

India's Role in Advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities

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Article History:

Received: 12-12-2024

Revised: 25-01-2025

Accepted: 05-02-2025

Abstract:

The Sustainable Development Goals present a chance to eliminate poverty and inequality, protect the environment, and ensure that all individuals of world have access to justice, prosperity, and well-being. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a fresh and logical perspective on the various aspects of development. In 2015, the United Nations unveiled its sustainable development agenda, which reflected Member States increasing recognition of the best way to alleviate poverty and improve people's lives worldwide. This research explores the United National Sustainable Development Goals which serves as a tool for the Indian government to collaborate in a coordinated and cohesive way to meet the development requirements of India's impoverished, marginalized and vulnerable populations and to scale up creative development solutions. The first section of the paper discusses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals created to replace the Millennium Development Goals, which generally apply to all nations, regardless of their level of development, and aim to advance world peace, prosperity, and health. The second section of the paper highlights the Role of India in promoting its efforts to address the interconnectedness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The paper also examines India's various challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper concludes by looking ahead of what are the options before India in its attempt to promote and achieve the goal of Sustainable Development. This research also emphasizes that India is a key player in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because of its sizable population, expanding economy, and dedication to tackling problems like poverty, healthcare, and climate change. India receives strategic support from the UN to help it fulfill its goals of eradicating poverty and inequality and achieving sustainable development in compliance with the SDGs, which have been agreed upon worldwide. The study accentuates that there are still many obstacles to overcome, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, to accomplish the SDGs fully.

Keywords: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Sustainable Development Index -2024, Niti Aayog.

1. Introduction

The life-sustaining system of our planet is heavily influenced by human activities, to the extent that additional environmental alterations could jeopardize future well-being. An integrated strategy is desperately needed to preserve Earth's life-supporting systems and guarantee ongoing socio-economic advancement (Steffen, et al., 2011). In order to accomplish this, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to provide a crucial blueprint for action that is essential

for both our planet and humanity (United Nations, 2015). On September 28, 2015, leaders from around the world convened at the United Nations to finalize an agreement on a set of goals that required a commitment of at least \$800 billion each year, which corresponds to 1% of the global gross national product, over the following 15 years. These goals were commonly known as "Agenda 2030" or the "Sustainable Development Goals" (Lempert, 2017). Following two years of extensive negotiations among nations at the UN headquarters in New York, this agenda received approval and officially began on January 1, 2016 (Chasek & Wagner, 2016). The 70th session of the U.N. General Assembly was addressed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon "Our destination is in our sights: an end to extreme poverty by 2030; a life of peace and dignity for all" (Ki-Moon, 2015). So the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are intended to offer a "supremely ambitious and transformational vision" for our common future through 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015). As per the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets were introduced by the UN General Assembly in 2015. These Goals signify the boldest example of global governance through the setting of objectives to date (Biermann, Kanie, & Kim, 2017). Through adaptation and mitigation, it seeks to provide a healthy, peaceful lifestyle free from poverty and hunger in safe, sound environments (Bizikova, 2017). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at tackling issues like poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental harm. These goals aim for an inclusive and sustainable future for all nations, regardless of their development level. India's large population and rapid economic growth make its role critical in achieving these global aims. India's challenges include meeting the needs of over 1.4 billion people while ensuring environmental protection. The country seeks to balance economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainability, participating actively in global discussions through platforms like the UN. This study examines India's national efforts related to the 2030 Agenda. India engages in various international partnerships and influences global policies impacting sustainable development. Despite progress, India faces significant challenges, including ongoing poverty, regional inequality, and environmental degradation. The paper seeks to analyze these barriers and their effect on India's national strategies. It highlights the importance of Niti Aayog in India's sustainable development approach, showing how commitments shape national policies. Ultimately, the paper will provide insights into India's role in the global development landscape and its impact on the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing the significance of India's contributions to global sustainable development, particularly in the Global South. India has adopted the 2030 Agenda during the United Nations Summit held in September 2015 (Srikanth, 2018). In India these responsibilities assigned to NITI Aayog include developing national indicators, monitoring their implementation by different ministries, and working with states to accomplish the SDGs' development goals. The Hon'ble Prime Minister's Narinder Modi emphasis on "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," which echoes the idea of "Leaving No One Behind," serves as the foundation for SDG India. As demonstrated during our G20 Presidency, India's support of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ('The World Is One Family') and its function in elevating the voice of the Global South shows the country's dedication to sustainable development (Aayog, 2024).

1.2.The Sustainable Development Goals and its Meaning:

The goal of sustainable development is to maintain the planet's ability to sustain a wide range of life forms while advancing prosperity, well-being, and social justice all while maintaining a high standard of living. Although the phrase "sustainable development" may have first appeared in a 1969 International Union for the Conservation of Nature mandate, it is most frequently linked to the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).(Griggs et al., 2013) reinterpret sustainable development as “development that fulfils the requirements of the present while protecting the Earth's life-support systems, which are essential for the well-being of both current and future generations”. Many international conferences provide some insight into the origins of sustainable development in global governance. The 1972 Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment, the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UN Conference on Environment and Development, and the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development were the first three and each of these gatherings played a significant role in shaping policies that connect the economy, environment, and society, with a focus on multi-stakeholder engagement and government leadership (Ward, 2012). Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals are informed by a number of previous examples of global governance and goal formation, including the Development Decade, which started in 1961 (Hickmann et al., 2022).The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets set by the United Nations, which are designed to be ambitious, comprehensive, and indivisible. These goals aim to guide communities and nations toward achieving peaceful, healthy lives devoid of hunger and poverty (Gratzer & Keeton, 2017). The SDGs are categorized into three main areas: Social, Environmental, and Economic Goals (Ghiasi & Zhou, 2017).

1.3.The Evolution of SDGs from MDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in effect from 2001 to 2015, were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 189 countries launched the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 with the aim of raising the standard of living in the world's poorest nations. Advocates and governments thought that improved "global governance through objectives," in conjunction with a fresh and more expansive set of inspirational goals, would promote sustainable sustainability (Sachs J. D., 2012).While the MDGs experienced significant achievements, including reaching the target for the number of individuals surviving on less than US\$1.25 daily, several goals are expected to remain unmet (United Nations, 2012).Even though there was no legally enforceable framework, the MDGs garnered a lot of support from the public and policy community both domestically and from international organisations which made sure that a sizable amount of money was channelled effectively(Vandemoortele,2011).

International governance has traditionally focused on how wealth and knowledge are transferred from developed to developing countries (Hudson & Dasandi, 2014). Encouraging democracy and strengthening the rule of law are explicitly mentioned in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which inspired the MDGs (United Nations General Assembly, 2020). The basis of the partnership between wealthy and developing nations in the MDGs encompasses the importance of human rights and civil liberties, effective governance, responsible economic choices,

transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and community engagement (Trundle & Gleeson, 2024). It is evident that the international community is growing increasingly conscious of the complexity of development and its impacts on the environment, economy, and society as evidenced by the shift from eight MDGs with eighteen targets and forty-eight indicators to proposals for seventeen SDGs with more than one hundred indicators (Waage, et al., 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals are distinct due to their intricate structure and wide-ranging application (Bhattacharya, Islam, and Salma, 2014). The Millennium Development Goals and other previous goal-setting attempts are not the same as the Sustainable Development Goals (Chasek and Wager 2016). The MDGs and SDGs are both a part of a global political process that includes countries and organisations that support "development" both at home and abroad, claims (Lempert, 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), similar to the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), emerged from a broader social development movement that has progressively gained prominence over the past 25 years in international development, sustainability, and social work (Androff and Damanik, 2023).

1.4. The Sustainable Development Goals and India:

In the last two decades, India has seen a great deal of political, social, and economic transformation. Its economy has undergone a significant transformation and is among the fastest-growing economies in the world. India's economy could rank second or third globally by 2047 when it celebrates its centenary (Venkatshamy, 2014). India adopted the UN SDGs, focusing on poverty eradication, health, education, climate action, and more (Mohandas, 2018). India's Sustainable Development Goals were founded on the overarching principle of ensuring that no one is marginalized (Kabeer, 2017). According to (Chatterjee, Hammill, Kumar, and Panda 2015), India is anticipated to have a crucial impact on the global success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to the strong connection between the nation's development objectives and the SDGs. At a conference of finance ministers and central bank governors held under India's G20 Presidency, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi voiced worries about the SDGs' sluggish pace (Subramanian, 2023). So India is committed to achieving SDGs within the specified timeframe and implemented several programs and laws to support green infrastructure, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy to guarantee that future generations inherit a healthy and prosperous environment.

2. Literature Review

The literature on India's involvement in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is extensive, addressing elements like national development programs and Problems. This review synthesizes eight key research papers that examine various aspects of India's engagement with the SDGs and its development strategies.

Androff and Damanik (2023): The Routledge International Handbook of Social Development, Social Work, and the Sustainable Development Goals explores how social development and social work contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The effectiveness of the SDGs hinges on their implementation, as each of the 17 objectives has a social aspect. The SDGs emerged from a larger social development movement over the past 25 years, gaining relevance in international

development and social work. This handbook is unique in examining the contributions of social work and social development to the SDGs, especially from voices in the Global South, including Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It includes eight parts with 35 chapters by 74 authors, aimed at a diverse audience interested in social sciences and development studies.

Annachhatre, (2018). This paper intends to encompass schemes with a focus on ‘Swachha Bharat Abhiyan’, the significant cleanliness campaign by the Indian government. Various social movements, including Mahatma Gandhi's, triggered public action and highlighted participatory democracy's role in India. India, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, still has many people living below the poverty line. High GDP growth does not translate into good sanitation and health care for millions. This situation has led to social movements seeking change for these vulnerable groups. A social movement is a long-term effort by a group to achieve shared goals and improve the social system. Health and sanitation are vital for economic growth; poor health can hinder progress. The Indian government has introduced various schemes for cleanliness, notably ‘Swachha Bharat Abhiyan’. Historical movements, including those led by Mahatma Gandhi, emphasized democratic participation in India.

Bhattacharya, Patro, Vaidyanathan, & Rathi (2016). This paper also highlights the need for a coordinated approach to SDG implementation by demonstrating the case of gender equality and urban planning. The authors evaluate how well certain policies work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on poverty reduction, sanitation, and financial inclusion. They also talk about the difficulties in putting these programs into action within India's varied social and economic conditions. Additionally, they recommend ways to improve policies to better meet the SDGs.

Jafare,(2024). This paper investigates the challenges India faces in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and suggests ways to address them. It analyzes India's efforts to meet the needs of its poor and vulnerable populations while balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. The research highlights India's progress in renewable energy but notes significant challenges, such as poverty and resource limits, that hinder its climate goals. It evaluates existing literature to understand India's role in the global SDG agenda and identifies research gaps.

Kumar and Anand,(2023). This analysis examines India's diplomatic strategies and their alignment with the global sustainable development framework, particularly the SDGs. Kumar analyzes India's participation in key international platforms such as the United Nations. India has made notable progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the past seven years, but significant gaps remain at various levels of targets and indicators. Achieving SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger) and 5 (Gender Equality) within the remaining timeframe is particularly challenging, necessitating focused efforts to address these gaps. Many targets initially set for 2020 were not met, and without prompt action, India may also miss several targets due in 2025. The analysis indicates a strong correlation between SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 2, suggesting that investments in nutrition and education could enhance overall effectiveness. The ongoing crises, including conflicts and pandemics, have further complicated progress towards SDG targets. Data constraints, particularly at disaggregated levels, hinder comprehensive analysis, highlighting the need for improved data

collection methods, including the use of non-traditional data sources. Strengthening India's statistical capabilities and fostering international cooperation in data practices are essential for capacity building. In summary, India must accelerate its efforts to meet the SDGs by 2030, leveraging interconnected goals and enhancing data systems.

Reddy, Reddy, Bhattarai, Nagaraj, & Bantilan, (2018). This chapter looks at how MGNREGA impacts basic entitlements like employment days, wages, and the coverage of social groups such as dalits, adivasis, and women. Evidence shows a rise in agricultural wages and a decrease in the male-female wage gap, along with changes in labor markets and work patterns.

Venkatshamy, (2014). The project's goal was to enhance tools for strategic analysis by adopting a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach rather than just focusing on regional studies and military matters. The project emphasized that India's security is tied to its economic progress. Sustainable development should consider societal and environmental factors, ensuring energy security and a peaceful neighborhood. Lastly, addressing the democratic aspirations of India's citizens, especially the youth, is crucial. The text calls for governance reforms and innovative conflict resolution methods. India must focus on socio-economic issues, climate change, and regional cooperation, particularly with Pakistan and China.

Writer,(2023). A study from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health reveals that India is unlikely to meet over half of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 2030 deadline. Published in *The Lancet Regional Health—Southeast Asia*, the research assessed progress on nine out of 17 SDGs by analyzing data from India's National Family Health Survey for 2016 and 2021. The study classified 707 districts based on their progress towards achieving these goals, finding that India is off target for 19 of the 33 SDG indicators. Alarming, over 75% of districts were off target for critical indicators such as access to basic services and child malnutrition. While India is close to meeting the target for improved water access, other goals may not be achieved until 2062. The authors recommend developing a strategic roadmap focused on key SDGs like No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, and Gender Equality to help prioritize and address specific areas in need

2.1. Methodology

This study uses qualitative research to examine India's role in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and its efforts to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It analyzes secondary sources like government reports, UN publications, books and scholarly articles to understand India's progress and challenges in sustainable development. The research includes primary data from India's national policies, SDG progress reports, and initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation and Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana schemes. It also evaluates the role of NITI Aayog in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study synthesizes academic literature to explore past research and identify gaps. Overall, it aims to provide a detailed view of India's diplomatic and developmental strategies and suggest possible future improvements. This study uses qualitative methods to explore India's role in Advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for Sustainable Development. It

highlights the challenges India faces in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and discusses future options to promote these goals.

2.3. Research Gap and Significance of the Study

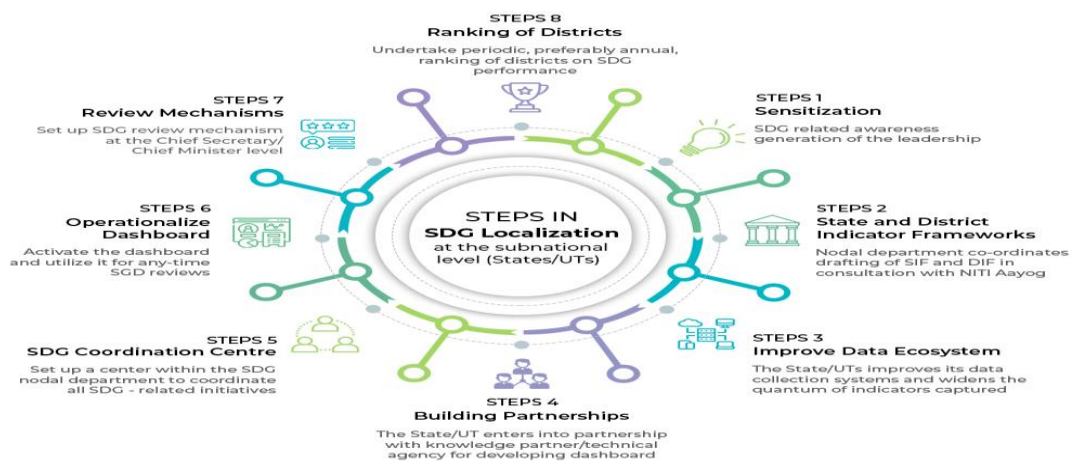
Many studies have explored how effective the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, set by the UN in 2015, and how India plays a role in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These studies highlight how India's contributions are important for sustainable development with India's large population and rapid economic growth make its role critical in achieving these global aims. However, there is a lack of research on the impact of certain platforms such as NITI Aayog on outcomes. In Indian to encourage progress, guidance should come from NITI Aayog to improve capacity-building for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in state and union territories. This includes efforts in the Department of Planning and Statistics and SDG cells, as well as government and academic training institutions. Without a strong national policy focused on evidence-based capacity-building for the SDGs, improvements at the state and local levels will not happen effectively. It is crucial to understand the role of Niti Aayog in India's approach to sustainable development and how commitments influence national policies. Additionally, it is important to analyze the barriers that impact India's national strategies. The aim of this study is to critically examine India's contributions to the SDGs, which can reveal valuable progress toward these global goals help track the effectiveness of interventions and identify areas for improvement. This study also examines India's role in achieving the SDGs is crucial for several reasons. As a rapidly developing nation with a large population, India's advancements can substantially influence global progress towards the 2030 Agenda. However, the country faces multiple challenges. Its large population complicates wide access to essential services, and deep-rooted economic inequalities slow progress on various SDGs. Resource constraints, including funding and infrastructure, hinder scale-up efforts. This study explore how India's progress helps in evaluating the effectiveness of strategies pinpointing areas that require further improvement and helping other developing countries gain insights into tackling similar issues. Additionally, the research will assess India's domestic policies and National development programs and plans, driven by the philosophy of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," or collective efforts for inclusive growth. The study will use a qualitative methodology, looking at primary sources such as government reports and scholarly articles to understand India's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explore how the United Nations' High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development serves as the key platform to eliminate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, everyone enjoys peace and prosperity and monitoring progress on these objectives, where countries can share their experiences and challenges. Finally, it aims to provide insights into India's efforts, identify successes and challenges, and suggest ways to improve India's strategies for sustainable development

3. Theoretical Frameworks Linking with India's role in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Theoretical frameworks show how states like India use their commissions, councils, policies and planning to reach development goals. These frameworks highlight the links between proper implementation of policies and promoting growth, peace, and prosperity. One key framework is the

NITI Aayog premier think tank for implementing SDGs .The Indian government's top think tank, NITI Aayog, carry out the SDGs. Furthermore, it has been suggested that states, particularly those that receive federal funding, design their programs similarly. Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation have another responsibility of the creating national indicators for the SDGs in India (Maurya, 2015). Two instances of NITI Aayog's proactive involvement in national initiatives to achieve the SDGs are the Aspirational Blocks Program and the Aspirational Districts Program. To guarantee the rapid development of the nation's more isolated and comparatively underdeveloped regions, the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) was introduced in 2018. On January 7, 2023, the Hon'ble Prime Minister introduced the Aspirational Blocks Program during the 2nd National Conference of Chief Secretaries. The program aims to improve governance and raise the standard of living in India's most challenging and undeveloped regions (NITI Aayog, 2023). NITI Aayog's State Support Mission is an overarching program designed to promote organised and formalised interaction with States and Union Territories. Its main goal is to help them reach their socioeconomic targets by 2047 and help to develop a roadmap that aligns with national priorities and their core competencies. According to (NITI Aayog ,2024) reports that the mission has been approved, with a total budget of Rs. 237.5 crore between 2022–2023 and 2024–2025. Another relevant framework is process of localizing the SDGs in India. NITI Aayog, in India specialized agency on the SDGs, works closely with States and Union Territories at the sub-national and district levels to support SDG Localization. The process of localizing the SDGs in India offers valuable insights for converting the objectives ambitions into real results for people. In India, local governments are directly involved in 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Budgets and local plans of Local governments must be linked for the SDGs to be effectively localized which calls for a strategy that promotes objective of Indian Government. To better meet the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, people with disabilities, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, Indian states have called for extending the reach of social inclusion and participatory initiatives within their current programs or adding new components in line with the SDG commitment to "leave no one behind.". This ensures growth that is truly inclusive of all members of society (SDG Knowledge Hub, 2024).

Steps in SDG locatization at the subnational level (states/UTs)



Source : <https://sdgknowledgehub.undp.org.in/localization/>

This picture demonstrate the steps included in SDG Locatization in india:India has a diversified political system, which makes the process of localising the SDGs there multi-layered and multi-stakeholder. The SDGs must be localised in India through participatory planning, design, implementation, and monitoring by relevant institutions at three levels: the federal level, the state and union territory (UT) level, and the local level (NITI Aayog, 2020). Although national initiatives define the scope of localisation, offer the foundation for policy and strategy, and build a shared vision of development, state and local initiatives are the primary drivers of SDG localisation in India (NITI Aayog & UNDP, 2019). **UN Support for SDG Initiatives in India** provides a theoretical basis for understanding how India's ambitious SDG journey has the full support of the UN, which looks forward to working with India to ensure that no one is left behind. The UN invited Indian civil society organisations, think tanks, and the media to participate in deliberations at the General Assembly in New York (A/CONF.227/20, 2015). The UN Country Team in India supports the initiatives of NITI Aayog to ensure inclusivity and advocate for adequate funding to achieve the SDGs (Bhattacharya, Patro, Vaidyanathan, and Rathi, 2016). To promote collaboration among state governments, central ministries, researchers, and civil society organizations on specific SDGs, the UN has conducted thematic consultations in close partnership with NITI Aayog and its collaborators (Anand & Das, 2022). In 2016, the UN provided assistance to the governments of five Indian states Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, and Odisha to adapt the SDGs to their unique local contexts in order to tackle significant development challenges (Kurian, 2016). The SDGs are integral to numerous government flagship programs, such as Swachh Bharat, Make in India, Skill India, and Digital India. Many of these initiatives are overseen by state and local governments, which play a vital role in the planning, funding, implementation, and monitoring of SDG-related activities (Lu, Nakicenovic, Visbeck, & Stevance, 2015). **History and Evolution of Sustainable Development in India** framework integrates and provide an overview of the events that made sustainable development in India possible. Early Phase (Pre-1980s): During this stage, environmental protection was the main priority. The Stockholm Conference of 1972, which mandated that all signatories undertake environmental protection measures, was significantly responsible for this era. India is among the select few nations in the world with a constitution that includes a pledge to protect and enhance the environment (Mehra, 2013). Acts like the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, Water Prevention and Control of Pollution Act 1974, and Forest Conservation Act 1980 were enacted (Chand, 2018) to find a balance between protecting its natural resources and attaining rapid economic growth in India. Post-Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984-1990s): During this stage, ensuring social justice and equity was the main priority. A rise in "judicial activism" in reaction to the 1984 "Bhopal Gas Disaster" resulted in a reinterpretation of pre-existing regulations and legislation (May & Daly, 2019). In 1987, a significant amendment was made to the Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act of 1981. The Public Liability Insurance Act was passed in 1991 to provide "no-fault" instant relief to those impacted by accidents involving the handling of identified hazardous substances (Raghavan, 1997). Integration with Global Agenda (1990s - Present): The Brundtland Report redefined "economic development" in terms of "sustainable development" to address the tension between growing ecological degradation and globalised economic expansion. Brundtland Report 1987 popularized the concept of sustainable development, influencing India's policy framework. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), is

commonly referred to as the Earth Summit. The historic meeting sought to address the issue of pollution and reevaluate economic progress to protect natural resources (United Nations, 1992). India actively participated in the UN Conference on Environment and Development, aligning itself with global sustainable development goals. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The primary objective of sustainable development during the MDG era was poverty reduction, which could be achieved by international trade participation and economic growth (Jong and Vijge, 2021). India actively participated in achieving the MDGs, aligning its development goals with global sustainability targets and alongside environmental concerns and Indian government initiatives started tackling problems including healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation. Now India adopted the UN SDGs, focusing on poverty eradication, health, education, climate action, and more.

4. Analysis of Progress and Challenges

India has demonstrated the greatest achievement in accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals through the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), which provides work for unskilled labourers and improves their standard of living. The MGNREGA's widespread implementation in every village in every district of India is another crucial feature (Reddy, Reddy, Bhattarai, Nagaraj, & Bantilan, 2018). According to (Chitravanshi, 2015), this initiative aims to improve livelihood stability in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of assured and guaranteed wage employment to a householder in each Indian rural home. The second most successful track record in achieving SDGs is the National Food Security Act which is being implemented to offer food grains at a reduced cost. The National Food Security Act of 2013, often referred to as the Right to Food Act, is a legislative measure enacted by the Parliament of India aimed at providing subsidized food grains to approximately two-thirds of the country's population, which totals around 1.4 billion individuals (NFSA, 2013). The Indian government's Swachh Bharat program aims to achieve several objectives and meet the vision and mission of "Clean India" by October 2, 2019, the 150th anniversary of the great Mahatma Gandhi's birth. The anticipated cost of the investment would be more than 62000 crore Indian rupees or 9.7 billion US dollars. The administration has stated that this effort is "inspired by patriotism" and "beyond politics" (Annachhatre, 2018). The initiative also seeks to raise knowledge about managing menstruation health (Lavanya, 2023). It is a modified version of Indian National Congress launched the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan 2009 (Khanna, 2015). In the field of save environment and use solar energy India has established an objective to generate 500 GW of renewable energy by the year 2030, with an interim target of 175 GW by 2022 (Chaudhury, 2019). There are now 48.21 GW of projects in development, 25.64 GW of projects in various stages of the bidding process, and 89.22 GW of solar energy capacity in operation as of September 2024. The "Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)" and "Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)" schemes are initiatives launched by the Indian government to improve urban infrastructure, with AMRUT focusing on basic amenities like water supply and sewerage across cities, while HRIDAY specifically targets the preservation and development of heritage sites in designated historic cities. The government has already approved approximately ₹1 lakh crore (US\$12 billion) in investments for urban development under the Smart Cities Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation of 500 cities (Hindu, 2021). The India-UN Development

Partnership Fund encourages sustainable development and shared prosperity across the Global South. The Fund, which was established in 2017 with a US\$150 million pledge, is led by the Indian government, run by the UNOSSC, and carried out in collaboration with the UN and other national governments (UNDP, 2017). The India-UN Fund supports partnerships and development initiatives in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe by fostering triangular and South-South cooperation.

The Position of India in the Sustainable Development Index: According to the Sustainable Development Report 2024, India is ranked 109th out of 166 nations and according to its SDG index score, India has made great strides toward achieving all 17 SDGs (Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller, 2024).

Highlights and findings from the SDG India Index's fourth edition:



Source: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2032857>

The Nation's overall SDG score increased from 66 in 2020–21 to 71 in 2023–24. In 2023–24, Goal 13 saw the largest scoring gain from 2020–21, followed by Goal 1. To meet significant challenges in the fields of climate action and sustainable cities and communities, the nation must improve its standing. Eight of the SDG targets have moderately improved scores, while five of them either stall or increase at less than 50% of the necessary rate (Niti Aayog, 2024).

4.1. Challenges in attaining SDGs in India:(Liu et al. 2015) indicate that numerous sustainability issues are interlinked and often involve complex, self-organizing systems. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are at risk due to its overly ambitious and poorly integrated global agenda, according to a 2018 evaluation of the SDGs (Lim, Jørgensen, & Wyborn,2018). India's initiatives to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the UN have made considerable progress.However, India faces numerous challenges in achieving sustainable development, including widespread poverty, environmental degradation like air and water pollution, the strain on infrastructure from fast urbanisation, limited access to clean energy, climate change vulnerability and a lack of awareness about sustainable practices in different areas. India is a fascinating case study to examine the difficulties of building capacity in many developing nations to achieve the SDGs because it is a very diverse nation in terms of politics, economy, and culture.India's

sustainable development targets would be hampered by several short to medium-term issues, such as the unpredictable global economy, developing skill shortages, and inadequate agricultural growth, which might cause inflation (Jafare, 2024). The future of policymakers will be complicated by the scarcity of natural resources and environmental issues, especially those pertaining to energy and water (Loomba, 2011). India must therefore take a number of self-examination steps, such as drastically cutting poverty and other social inequality, tackling domestic political violence democratically, maintaining and improving conditions for economic growth, leveraging India's demographic advantages to turn them into a national asset, and reforming political institutions to ensure their legitimacy and efficacy. India is expected to have more people than China by 2025, with a population of 1.65 billion (Wolf et al. 2011). Even with its efforts to fight poverty, India continues to have the largest percentage of people living below the global poverty line. According to Lim, Jørgensen, and Wyborn (2018), in the worst case scenario, it might cause wealthier countries to prioritize domestic solutions to poverty, postponing the treatment of the world's poorest countries. Between 2015 and 2030, the average annual financial shortfall for SDG-related businesses in developing countries remains at over \$2.5 trillion, given the current level of public and private investment (UNCTAD, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic, with escalating conflicts, trade disputes, and geopolitical tensions, as well as the increasing effects of climate change, presents significant challenges to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, the most vulnerable populations and developing countries are experiencing hardships due to critical deficiencies in our global financial and economic frameworks, historical injustices, and a decline in international cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic and several huge shocks in 2020–22 have significantly hampered global efforts to end extreme poverty. In 2020, the pandemic reversed three years of global progress by causing extreme poverty to rise for the first time in decades. The recovery has been uneven, with low-income countries falling behind. The ongoing polycrisis makes it increasingly impossible to eradicate poverty by 2030, particularly in regions that lack the financial means to cope with economic pressures (United Nation, 2024). Even while India has accomplished important health goals like the eradication of polio, it still faces new obstacles in the areas of sustainable living and health as it advances. Cities that struggle with dangerously high levels of pollution and traffic, coupled with an unwell populace, might severely reduce the advantages of India's urbanization and demographic dividend and cause the standard of living for its people to rapidly decline. According to a study led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the goal for better water access in India is just a year away, while other goals, including those for partner violence and basic service availability, might not be met until 2062 (Writer, 2023). India has implemented a number of capacity-building programs to help government officials develop their views on the SDGs and to help them create plans of action to put them into practice. At their convenience, states or UTs have created and presented SDGs trainings. They lack focus and consistency because of the adhoc nature of SDG trainings. It is very challenging to comprehend the actual advancements and effects that capacity-building (Sengupta & Sinha, 2022).

5. Conclusion

The global community is keenly observing India's initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India's ability to meet these goals would suggest that a significant

segment of the world has also made progress. India must establish effective mechanisms for implementing the SDGs and monitoring their progress. One of the most significant challenges facing India is the formulation of appropriate indicators. To meet the SDG targets by 2030, India must confront its fundamental issues, which encompass gender disparity, inconsistent development, and a sluggish pace of advancement. To learn from its COVID-19 reaction, India should prioritize effective political leadership, upgrade its digital infrastructure, and implement prompt and targeted measures. By putting into practice a comprehensive, creative plan, India may greatly progress its SDGs and improve the welfare of its citizens. The aforementioned are important best practices for achieving sustainable development in India: putting a strong emphasis on renewable energy sources, adopting sustainable agricultural methods, conserving water, encouraging community involvement, investing in high-quality education with a sustainability focus, and incorporating climate change adaptation plans into policymaking across sectors. The foundation for SDG adaptation at the national, state, and local levels was laid in India as well by SDG advocacy, training, and communication. New approaches to planning for, funding and thinking about development were introduced by the 2030 Agenda. Unquestionably; there has been some advancement in the area of SDG capacity-building, but much more work remains. In the past four years, the leading states have created resource materials in their native tongues, but they are still insufficient. The fact that there is still a long way to go and less than ten years remain to accomplish the Global Goals is concerning. Both the leading and performing states must take greater initiative, create educational resources, and disseminate them extensively. In order to steer the country towards achieving the SDGs, NITI Aayog offers the overall structure and leadership. Therefore, the directive must originate from NITI Aayog in order to spur change in the areas of capacity-building for the SDGs at the state and UT levels (in the Department of Planning and Statistics and in SDG cells) as well as in government and academic training institutions. The mechanism of capacity-building at the state and local levels will not change as intended unless there is a strong national policy of evidence-based capacity-building related to the SDGs.

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