

A path towards Sustainable Development Goals

by Mushahidul Ahmed - Friday, February 28, 2020

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Mahatma Gandhi was aptly quoted saying that the “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed”. The quip conveys a broader meaning in the context of both the environment and the economy. The more we exploit the environment off its resources to strengthen our current economy, the more villainous a role we play against our future generations.

Sustainable development is defined as the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in 2015. SDGs had replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were launched by the United Nations in 2000 in order to tackle the indignity of poverty. Also known as the ‘2030 Agenda’, it is a list of targets for the socio-economic development which was a landmark achievement, providing for a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all. Recently, the NITI Aayog has published the SDG Index of the country as well as the performance of the states and union territories.

The list comprises of 17 specific targets which are: No Poverty(Goal 1); Zero Hunger(Goal 2); Good Health and Well Being(Goal 3); Quality Education(Goal 4); Gender Equality(Goal 5); Clean Water and Sanitation(Goal 6); Affordable and Clean Energy(Goal 7); Decent Work and Economic Growth(Goal 8); Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure(Goal 9); Reduced Inequalities(Goal 10); Sustainable Cities and Communities(Goal 11), Responsible Consumption and Production(Goal 12), Climate Action(Goal 13), Life below Water(Goal 14), Life on Land(Goal 15), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions(Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals(Goal 17). This time, the Index has been constructed with reference to 13 out of 17 SDGs (excluding Goals 12, 13, 14 and 17).

The country has achieved a score of 60 out of 100 which is a good indication, by improving three positions from 57 points last year. In the recent years, India has been able to achieve a considerable progress in Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6) and Affordable and Clean Energy (Goal 7). The score of the country towards Goal 6 is 88, which has been possible by the positive outcomes of the Swachh Bharat Mission. With reference to Goal 7, India has been able to score 70, due to the enhanced use of solar as well as other sources of clean energy. Improvement in goal 7 can also be credited to the extensive coverage of LPG for households (under *Ujjwala* scheme) and saturation of electricity connections. With this practice, the nation might be able to see a reduction in oil import bill with at least a minute decrease of energy dependency on other countries as well. Additionally, India could be in the top performers and

contributors' list in the Paris Agreement, which sets out a global framework to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. Focusing on non-renewable energy sources can contribute a lofty improvement in the health sector of the nation due to the reduction of emission of green house gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and water vapor.

Despite making significant progress, we must put more emphasis in achieving a good score where we lag, especially Zero Hunger (Goal 2) and Gender Equality (Goal 5). With reference to these, Rajiv Kumar, Vice- Chairman of NITI Aayog, has said that nutrition and gender equality continue to be problem areas for the country and require a more focused approach. The foremost reason why we are lagging in Goal 2 is the extent of malnutrition in the country. Kerala, Goa and few north-eastern states: Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have scored above 60, with Goa leading at 75 points. Here, twenty-two states and union territories scored below 50, with central Indian states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Chhattisgarh scoring below 30, indicating an abysmal level of hunger and malnutrition.

In case of Gender Equality (Goal 5), India ranked 95th out of 129 countries where only three states are at a score above 50, which are Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala. Speaking about Gender Equality, we are still miles behind due to the gender-based discrimination still prevalent in our societies and the sexual violence against women. Moreover, their representation and participation, in political and social spheres, need to be emphasized. Further, India has slipped a point from 65 to 64 as far as Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8) is concerned. Data points considered to reach the conclusion were annual growth rate of net domestic product per capita, ease of doing business, unemployment rate and labor force participation.

Kerala has topped the list with a score of 70, which is much above the National Average with Bihar at the bottom rank. Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim and Odisha have improved the highest compared to the previous years' targets. Partial credit for Odisha's performance can be given to the government initiative, 'Mo Sarkar'. Its objective is to provide 'service with dignity' to people who are coming to government offices by collecting feedback on the behavior and professionalism of government officers. With the help of this initiative, Odisha government promotes transparency and accountability eradicating corruption, with the State Vigilance Department.

Assam, it must be said, has been one of the worst performers with a composite score of 49, which is a matter of great concern. The only positive aspects are the performance in Goal 15 (Life on Land), where the performance is at the peak with a score of 100, 75 in Goal 10 and 61 just crossing the National score towards Goal 8. Looking into Goal 7(Affordable and Clean Energy), where India scored 70, Assam showed a miserable performance.

Emphasis should be laid upon increasing SDG with reducing our environment impact to achieve a good, successful and healthy life because environment preservation is important to safeguard our future, while development is also needed to improve people's quality of living. For that, steps should be taken from the government side to provide knowledge and awareness about SDGs. Apart from the government initiatives, individuals should also take great concerns and work hard as the charity always starts at home. Let everyone be provided a legitimate chance to work for achieving strong scores on SDG increasing development and growth, remembering what Nehru said before he died: 'If we do not ultimately solve the basic problems of our country ... it will not matter if we call ourselves capitalists, socialists, communists or anything else.'

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