

“Understanding the role of NITI Aayog, India in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Human Development”

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Abstract: This research paper aims to study the role of National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Human Development. India is home to nearly 17% of the population of the world and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress and achievement in the East and South Asia Region will be impacted by the demography in India. The role of national and sub-national agencies in India may also serve as a best practice for cross-country references for other nations. Another important aim is also the convergence India has achieved through the NITI Aayog in setting the National Development Agenda and matching it up with the SDGs.

Keywords: People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership, Peace, NITI Aayog,

Date of Submission: 21-02-2019

Date of acceptance: 08-03-2019

I. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

The 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) formally adopted the resolution on “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. (United Nations, 2015) The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprises of 17 goals and 169 targets and came into force on 1st of January 2016. The Government of India (GOI) has appointed the NITI Aayog as the nodal agency for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs in India. The United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the year 1992 laid the foundation for the discussions on the conception of sustainable development. This conference was famously referred to as the Rio Earth Summit. The member countries agreed on a draft known as ‘Agenda 21’. In the year 2000, the Millennium Summit held at the UN headquarters in New York, USA saw the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 189-member countries. In the year 2002, a decade after the Rio Earth Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The outcome document of this summit was known as the ‘Johannesburg Declaration’. (United Nations, 2015)

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the year 2012. This conference was referred to as ‘Rio+20’ commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit (1992). The conference focussed on the ‘Post-2015 Development Agenda’. The idea was to evolve a global dashboard with goal-setting and targets to be achieved by member countries after the completion of the MDGs in 2015. The conference agreed to develop conceptual framework based on the ‘Agenda 21’ and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation agreed to by member countries in the 1992 and 2002 conferences respectively. The outcome document of this conference was ‘The Future We Want’. (United Nations, 2015) In 2013, a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) was formed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and was tasked with the preparation of a draft proposal on the SDGs. India was also a member of this OWG. The group met over thirteen sessions between March 2013 and July 2014. They came up with the final report titled ‘Open Working Group Proposals for Sustainable Development Goals’ and submitted the report to the UNGA in July 2014. The OWG Report was adopted during the 69th session of the UNGA in September 2014. (United Nations, 2015)

The UN Summit for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was held in the headquarters of the UN in New York, USA in September 2015. The resolution titled ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ was formally adopted by 193-member countries in the UNGA. (United Nations, 2015) The SDGs comprised of 17 goals and 169 targets and came into effect from 1st January 2016. The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi attended the summit and delivered an address in the UNGA on the importance of SDGs and role of India in achieving the same.

II. TRANSITION FROM MDGS TO SDGS

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were conceptualised and formally agreed upon by member-countries in the UNGA in September 2000. The ‘Millennium Declaration’ laid the foundation for countries, international organisations to converge on basic development issues plaguing the world’s population. India adhered to the UN Development Group (UNDG) 2003 framework for achievement of MDGs and it included eight goals and 12 out of 18 targets (targets 1 to 11 and 18) which were relevant to India and the related 35 indicators. The six targets of MDG 8 were related to landlocked/island/least developed countries. Hence, these targets were not recognised by India at that time.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India published statistical monitoring reports of MDGs at the national level from 2005 onwards. The progress achieved was measured with standardised research tools with reference to the base year of 1990 levels. In the year 2010 a special report published the status at the State level in India. The MoSPI brought out Country Reports for the years 2011, 2014 and 2015 which discussed in detail the progress achieved under the MDGs by way of analysis of the targets and related policy initiatives of the Government of India. (MoSPI GOI, 2016) The MDGs Factsheets were published in 2012, 2013 and 2017 gave an overview of the level of progress of MDGs at the national level. (Social Statistics Division MoSPI GOI, 2017)

The MDGs reporting system in India lacked an exclusive independent statistical machinery which focused on the quantitative monitoring of the MDGs. Some of the major reasons for the difficulties faced during statistical tracking of the MDGs in India were:

- a.) Inadequate statistical mapping at the sub-state level
- b.) Lack of periodicity in annual national data
- c.) Lack of convergence among national survey agencies

India’s progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets under MDGs was presented in the ‘Millennium Development Goals – Final Country Report of India’ brought out by the Social Statistics Division of the MoSPI in 2017. India has achieved the target in halving poverty head count ratio; eliminated gender inequality in primary and secondary education; achieved the target in reversing fight against HIV/AIDS; providing drinking water facility and in improving landline and internet connectivity penetration. Good progress was made towards the targets in achieving universal education; child mortality rate; reversing infectious diseases and loss of environmental resources etc. India lagged in some targets such as eliminating extreme hunger, maternal mortality rate, sanitation facilities etc. (Social Statistics Division MoSPI GOI, 2017)

In 2015 the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank Group brought out a review of the MDGs performance worldwide. The review was done by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). (United Nations, 2015) The review identified country specific situations, bottlenecks to the achievement of goals and potential solutions. The review also made the observations that most of the MDGs were absorbed broadly into the SDGs. In transitioning from the MDGs to SDGs the review came up with three main observations:

- i.) Support cross-institutional work between UN and World Bank
- ii.) Better understanding of cross-sectoral work and inter-relatedness of goals and targets
- iii.) Promote global and high-level advocacy

The SDGs provide a broad set of goals and targets to be achieved by the year 2030 and have become international obligations with a potential to converge national policy framework and domestic spending priorities of the countries in the target period. In India there is some national convergence between the SDGs and the development goals with the government’s agenda “SabkaSathSabka Vikas” (collective efforts & inclusive growth). (NITI Aayog, 2017) The National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has been identified as the nodal agency for the national SDG monitoring framework by the Government of India. (NITI Aayog Website, 2015) The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is responsible for developing a National Indicator Framework for measuring the progress of the goals and targets by the governments at the national and state level. (MoSPI GOI, 2016)

III. NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING SDGS

In India the national strategy for achieving the SDGs is actively functional beginning with the Parliament, the nodal agency NITI Aayog and the Ministry for Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The core agenda in formulating the national level strategy by the NITI Aayog has been Mapping of Ministries and Programmes; Identification of Indicators; Consultation with stakeholders; Dovetailing the National Development Agenda with SDGs; Meticulous Implementation of schemes aligned with SDG targets and Rigorous outcome-based monitoring.

The Speakers Research Initiative (SRI): which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Aug 2015 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017) is an example of the efforts by the Members of Parliament (MPs) in contributing towards the national strategy for achieving the SDGs. This initiative has so far organised three workshops in July 2015; Aug 2016 and Dec 2016 in orienting parliamentarians in the SDG goals and targets. The Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) discussions on SDGs were held in Aug 2015 and Aug 2016 respectively. In March 2016 a National Conference of Women Legislators was organised in New Delhi on the theme, “Women Legislators: Building Resurgent India”. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017)The conference was organised from a gender perspective in approaching the SDGs. The 2nd BRICS (an acronym for the association of five major economies of the world Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Women Parliamentarian Forum, which was organised in Aug 2016 on the theme, “Women Parliamentarians-Enablers for Achieving SDGs” came up with the “Jaipur Declaration”. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017)In Feb 2017 the South Asian Speaker’ Summit on SDG was held in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the summit declaration is called as the “Indore Declaration”. (IPU and Parliament of India, 2017)These initiatives showcase the convergence and initiatives taken by the legislature of the Indian Parliament and sets the platform for the sub-national level state governments to work towards achieving the SDGs. (Speakers Initiative, 2016)

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI): is actively engaged as part of the national framework for achieving the SDGs. The ministry was entrusted with developing a National Indicator Framework (NFI) which will form an important source for monitoring and measuring the progress of the national and state governments in the coming years. A dedicated SDGs unit has been created in the Social Statistics Division of the Central Statistics Office for monitoring the progress under SDGs based on the indicator framework developed by the ministry. This unit will be a SDG data focal point for all stakeholders at the national level. (MoSPI GOI, 2016)

NITI Aayog & State/Union Territories: India comprises of 29 States and 7 Union Territories as its sub-national administrative divisions. NITI Aayog has held two consultations in Jan and Dec 2018 with representatives of the respective the state governments. (NITI Aayog, 2018)The focus of the review meetings was on the mapping of schemes, indicators and monitoring of targets, capacity building, localisation of SDGs and challenges faced in the implementation of SDGs with state level policy goals. According to the review meeting 26 states/UTs have mapped respective departments and interventions with SDG targets; 15 states/UTs have developed a Vision Plan on SDGs; 12 states/UTs have initiated the process to draft a Monitoring Framework; 4 states/UTs have set-up a task force for drafting the framework and 19 states/UTs have held consultations on SDGs for orienting local governments with the priority indicators, converging implementation perspectives, integration at the state level policy framework and budget allocation. (NITI Aayog, 2017)

IV. NITI AAYOG & INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGS:

The SDG institutional implementation framework comprises of the main nodal agency the NITI Aayog at the national level. The role of NITI Aayog can be analysed from a global, national and sub-national perspective.

Global Level Framework:

The UN appointed Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEA-SDGs) of which India is a member, brought out a Global Indicator Framework and adopted during the 48th Session of the UN Statistical Commission in 2017. The 232 indicators pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are agreed upon to by member nations that are a signatory of the SDGs. Annual refinements of indicators will be included in the indicator list as they occur. (UN STATS, 2017)

HLG-PCCB High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into operation in 2015 in the 46th session of the UN Statistical Commission. (UNSTATS, 2015) The primary task for this group is to provide with statistical monitoring and reporting of data with regards to the SDGs. The group has had nine meetings so far since 2015 and held a global consultation for developing sustainable development data.

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) has a central role in the review and follow-up of the SDGs (UN , 2019) and has been formalised based on the outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 “The Future We Want”. (UN, 2013) Since, 2013 the HLPF has met periodically to encourage member-nations to conduct and submit national and sub-national level reviews on the progress and achievement under the SDGs. These reviews are called as Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). India has submitted its VNR report for the year 2017 based on its performance of SDGs to the HLPF under the aegis of the NITI Aayog.

National Level Framework:

GOI-UNSDF 2018-2022: In Sep 2018 the NITI Aayog and UN sign and formalised the Government of India-UN Sustainable Development Framework (2018-2022). (GOI, 2018) Interestingly, 2022 marks the 75th year of Indian independence. The seven focus areas of the UNSDF in India are Poverty and Urbanisation; Health, Water, and Sanitation; Education and Employability; Nutrition and Food Security; Climate Change, Clean Energy and Disaster Resilience; Skilling, Entrepreneurship, and Job Creation; Gender Equality and Youth Development. (UN India, 2018) The focus will be on Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh which account for nearly 67.6% of people living in poverty across India. The NITI Aayog has identified 115 districts at the sub-national level across India under the Transformation of Aspirational Districts scheme. (NITI Aayog, 2018) These districts are covered under the UNSDF program.

National Indicator Framework:The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) was given the responsibility to draft a national level indicator framework for mapping the targets and indicators of the SDGs and also to monitor and measure the progress of the national and sub-national agencies involved in the entire process. The National Indicator Framework (NFI) which was finalised in August 2017 has 306 indicators based on national and sub-national consultations with Ministries, Departments and other stakeholders. (GOI, 2018)The NIF provides the largest monitoring framework in India and will be dependent on a statistical flow of information and are nationally accepted indicators.

High Level Steering Committee: The Government of India appointed a High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) in October 2018. (GOI, 2019) The purpose of this committee is to review and refine periodically the National Indicator Framework (NIF) developed by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The committee is headed by the Chief Statistician of India and comprises of the Secretary, MoSPI, Secretaries of other Ministries of the Government of India and Members of NITI Aayog.

NITI Aayog 3-year, 7-year & 15-year Plan: The 12th Five-Year plan of India was completed on 31st March 2017. This marks the end of an era in terms of planning in India. The NITI Aayog replaced the Planning Commission in 2015 and has been at the helm of cooperative federalism and framing the national development agenda for the country. Instead of a single five-year plan, NITI Aayog has come up with a 3-year, 7-year and 15-year planning and development document. The Three-Year Action Agenda for 2017-'18 to 2019-'20 was brought out in 2016.(NITI Aayog, 2017) The 7-year Strategy Document (2017-'24) and the 15-year Vision document (2017-'18 to 2031-'32) are in progress now under the direct supervision of the Prime Ministers' Office in India. (NITI Aayog Website, 2015) These documents show a national convergence with regards to aligning the national development agenda with that of the SDGs which is an essential requirement for progress in aiming to achieve goals and targets. Some of the major highlights of this plan document are to triple the size of India's economy in 15 years by increasing its GDP from Rs.137 Lakh Crore to Rs. 469 Lakh Crore in 2032; per capita income and per capita GDP is also proposed to grow three times in this period. By 2031, India's urban population is expected to increase by 22 crores. (NITI Aayog, 2017)Taking a clue from China's long-term urban development agenda, there is emphasis on urban infrastructure development. Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the “one nation, one aspiration, one determination” philosophy, the role of sub-national governments in overall development of the country is set to rise.

Strategy for New India @75:The 75th year of Indian Independence in the year 2022 is a major landmark for one the young and largest democracies in the world today. The “New Strategy for India @75” (2018-2022) is a strategy document published by NITI Aayog in order to bring in further innovation and efficient management in policy formulation and implementation.The document gives projectors under four major heads, they are: Drivers, Infrastructure, Inclusion and Governance.

Sub-National Level Framework:The localisation of SDGs is critical in the roadmap laid out by the NITI Aayog in achieving the targets and indicators as per the various goals of the SDGs. The capacity building and convergence of State level schemes with the national development agenda coterminous with the SDGs is essential for any progress. India is home to 17% of the worlds' population which will have a positive impact on the progress of SDGs in South Asia especially. Importantly India is home to nearly 21.9% of Below Poverty Line (BPL) population as per the country's official Census of 2011. The next census is due in 2021. The worrying trend is 7 out of 29 States namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh account for nearly 67.6% of people living in poverty across India. (NITI Aayog, 2018) The major challenge for NITI Aayog is to aim for parity in the progress of the SDGs across India. The Task Force setup by the NITI Aayog comprising Central Ministries and States has organised a series of National and Regional Consultations alongwith the United Nations India. The regional consultations have been organised in Hyderabad, Guwahati and Kochi so far. Another initiative is called SAMAVESH, which is a national network of resource institutions. This is to enable consistent access to knowledge and expertise among sub-national governments within India. A volume of Best Practices highlighting the various innovations and progress made by State/Union Territories was published by the NITI Aayog last year.

V. SDGS INDIA INDEX 2018 – DEVELOPED BY NITI AAYOG:

The commencement of the SDGs since 2016 globally in 193-member states of the United Nations also increased the need for better indices to measure the progress of these national governments periodically. The global SDG Dashboard and SDG Index has been published every year since 2016. The 2018 SDG Index & Dashboards Report provides deep insight into the global responsibilities in implementing the goals. The report also details the regional and country profiles in the report. The SDG achievement gaps have been identified based on per capita estimates of member states. India ranks at 112 of 156 countries for the year 2018 globally with an Index score of 59.1 and a Regional average score of 64.1 for the East and South Asia Region. Among the G-20 countries India ranks at 10 of 20 countries in terms of national coordination and implementation mechanisms for the SDGs among these countries in 2018.(Sachs, J.,Schimdt-Traub,G., Kroll, C.,Lafortune, G.,Fuller,G.,, 2018)

The NITI Aayog released the first ever Baseline Report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) India Index for the year 2018 (NITI Aayog, 2018) with a comprehensive analysis of the performance of the 29 States and 7 Union Territories in India towards the implementation of the 2030 SDG targets. The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), United Nations in India and the NITI Aayog developed the index in collaboration. The index comprises of a composite score for each sub-national level government within India. The index rates their aggregate performance across 13 of the 17 SDGs. The score between 0-100, denoted the average performance of the State/UT towards the SDGs. The SDG India Index gives the nation as a whole a score of 57 and the top 3 performers are Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu among the State governments and Chandigarh is a frontrunner among the Union Territories.(NITI Aayog, 2018)

Tamil Nadu has scored 66 and the state has a overall rank of 3 in the SDG India index for the year 2018. The state has emerged as the top scorer in eradicating poverty, providing clean and affordable energy among other goals. Kerala has scored 69 and shares the top rank with Himachal Pradesh. Kerala’s performance is due to the performance in reducing hunger, achieving gender equality and providing quality education. Whereas Himachal Pradesh ranks high on providing clean water and sanitation, reducing inequalities and preserving the mountain ecosystem. The Union Territory of Chandigarh with a score of 68 merges as a top performer nationally due to the progress in clean water and sanitation, providing affordable and clean energy, quality education and generating decent work and economic growth for the people of the region.The basic aim of the national index is to instil competition among States so as to improve the performance across social indices. This is critical given the progress of sub-national governments will decide the progress of the country.

VI. CONCLUSION:

India is an important contributor to the global agendas of the Millennium Development Goals previously and the Sustainable Development Goals. There is a dynamic national convergence of the development agenda of the country with that of these global goals. The Prime Minister’s message of “SabkaSaath, SabkaVika”, also embodies the five Ps of the global SDG movement namely – People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace. This research paper underscores the importance of the NITI Aayog in establishing the connect between the global and national; national and sub-national and localisation of SDGs. The role of NITI Aayog in extending cooperative federalism and also in establishing unique mechanisms for the SDGs at the national and sub-national level has been highlighted in this paper. The years to come will stand testimony to the performance and role of NITI Aayog and critically it will also set the platform for the nation’s performance in the achievement of the SDGs.

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Dr. Anbu Arumugam. “Understanding the role of NITI Aayog, India in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable HumanDevelopment”. ” IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 24 no. 03, 2019, pp. 44-49.