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Agenda item 4: Promoting effective governance and institutional reform to accelerate delivery of the SDGs

Effective Governance to Accelerate Delivery of the SDGs: Indian Perspective

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals are universal call to action towards reorienting the world on to a more sustainable path. They reflect an approach that perceives the environment, economy and society as embedded systems. The goals being universal and country driven are aspirational and interconnected. They are key to *'Leaving No One Behind (LNOB)'*, encompassing comprehensiveness, inclusiveness and equity; making the quality of governance crucial. This resonates with the spirit of India's national development goals and agenda of, *'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas* (together with all, development for all, the trust of all).

Transformative Agenda

The path towards SDGs requires dynamic channels of good governance constituting effective linkages. It is imperative to initiate actions towards key governance issues like rule based governance, quality administration and management, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption mechanisms, etc. This entails integration, participation and reflexivity at multiple levels in governance. The coordination between different policy levels and sectors, participatory arrangements (incorporating stakeholders into decision-making processes) and the role of effective quantitative and qualitative monitoring mechanisms to constantly review and revise the strategies assume significance.

The SDG agenda being transformative necessitates the effective use of public resources, fostering inclusive and accountable processes and ensuring robustness of data for good governance. SDG's provide a framework to stimulate shared action on five key themes and areas of critical importance for humanity: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. There is need for appropriate actions beyond the current growth policies for meeting the targets of SDGs. Enhanced growth may enable achievement of the socio-economic aspects of the Agenda, but at the expense of the environmental goals. Hence, the path towards SDGs calls for actions on the 'smarter track':

- Accelerated renewable energy growth;
- Accelerated productivity in food chains;
- Localized development models;
- Active inequality reduction;
- Investments in education for all, gender equality and family planning.

Such transformation is only likely to occur in the context of good governance, delivered through initiatives that builds SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

Good Governance

The implementation of Agenda 2030 requires a change in the governance culture of a country, which the government cannot do alone, as it requires cooperation and partnerships with different sections of the society. Good governance is not a finished product but a continuous and dynamic process. It is exploring sustainable means to match the expectations of its constituents. There is an increasing need to strengthen coordination at local, national and international levels (vertical integration), as well as among the same levels of governance, ministries and economic sectors (horizontal integration). In an effective multi-level governance framework, actors exchange, plan and coordinate activities that relate to planning, implementation and reporting, while also sharing financial resources and responsibility for outcomes. By strengthening local leadership, generating bottom up approaches for decisions and consultative processes, vertical integration can identify and implement solutions collaboratively. On the other hand, horizontal integration is collaboration between different regulatory bodies at the same level of governance.

India's Trajectory on SDGs

India strives to achieve the targets under the SDGs with the help of the dedicated flagship programmes and appropriate policy interventions with due emphasis on home grown solutions to the varied governance, developmental and environmental challenges that the country faces today. The Government of India has unfurled the, 'strategy for New India @ 75', that is aligned to SDGs and aims to push India towards US\$ 5 trillion economy by 2024. Projected to be the most populous and youngest country in the world by 2024, India's contributions will be significant for the achievement of SDGs.

The Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi in his statement at the United Nations Summit in September 2015 during the adoption of the SDGs stated that, "Just as our vision behind Agenda 2030 is lofty, our goals are comprehensive. It gives priority to the problems that have endured through the past decades. And, it reflects our evolving understanding of the social, economic and environmental linkages that define our lives. The sustainable development of one-sixth of humanity will be of great consequence to the world and our beautiful planet." Success stories from India in its journey towards achieving the SDGs have the potential to guide other countries.

The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), with the Prime Minister of India as its chairperson, has been assigned the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs in India. As part of this implementation process, NITI Aayog has carried out a detailed mapping of the 17 Goals and 169 targets to Nodal Central Ministries, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and major government initiatives. Most State governments have carried out a similar mapping of the SDGs and targets to the departments and programmes in their respective States. The NITI Aayog has initiated a series of national and regional consultations in collaboration with the other organizations to deepen dialogue on the SDGs with States and stakeholders including experts, academia, institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations and Central

Ministries. It has also led the process of Voluntary National Review preparation, critical to assess the progress towards goals. The national reviews on SDGs appraise the mechanisms established at the State levels which provide an opportunity for States to learn and share experiences.

Flagship Programmes

The flagship programmes like *Swachh Bharat Mission, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Jan - Dhan Yojana, Digital India*, etc., highlight Indian Government's commitment to ensure social equity. The government of India is focussed and invested in the design and implementation of some of the large-scale programmes bridging critical developmental gaps on key SDGs. For instance, *Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)* is the largest government health protection scheme in the world, entitling 500 million Indians to annual health protection coverage of approximately US\$ 7100. The government launched *Poshan Abhiyan*, a National Nutrition Mission for children and women to eradicate malnutrition by 2022. The program recognizes the interconnectedness of nutrition with other aspects such as water, sanitation, hygiene, mother's education, poverty, ensuring convergence of all the services on a household for reducing under nutrition in the country. The government's program, '*Transforming of Aspirational Districts*', across 112 districts, to reduce intra - region disparities and improve service delivery is related to achievement of some of the SDGs. The *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)*, which is the world's largest financial inclusion programme is another noteworthy example of a crosscutting initiative. These initiatives demonstrate the advances India has made to move ahead on the SDGs keeping the focus on '*Leaving No One Behind*' intact in development planning.

Localising SDGs

India, having a federal governance structure, most of the functions that have a bearing on SDGs fall within the purview of the State Governments. The commitment of the Government of India in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals can be realised only if actions at the national level are complimented by initiatives of the State Governments and the Union Territories (UTs). Further, the focus of SDGs on equality, inclusion and justice makes the participation and contribution of States imperative in the pursuit of SDGs'. In India, there are strong Local Governments; Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural areas and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in urban areas. After substantial financial devolution to the PRIs under 14th Finance Commission, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is supporting village-level PRIs in planning and implementing development initiatives in their respective areas. The national development agenda covering the SDG framework guides the capacity building of the PRIs as well as the actual planning process.

The process of recognising local contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda can be attained through localising the SDGs. Localisation relates both to how local and State governments can support the achievement of the SDGs through bottom up action as well as how the SDGs can provide a framework for local development policy.

Conclusion

India apart from integrating SDGs into its ongoing national and State policies and programmes need to focus on nurturing partnerships at the regional and global levels. It strongly believes that combined and sustained efforts at national and global levels will ensure shared prosperity. Strengthening governance capacity is critically important to respond effectively to the complex set of sustainability challenges. The 2030 Agenda is not about what the rich should do for the poor, but concerted efforts of all countries for the global well-being of this generation and those to come. In an interlinked and globalised world, all countries must be proactive in addressing the challenges of sustainable development. The societies with strong social fabrics characterized by trust, equity and rule of law tend to enjoy greater stability, resilience, dynamism and long-term sustainability. They can safeguard against the corrosive effects of corruption and exploitation of vulnerable populations during times of crises. The successful implementation of SDGs requires integrated policies addressing trade-offs across different policy areas and maximizing synergies, convergence and impacts.