village/Gram Panchayats develop their own action plan to improve living conditions. There is a need to be more inclusive in addressing the problems of people from different sections. Many vulnerable families and persons coming from the Dalit community, widows, single women, old people, children without care and protection, persons with disability need special attention from all the service providing agencies and village community as a whole. Strengthening stakeholder participation in governance, particularly in decision making, is the second most important point. The various village level committees formed under different development programs like School Management Committee, Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee, PDS Committee, Social Justice Committee need to be strengthened so that they plan and monitor the service delivery in an effective manner. Along with this, pro active disclosure of various schemes should be displayed in public notice board. For example, if the stock of essential drugs at the beginning of the month is displayed in the Primary Health Centre, the access to free medicines can be improved. Similar is the case with utilisation of different funds, PDS stock, etc. Each village panchayat must assess the status of various public assets and services with regard to their functionality and thus rationalise their usage. Primary focus must be given to five key services: (i) Anganwadi- as it has direct link with child development and curbing malnutrition as well (ii) primary education which is linked with universal literacy, particularly among girls (iii) drinking water and sanitation, having direct linkage with the health status (iv) access to public health services, this will improve

institutional delivery and healthy life (v) access to public distribution system and food availability in Anganwadi and mid-day-meal it will address malnutrition.

Further, GPDP process would have situational analysis as the first step. For every SDG, the Gram Panchayat can prepare a base scenario. It would be appropriate to introduce SDG and all the relevant themes to the Gram Sabha and ensure that the Gram Sabha discussions consider these aspects. Let us also see how other programmes and schemes can be tapped/ converged/ supplemented/ complemented to address SDGs. Also, how various other resources and activities – institutional, schematic, departmental, voluntary, local can be used and incorporated in the plan. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan, thus, needs to be a holistic and result based plan contributing to the SDGs from local to global. In addition, Ministries/ States to map and align their schemes' progress assessments to the indicators at Gram Panchayat level, Block Panchayat level and District Panchayat level. In this respect, guidelines are to be issued from Ministries and State Governments relating to Localisation of SDGs involving and stating clearly role of various institutions below the State level till the GP level. Panchayat Development Index and assessment framework with Themes, Local targets and Indicators for measuring progress worked through MoSPI and States Statistics Departments, linking to evidence based plan and budget with SDG markers is to be put in place, covering all schemes operating at Gram Panchayat level. Establishing a robust data sharing and monitoring mechanism covering all the LIF targets and indicators and linked to reports of performance for Departments/Ministries and PRIs on Localising SDGs, is the need of the hour. Setting up and utilising the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for convergence and Localisation of SDGs in PRIs on regular basis, is also desirable.

To conclude, accelerated efforts are needed to boost sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges we face. It asks for transformative economic, social and environmental solutions. We will need inspiration and creativity at global, local and individual levels- from national and local governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and youth. ■