# India

## Executive Summary

# Civil Society Spotlight Report on the SDG 4 Implementation Status in India

| COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES | |
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| TOTAL POPULATION: | 1.339 billion (UNESCO, 2017) |
| POPULATION AGED 14 YEARS AND YOUNGER: | 372 million (27.78%) (UNESCO, 2017) |
| GNI PER CAPITA: | US$ 1,790 (World Bank, 2017) |
| INCOME GROUP: | Lower Middle Income Status (World Bank, 2018) |
| HDI VALUE AND RANK: | 0.640, 130 out of 189 (UNDP, 2018) |
| POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO AT NATIONAL POVERTY LINES (% OF POPULATION): | 21.9% (World Bank, 2011) |
| OUT OF SCHOOL: | • 2,897,747 children- 935,040 female and 1,962,707 male (UNESCO, 2013)<br>• 11,109,371 adolescents- 4,259,197 female and 6,850,174 male (UNESCO, 2013)<br>• India is the country with the highest number of out of school children in the world. |
| LITERACY RATE (15-24 YEARS): | • 86.14%;<br>• Female 81.85; Male 90.04% (UNESCO, 2011) |
| LITERACY RATE (15 YEARS AND OLDER): | • 69.3%;<br>• Female 59.28%; Male 78.88% (UNESCO, 2011) |
| EDUCATION EXPENDITURE: | 2.7% of the GDP in 2017 to 2018 (India Budget 2018) |

This report highlights the current status of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in India and covers seven themes. The report has been prepared through a collaborative process in which several civil society organisations (CSOs) and teachers' union members have contributed. Several national, sub-national, and grassroots level organisations were also part of the writing process. The findings have been fine-tuned and further endorsed through several consultative processes both at the national and state levels. The report analyses the current status of education in India, challenges, and makes specific recommendations.

### Government Rollout of the SDGs: Policy Mandate, Coordination Mechanism, Indicators, and Funding Commitment

After the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, was assigned the responsibility of overseeing their implementation. A three-year action plan for 2017-18 to 2019-20 has been published by NITI Aayog to recommend policy changes and programmes for action. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) was entrusted with the task of developing the National Monitoring Framework for the SDGs.

### Future Plan of Action[1] for SDG 4

In the three-year (2017-18 to 2019-20) action agenda, the Indian government is focusing on improving learning outcomes. The three major goals to achieve in the action agenda are as follows:

1. Orient the system towards outcomes- The government seeks to accomplish this goal by introducing an independent, state-of-the-art sample-based outcome measurement system, tracking,

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1   http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/coop/India_ActionAgenda.pdf

and supporting state-level improvement through a School Education Quality Index (SEQI), modifying the requirements under the Right to Education Act (2009)[2] on inputs, and encouraging states to deploy resources as efficiently as possible to achieve outcomes.

2. Provide tools to teachers and students for effective learning- The government would commission research, and if successful, will adopt only evidence-based Information and Communication Technology tools, focus on foundational learning, and pilot a system of technology-aided adaptive examinations.

3. Improve existing governance mechanisms and pilot new ones- To improve existing governance mechanisms, the government has identified basic governance processes and structural reforms and included in SEQI. It will also explore the role of private players and the Public Private Partnership (PPP) models in education.

A final indicator framework with a total of 306 indicators has been developed by MOSPI. Recently, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of India also gave its go-ahead to establish a National Monitoring Framework on the SDGs. A high-level steering committee will periodically review and refine the National Indicator Framework (NIF) to monitor the SDGs with associated targets.

Out of 306 indicators, there are 20 indicators under SDG 4. Out of these 20 indicators, only two indicators explicitly talk about gender (in terms of male and female), while only one indicator specifically talks about children with disabilities. Surprisingly, none of the indicators talks specifically about socially deprived groups, like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and religious minorities.

The government has also undertaken the process of mapping schemes which have been aligned to the corresponding SDGs. Recently, the government, with support from the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), has come up with an SDG Index 2018 in which 62 indicators were selected. The Index targets the progress of all the states and Union Territories (UTs) on these 62 indicators, measuring their achievements on several targets.

Launched in 2015, the Speaker's Research Initiative was formed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha to provide SDG-related insights to Members of Parliament. The Lower House of the Parliament has organised several discussions on the SDGs with parliamentarians from both Houses as part of the Speaker's Research Initiative. An official committee of parliamentarians has also been formed to raise awareness on the SDGs among legislators.

## State-Level Initiatives

Seventeen states have prepared their vision or action plan 2030. States and UTs have identified the planning department or its equivalent as the nodal department for action on the SDGs. Six out of 35 states and UTs have developed their SDG monitoring framework, and most states have initiated the identification and finalisation of indicators based on the national indicators framework.

[2]   The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Act in India makes education free and compulsory for children in the age group of 6-14. According to the RTE Act, every school needs to abide by the norms in the act, i.e norms related to teacher's qualifications, infrastructure, curriculum, pupil-teacher ratio, etc.

While the government emphasises on the importance of the involvement and participation of the district-level administration, and rural and urban local governments in the implementation structure, the mechanism for such involvement still needs to be developed.

## Role of CSOs in VNR/ SDG Monitoring and Feedback on the 'Rollout'

The Indian government claims to have undertaken various national and state level consultations with CSOs on the indicators developed by MOSPI. However, consultations have remained limited to only a few CSOs as these were considered more of a 'tick-box' activity. The government counterparts were hardly present during the CSO sessions, and the feedback from CSOs was hardly incorporated in the government plans. After MOSPI came up with the draft indicators, the indicators were put up in the public domain to seek suggestions from all the stakeholders. CSOs provided feedback on each of the draft indicators but the government responded by asking the CSOs to limit their feedback to just three indicators per SDG.

Similar was the experience during the VNR process. Initially, the CSOs were supposed to write a chapter and there was a task team for VNR. Later on, the CSOs were informed that instead of a chapter, only case studies will be taken from them, which was later dropped as well. It was conveyed that in the VNR, the role of CSOs will be 'acknowledged' and the names of the task team of CSOs and other organisations would be mentioned. Finally, even the names of the CSOs were dropped from the VNR. In short, no feedback on the VNR was sought from the CSOs.

Even until now, there is no institutionalised SDG Monitoring system for civil society engagement.

The government has overlooked the suggestions of CSOs, such as deciding the priority in financing by the population of the state and district, bridging inequities among states in terms of government spending per capita, the number of government functionary per capita, and applying population weights and baseline weights to the SDG Index to arrive at equity among state financing.

## Challenges in Achieving the SDGs

The government has taken positive efforts in developing mechanisms for the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the country. However, these measures are very limited.

Prioritising only a few goals means disregarding the multiple interlinkages of the SDGs. Although it has insufficient data on the SDGs, the SDG Index created by NITI Aayog is being used as a 'performance index.' It has become increasingly clear that the Index would result, either formally or informally, in 'performance linked financing' among states and districts within states. This performance linked financing is also shown as the 'best practice,' whereas in reality, it would mean that those states and districts that need the most support would get less budget purportedly because 'they are lacking in performance,' while they should be getting more support following the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) or equity spirit of

the SDGs. Thus, the SDG Index is likely to increase inequality among districts and states, and rural and urban areas.

The action plan developed by NITI Aayog indicates that policies are more focused towards 'outcomes.' This leads to the weakening of existing progressive policies. For example, in the context of education, the action plan discusses doing away with the norms on inputs like teacher qualifications and infrastructural norms. Instead, it focuses more on the outcomes, and hence fails to acknowledge that, without the inputs, the outcome will be impossible to reach. The policy also opens avenues for the privatisation of social services like education.

Serious challenges lie in the financing of education. Although the government has undertaken a mapping exercise of the government-run schemes and aligned these schemes to various SDGs, there are no clear plans on financing for the SDGs. Interestingly, some states like Assam have taken the initiative to align their budget outcome document to the SDGs at the state level. However, the same initiative needs to be put in place at the national level as well.

There is no institutionalised mechanism of engaging the CSOs in strengthening the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs and therefore the narratives remains lopsided. There is a need to engage more stakeholders at all levels, and define their roles in policy making processes and implementation of the SDGs.

## Discussion on the Most Critical Issues

India is the home to the highest number of out-of-school children. Despite the government's efforts to make education more accessible to all, there are still more than 30 million children who are out of school.

Although India has the highest number of stunted children (under the age of five years) in the world, their access to the right start in education through Early Childhood Care and Education is still not a legal entitlement.

The lack of qualified teachers remains critical at all levels of education. There is a gap of more than 900,000 teachers in the elementary and secondary education. Even in the context of higher education, this remains a challenge as almost 45 per cent of teaching positions are vacant. Moreover, since more than 90 per cent of the teachers' training institute is privatised, the accountability of these institutes severely affects the quality of teachers.

Budgetary allocations made to the education are far below the global as well as nationally accepted benchmark. Public expenditure on education in India was 2.7 per cent of the GDP in 2017 to 2018. This was about 10 per cent of the total government (Centre and States) spending. Further, there is a huge systemic lacuna, which leads to the immense underutilisation of available resources.

There is an enormous growth in the privatisation of education in the country. Not only does it adversely impact the quality of and access to education, but it also reinforces existing hierarchies in society and excludes the most marginalised and vulnerable groups. Curbing the privatisation of education is thus crucial to ensure and promote inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Policies on youth employment have been very limited in its approach as more focus is placed on developing a pool of workers to serve corporations and industries rather than enhancing the avenues for the increased employment of the youth. In addition, non-traditional livelihoods have yet to find its place in government programmes.

■ Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 2019 with the theme "My Education, My Right(s)" organised by West Bengal Primary Teachers Association

India's literacy rate is very low, which suggests problems with the education system. The literacy rate among transgender population is at 56.07 per cent. This is lower than the average literacy rate among the general population and even lower than those of the females. No programme has been implemented to improve the literacy of the Indian population. Even the definition of 'adult' is ambiguous, further diluting the focus.

While the Government of India has technically acknowledged the third gender, there have been no concrete strategies or programmes to ensure that members of the third gender are provided with quality and inclusive education that is at par with other children. The current education system, as well as the teachers and other personnel, lacks the understanding and the skills to effectively respond to the needs of the children who do not fall in the binary of male or female.

Equity has not been kept front and centre in policy framing in the country, so the most marginalised groups, such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, transgender, girls, and persons with disabilities, are left behind.

## Concluding Statement

While there have been few initiatives from the government for the implementation of the SDGs, the limited approaches have resulted in the mere 'mapping' of existing schemes to SDGs, as well as the cherry picking of indicators based on the availability of data and on what is convenient to show 'good performance.' There has not been a special focus on those left behind as it has been generally assumed that the government was 'already doing' what needed to be done for those who are left behind.

Financial resources are a fundamental driver to the SDGs. Hence, focusing on the issues of availability and the management of finances is a crucial step to make significant progress towards the 2030 Agenda. However, the commitment to allocating ample financial resources to SDG 4 implementation has not been met. Not many efforts can be seen from the government to align its resources as per the needs of SDGs. The lack of reliable data is another issue that must be addressed. In order to improve data collection, there is also a need to engage and capacitate the local government.

Education is the key to achieving the SDGs in full. Interconnectedness is therefore a must for the government to keep in view while increasing its efforts and implementing concrete actions. •