A Study of the Sustainable Development Goals, Issues and Challenges and Achievements for India

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Abstract

The world economies have unified in their efforts to achieve the goals of sustainable development. Gender inequality is another social issue rampant in India today, even in spite of the mass immigration of predominantly male workers abroad in search of work when women are left responsible for farms, homes and local businesses. This is in sheer contrast to the earlier approaches where governments pursued goals for the growth and development of their respective economies. The struggle for growth and excellence has created imbalance in the economic development among countries, depleted some of the natural resources and has thus altered the ecological balance. The impact of this is being experienced in the form of global warming and climate change. Since this threatens the very existence of human life on earth, a course of action that would ensure a safe environment for future generations has become the need of the hour. Sustainable development is a term coined to ensure that development takes place in such a way that natural resources are sustained and passed on to the future generations unimpaired. This paper makes an attempt to understand the challenges encountered by India in achieving Sustainable development goals and offers suggestions to overcome them.

KEYWORDS: Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)

1.1 Introduction

Sustainable development is a phrase we hear thrown around from time to time in order to underline our ideal vision of the future- rid of all the problems that the inhabitants of the Earth tackle today. Depletion of natural resources. Gender inequality. An unequal distribution of wealth. These are just a few but they illustrate accurately the issues which we are striving to eliminate. However, due to the all-encompassing nature of the term Sustainable Development and the gravity of the situation which it looks to solve, many treat it as an abstract, unachievable concept usually taking into consideration the shocking images of over polluted oceans or the hopelessness of their life situation due to being born female. Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of this field and its challenges is quite necessary in our current environment and can help in living a more conscious and altruistic life.

Sustainable Development has become the buzz word of the international community. The struggle for growth and excellence has created imbalance in the economic development among countries, depleted some of the natural resources and has thus altered the ecological balance. Since this threatens the very existence of human life on earth, a course of action that would ensure a safe environment for future generations has become the need of the hour. Sustainable development is a

term coined to ensure that development takes place in such a way that natural resources are sustained and passed on to the future generations unimpaired.

At this juncture this paper makes an attempt to understand the challenges encountered by India in achieving the Sustainable development goals. The paper also makes an attempt to suggest measures to overcome the challenges. India is a very unique example of a developing country due to its culture, political practices and geopolitical location and not all development projects active in India can be applied to many other developing countries, however, it helps in the illustration of how challenging sustainable development can be for many countries and how very important achieving it is. Hopefully, a liquidation of the corruption in the political system will make headway for positive change, nevertheless, owing to its long-running roots in India, that day will probably not arrive for many a year and sustainable development will have to continue to be led by citizen-led initiatives and NGOs. However, the latter of the two faces its own internal problems and its own form of corruption. So, it can prove to be inefficient. The future may not be bright for India, nevertheless, there is *a* future in store for the country and it is up to the government, Indian citizens and the international community to decide how it pans out.

1.2 The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which came into effect on 1 January, 2016 is an improvement on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) . In India, as far as MDGs are concerned, considerable progress has been made in the field of basic universal education, gender equality in education, and global economic growth. However, there was slow progress in the improvement of health indicators related to mortality, morbidity, and various environmental factors contributing to poor health conditions [2].With SDGs in place the Indian government is now trying to integrate the efforts taken towards achieving MDGs with SDGs. SDGs are wider in scope.

The Sustainable Development Goals are as follows.
   (1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
   (2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
   (3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
   (4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
   (5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
   (6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
   (7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
   (8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
   (9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

   (10) Reduce inequality within and among countries.

   (11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

   (12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

(13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

(14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

(15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

(16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

(17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goals have been built on the universal principle of 'leave no one behind' . As far as India is concerned, the national development goals of India, converge well with the SDGs and India is expected to play a leading role in determining the success of the SDGs, globally.

1.3 Measures taken for implementing SDGs in India

NITI Aayog, the Government of India's premier think tank, has been entrusted with the task of coordinating the SDGs. States have also been advised to undertake a similar mapping of their schemes, including centrally sponsored schemes. In addition, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is engaged in the process of developing national indicators for the SDGs. Many of the Government's flagship programmes such as Swachh Bharat, Make in India, Skill India, and Digital India are at the core of the SDGs. State and local governments play a pivotal role in many of these programmes.[6] State governments are paying keen attention to visioning, planning, budgeting, and developing implementation and monitoring systems for the SDGs.[7]

1.4 UN Support for SDG initiatives in India

The United Nations in India supports the participation of civil society organizations, think tanks and the Indian media in discussions and side sessions at the International Conference on Financing for Development at Addis Ababa and during the General Assembly in New York.

The UN Country Team in India supports NITI Aayog in its efforts to address the interconnectedness of the goals, to ensure that no one is left behind and to advocate for adequate financing to achieve the SDGs . In close collaboration with NITI Aayog and partners, the UN has supported thematic consultations on the SDGs to bring together various state governments, central ministries, civil society organizations and academia to deliberate on specific SDGs.

1.5 Important of the Sustainable Development

Owing to our rapidly growing population, in the future more resources will be needed in order to accommodate for it and, unfortunately, the resources that we take benefit of now are not all renewable. Taking this into consideration, the tech industry will have to adapt to future conditions as of now the rare metals and minerals used in the industry, such as Palladium – a metal widely used in the production of consumer electronics, are becoming increasingly scarce. Another factor to take into consideration is the fact that China currently produces 97% of the world's rare earth materials and was it to, hypothetically, place a blockade on its exports; production of technological goods would become incredibly difficult. Seeing as our industries are investing and relying more and more on technology if rare earth metals were too slowly disappear, prices would rocket, and so would inflation rates, making it impossible to function for, at least, a prolonged period of time. For this reason, new alternatives and innovations in the tech industry are essential to sustainable development in order to secure steady development in this field without relying on an excessive amount on exhaustible materials. By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities.

 Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that this is a great issue seeing that demand for lumber is never ending so deforestation is unavoidable. Some companies, such as IKEA, plant trees in the place of those which they cut down, however, these trees are often planted with the aim to generate more profit in the future and these formerly abundant forests are usually replaced with monoculture plantations which greatly cut down on the biodiversity of the surroundings. In conclusion, unless we find more sustainable alternatives to wood, the future doesn't look that bright.

1.6 Sustainable Development Achievements

 (1) In spite of the very difficult circumstances in which many developing countries currently find themselves in, sustainable development is achievable; however, it would require a lot of concentrated and coordinated effort.

 (2) If appropriate supply-side policies, such as education and vocational programmes, were to be implemented, illiteracy rates would drop and people would be made more aware about the environment surrounding them which would contribute greatly to a rise in environmental awareness.

 (3) In addition, an appropriate government, which prioritized the growth of green GDP instead of GDP measured by the usual methods, would have to come into power and use its budget efficiently in order to invest in green energies, health services, and benefits systems, amongst others.

 (4) Of course, this is only touching the tip of the iceberg, nevertheless, it illustrates very well that sustainable development is achievable and straightforward, however, each of the steps underlined above are incredibly hard to achieve.

 (5) Concluding, sustainable development is achievable, however, it is only achievable is everyone is dedicated to achieving it. In order for this to happen, the world needs a wakeup call of cosmic dimensions the only worry is it might be too late by then.

1.7 Sustainable Development in India Development and its Challenges

As a result of its unique geographical location and geopolitical situation, India, as a developing country, has faced many environmental, social, and economic issues, such as the extreme levels of pollution in bodies of water as was in the case of the Bagmati river which, fortunately, after state and volunteer-run efforts is now cleaner than it has been in a long time. Unfortunately, that fate has not met many of the 600 rivers flowing through the Kathmandu valley, where the population of the country is the densest, and they remain polluted by industrial waste from nearby factories. Owing to funding from the international governments, India has recently undergone a period of accelerated development and an introduction to a consumerist culture which in conjunction with the lack of awareness regarding environmental issues has lead to a inefficient use of freshwater that is oh so abundant in India.

As we know, access to water is one of the main contributing factors to feeding a society and the water going towards the unethical industrial production of livestock would help cultivate could be going towards raising crop plants, which require less water to produce, less land and which have the potential to feed a much larger amount of people. It's very important to take this into consideration in the context of the crisis of overpopulation and sufficient nutrition, however, the keeping of livestock poses many other challenges to sustainability:

- The pollution of bodies of water with agricultural waste.
- The amount of fuel used in the transport of animal products and the livestock itself.
- Emissions of methane and other greenhouse gases by livestock which contributes to global warming.
- Diseases associated with an excessive consumption of animal products, such as diabetes, cardio logical diseases, and obesity.

1.7.1 Waste Management

Having had grown up in India the one thing that has a prominent place in my memory is the rubbish it is everywhere. Streets, rivers, fields, being eaten in the middle of the road by a hungry goat or sacred cow. In spite of pilot projects being run in order to test out methods of reducing the waste levels, such as the building of fecal sludge treatment plants and infrastructure allowing biogas generation, due to the visible incompetence of the government and municipalities these projects have been left abandoned.

Thanks to initiatives like these, awareness is being raised through the Indian society, especially youth, about the consequences of a polluted environment as well as municipal Solid Waste Management being proposed. Unfortunately, not all projects proposed by NGOs come into power as a result of the corruption and inefficiency of the Indian government and it is most likely that India will have to go through a true eye-opener until its citizens and the people responsible for the environmental well being of the country wake up.

1.7.2 Social Inequalities

Apart from a plethora of environmental issues that one of the most environmentally diverse countries in currently suffering, there are also a number of social issues present in India that urgently require attention. For the sake of being concise, it is necessary to highlight the most crucial issues, however, it is vital to comprehend that every inequality,

no matter how small, deserves attention. One of the most glaringly obvious social inequalities in India is the corruption rampant in the government.

It is important to first understand what corruption is exactly as it's another one of those buzzwords you can meet floating around without fully understanding them. Corruption plays a great role in the situation India currently finds itself in a very slow if at all present rate of development, polluted and in poverty. Owing to the elitist nature of Indian politics, despite it being a democratic country, it is very difficult to gain recognition as a new political party. Therefore, the same faces stay in power, even if they are not in a position of power in the public eye, meaning that bribes continue being handed around from corporations in order for the police to turn a blind eye to the amount of waste they're churning into a nearby river. In this type of climate, development is very difficult unless there is a large amount of profit associated with it. Gender inequality is another social issue rampant in India today, even in spite of the mass immigration of predominantly male workers abroad in search of work when women are left responsible for farms, homes and local businesses and even though she is responsible for this subsistence or cash farming, she does not have access to the profit the land yields, that access is granted solely to the "breadwinner" of the family the husband. Due to the patriarchal nature of Indian society, economic abuse is commonly used against women with men claiming the entirety of access to shared funds and belittling women by monitoring their basic spending habits.

Overall, from the onset, Indian women are doomed to live a life associated with difficulties. A woman who first falls pregnant with a baby girl will often undergo the process of having an abortion, either to spare her from the same fate or as a result of domestic pressures of producing an heir to a family business or a child who can inherit the father's will. Speaking from experience as a firstborn Indian girl, the inequality in treatment between children is immense.

One memory I have is of my brother, seven years younger than I, receiving golden bangles and gifts from my Brahmin grandparents while I received none. All because I was a girl and I wasn't anything to be proud of. I was lucky enough to have a mother who encouraged me to succeed in life and prove everyone wrong, however, many girls growing up in conservative Indian families, especially in rural regions, do not meet the same fate. In short, women's rights are an issue widely abused in India as a result to the patriarchal culture omnipresent which does not want to make way for "Western" ideals of freedom of speech, the right to work, the condemning of domestic violence and the right to an education.

Women are often left impoverished as a result and make up much of the Indian population which resides in poverty. Achieving female empowerment in India is one of the challenges of sustainable development there as extreme poverty is not a sustainable status quo. There are initiatives being created in order to facilitate the accessibility to microloans to women in rural regions, in order to disincentives their migration abroad, such as the Volunteers Initiative India and UN Women and the UNFPA play a significant role in securing health services and education on sexual health for women.

1.8 The Main Challenges of Sustainable Development Today

Having highlighted the importance of sustainable development, it is also important to understand that it does need a lot of concentrated effort and, like many things in life; it

does have many challenges ahead of itself. It is also important to note that sustainable development is equally valid in developing and developed countries, despite them dealing with pearly opposite sides of the spectrum. Developed countries may be developed but that doesn't necessarily imply that they are sustainable and for these countries, the main goal is to rid their society of issues such as social inequalities, waste management, and environmental responsibility.

1. Lack of financial resources to carry out and plan sustainable development.
2. Sustainable development is often not possible in war-torn countries as there are other priorities on hand.
3. Natural occurrences, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, can pose a threat to sustainability as they can shift the flow of water and destroy certain elements of infrastructure.
4. The governmental conflict between immediate profit and investment towards sustainable technologies.
5. Corruption.
6. Lack of efforts at a municipal level

1.9 Sustainable Development

- The notion of Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

- Sustainable Development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.

- The Brundtland Commission suggested that meeting the needs of the future depends on how well we balance social, economic, and environmental objectives, or needs, when making decisions today.

- Using the non-conventional sources of energy is one the best strategies to protect the environment.

- In rural India, a good number of people still use wood and other biomass products for cooking, and it has a great negative impact on the environment as the process involves cutting of trees; hence, providing them LPG as an alternative strategy would help save the environment.

- Promoting the use of CNG for motor vehicles is another important alternative.

- Solar power is very handy to use; a solar power plant can be established either for a single house hold or also for a big factory.

- Promoting the use of traditional knowledge practices is also environmental friendly and also good for the human health.

- Organic farming also needs to be promoted at large scale to improve the environmental condition, as conservation of the environment is the major objective of sustainable development.

1.10 Challenges in attaining SDGs in India

Four areas have been identified as areas of concern for India in Achieving SDGs . They are discussed below:

1.10.1Defining Indicators

One of the major challenges for India is devising suitable indicators to effectively monitor the progress of SDGs. India's past records reveal that it has not been very successful in setting relevant indicators to measure outcomes. The definition for "safe" drinking water has been misconstrued with the availability of hand pumps and tube wells and the official data suggested that 86% of Indians had access to safe drinking water and therefore were "on track" for the MDG goal on drinking water . But the number of waterborne diseases and deaths due to diarrhea are quite high in India.

1.10.2Measures to Overcome Challenges

The challenges discussed above can be overcome by developing an exclusive model for implementing, monitoring, measuring and reporting SDG related course of action. Though India has well established organizations such as the CSO to provide statistical data many times they are general and do not match specific requirements. Even in case of MDGs, India was not able to measure its achievement accurately because of lack of data.Therefore, developing suitable indicators to assess the progress of SDGs and also simultaneously developing a system that can support this exercise by supplying the required data is of paramount importance.

1.11 Techniques used in Developing IIAG

Some of the techniques used in developing IIAG are worth noting and may be applied in the Indian context also.

1.11.1Clustered indicators

Indicators measuring a specific governance concept are sometimes available from multiple sources. To improve the accuracy of the indicator measurement and avoid double counting, these measures are combined into a single clustered indicator, which is the average of its underlying sub-indicators.

1.11.2 Handling missing data

Most indicators included in the IIAG have missing data points over the time series. As this can have an effect on a country's aggregate scores, estimates are provided for missing data, following a statistical process called imputation. According to this process, if data is missing outside the time series, it is replaced by an existing data point. When data is missing inside the time series, these are replaced with numbers incrementally higher or lower than the neighboring data points.

1.11.3 Normalization

Given that the data utilized in the construction of the IIAG come from 35 separate data providers that present their data on different scales, it is necessary to standardize all data. This is done through a statistical process called normalization whereby raw data for each indicator are transformed by the min-max normalization method. This process allows all scores to be published in common units and within the same bounds of 0-100, where 100 is always the best possible score.

1.11.4 Data aggregation

The IIAG uses a transparent, simple and replicable method of data aggregation. A simple average is calculated using the structure of the Index to arrive at the Overall Governance scores. All of the above four techniques are ideal and very much applicable for India. The Administrative system in India is highly bureaucratic with two Governments, one at the centre and the other at the state level. This has resulted in duplication of data. Even the available has gaps in it and suffers from errors of standardization. All this can be resolved by developing an Indian Index of Sustainable Development by following the techniques discussed above. IISD can be developed for a period of 15 years from 2015-30. The data set can be updated every year according to recent developments and revised for all the 15 years by following the same pattern of Ibrahim index. This would ensure availability of the most recent data set.

1.12 Financing SDGs.

The challenge of financing SDGs can be resolved to some extent by strengthening the existing academic infrastructure in the nation. India is a regional hub for higher education and boasts itself for being the home town of several renowned institutions such as IIT and IIM. These institutions have well developed infrastructure for research. These resources can be pooled and effectively utilized in designing, developing and measuring indicators meant for sustainable development.

In developing countries like India, there was some hesitation in reducing carbon emissions for two reasons, first their per capita emissions were lower, and second, it would mean compromising with the development of the nation. Therefore a carbon trading system was evolved among the countries of the world where firms were permitted to emit carbon within the prescribed limit and were assigned carbon credits for this purpose If any firm wants to exceed the limit it can buy the unused credit from another firm. In this way the buying firm is penalized for exceeding its carbon quota and the selling firm is rewarded for reducing its emissions. Governments can consider the idea of penalizing firms with higher carbon footprints by making them finance the sustainable goal programmes in the developing and least developed countries.

1.13 The Responsibility of Implementing SDGs

With NITI Ayog expressing its doubt as to how far it would succeed in this laborious task it is high time the Indian Government decentralizes this task and while doing so it must be borne in mind that SDGs aim at conserving and passing on the natural resources to the next generation. This cannot be done without involvement of the society. But a society so knowledgeable to use its natural resources in a perfectly ecologically sound manner is nearly impossibility. Changing social, political, cultural, technological and ecological conditions will exert new pressures on the natural resource base and the possibility of its misuse or overuse always remains [20]. Therefore a political order in which decision making will be done by those who would suffer the consequences of those decisions would be ideal. A new system that would ensure participation from groups that are directly connected to the problem needs to be evolved.

1.14 Conclusion

India is a country with the second largest population in the world. The steps taken by India for the achievement of SDGs matter a lot to the world. If India succeeds in attaining the SDGs it would mean a larger section of the world has achieved it. Therefore it is imperative for India to develop effective methods for implementing, monitoring and measuring the progress of SDGs. The biggest challenge for India seems to be the development of suitable indicators. This can be handled by developing an Indian Index for Sustainable Development by taking the Ibrahim index as a base. Sustainable development an issue which should be treated very seriously as it affects everyone, as illustrated by the scenarios above. If the world were to continue functioning as it is currently, many do not predict it a stable future. In order to secure a secure environment for our future generations, every single person and corporation needs to start reconsidering their own lifestyle choices and spreading awareness about the issues that plague this planet so that we can slowly begin to enforce actual changes.

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