

India

Civil Society Spotlight Report for HLPF 2020



Girls Leading the Girls Enrolment Campaign

COUNTRY CONTEXT

This report highlights the status of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education for All (SDG 4) in India. This has been prepared through a collaborative process in which several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Teachers' Union members have participated. Several national, sub-national, and grassroots level organisations have been a part of the consultative process. The findings have been finetuned and further endorsed through several consultative processes both at the national and state level. The report analyses the status of education in India, challenges in achieving the targets of SDG 4 and based on it, makes recommendations for future policy designs.

GOVERNMENTS ROLLOUT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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 had been published by NITI Aayog, which recommends 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. A final indicator framework, with a total of 306 indicators, has been developed by the MoSPI.

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COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



Population:	1.380 billion (UN, 2020)
2020 Global Index Score:	61.9/100 (SDR 2020)
2020 Global Index Rank:	117/193 (SDR 2020)
SDG 4 Dashboard:	● Challenges remain (SDR 2020)
SDG 4 Trend:	→ Stagnating (SDR 2020)
SDG 10 Dashboard:	● Major challenges remain (SDR 2020)
2019 HDI Value/Rank:	0.645, 131 out of 189 (HDI, 2020)
GINI Index:	35.91 (Statista, 2020)
GNI per capita (PPP\$):	USD 6,681 (HDI, 2020)
Income Group:	Lower Middle Income Status (WB, 2020)
Education Expenditure:	3.1% of the GDP (CBGA, 2020)
Literacy Rate (15 years & older):	Total: 74.37% Female: 65.79% Male: 82.37% (UNESCO, 2018)
Drop-out Rate:	Primary: 4.13% Upper primary: 4.03% Secondary: 17.06% (MHRD, 2018)



Lead girls conducting an Enrolment Campaign

Recently, the Cabinet of Ministers of 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 in SDG 4, and out of these 20 indicators, only two indicators explicitly talk about gender (in terms of male and female). In addition, only one indicator specifically talks about children with disabilities. Surprisingly, none of the indicators talks specifically about socially deprived groups, such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and religious minorities.

The government has also undertaken the process of mapping its schemes and has aligned them to the corresponding SDGs. Against the 62 indicators in 2018 SDG mapping by NITI Aayog, in 2019, NITI Aayog has increased the number of indicators to be measured to 100, out of which only nine are dedicated to Goal 4 on Quality Education. According to the VNR presented by the Government of India in the High-Level Political Forum, technology-driven education is a pillar of Atma Nirbhar Bharat, under which the government has mentioned three programs, namely *PM e-vidya* for multimode access to digital education, *Manodarpan*- an initiative for the psychosocial development of kids, and the New National Curriculum and pedagogical framework for school, early childhood and teachers.

In measuring the country's performance on the SDG India Index and Dashboard 2019-20, it was found that for SDG 4 and its disaggregated nine national indicators, the overall Index Score for the country is 58 and ranges between 19 and 81 for the States, and between 43 and 80 for the Union Territories (UTs),¹ on a scale of 0-100 (NITI Aayog, 2019).² This indicates that the distance to the target covered so far by India in quality education, with a significant variation among the subnational units. At 58, India is far from achieving SDG 4.

STATE-LEVEL INITIATIVES

States and UTs have created discrete institutional structures for the implementation of the SDGs in their specific contexts. All States and UTs have identified and tasked nodal departments for the implementation of the SDGs. Departments dealing with planning and finance have been given this nodal responsibility. Several States have also created nodal mechanisms within every department and also at the district levels to make coordination, convergence, and data management more precise and predictable.

All States have also created professional units on the SDGs in the shape of an SDG cell in the nodal department with personnel having technical expertise and experience. Key activities of the SDG cells/teams include preparing knowledge products and progress reports, organising capacity building programmes, providing inputs as required from time to time, and playing a support-oriented role in interventions on SDGs. As many as six States/UTs, namely Assam, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Haryana, have matured renditions of such units with full-fledged centres of excellence in collaboration with support organisations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) development process involved seven major elements, which are as follows:

- The VNR forum, which was tasked to run the consultation with different concern groups;
- The SDG taskforce, which is an old body designated to provide technical support and fine-tune the findings before the finalisation of the report;
- The stakeholder engagement in which major consultations with CSOs, NGOs, and other private entities were conducted;
- The consultation with state and local administrative bodies;
- Media outreach and communication to create more awareness of the SDGs;

1 Union Territories (UTs) are defined as the federal territories that are administered by the union government and in which lieutenant governors appointed by the President of India serve as the territories' administrators. See: <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/india-and-union-territories-1613735982-1>

2 SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019-20. (2019). NITI Aayog. Retrieved from <https://niti.gov.in/sdg-india-index-dashboard-2019-20>



Enrolment Campaign led by girls and leaders

- Research, a collaboration of the Ministry of Finance, NITI Aayog and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to estimate the cost of achieving the SDGs; and
- The report write-up

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Indian Government has taken positive efforts in developing mechanisms for monitoring and implementation of the SDGs in the country. However, the mechanism needs more thinking and evolution to achieve its full potential. This model does not factor in the interconnectedness and interdependence of the SDGs. Instead of aiming for sustainable change for the longer term, it prioritises only a few of them as a quick fix.

The SDG Index created by NITI Aayog misses out on several targets under different goals. The SDG Index is being used as a 'performance index' and it is becoming more evident that the SDG Index would result, either formally or informally, in 'performance linked financing' among states and among districts within states, which might lead to worsening of the condition of backward districts. The financing of the SDGs monitoring initiatives remains a big challenge. Although positive steps have been taken by the government like undertaking a mapping exercise of the government-run schemes and aligning it to various SDGs, there is a further need to have well-defined and clear plans on financing for the SDGs.

The policies adopted by governments both union and states are more focused on 'outcomes' (which can be clearly seen in the action plan developed by NITI Aayog) leading to the weakening of already existing progressive policies. For example, in the context of education, the action plan talks about doing away with the norms on inputs like teachers' qualifications and infrastructural norms and focuses more on the outcome. While the outcome is important, the means of achieving the outcome is through inputs.

Interestingly, few states have taken the initiative at the state level. Such steps at the national level will be a welcome step. The limited engagement of CSOs in strengthening the monitoring

and implementation of the SDGs leads to narratives remaining lopsided. It would be pragmatic to engage more stakeholders at all levels and define their roles in policymaking processes and the implementation of the SDGs.

DISCUSSION ON THE MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

India is home to the highest number of out-of-school children. While there have been efforts to make education accessible to all by the government, there are still more than 30 million children who remain out of school. It is also troubling to note that India has the highest number of stunted children in the world, while Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is still not a legal entitlement in the country.

The lack of qualified teachers remains critical at all levels of education. There is a gap of more than 900,000 teachers in elementary and secondary education itself. Even in the context of higher education, this remains a challenge as almost 45 per cent of the teaching jobs lie vacant. Since more than 90 per cent of the Teachers' Training Institutes are privatised, the poor accountability of these institutes severely affects the quality of teachers.

Budgetary allocations made to education are far below the global as well as nationally accepted benchmarks. Public expenditure on education in India was 2.7 per cent of the GDP in 2017-18. According to the 2021-2022 budget presented by the Indian government, Funds for schools slashed education and higher education sectors have been allotted Rs 93,224 crore (USD 12.38 billion) against Rs 99,311 crore (USD 13.18 billion) last year.³ There is a huge systemic lacuna that leads to the immense underutilisation of resources and rampant growth in the privatisation of education which is not just exclusionary but also leads to the weakening of the public education system. There is a need to curb education privatisation as it creates and strengthens the already existing hierarchies in society. While efforts have been taken by the government for enhancing the skills of youth, the policies need to be expanded. Currently, the

³ The Oanda currency converter was used to determine the conversion rate of Indian Rupee to US Dollar in July 2020.



Leaders meeting with parents for girls' admission

focus is more on developing a pool of workers to be able to join the industries. What is required is some focus on enhancing the avenues for youth employment.

Non-traditional livelihoods still do not find a place in government programmes. Even when the literacy rate in India is very low, there are no specific programmes run by the government. The definition of 'adults' is also very ambiguous which further dilutes the focus. The literacy rate among the transgender population is at 56.07 per cent which is not only lower than the average literacy rate among the general population but is even lower than the literacy rates among females in the country. The government's step of technically acknowledging the Third Gender is commended, however, more concrete strategies or programmes to include them in education at par with all other children are needed. The education system, including teachers, lack the understanding and skills to address the challenges and aspirations of children who do not fall into the binary of male and female. Equity still is not in the centre stage while framing any policy. In India, it is the most marginalised sections, particularly the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, transgender, persons with disabilities, and girls, among others, who are left behind and therefore need immediate attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also made a negative impact on school-going children. According to various estimates by international and national agencies, the dropout numbers can be in a range of 20 to 25 million students, of which a big chunk would be girls and students from economically and socially backward communities. The sudden shift from physical classes to digital learning created a shock with long-term impacts on both children's learning and teachers' ability to teach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt a clear commitment to Early Childhood Care and Education as a right and put in place a strong regulatory framework.
2. Ensure free and compulsory education up to secondary level, consistent with the targets under SDG 4 and urgently fill up vacancies of more than 900,000 qualified teachers.
3. Accelerate the expansion of government schools, improve education quality, and address equity issues to ensure the access of the most marginalised groups and out-of-school children, while decisively addressing the rising commercialisation of education that results in further inequity and segregation in education.
4. Allocate additional resources to achieve a budget share of at least 4 per cent of the GDP for both elementary and secondary education, ensuring adequate and equitable financing of education, particularly given the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that have made resource augmentation to poor areas more urgent.
5. Improve the implementation of the national skills development mission by considering the differential access of women and marginalised groups and adopt a more transformative pedagogy that includes skills training, rights-based information, sexuality education, along with professional training and exposure to opportunities for employment.
6. Adopt a robust policy for adult education that reaches out to the most marginalised rural communities. The Padhna Likhna Abhiyan, the only adult education programme, should not rely on "Voluntary Literacy Educators." This strategy has failed in the past and undermines the need for trained and skilled adult educators who can provide good quality education to adults. The current budget allocation under PLA is extremely low at USD 6 per learner annually and this needs to be revised immediately.
7. Keep functional literacy as a primary skill and upgrade it with digital literacy to give new sets of capabilities required to adapt to the post-COVID-19 realities. •



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Since 2001, the **National Coalition for Education (NCE)** India is a conglomeration of civil society organisations, Teachers' union and Parliamentary Forum working on the Right to Education. The coalition members of NCE have proven records of initiating people's movement mainly in the field of child rights, women, and the underprivileged denied the right to education. The collective advocacy initiatives taken up by the coalition members of NCE India has contributed to the policy changes towards achieving the education for all campaign worldwide. It strives to strengthen the participation of women, children, and other vulnerable groups deprived of elementary education to make education a reality for all. NCE India is a member organisation of ASPBAE.



Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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