

19th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Agenda Item 10: Training and awareness-raising for the Sustainable Development Goals

Efforts Towards Training and Awareness-Raising for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
Indian Context

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a challenging outcome-oriented framework of goals for all countries, regardless of their level of development. This calls for close collaboration globally and nationally, across levels of government. An understanding of complex interactions and trade-offs among policy areas reinforces the path towards achieving SDGs. The Sustainable Development Goals have targets directly related to the responsibilities of local and regional governments. The awareness at these levels supports the national plans for the implementation of the SDGs.

Sensitisation and Advocacy

The main challenge in advancing the SDGs is to make sure that the goals are effectively translated into national, regional and local policies. Every country has to prioritise judiciously and adapt the goals and targets in accordance with local challenges, capacities and resources available. The need to engage in continuous advocacy to sustain momentum of localising the SDGs is critical. The initiatives for enhancing public awareness and sensitisation about SDGs make the process of implementation participatory and inclusive. The successful adoption of sustainable development policies and initiatives at the national and sub-national levels calls for awareness generation, advocacy, and effective communication. The challenges that the SDGs tackle are diverse and complex and the integrated and transformative nature of the goals require a multidisciplinary and innovative way of working for implementation at the national, regional and local levels. This new way of planning, financing, implementation, and monitoring entails re-skilling and development of new competencies for all diverse stakeholders.

National Level

The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, premier think-tank of Government of India at the national level has organised goal-wise sensitisation workshops in collaboration with relevant Union and State Ministries, subject experts, civil society organisations, think tanks and the United Nations. This ensured familiarisation of all government officials concerned, with the global goals and the targets. The 2030 Agenda Declaration was translated into all regional languages to ensure wider dissemination. Technical regional workshops on localising SDG indicators and developing data methodologies were held at the sub-national levels. NITI Aayog has vigorously pursued advocacy with sub-national governments to heighten the thrust on SDGs. The SDG India Index Report, published annually, is expected to drive the States to achieve the targets on time.

Initiatives by State Governments

Most of the States have undertaken sensitisation programmes for all the district level officers on SDGs in order to generate awareness on an array of socio-economic issues. The States are conscious of the need to align decentralised planning processes with SDGs. Training on SDGs is an integral part of the training programmes for elected representatives and officials at the State/district/local levels.

The communication modules on SDGs in vernacular languages are aimed at developing capacities of district, block and village level functionaries as trainers. The modules on health, water and sanitation, nutrition, education and child protection contain sessions on understanding the relevant indicators and the schemes being implemented to achieve the particular SDG.

The governments through designated nodal departments (Agriculture, Women and Child Development, Drinking water and Sanitation, Health etc) spread awareness and attempt to effect behavioural change in the communities. All line departments are monitoring and reporting the progress of SDGs to the nodal officer in the respective states. Some States are undertaking capacity building of multiple stakeholders by including a module on SDGs in their 'social education Programme'.

Integrating SDGs with Local Plans

Local governments, both rural and urban, are best placed to 'put people first' and ensure 'no one is left behind'. In India, twenty-nine functions related to socio-economic development are devolved to local governments as identified in the sub-national laws. As a result, out of the 17 SDGs, 15 are directly related to activities carried out by local governments in India (SDG 14 on marine resources and SDG 17 on global partnerships fall outside the ambit of local governance institutions). The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj responsible for administering local self-government in rural areas has been advocating integration of SDGs within the local plans (Gram Panchayat Development Plans - GPDP) approved by the village council (Gram Sabha). The district administration plays an important role in scrutinising and endorsing local government plans. As a result, awareness of the district administration on SDGs assumes importance. Several States have either entrusted the District Planning Committees (a Constitutional body for district level planning and monitoring of programmes) with the responsibility of coordinating SDG implementation or have created district level structures (District SDG Cell) under the leadership of the District Collector for the purpose.

Capacity Development

The capacity development needs a long-term strategy to boost the institutional capacity of the government on the SDGs. Though India has many strong and well-functioning institutions, the magnitude of efforts to implement the SDGs will require a more comprehensive approach. The capacity building initiatives in the States include:

- Sensitisation and orientation of government officials of various departments and agencies on SDGs;
- Generating common understanding about how different departments can synchronise their efforts to achieve the SDGs and associated targets;
- Consultations on mapping of departments and schemes on SDGs and associated targets;

- Orientation and training on SDG indicators, data collection and monitoring framework;
- Workshops on SDG-oriented budgeting, linking outcome-budgets to SDGs and related issues.

There is a need to map the learning trajectory on SDGs for key actors within the government to ensure the sustainability of capacity development efforts. It is also required to train same set of people at different points to introduce to new issues, methods and tools. A gap analysis has to be undertaken periodically to determine the level of human and institutional capacities to deliver the SDGs and accordingly courses should be developed for capacity building to address the gaps. The courses can preferably be integrated into higher education institutions to ensure sustainability and continuity.

Role of Civil Society Organizations and Corporates

In India, an important role is also being played by civil society organizations that have been working on SDG-related issues from the grassroots to the national level. They, working individually and in coalitions, have partnered with the government to provide inputs, create awareness and offer feedback. Their initiatives span the following:

- Preparing Information Education and Communication materials on SDGs, conducting capacity building workshops and awareness campaigns;
- Supporting States with integrating SDGs into the planning and implementation process;
- Highlighting issues of sustainable energy management and climate justice for necessary policy action at the state and national levels; and
- Conducting research and documentation on SDGs as well as their relevance to the rights and entitlements of various vulnerable sections of society.

The SDGs can be linked to programmes and funding proposals of civil society organisations which could improve the possibilities of international partnerships and other collaborations. This would also increase public awareness of the SDGs. Civil society organisations must adapt and be flexible in creating a more effective space for engagement and dialogue.

Corporate sector organisations including industry associations have held consultations and initiated actions in various areas including environmental sustainability, innovative climate action and inclusive development strategies on various themes. Apart from working with organisations within the industry and related sectors, they have also worked jointly with the government and civil society to develop innovative solutions and courses of action such as:

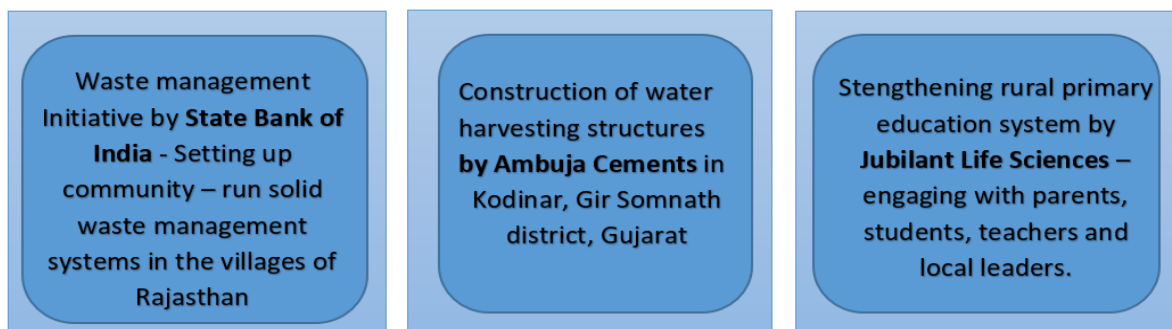


Fig1. Few Examples of Corporate Organisations Working for SDGs(Source:FICCI Report,2018)

Awareness Generation and Advocacy

In India, various initiatives for enhancing public awareness and sensitisation about SDGs have been stepped up to make the process of implementation participatory and inclusive and also to ensure behavioural changes in the society so as to bring and adopt practices that promote sustainable development. Some such initiatives initiated by different States in the country include:

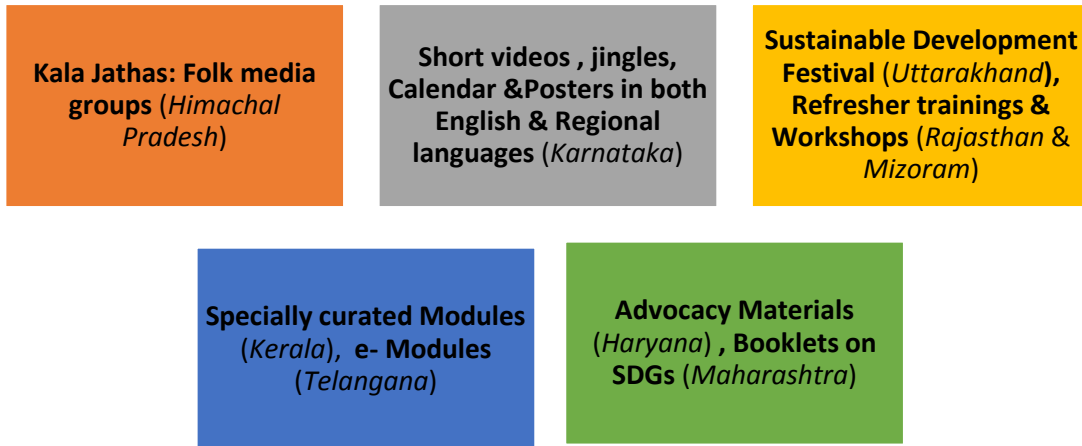


Fig2: Few Awareness Initiatives by State Governments (Source: Localising SDGs NITI Aayog Report,2019)

Conclusion

The SDGs Communication strategy outlines long and short-term objectives and required change as per Agenda 2030. The need for synergy and an integrated approach to achieve the desired outcomes is imperative. Though the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 goals. Raising awareness of all the stakeholders on SDGS is critical and is the driving force for collaborative governance to ensure inclusive public service delivery. The COVID-19 crisis undoubtedly brings extraordinary challenges to the achievement of the SDGs. There is a need to ensure that adequate finances are channelled to support progress on the SDGs with a well coordinated stimulus package across the world. The post-COVID 19 world needs the spirit of solidarity and a new unity of purpose to take the SDGs forward. The methods of training, awareness raising for SDGs and the way to reorient in the wake of COVID 19 merit serious attention as virtual learning, communication and interaction have become the new normal.