



RIS
Research and Information System
for Developing Countries
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली



Roundtable Discussion

Future of SDGs

24 March 2026 | 1:00-5:00 pm

Jacaranda Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi



CONCEPT NOTE

The global development landscape has entered a phase of profound uncertainty and transition. Currently, the weakening of multilateralism and increasing geopolitical fragmentation have made it more difficult to sustain collective action and global solidarity on sustainable development priorities, and have also raised concerns about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as only 17 per cent of SDG targets are on track globally. This reflects the limited progress that has been achieved globally amidst growing concerns that Agenda 2030 will remain severely short of its ambitions and objectives.

In several areas, progress has slowed due to successive shocks, including the pandemic, deepening economic instabilities, unsustainable consumption and production, climate-related disasters, and rising geopolitical tensions. The five Ps of the Agenda 2030 - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership have not been approached coherently and cohesively with human action, causing significant divergence. The objectives of leaving no one behind and reaching the farthest first appear to be projected further into the future, provided there are renewed efforts on collective action and localisation across several regions. In 2025, an estimated 808 million people were living in extreme poverty, up from the previous estimate of 677 million representing 9.9 per cent of the world's population, or 1 in 10 people. Global hunger and food insecurity have declined in recent years but remain above pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, an estimated 8.2 per cent of the global population faced hunger and about 28 per cent, nearly 2.3 billion people, were moderately or severely food insecure. Achieving Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy) targets demands

substantially increasing clean-energy investments, particularly in developing economies. Without accelerated investments and action, 645 million people will still lack electricity access, and 1.8 billion will lack access to clean cooking in 2030.

a) Lessons from Localisation Efforts and National Policies

The challenges are particularly severe for countries of the Global South. In the current global scenario, the Global South faces several structural bottlenecks, reflected in economic and fiscal constraints, weak innovation ecosystems, dependence on imported technologies, high concentration of global capital stock, misallocation of resources and market failures that lead to negative spillovers hindering the progress on the SDGs. These constraints manifest in financing gaps, technological divides, institutional weaknesses, and climate vulnerabilities. Debt servicing costs in low- and middle-income countries reached a record \$1.4 trillion, squeezing resources needed for sustainable development. Despite this challenging scenario, lessons from localization efforts and national policies need to be evaluated appropriately to strengthen means of implementation across countries. The last decade has nevertheless generated awareness and willingness to contribute to localisation and efforts on sustainable pathways, even as economic systems remained vulnerable. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2025, on average, East and South Asia have shown the fastest progress on the SDGs since 2015, driven notably by rapid progress on the socioeconomic targets.

Meanwhile, India appears to be a bright spot, having made significant progress on localization of SDGs through transformative efforts like the SDG India Index, Aspirational District Programme, Cooperative Federalism, apart from large scale welfare schemes all contributing to remarkable reduction of Multi-dimensional Poverty in India. India's experience offers significant lessons on solutions and partnerships. In order to strengthen international cooperation for economic progress and sustainable development, Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi proposed in his Closing Remarks at the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit (VoGSS) the idea of the Global Development Compact for the Global South. The modalities of this development compact, as defined, are: Trade for Development; Capacity Building for Sustainable Growth; Technology Sharing; and Project specific Concessional Finance and Grants. As suggested by the Prime Minister, India stands with partner countries not just for their assistance but, but India is committed towards development in the Global South. Even though 'development compact' uses a plurality of modalities, their convergence, interlinkages, and intersubstitutability are considered important under such partnerships to ensure the intended development impact.

b) Future of SDGs

The developing countries have repeatedly emphasised the need for financial support for industrialisation; promoting science, technology, innovation (STI) for SDGs; technology transfer; digitalisation; trade facilitation; and investment in capacity building that could potentially

contribute to progress on the SDGs. According to OECD, if the SDG financing gap continues to grow at its 2015-2023 rate, it will reach USD 6.4 trillion by 2030, and the need for strengthened financing mechanisms that can accelerate progress on the SDGs and address widening resource gaps in developing economies becomes important. UN Secretary General has called for ambitious action in six critical SDG transitions: food systems, energy, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, and climate and biodiversity. There was also a proposal for an SDG Stimulus to offset challenging market conditions faced by developing countries and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Among emerging technologies, Artificial Intelligence has emerged as an all-pervasive force shaping not only knowledge outcomes but also significantly impacting economic enterprise and societies. The pace and quantum of transformation in the area of AI is unprecedented in human history and is pushing societies and countries to re-evaluate norms of engagement to fully leverage its benefits and overcome potential challenges. In this context, AI would also influence norms of international cooperation.

At the critical midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, India delivered the G20 2023 Action Plan to Accelerate Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), taking a cross-cutting, action-oriented approach to interconnected issues, including health, education, gender equality and environmental sustainability. India placed for consideration the progress in the area of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) driven by revolutionary digital innovations; thereby strengthening public goods provisioning through public-private partnerships overcoming barriers to technology. India also shared its transformative development approaches, including women led development that forms the fulcrum of the SDGs.

India has also strongly advocated for Lifestyles for Environment (LiFE), which was endorsed as a sustainable pathway during the G20 Presidency of India and could be a guiding framework for organising global and local action on sustainable development over a longer horizon, with the expectation that the world would stabilise and recover from the ongoing episodes of disruptions and trust deficits. The G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (LiFE) calls for a) integrating development, environment and climate agendas; b) meet basic needs of the people; c) promote individual and community behaviour change through nudging and incentives; d) promote sustainable consumption and production, value chains and technological transitions; e) mainstream sustainability; f) leveraging data and digital technologies; g) promote role of local communities, local governments and traditional knowledge; h) enhance financing of development, environment and climate goals; and i) strengthen international cooperation, collective action and partnerships. This calls for deep transformation on principles of equity, trust and ethics; individual, community and local agency; and overhaul of systemic modalities – both national and cross-border! Policies and actions must be directed towards a new development paradigm that creates resilience and regeneration with entrenched foundations to sustain and survive future shocks.

Scope and Outcomes

Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, through its comprehensive work programme on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has been contributing substantially to research and capacity building on SDG localization and means of implementation issues since 2015 and has fostered an active platform of multi-stakeholder engagement over the years. Building on this work, RIS also made significant contribution to India's priorities of Lifestyles for Environment (LiFE) during India's presidency of the G20 in 2023 and has deliberated on the scope of sustainable development priorities and implications for Global South across multilateral and regional processes.

We note that, as the world passes through a phase of weakened multilateralism and geopolitical fragmentation, efforts are being made by experts and the wider stakeholder community to reflect on factors that currently impede the SDGs and also engage deeply on the future of partnerships on sustainable development.

In this context, RIS has initiated active engagement on exploring future pathways of sustainable development, implications for India and the Global South. The first consultation in this series was organized on 12 March 2026 on the theme "International Cooperation and Global South" in partnership with OECD Development Centre and DAKSHIN at RIS. We propose to host the second Roundtable Discussion on "Future of SDGs" on 24 March 2026, from 14.00-17.00 IST, starting with Lunch at 13.00 IST (at Jacaranda Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi). The Roundtable would bring together policymakers and experts to deliberate on localisation efforts and national policies, as well as on the future of the SDGs as elaborated above. The Roundtable is designed to be an interactive dialogue among all interlocutors, and for appropriate sequencing, we shall split the session into an introductory segment followed by two thematic components: a) Lessons from Localisation Efforts and National Policies; b) Future of SDGs.

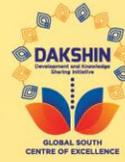
We shall explore four key questions:

1. What have been the lessons from the SDG localisation process in terms of policy design, alignments, multi-sectoral convergence, partnerships and monitoring?
2. Based on global, regional and country-level realities, what are the key bottlenecks to means of implementation?
3. What are the future pathways for SDGs and beyond, and how Global South may provide leadership to the process?
4. Given geopolitical, environmental, and technological disruptions, what are the opportunities of innovations and partnerships towards a new development paradigm?

The deliberation is expected to provide a nuanced and deep understanding of the issues and offer insights for research and action.



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PROGRAMME

Time	Agenda
13.00-14.00	Lunch
14.00-14.30	Introduction and Context Setting
	<p>Chair: Ambassador Sudhir T. Devare, Chairman, Research Advisory Council, RIS</p> <p>Context Setting: Dr Sabyasachi Saha, Associate Professor, RIS</p> <p>Remarks: Professor S.K. Mohanty, Distinguished Fellow, RIS</p> <p>Keynote Address: Mr Stefan Priesner, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India</p> <p>Special Remarks: Ms Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India</p>
	Round of Introductions and Group Photo

14.30-15.30	Theme I: Lessons from Localisation Efforts and National Policies
Initial Remarks [6 Minutes Each]	<p>Chair: Dr P.K. Anand IAS (retd.), Former Visiting Fellow, RIS</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Pratap Singh Birthal, Former Director, National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NIAP), New Delhi. • Professor Jyoti Chandiramani, Director, Symbiosis School of Economics, Pune • Dr Manish Priyadarshi, M&E specialist and Director, NITI Aayog • Dr Sanjeev Kumar Varshney, Consultant, RIS (Online) • Dr Ganga Tilakaratna, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Sri Lanka (Online) • Dr Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi <p>Open Discussion</p>
15:30-15:45	Coffee Break
15.45-16.45	Theme II: Future of SDGs
Initial Remarks [6 Minutes Each]	<p>Chair: Professor Pami Dua, Member of Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister and Distinguished Fellow, RIS</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Sandhya Seshadri Iyer, Professor, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai • Ms Anita Prakash, Founder, Research Lab Asia; Former Director, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) • Dr Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Ex-Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations ESCAP-SSWA (Online) • Dr Nicolas J.A. Buchoud, Global Solutions Initiative, Berlin and Adjunct Senior Fellow, RIS (Online) • Professor Gladys Lechini, University of Rosario, Argentina (Online) • Professor Sanjeev Kumar, Dean, School of Liberal Arts, Bennett University, Uttar Pradesh <p>Open Discussion</p>
16.45-17.00	Closing Remarks and Way Forward: Dr Seshadri Chari , Chairman, China Study Centre MAHE, Manipal & Member, Governing Council, RIS