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## Accelerating SDGs

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Suman K. Bery\*

**T**he 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses the world's shared aspirations for its people, planet, and prosperity to be achieved through collaborative and sustained partnerships & peace. In this chapter, four areas are addressed including the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a commitment by each sovereign to its own citizens and India's experience in this regard; over and above this domestic commitment, why global progress on the SDGs is a central public good; how a multilateral system significantly discredited by its performance during the COVID pandemic can restore its relevance by imparting global momentum to the SDGs and the importance of the G20 Leaders guidance in supporting a revived multilateralism.

### Relevance of the SDGs and India's Approach

India's G20 Presidency coincide with the crucial midpoint of the 2030 Agenda. The motto of India's Presidency -- *Vasudhaiva*

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\* Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog

*Kutumbakam* or “One Earth – One Family – One Future” reflects the ethos of the SDGs. Given the diversity of issues at the local level and the magnitude of the challenges, in a country like India, achieving the SDGs is only possible through localisation. The Indian model of SDG localisation encompasses four key pillars -- creating institutional ownership; establishing a robust review, and monitoring system; developing capacities for integrating SDGs in planning and monitoring as well as promoting a 'whole-of-society' approach.

To foster competitive federalism, NITI Aayog has developed the SDG India Index, an aggregate measure that can be understood and used by all stakeholders. It has also developed State and District Indicator Frameworks as well as dashboards for periodic progress monitoring. All 28 states and 8 Union Territories of India have embraced the SDGs. Most of them have put in place institutional structures to steer the adoption, implementation, and monitoring of SDGs. India’s recent achievements provide some support to these efforts. Around 135 million Indians escaped the clutches of poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21. NITI Aayog’s Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 encompasses 12 SDG-aligned indicators, all of which have demonstrated marked progress. Over 331 million more people have gained access to improved sanitation, thereby increasing the coverage from 49 to 70 per cent. Over 233 million more people have obtained access to clean cooking fuel. Electricity coverage has improved from 88 to 97 per cent, benefiting 183 million more people. Vaccination of children under two years of age has improved by 23 per cent. The Infant Mortality Rate has been reduced by 14 per cent.

## **SDGs as Global Public Good**

In an integrated world, the ability of sovereign nations, particularly the least developed countries, to achieve their SDGs

depends on a supportive global environment. Multiple challenges confront the world today. There is a North-South divide and an East-West disconnect, Covid's impact across sectors, the Ukraine conflict, a debt crisis, and trade disruptions. These factors have impeded efforts to achieve the SDGs and to undertake climate action.

In April 2023, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the collective promise made in 2015 of a more green, just and equitable global future was in peril. The Secretary General emphasized that "we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been". A report on the SDGs released by him on the occasion revealed that just 12 per cent of the 169 SDG targets were on track, while progress on 50 per cent was weak and insufficient. Progress had either stalled or even reversed on more than 30 per cent of the goals.

With multiple crises making their impacts felt simultaneously, the number of people living in extreme poverty was higher than the numbers four years ago, the UN report said. Other fallout include record-high inequality and rising greenhouse gas emissions. The UN Secretary General pointed out that many developing countries cannot invest in the SDGs because of burdensome debt, while climate finance was far below commitments. Richer nations had not yet delivered on the \$100 billion promised annually in support, among other climate pledges.

"The SDGs are the path to bridge both economic and geopolitical divides; to restore trust and rebuild solidarity," the Secretary General said adding: "Let's be clear: no country can afford to see them fail." The UN Secretary General used the occasion to appeal for an SDG Stimulus plan of at least \$500 billion a year, and for deep reforms to the international financial architecture. India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, alluded to some of these issues at the G20 Development Ministerial meet in the pilgrimage city of Varanasi in June 2023, when he alluded to "an opportunity for us as the G20 to demonstrate solidarity" on these matters.

Further, the decisions we make today have the potential to contribute to an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future. Describing the SDG agenda as a landmark “not only in its universality, in that it applies to all countries but also in its integrity, in that it can only be successful as a comprehensive agenda,” Minister Jaishankar said that there was “fragmentation in international priorities wherein some goals are deemed more important than others.” This approach was not in our collective interest. “As the world struggles with the multiple interlinked crisis that have emerged, we have witnessed a painful illustration of that very interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals,” the Minister emphasised, adding that it was in this context that India had put forward an ambitious 7-year Action plan for Accelerating progress on the SDGs.

“We, as the G20 need to be bold in our ambition. We need to come together to address the crisis as one. The theme of the Indian Presidency ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’ therefore is an urgent call for action,” Minister Jaishankar said. This call to action comes against the backdrop of a decline in the SDG Index score especially since 2020 which has been driven primarily by a reversal in progress on socio-economic goals. SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) have been especially impacted but volatility in global financial markets and those for food and energy have put an enormous strain on people’s well-being, and on the sustainable development agenda in all geographies, especially in developing countries. In particular, developing countries, including LDCs (Least Developed Countries) and SIDS (Small Island Developing States), have been disproportionately affected by these crises and challenges.

The G20’s main claim to legitimacy is its stewardship of the global economy. Stalled progress on the SDGs at a global level reflects poorly on this leadership. More broadly, the world will be a safer place if progress is made on SDGs. It is in this sense that

collective progress on Agenda 2030 can be seen as a global public good. The G20 Development Ministers' Meeting in Varanasi therefore marked an important milestone in our efforts towards reinvigorating global action for achieving the SDGs. Emphasizing the key role of the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) in advancing the G20's contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, and in coordination with other G20 work streams, the Development Ministers welcomed the close collaboration and alignment between the DWG and other G20 working groups facilitated by the Indian Presidency. The Development Ministers unanimously adopted the G20 2023 Action Plan on Accelerating Progress on the SDGs and the High-level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development.

The key highlights of the Action Plan included a focus on action in the areas that would have a transformative impact on accelerating progress towards achievement of all SDGs including digital transformation; gender equality and empowerment of women; and implementing sustainable, inclusive and just transitions globally, while leaving no one behind. This approach, would help address challenges faced, especially by developing countries, including bottlenecks in financing for development and feed into the Presidency's goal of coming up with G20 Green Development Pact to foster strong collective actions for powering sustainable development, climate and environment actions in an interconnected manner around the world.

The Action Plan seeks to accelerate achievement of all SDGs in all regions by promoting collaboration among G20 workstreams, and aims to enhance international partnerships with all developing countries, the UN and other relevant International Organisations, and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) including Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). The Development Working Group (DWG), as a coordinating body and policy resource for G20 actions towards developing countries and cross-cutting issues of sustainable development, will steer the implementation of

the 2016 and the current 2023 Action Plan.

## **Reforming Multilateral Institutions**

The G20 has had an Action Plan to support the SDGs over several Presidencies in the past. India's Presidency has arguably raised the level of ambition to a new level by linking the SDGs to the larger theme of repurposing the multilateral order. The Action Plan calls for the "scaling up adequate, affordable and long-term financing from all sources for developing countries, including LDCs and SIDS, for achievement of the SDGs." G20 Expert Group on strengthening Multilateral Development Banks has identified some measures to improve financing ability of MDBs. Those include optimizing existing balance sheets, robust credit ratings and preferred creditors status.

In addition, partnerships with international and regional organisations, including IFIs (International Financial Institutions), MDBs, and regional development banks. The reform of the international financial architecture is an agenda that spans both the Sherpa and Finance tracks which found expression at the Leaders' Summit. While considerable attention is being devoted to the issue of reform of the MDBs, there is also work to be done with regard to the use of Special Drawing Rights made available to the International Monetary Fund. Diffusion of medical, digital and environmental technologies falls within the framework of the WTO and the UN's Framework Convention for Climate Change.

## **Importance of G20 Leaders' Process**

There is general disappointment on how the lack of consensus among major nations has hobbled the responsiveness of these institutions to deal with major challenges. As the prime forum for international economic cooperation, the G20 can -- and should

-- do more. The G20 can lead by example in several ways: fully embed sustainable development in its own actions; provide critical support to global public goods, including by advancing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda as well as support developing countries' own capacities to design and implement sustainable development strategies.

The 2023 Action Plan is a multi-year living document which focuses on actions in areas that can have a transformative impact on accelerating progress towards the achievement of all SDGs in all regions, including digital transformation; gender equality and empowerment of women; and implementing sustainable, inclusive and just transitions globally, while leaving no one behind. This approach will help address challenges faced especially by developing countries, including bottlenecks in financing for development. The outcome documents adopted at the Varanasi Development Ministerial has been annexed to the G20 Summit held in New Delhi on 9-10 September 2023. India's G20 Presidency which has been ambitious, inclusive, decisive and action-oriented can provide a much-needed impetus to the faster realisation of the SDGs across the world.





**“Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,  
Sabka Vishwas, Sabka  
Prayas....**

*It has yielded great dividends  
in bringing the country  
together to pursue progress  
and deliver the fruits of  
growth to the last mile.”*

**— Shri Narendra Modi  
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India**