

NATIONAL CONCLAVE ON SDGs

19-20 December, New Delhi

A REPORT





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INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as detailed in the UN resolution, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, are an intergovernmental set of 17 aspirational Goals with 169 targets. They follow and expand on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were agreed upon by 189 countries in 2001 to eradicate poverty, hunger and inequality.



The post 2015 MDG goals or the SDGs are an outcome of the Rio+20 summit in 2012 and are accompanied by targets and will be further elaborated through indicators focused on measurable outcomes. They are action oriented, global in nature and universally applicable. These 17 goals constitute an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities for sustainable development. The goals and targets integrate economic, social and environmental aspects and recognize their inter-linkages in achieving sustainable development in all its dimensions.



CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

India's commitment to SDGs is critical in India's development. The Prime Minister and the Government have expressed their commitment to the SDGs and have stressed the convergence between the SDGs and the country's national development goals. Given the federal Indian structure, the Government will need to adopt a decentralized, bottom up approach towards implementing and achieving the SDGs.

Government of India presented a Voluntary National Review report at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July, 2017. Some of the key highlights presented in the report also focused on achievements at the state level. Several states are enthusiastically working on the SDGs agenda and have devised their own unique action plans, with a particular emphasis on priority issues of their own states. Based on the collaboration with NITI Aayog, states are working on integrating their state level action plans with National SDGs implementation and India's Vision 2030.

As the clock ticks away, it is important to reflect and learn from the process of implementation at the State level. This reflection would be helpful in strengthening the SDGs work in the coming years. In this direction, NITI Aayog, UN in India, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Government of Chhattisgarh, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Kerala Institute of Local Administration and the National Foundation for India (NFI) jointly organized the National Conclave on SDGs with the objective of learning about the experiences, challenges and possibilities in the implementation of SDGs at the State level.

The conclave brought together key national, state, civil society, academic, corporate, media and other actors to share experiences and challenges emerging from various efforts to localize SDGs and identify new strategies and avenues for achieving SDGs by 2030. The design of the conclave emphasized the need to explore collaborative efforts within and among national and State governments, civil society, academia, corporate, media and other key actors for successfully carrying forward the multi-stakeholder agenda. The conclave also aimed at identifying and addressing capacity building needs for various stakeholders including citizen groups on implementing and tracking SDGs. An overarching purpose of the conclave was to reflect on strategies for "Leaving no one behind", the key principle of the 2030 Agenda.



SESSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The Inaugural session set the context for the discussions to take place in the conclave and highlighted the opportunities for various stakeholders like the governments, civil society, the business sector and other stakeholders to work together for achievement of SDGs. The 1st session put forth an overview of implementation of SDGs in the country and States. It was followed by three technical sessions on the 1st day.

The session on implementation of SDGs and convergence in the States went into the processes and issues of planning and implementation by different agencies at different levels. It also focused on improving convergence among various departments in the State administration. The next one was on monitoring of SDG implementation, which brought into discussion the National SDG Indicator Framework, proposed SDG Indicators and strategies and best practices for monitoring progress on SDGs. The session on capacity development at State, district and grassroots levels led to reflections on capacity needs of different stakeholders as well as preparation of capacity development strategies at the level of government, local bodies and citizen groups to ensure effective integration of SDGs in policy and programme implementation.



The 2nd day began by discussing the experience and potentials for strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships on SDGs. Actionable options were discussed for working towards an inclusive development agenda with focus on the needs and priorities of the disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society. It was also deliberated how to strengthen the roles and initiatives of governments, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders coming together to achieve SDGs for everyone. The next session went into strategies for improving the effectiveness of communication with and mobilization and engagement of various social groups and institutions for achieving SDGs and associated Targets. The final session threw light on the emerging ways forward.

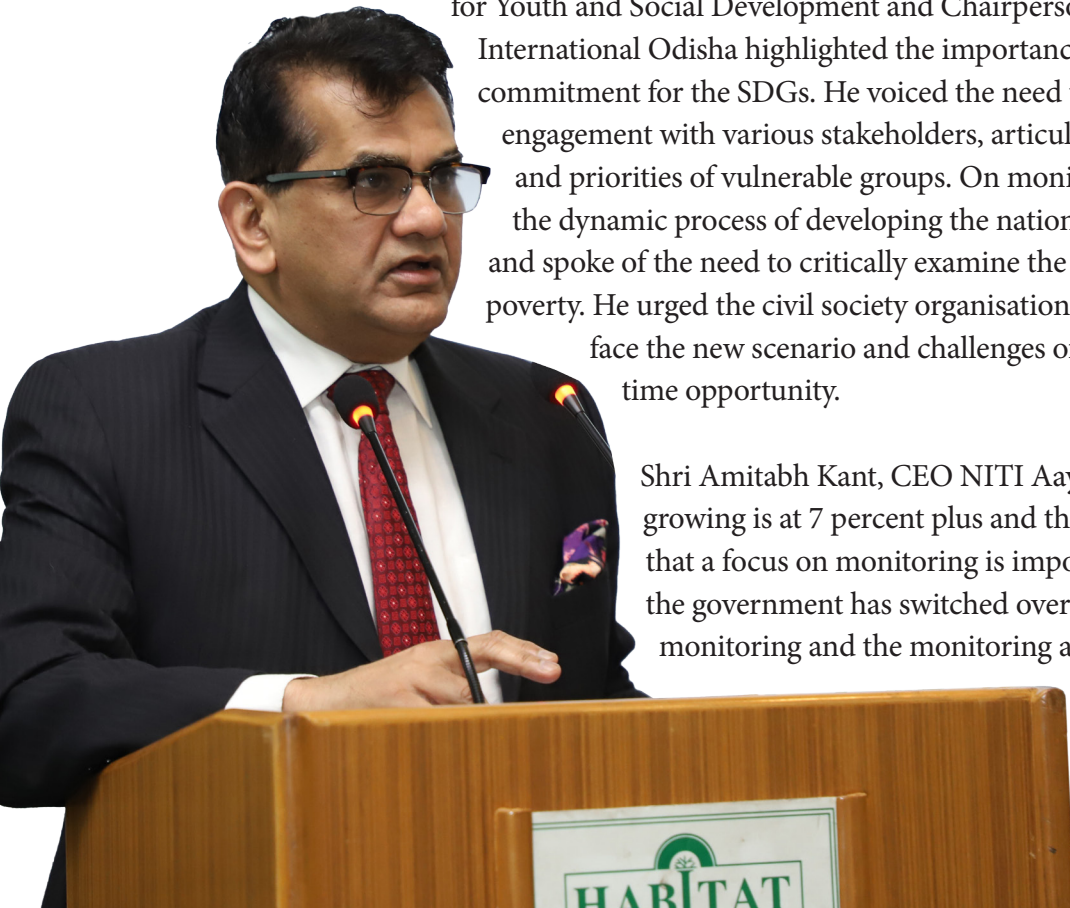
SETTING THE STAGE

The session began with a welcome and sharing of objectives by Shri Amitabh Behar, Executive Director, National Foundation for India. He spoke of the SDGs being transformative, the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships and ownership by local leaders and the importance of leaving no one behind.

Briefly introducing the implementation perspective on SDGs in the country, Dr Ashok Kumar Jain, Adviser, NITI Aayog mentioned about the role of NITI Aayog of overseeing the implementation of SDGs in the country. He said that the national SDG indicators are on the verge of finalisation and that the UN has almost finalised the dashboard for SDG monitoring. He further mentioned that the Parliament is giving time to discussion on SDGs in its sessions. The Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha has also asked all state legislatures to take up the issue as well, following which Andhra Pradesh has taken up a discussion on SDGs in its recent session. Dr. Jain informed about the discussion on SDGs held with the Queen of Belgium (on SDG Goals 3 and 4). He also informed that the SDG agenda is being taken up with the industry and civil society.

Congratulating NITI Aayog, NFI and State governments for initiating the multi-stakeholder dialogue on the SDGs, Shri Jagadananda, Co-founder of the Centre for Youth and Social Development and Chairperson Transparency International Odisha highlighted the importance of the political commitment for the SDGs. He voiced the need to take forward the engagement with various stakeholders, articulating the aspirations and priorities of vulnerable groups. On monitoring, he appreciated the dynamic process of developing the national SDGs indicators and spoke of the need to critically examine the structural problems of poverty. He urged the civil society organisations to prepare themselves to face the new scenario and challenges of SDGs, which is a life-time opportunity.

Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO NITI Aayog, said that India growing is at 7 percent plus and the belief at NITI is that a focus on monitoring is important. He said that the government has switched over to outcome-based monitoring and the monitoring and evaluation wing at NITI Aayog has been restructured to manage the monitoring of



outcomes. Monitoring of outcomes is the key, he said, as had been the case in ranking of states on ease of doing business. This has brought about so much healthy competition among States. The competitive pressure had forced the eastern states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to work to improve their rankings. Likewise, there is ranking states on health, education outcomes, and agriculture. He said that states will also be ranked on an SDG index.

But, he said that India cannot be transformed unless we focus on the quality of education, improve our health parameters and nutrition status. The government realises this and the structural reforms like the nutrition mission focuses on the conversion of the many schemes. The problem is not of poverty of resources or schemes, but the lack of focussed integration on the ground.

He also said that monitoring has to be on a real-time basis. He spoke of outdated data and the need for real-time data for good decisions. Giving an example of how he saw this being tackled, he spoke of technology in the hands of anganwadi workers who would feed in data of every child and every mother on a real-time basis. This will help improve delivery of health and nutrition services, he argued.

He mentioned that the government has decided to begin work with 115 backward districts this year where the central government will work in partnership with the state government, in the spirit of federalism.

There are several challenges in the way, like with posts vacant. This will also need partnership with civil society, he said. With real time data, he spoke of the possibilities of monitoring which district has moved up, which is moved down. This will all be possible with data-based monitoring on a real time basis.

As a last challenge, he said that it will be difficult to achieve the SDG goals in the 21st century with 19th century institutions. This demands restructuring of the institutions. An instance is the changing of the medical council into a dynamic medical commission, through the medical commission bill on which the NITI Aayog worked.



He said that his personal view was that growth and jobs in the coming years will come from the social sector – this sector will drive India's growth. Therefore, education and nutrition are critical and the view of NITI Aayog is that ranking of states of states on health and education (that will come out shortly) will be of huge benefit. Likewise, on SDG, NITI Aayog will come out (in consultation with the states) and index on ranking on SDGs. In conclusion, Shri Kant reiterated NITI Aayog's belief in close partnership with civil society – especially in each one of the 115 aspirational districts.



Delivering the keynote address, Mr Bibek Debroy, Chairman Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Member, NITI Aayog spoke of the puzzle of measuring human development – how, he asked, do we measure human deprivation?

He said that while the debating on the indicators to be used can be debated, it will be important to bear in mind the Human Development Index (HDI) of the UNDP, based on just three building blocks – and though more could be added. But given that there is co-relation between all the building blocks, the choice of three helped keep things simple,

especially to explain to policy makers – which is why HDI got traction. It was the same with MDGs that got a lot of traction. In contrast to the SDGs, the MDGs were simpler – simpler goals, targets, and indicators.

Speaking on the centrally sponsored schemes, he said that at one time, there were 455 centrally sponsored schemes. BDOs did not know about all. Now, in the context of monitoring, it is reasonable not expect the monitoring of 2,000 indicators: even 300 (as the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is identifying) is an enormous number.

He said that the broad path that SDGs are meant to take is not very different from India's own development aspirations. The government has spoken about, Sab ka saath, sab ka vikas. This boils down to two very simple principles – first, every citizen must have access to certain minimum basket of services, where the expenditure is primarily public (he differentiated between expenditure and provisioning). The second strand of sab ka saath sab ka vikas, according to Mr

Debroy, is that every entrepreneur has an enabling business environment. (He differentiated entrepreneurs from corporate manufacturers).

In those terms, the bulk of the SDGs indicate a movement in the same direction. The question is “how do we go about this”. On monitoring, he said, there is an issue of the quality of data – beyond state-level data, he spoke of data that goes further down below.

Another point he raised was the question of who delivers public goods and services? Public goods and services are delivered by local bodies – not by Delhi or state capital. There is demand is for efficiency. But the supply side also has to be decentralised downwards. That is a constitutional mandate. Beyond fiscal devolution – actual decentralisation of funds, functions and functionaries down to the local bodies has to be a reality, he said. This is a purview of state governments, he said. Decentralised planning will help prioritise resources, he said. This will entail trade-offs of the resources.

Speaking of the wish of everyone for India to become developed and for the citizen of India not be impoverished and denied access to services, he said that one of the reason we could not accomplish much in seven decades, was because the canvass was too broad. This will demand more focus. Therefore, the physical infrastructure, social structures will enable move towards progressing in the direction of the SDGs.

In conclusion, he said that the SDGs are a trigger that enables us to get our thought process going, to get states on board, to think about planning for development and the elimination of deprivation. Importantly, the conclave provided a platform for engagement between the NITI Ayog, the various state governments and government agencies and civil society actors. This deliberative platform brought up a rich crop of ideas and perspectives which would be very useful in the context of ongoing and upcoming work on the SDGs.

The six technical sessions, including an overview of the SDGs, were deliberated by a packed hall representing organisations from the government as well as civil society. The following pages provide a session-wise account of the topics and issues covered during the two days, along with the emerging perspectives and a summation of the session.



TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Implementation, Convergence,
Monitoring and Partnerships

01 MILESTONES AND LANDMARKS Strengthening Monitoring of SDGs in the States

This session dwelled on:

- a) Understanding and operationalizing the National SDG Indicator Framework with over 300 Indicators
- b) Exploring strategies and best practices for monitoring SDGs progress in the States

Emerging Perspectives/Ideas/Information

The session noted the importance of learning from the implementation of the MDG on the issue of convergence outlining the importance of values in SDGs – the values of inclusion, human rights, peace and governance, all of which give quality to the SDGs.

The session agreed on the need to take steps in the direction of decentralisation of SDGs with local action and won't cost money. Decentralisation will provide a qualitative picture from ground-upwards as panchayat officials think of issues, not programmes, unlike bureaucrats. As a link, GPs preparing GPDP and MGNREGA and Mission Antoyadya (in 50,000 panchayats) were also involved.

Ms Sunita Dhar from *Jagori* spoke of the SDGs, as a universal set of goals adopted by several human rights and grassroots movements across the world – which makes them particularly different from the MDGs. The SDGs' focus on human rights and inclusion – unlike MDGs that did not have a stand-alone goal on gender (SDG Goal 5 provides a multi-dimensional approach to gender equality).

SDG have also brought up the issue of ending violence against women which was not on the MDGs' target. This meant that we lost 15 years when we were not collecting data or working consistently towards a national development agenda, apart from schemes, programmes and national priorities. Lastly, she spoke for non-negotiable principles on gender responsive governance that must be built into our local governance systems.



Dr Shaleen, Additional Secretary, Finance Department, Government of Haryana, argued that the SDGs are more inclusive, participatory, and integrated and incredibly ambitious, requiring not only policy changes but also efficient and innovative use of fiscal resources.

He delved into the dichotomy of Haryana – an exceptional growth on the economic front did not mean all districts have equitable growth, and so, along with excellent performance of services sector, the government also wants to ensure that agriculture sector also thrives and farm incomes double by 2022, because that will have direct implications on improving poverty levels for the vast majority of the population dependent on the agriculture.

Dr Shaleen presented the SDG vision of the government of Haryana as: “a vibrant, dynamic and resurgent unit of federal India. A state where farms overflow with produce; the wheels of industry grind uninterrupted; none feels deprived; people have a sense of fulfilment, the youth sense of pride, and women enjoy not only safety, security and equal opportunities but also feel empowered.” He underlined that ‘Antyodaya’, ‘Minimum Government and Maximum Governance’, and the will to make the state a better place to live in constitute the bedrock of this vision.



Mr R R Shinge, Director Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra presented the vision statement of the government of Maharashtra: “All citizens of Maharashtra are happy, healthy, educated, empowered and leading peaceful and prosperous lives”. The fundamental principle of the vision is a sustainable, balanced and all-inclusive socio-economic growth of the State.

Providing an overview of the action taken thus far by the Government of Maharashtra with respect to the SDGs, Mr R R Shinge said that state and district-level schemes have been mapped with the Goals and categorised as ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’ and departments have been requested to confirm to the categorisation. Meetings with senior functionaries of various departments have been conducted for sensitising about SDGs and a ‘Vision 2030’ document for the State has been prepared considering SDGs and targets for the goals in consultations with all departments and submitted to NITI Aayog.



Summing-Up

It was observed by participants that there was no mention of work on Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) in which the values are based – which is what makes SDGs different from MDGs, especially in the direction of enabling the delivery of justice and access of justice for ordinary people.

The issue of insufficient human resources also came up, with particular mention of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan that do not have sufficient staff and vacancies have gone up to 50 percent. It was also pointed out that India no longer a recipient country and this will have a bearing on the capacities for designing for implementation and convergence.

Participants from Manipur spoke of how district-level workshops helped set priorities for the vision document, pointing out that it was not possible to take up everything with the government’s limited resources. This exercise pointed to the top priorities as hunger, health, education and justice.

The panel pointed to an inadequacy of data collection and the lack of capacity to gather, monitor and evaluate the data. On the matter of human resources, it was said that the larger part of vacancies is in C & D categories of posts which will be filled up to 80 or 90 percent as the process of interviews has been waived. But capacity building is required. Finance, Dr Shaleen said, was not hindrance but inability to spend according to plans was. He gave the example of Haryana’s education department that is utilising just 45 to 50 percent of funds allocated.

02 PREPARING THE GROUND

Enhancing Capacities at State and Grassroots Levels

This last session of the day took to deliberate on the following:

- Identifying capacity needs of different stakeholders for effective implementation of SDGs
- Preparing strategies for capacity development of governments, local bodies and citizen groups to ensure effective integration of SDGs in policy and programme implementation

Emerging Perspectives/Ideas/Information

Mr Amit Khare, Development Commissioner, Government of Jharkhand stressed and clarified that the SDG Action Plan was of the state, not of the State Government – the State Government is providing the platform. He said that the focus was on outputs and outcomes. In this respect, he said, the SDG Action Plan, unlike a typical five-year plan adopts a sectoral approach identifying all outcomes at the end of the three-year period. There is commitment and effective participation of all stakeholders including PRIs, CSOs and the private sector to play constructive roles to achieve these outcomes and envisages effective convergence of various development initiatives at the delivery point.

According to Mr Khare, the way ahead lies in tailoring the SDGs and integrating these into 3-year action plan with an annual budget, adoption of sectoral approach and capacity enhancement at district, sub-district, and grass root level. This called for convergence and improving coordination across government units and other stakeholders including growing the private sector & CSOs.

Mr Amit Khare spoke of the need to trust citizens, particularly those living in the margins, rather than leave them to the devices of the state's machinery – this would ensure more efficient and accountable use of government resources, he argued.

Mr Joy Elamon, Director, Kerala Institute for Local Administration (KILA) countered the question on the new talk of capacities for SDGs, advocating from multi sectoral initiatives as all goals are inter-linked and a single initiative contributes to varying goals. This requires convergence among different stakeholder groups at various levels, especially because the SDG come with a time-frame. The issues of capacities include knowledge, skills, attitude, systems and change. He stressed on planning and implementing together, particularly because



multiple players are involved and argued that this requires skills for monitoring goals and targets – not monitoring the implementation.

It was important to communicate this to the grassroots, he added: Panchayats can resist introduction saying that plans like participatory planning, GPDP, MDGs and now SDGs are part of a train of events, not development tools. SDGs, on the other hand can be introduced as a coherent development programme, he said.

Mr Joy Elamon referred to the 'No-cost, Low-cost' axiom introduced by Mr Vijayanand. An example in this direction is immunisation – most of the activities have actually been provided for but getting people in demands no additional costs.

Mr Tom Thomas, CEO, Praxis India illustrated the pitfalls of not inviting the community's participation – and, conversely, the rewards of involving the community. He conveyed that beyond data, it was about the participation of communities in the gathering of the data to bring about transformational changes. Leaving no one behind is not about just providing them doles but active participation of the communities. It was not only to bring communities out of poverty, but to help them stay out of poverty. SDGs cannot be seen as being about high level panels – it is also about ground-level panels.

He said that while data provides numbers, the question remains how data



brings out discrimination or disrespect on the ground. A transgender or an urban poor bear the same degree of disrespect when they go to a hospital. They say that the expectation of respect is missed out in development programmes. They expect participation in the work being done for their communities – this ensures them respect. Participation is high on the agenda of the poorest of the poor, Mr Tom Thomas said.

Summing-Up

The discussion following the session attended to the issue of citizen data as valid data – as opposed to top-down data. Participants felt that there was a need to start to thinking of data for use at the local level – that data has legitimacy.

The opinion across the discussion was that SDGs cannot be monitored one-by-one and by different groups. For instance, the health department cannot monitor the SDGs by themselves and the states have to be prepared to come up with a baseline of the capacities. This brought forward the issue of building the capacity of those entrusted to develop capacities to ensure that no one is left behind.

There was attention to a strong mechanism of data collection – which was only matched by a weak delivery of data. That can be tackled only with the realignment of objectives. An example from Assam showed that data would show how indicators on health varied from community to community. For instance, Assam has high maternal mortality rates. But if one were to ignore data from a handful of communities, the data will be as good, if not better than the national average. But there is no blueprint on how to get people to participate, or how to get people make plans for themselves – but there would be lessons elsewhere in the country.

There was the issue of pedagogy – citing how outsourcing of training sessions at state run trainings does not connect the learning modules. It was also mentioned that trainings for state functionaries on governance do not attempt to unpack the preamble to the Constitution of India.

03 STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS ON SDGS

Multi-Stakeholder Agenda for Action

This first session of the second day explored strengthening roles and initiatives of all stakeholders in the country to ensure none is left behind. In this direction, the session provided a rich discussion on:

- Exploring action perspectives for working towards 'Leave No One Behind'.
- Strengthening the roles and initiatives of governments, national parliaments, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders coming together to achieve all goals for everyone

Mr P D Rai, Member of Parliament who chaired the session said that the session was of interest, especially looking at how the government in the states and at the centre and other stakeholders are either taking action or conversely, not taking action.

Emerging Perspectives/Ideas/Information

Dr W R Reddy, Director General, National Institute for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) began with a question: if SDGs should drive local government or should local government drive SDGs? He felt that it should be the local government that should lead the GPDP which should yield the SDGs. This approach helps put people, the Gram Panchayat and the GPDP at the centre of focus. This will require the assistance from multiple stakeholders, with an emphasis on volunteerism.

He explained the 3Fs distilled from the 73rd Amendment: Functions, Funds (both of which have been tackled to a reasonable extent) and Functionaries (alluding to the deficit of human resources). Capacity building for planning in the shape of trainings lasting three to five days may not be enough because that will not equip the local leadership to bring about a behaviour change among the people to enable their participation.

Mr Sachin Joshi from the CII Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development emphasised that business was part of the design of SDGs and CII also participated in the process and that business is a provider of solution and a critical piece of the puzzle. On the role of business in SDGs, he spoke of the wider acknowledgment that



SDGs are a business issue within the business community. That acknowledgement has to rapidly translate into action. Some SDGs are very core to business, like sustainable cities, jobs, climate change, water etc.

Dr Yogesh Kumar, Executive Director, Samarthan, spoke of the need to figure out what values we want to promote in order to develop partnership in the Indian context – with the panchayats, business, parliamentarians, the value of trust and how these complement each other to develop the roadmap and broad policy on the principles of partnerships so that the goals can be attained.

He spoke of four sets of people who can be the game changers for the SDGs. Firstly, even one elected panchayat representative trained on SDGs will mean 2.5 lakh panchayat leaders. The second lot will come from the movement of the SHGs as 2.5 lakh women; one from each SHG can be torch bearers in these panchayats. CSOs can help locate the third set of 2.5 lakh workers from among key functionaries. And lastly, 2.5 lakh young people who have shown maximum optimism.

Dr Yogesh Kumar spoke of a second set of Action Areas: This would hinge on trusting Panchayats, who in reality have become the last rung of the administration, rather than being a government. Panchayats are spending more than ₹50 lakhs – but with the electronic fund management systems, the powers to use these funds lie with the administration.

Ms Yamini Iyer, President, Centre for Policy Research said the idea of multi-stakeholder partnership required a fundamental stress on how to do business with the government. Addressing this head-on is important because the structure is deeply centralised. In the context of the SDGs, she spoke of the strong role of the central government in designing welfare programmes, even though it professes to be otherwise. She said that it is a tug of war where the rhetoric is towards decentralisation, but in practical terms, the movement is in the direction of centralisation. Centrally sponsored schemes have become far more centralised, she argued, despite talk of cooperative federalism.

She cited the example of the National Health Mission that was designed to promote flexibility at the state level but has got converted into a programme with 2009 line



items and the planning process is a non-starter precisely because of the clear guidelines from the centre on what has to be done.

Summing-Up

In the pursuit of the motto of 'No one to be left behind', it is important to remember that those who would be left behind would be the marginalised, differently-abled, tribal people, women etc. Ultimately, it is the Panchayat who have a sight of who the marginalised are. This calls for building the capacity at the level of the Panchayats.

GPDP is limited by the packet of funds as the panchayats attempt to plan according to their funds. But, the concept of GPDP is beyond planning and for funds. At the heart of the GPDP is the visioning. In his view, panchayats should be able to envision where they would like to be in, say, five years. Panchayats are inclined towards No Cost or Low Cost – E.g. enabling all children going to school. This type of development confirms to Swaraj.

Participants concurred on the need to revisit the planning framework, especially as there are multiple approaches to planning. GPDP and other panchayat work are largely driven by the rural development department while the framework of planning promoted earlier with the state planning commissions has become almost redundant. Changing this, again, points to building capacities.

There is scope for strengthening community monitoring and it will help identify and fix gaps in the national data system that can provide estimates on a macro level, but for the true picture from the ground level calls for social audits as an accountability mechanism. Social audit societies need strengthening so that the social audit is a cosmetic exercise and multi-stakeholder partnerships should regularly question whether the mechanism by which these schemes are funded and implemented are designed to have any relationship with the SDGs.

Lastly, as Sachin Joshi of CII spoke of Goal 17 being about partnerships and said that beyond the mandated 2 percent for CSR is the remaining 98 percent. The process of making this money has a far-reaching impact on SDGs and companies are now disclosing their progress on SDGs in the form of Sustainability Reports.

04 ENSURING VISIBILITY AND OWNERSHIP

Strategies for Communication, Outreach and Popularizing SDGs

The last of the technical session of the conclave provided an opportunity to visit the experiences from the ground and listen to best practice from practitioners. The discussions revolved around:

- Discussing the experience so far and identifying gaps and emerging issues
- Learning from innovative and best practices for demystifying and popularizing SDGs among citizens, businesses, media and other stakeholders

Emerging Perspectives/Ideas/Information

Mr Rajiv Chandran began the discussion with the question on who owns the SDGs – is it the people or the government? He posed that if the government has to report on the SDGs, does the ownership of the SDGs belong to the people. For it to belong to the people, the people need to be vigilant and look for the lacunae in the agendas that we develop. The ideal situation, from the UN point of view is that the SDGs are owned by both, the government and the people. The government's ownership has to be integral to the government systems and the issue of percolation (moving from the NITI Aayog to the district level) is a challenge. There is also the issue of the role of the civil society to generate public opinion on the SDGs.

The media is a difficult partner of the SDGs – the SDGs seem to be huge, easily divisible which is so complex. Media is better at looking at government schemes – looking at errors, but they are not eloquent with the SDGs. So working with the media is a constant struggle in terms of the language of the SDGs, the data that is generated and its interpretation. The vernacular media, on the other hand, should be a special object, he said, given its reach and scope. But the fact is that we have not managed to efficiently translate the SDGs or the concept to be of interest to the media.

Ms Sonia Luthra, Principal, ASN Senior Secondary School, explained that making Sustainable Schools meant schools that will work towards sustainability as 'improving the quality of life for all – economically, socially, environmentally – now and for future generation'. This is done through empowering schools and teachers to educate the children on SDGs. She explained the 4C's of infusing UNSDGs in the School setup as: Curriculum Connection; Campus Culture & Practices; Community Outreach, and Collaboration and Partnership.

NATIONAL CONCLAVE ON SDGs

Roadmap for State Action

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Stalin K Padma from Video Volunteers took off from what Rajiv Chandran mentioned earlier. He said that while SDG is for the people, the question is if SDGs are of the people – perhaps it is partly of the people, because it comes from people's representative bodies. But the crucial question, he said, is how it becomes By the People. He spoke of the repeated mention of 'Leaving No One Behind' and imagined of the possibility of those historically left behind being at the forefront of the monitoring and creating stories on the implementation and achievement of the SDGs. He imagined communities for whom SDGs mattered the most to be architects, being the creators of the narratives. He said that video volunteers have been practicing this method with a fair bit of success for 10 years.

Speaking of Chhattisgarh's Efforts to increase SDG Dialogues at the National level, Mr P P Soti from the planning department, Government of Chhattisgarh mentioned that the state government has formed task forces on poverty, agricultural development, industrial development and the social sector for increasing visibility on SDGs at the state level. Standing working groups support the work of the task forces. Besides, it has been ensured that relevant SDG-related components are included to in consultation processes and the reports are shared with the state government.



He also spoke of the identification of Chhattisgarh Samvad, a Chhattisgarh government agency as a resource agency for IEC. It has been identified to facilitate development of IEC material on SDGs. Alongside, region-specific strategies have also been employed for popularisation of SDGs.

Mr Soti mentioned the SDG Mapping Exercise wherein major schemes/ flagships of the government of India and the Government of Chhattisgarh mapped with respective SDGs and published in form of a learning material in the Hindi language. Simultaneously, Audio- Visuals and songs on SDG have been developed in Hindi language and also in the local dialects.

Mr Sanjay Dev, Convenor of the Amar Ujala Foundation attempted to answer the question “How does the development sector (actors in Vikas) engage the mainstream media?” He said that coverage in the media, excluding the coverage of politics, is about issues of development – water, road, schools, health etc. It might also be on the SDGs, though not directly referring to the SDGs. He postulated that media can no longer be seen as just a communication tool or a provider of news but as a stakeholder, especially since 90 percent of the content on media is about development.

Summing-Up

The underlying values of the SDGs for the UN are leaving no one behind and Human Rights for all. Linking these can make an efficient communication package for the UN in India. This will be complemented by the five Ps: Peace



(peace as peace beyond war, not just peace associated with war), People (actors and beneficiaries), Planet (there is no Planet B), Prosperity (no longer doubt), and Partnerships (our futures are tied – problems are universal).

The chair raised the issue of social media that has challenged mainstream media – given its spontaneity. But given its lack of regulation or responsibility, an independence without responsibility is growing at a faster rate than mainstream media. The credibility of the news is not a function of the platform. It is a function of those reporting the news. Platforms are agnostic of truth. Communication strategies need further groundwork – the strategy is very clear for communication. It is to provide the first turn to communicate to those impacted the worst by an issue. Besides local action, there is also a need to pay attention to national action.

SDGs is not an aspiration, but another word for human rights that needs to be unpacked by going into the communities and understanding their interpretation of the SDGs. Visibility, outreach and popularising can only be done if ownership is ensured. For effective communication and outreach, it is important to ensure ownership. People consume media products relevant to them. Yet, SDGs are meant for the most marginalised communities who have traditionally not been owners of anything. They have been notional recipients and so, subverting that power dynamics is important to the success of the SDGs as the very act of monitoring can contribute to achieving the SDG Goals.



EMERGING DIRECTIONS & TAKEAWAYS

The Conclave projected a vast canvass of issues and concerns as well as highlighted pointers for forward action on a wider scale. Focusing on the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and working upon existing initiatives and rising opportunities, several takeaways came forth from the two-day process.

PLATFORMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Being the first major occasion for civil society institutions to share a platform with government representatives for a discussion on the SDGs at the national level, the conclave spurred discussions for strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms with government (including NITI Aayog), UN bodies, civil society, academia and the private sector as these could help further highlight the work of the governments, especially at the State level and support the civil society to complement the government agencies in their efforts.

The subject of the lack of a deliberative platform at the national level also came up during the course of the technical sessions and especially during the concluding session. It was felt that the earlier initiative of the erstwhile Planning Commission to create space for interaction with civil society actors was very useful. It was felt that restoring such a space by the NITI Aayog will be helpful. The Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog agreed to the idea of such a deliberative platform to meet once every three months for concrete suggestions on the progress of the SDGs.

MULTIPLYING BEST PRACTICES

Several leading initiatives have come up in course of the work on SDGs. The Government of Assam is aligning its budget with SDGs. Several other States like Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, have also taken up the issue of financing of SDGs with respect to their budget allocations. Learning from such initiatives and strengthening them will be very productive and will also open up paths at the Central level for exploring various options for financing of SDGs. On the other hand, the Department of Panchayati Raj of the Government of Kerala has designed





a framework for SDGs in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Jharkhand, on the other hand, has an action plan for the State. It was felt important to widen engagement on such initiatives.

CAPACITY BUILDING

There was much deliberation on the subject of capacities, particularly in relation to the issue of data. An inadequacy of data collection was traced to the lack of capacity to gather, monitor and evaluate the data. There was an agreement that building capacities was critical for India to meet its goals by 2030, especially as an empowering function, which from the lowest level of the administration empowers people. The issue of capacities of the official statistical system pointed to a need to strengthen capacity for meeting unprecedented demand for data and statistics required for monitoring SDGs.

It was agreed that the way ahead lied in tailoring the SDGs and integrating these into action plans together with the adoption of sector-wise approaches and capacity enhancement at district, sub-district, grass-root level. Capacity building was often mentioned in the context of training panchayat members on SDGs. This would be in the shape of trainings to equip local leadership to bring about a behaviour change among the people to enable their participation through handholding, going beyond capacity building.



LOCAL SELF GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS – PARTICULARLY PANCHAYATS

Decentralisation will provide a qualitative picture from ground-upwards as panchayat officials think of issues, not programmes, unlike bureaucrats. This will have to go together with public awareness on SDGs to be able to reach every Gram Panchayat across the country, especially given that the GPDP in the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats help in prioritising work – panchayat have a sight of who the marginalised are and this should be borne in mind to realise that no one is left behind.

Speakers and participants raised concerns about how Panchayats are in reality becoming the last rung of the administration, rather than being a government. It was pointed out that in many cases, Panchayats do not have a clue of the development funds meant for the area under their jurisdiction.

INFORMATION AND DATA

A citizen-centric data would help understanding and operationalising the National SDG Indicator Framework. It was pointed out that data is not available to civil society groups on subjects like violence against women, Dalits and tribal people, because data was not being collected for 15 years as it did not figure on the MDGs. It was also pointed out that the data systems have been steeped in the old paradigm



– hugely tilting towards the monetary indicators rather than social indicators. It was iterated that sticking to the current form of data will mean losing the SDG battle even before it has begun. There was an opinion that new dimensions will require new approaches and people-centred data collection will lead to people centred development. Mention came up of participatory, easy-to-follow data collection tools to collect data that also sensitises people.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Considering that the SDGs are about leaving no one behind, the global framework becomes particularly important in a country like India. It was felt that leaving no one behind demands attention from the perspectives of women and marginalised sections like Dalits and tribal people. The consensus opinion seemed to be that leaving no one behind should become the frontline message for all stakeholders.

In the context of leaving no one behind, there was a strong urge, particularly from participants representing civil society groups, that one of the distinguishing features apart from the wholeness and integrated approach of the SDGs is about questions of justice, often bring to focussing Goals 10 and 16 over the course of the two days.



