
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS DURING COVID 19: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EDUCATION (SDG4)

Ms Mohita Yadav & Ms Manan Dardi, Assistant Professor, Vivekananda School of Law and Legal Studies, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, New Delhi

ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has come at a crucial and vulnerable stage when the multinational community is perforating into the final decade to 2030, a year specified to achieve these goals. The world has to strive hard to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) after the devastating effects of pandemics across the globe. Nevertheless, India has made tremendous headway in putting the “Education for All” concept into action. Several significant programmes and policies have been executed to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of six to fourteen years. Initiatives such as the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education (RTE) have provided much-needed support to India's education system. Education is becoming more accessible, equitable, and high-quality. However, current accomplishments and regardless of efforts, there are multiple gaps existing in the country's educational system. The paper's objective is on India's current efforts to contextualising Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education in the pre and post pandemic Indian scenario by incorporating them into the creation of New Education Policy. The paper also includes the required course of action which can be adopted to achieve the target within the defined time limits. It also looks at changes in education attainment at all levels in India, as well as some of the significant difficulties in the education system, such as quality education and accessibility.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Education for all, Right to Education, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, New Education Policy

INTRODUCTION

In September 2015, when the United Nations celebrated its 70th anniversary, all the Heads of the State and Government met at headquarters in New York to decide the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The Sustainable Development Goals, alternately called the Millennium Development Goals also, were taken on as a general source of stimulation to end impoverishment, safeguard the earth, and ensure that by 2030 all individuals acknowledge concord and success. The significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments were reassured by these goals. All the SDGs are interconnected, and they discern that work in one area has an impact on outcomes in others and that augmentation should take into account natural, societal, and financial maintainability. So, an integrated approach is mandatory for development across various goals.²

After an unwelcome consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is now a universally accepted fact that it profoundly impacts almost all sectors. The world has to strive hard to achieve the SDGs after the devastating effects of pandemics across the globe. Covid-19 has come at a crucial and vulnerable stage when the multinational community is perforating into the last decades to 2030, a year specified to achieve these goals. We have to modify our roadmap for accomplishing these goals, and this process becomes more complex due to the interdependence of the plans on each other. For instance, to achieve SDG 4, i.e. quality education,³ the focus has to be placed upon other goals also like Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure);⁴ Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality); and Goal 16 (Peace and Justice Strong Institutions);⁵ SDG 3 (health and well-being);⁶ SDG 5 (gender equality);⁷ SDG 8 (decent work and sustainable growth);⁸ SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production);⁹ and SDG 13 (climate change mitigation).¹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted the fact that the major determining factor of whether or not the international community achieves the SDGs is the extent to which countries can commit resources to the objectives while allocating resources

¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/70/L., 1UN Doc A/RES/70/1 (October 21, 2015).

² Ibid.

³ United Nations, #Envision2030 Goals 17: Partnerships for the Goals, *available at*: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal17.html> (last visited on January 19, 2022).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

based on current realities. An important factor to consider is understanding the Government's response to COVID 19 to reach the Agenda of 2030 and leveraging the predicament as a chance for future development plans.

Education is a primitive human right protected by numerous intercontinental and national treaties, policies, and laws. The international community has reaffirmed this right in numerous covenants and agreements, including Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),¹¹ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Under Article 21A (added by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India, 2002), India enacted the Right to Education Act, 2009, which focus on providing free and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14.¹²

Quality education is one of the global goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and a central target of all the states worldwide. Five years into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world is still a long way from ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education by 2030. Since roughly the year 2015, substantial progress has been made towards the direction of universally high-quality education. The total enrolment rate in third world countries reached 91 per cent, while the number of children out of school universally fell by nearly half.¹³ However, as per UNESCO, COVID-19 has impacted the education of more than 1.25 billion students, posing a threat to SDG 4 (quality education).¹⁴ The United Nations has cautioned that coronavirus poses a threat to all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and may undo previous advances. The impact of widespread education disruption on SDG 4 (quality education) cannot be emphasized.

¹¹ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *available at*: https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/UDHR_Eng_0.pdf (last visited on January 19, 2022).

¹² Government of India, *The Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002*, (December 12, 2002).

¹³ UNEP, Quality Education, *available at*: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQiArt6PBhCoARIsAMF5wagsMC6afk4AOLRjMzg45cb3EBs27455O5xz6_MIZAJQntITWF8oWWkaAjsbEALw_wcB#quality-education (last visited on January 19, 2022).

¹⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communications, *UN Working to fight COVID-19 and achieve Global Goals*, *available at*: <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-working-fight-covid-19-and-achieve-global-goals> (last visited on January 22, 2022).

Moreover, the educational system has a tremendous interruption, especially in states where many people live in poverty or engage in informal and hazardous sectors. With little social safety net, the potential mortality or severe sickness caused by hunger, famine, and other diseases may be more persuasive than COVID-19 in such states. The right to education is unalienable, and education is a precedent for uplifting economies to achieve the SDGs within the pre-decided framework.

INDIA'S PROGRESS ON SDGS DURING PRE-COVID 19 PERIOD

India's dedication to achieving the SDGs can be seen in its alignment with the indigenous development strategy, as demonstrated by the *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas mantra (Collective Efforts for Inclusive Growth)*, evidenced by the SDG India Index. National Institution of Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has a dual mandate to look after the embracement and ascertainment of the SDGs in India. NITI Aayog produced SDG India *Index 2020–21* in conjunction with the United Nations in India, which monitored the advancement of all Indian states and union territories on 115 indicators connected with the *Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) National Indicator Framework (NIF)*.¹⁵

Overall, the country's SDG score rose by 6 points, from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020–21. Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) have excellent country-wide performance, with composite Goal ratings of 83 and 92, respectively, driving this great stride toward reaching the targets.¹⁶

Local governments are critical to India's SDG success because they are perfectly positioned to 'put people first' and ensure that 'no one is left behind'. Most executive policies, such as *Swachh Bharat, Make in India, Skill India, and Digital India*, are based on the SDGs. Many of these projects are primarily reliant on state and local governments.¹⁷

Local government performs a crucial role; 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are strongly linked to actions taken by local governments across the nation. State governments

¹⁵ NITI Aayog, SDG India Index & Dashboard 2020-2021, available at: https://www.niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDG_3.0_Final_04.03.2021_Web_Spreads.pdf (last visited on January 22, 2022).

¹⁶ NITI Aayog, NITI Aayog Releases SDG India Index and Dashboard 2020-2021, available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1723952#:~:text=The%20country's%20overall%20SDG%20score,to%2066%20in%202020%E2%80%9321> (last visited on January 22, 2022).

¹⁷ Ibid.

must prioritise envisaging, designing, budgeting, and constructing SDG implementation systems.

India has done a tremendous job in its poverty eradication programmes. Almost 271 million people were lifted out of multifaceted destitution through economically effective development. It has also accomplished the goal of 100% rural sanitation and sudden curtailment in child and maternal mortality rates. India has provided electricity to all of its villages, reduced CO₂ emigration by 38 million tonnes per year through energy-efficient instruments, provided pure cuisine energy to 80 million poverty-ridden homes, and intend to establish 450 GW of renewable energy and revive 26 million hectares of demoralized holdings by 2030.¹⁸

Good education is a cornerstone of everlasting growth as it fosters wealth creation, economic versatility and communal cooperation. Notwithstanding, many nations keep struggling to provide students with accessible and high-quality early education, a concern addressed by SDG 4. The Indian national government acknowledges the challenges faced by the education sector and has established new policies to handle the numerous demands and issues. A few of the projects include *Samagra Shiksha*, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*, *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)*, and *Teacher Education (TE)*. Several of the digital activities that are helpful in the promotion of automation in the education sphere are *Shala Kosh* and *Shaala Saarthi*.

Since implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, India has demonstrated a significant commitment to global goals throughout the last few years.

INDIAN CONDITION PRE AND POST-COVID CONCERNING QUALITY EDUCATION

Since the passage of the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2009, India's educational system has been enhanced after mandating compulsory and free education. The Covid-19 pandemic, on the other hand, has slowed this progress significantly.

Several children in India were adversely affected after the government-imposed lockdown in Covid 19. Many children from the least affluent milieu abandoned school; some were compelled to work to support their families due to loss of income.

¹⁸ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, *available at:* <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/india> (last visited on January 22, 2022).

Private, urban schools in India were better suited to the new situation than government schools, which struggled to transition from traditional face-to-face learning to an online mode, particularly in rural India. The challenges confronting the Indian education system were exacerbated by the pandemic, and these included:

A technological and access divide: Uninterrupted education is dependent on digital infrastructures, such as the Internet, laptop computers, and phones. At the same time, while students in urban schools have greater access than students in rural schools, class and gender disparities influence who can and cannot use these devices. Furthermore, other constraints exacerbate access issues such as the unreliable supply of electricity, environment of the home, space for study, etc.

Uncertainty on exam paper: The grading system, as well as the logistics of administering tests to students who have completed their primary education, have been thoroughly examined. Nonetheless, due to this unprecedented situation, the formalisation of a national procedure for students to take their final exams has been delayed. As a result, many students did not finish their high school curriculum and missed out on opportunities to further their education.

Education for bereaved children in Covid-19: Since the global pandemic, in India, nearly 15 lakh children have been orphaned, including 1.2 lakh in India.¹⁹ Such children's learning opportunities are jeopardised. Despite the need for a national solution, several states, including Delhi and Andhra Pradesh, have established child care institutions for children who are in torment and require prompt action.²⁰ This is in addition to the government's free education programme for children whose parents have died due to Covid-19.

This pandemic has been identified as the greatest crisis of our time. A new approach and partnership are required to ensure that citizens of the country receive the promised education. Rotary.²¹

Collaborating with state governments to enhance literacy rates: Various private-sector enterprises, with state government assistance, focus on enhancing the rate of literacy among

¹⁹ Sneha Mordani, "Over 15 lakh children lost a parent to Covid, including 1.2 lakh in India" *India Today*, July 25, 2021.

²⁰ Government of India, "The Report of the Committee for Analysing Data of Mapping and Review Exercise of Child Care Institutions under the Juvenile Justice (Care and protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Other Homes" (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2018)

²¹ Government of India, "India Report Digital Education: Remote Learning Initiative across India" (Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, 2021)

schoolchildren and adults, mainly by training the teachers, enhancing the technology and developing the infrastructure, and by creating public awareness of the advantages of reading.²²

Despite the fact that Covid-19 has perturbed the education system, this moment has the potential to effect change. Organizations in the public and private sectors must work together with the Indian government to implement new teaching and learning methods and safeguard that all students have ingress to the necessary devices and infrastructure. In that case, India will provide opportunities for an improved standard of life and more fulfilling lives for future generations.²³

Though India had faced significant issues while dealing with the education system during the pandemic, it has also adopted various ways to cope with these challenges. India adopted National Education Policy 2020 on 29th July 2020, which aims to bring a massive transformation in India's educational sector. It has replaced the policy of 1986. The NEP 2020 is the most detailed and forward-thinking policy document in the history of Indian education. It sees no impediment to providing everyone with high-quality, outcome-oriented education. It currently includes youngsters in their most formative years, between the ages of three and five, for their intellectual growth and development. The administration's dedication to the principle of "No one to be left behind" is shown by the return of 20 million out-of-school and dropout children, as well as the universalisation of school education from the age of three. The NEP 2020 strongly emphasises achieving global access to education at all levels, from preschool to secondary school. It will undoubtedly be challenging to implement reforms in India since education is a shared issue between the states and the central government, as stipulated under its Concurrent List. However, given the initiative and opportunity for public participation provided by the NEP, governments will aim to be hyperactive in implementing the NEP's recommendations.

REQUIRED COURSE OF ACTION

Change is unavoidable and due to Covid 19, it has been forced upon society. To deal with the

²² Rotary India Literacy Mission, Literacy touching lives Rotary South Asia Society for Development & Cooperation Annual Report 2016-17, available at: <https://rotaryteach.org/documents/audit-statements/2021-07-01-13-27-53-Annual%20Report%202016-17.pdf> (last visited on January 28, 2022).

²³ Shekar Mehta, "Education In India During Covid-19: Challenges Faced And Solutions for a Post-Pandemic Era" *Outlook*, Nov. 11, 2021.

situation and maintain educational quality, India must take the following steps:

- The learning modules can be altered to accommodate a distinct way of learning, and the course sections can be developed from several authorities to respond to the goals and requirements of the mentee. Students can continue their education in the new pattern.
- Covid-19 has compelled humanity to avoid physical contact. It has made it more difficult to continue teaching and learning by maintaining social distance. Maintaining social distance has made it more difficult to continue teaching and learning. To meet these challenges, there is a greater demand for Online Distance Learning and online modes of education, and this trend is expected to continue.
- Blended learning amalgamates in person and online learning methods. Covid-19 has precipitated the promotions of digital techniques for educational delivery and motivating academic establishments to advance towards a hybrid learning model. Teachers and students alike improved their technological abilities. When combined with post-Covid-19 technology, the traditional face-to-face method will result in blended teaching and learning, potentially transforming the structure of the educational system.
- Access to online libraries, books, and journals should promote remote learning. Also, adequate facilities for differently-abled students must be developed. There is a need to collaborate with other universities and edu-tech companies to create innovative solutions to make digital learning more convenient and practical.²⁴

Governments must also implement strategies to assist students in recovering from learning losses caused by school closures and returning to school. A system like this could include the following components:²⁵

- Work with health officials to recommence institutions at the earliest opportunity, but cautiously.
- To re-establish their critical skills, each child's foundational skills should be assessed.

²⁴ Anwesha Sarkar, "Online classes during lockdown in Bengal" *Dalit Camera*, June 18, 2020.

²⁵ Emiliana Vegas, Sunhwa Lee, et al., "How has education technology impacted student learning in India during COVID19?" *Brookings*, Aug. 23, 2021.

- Educator and students' access to digital devices and connectivity should be improved, also the guidance and support of the teacher ed-tech resources should be resources best aligned for each student's learning level.
- Socio-emotional support should be provided to educators and students, acknowledging that the pandemic has begotten in the loss of learning and upheaval in so many families.

CONCLUSION

The closure of educational institutions across the globe has significantly posed enormous obstacles in catering for the requirement of fragile groups of our society like students. Numerous complications have been faced by the people, such as suspension of classes, postponement of exams, loss of employment for academicians, unpreparedness for online education culture, escalating pressure on parents to educate their children, reduction in social mobility amongst students much more. The pandemic may have long-term mental - interpersonal effects on many people, including students, teachers etc.

Henceforth, It is crucial to start with a proactive strategy to student learning that is instituted on the close association across different participants and addresses students' performance and welfare needs. School administrators, instructors, guardians, children, pedagogical and health practitioners, and communities must all work together to (re-)create institutions as safe and inclusive environments for all children.

Education (SDG-4) is the underlying pillar for all other SDGs. It promotes socioeconomic mobility upward and can serve as a potential medium for raising awareness of other SDGs. Government schools are a lifeline for 60 per cent of India's students, and the digital divide has walloped them. To some extent, training and reskilling teachers for online lecture delivery would help to close the gap.

The top objective should be to use modern technology to help India's millions of young pupils gain a competitive edge. Educational institutions must improve their knowledge and information technology infrastructure to be equipped for COVID-19-like circumstances. In a pandemic situation like this, the concept of "work from home" is more pertinent to limiting COVID-19 spread. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India should devise unconventional measures to ensure that all children have uninterrupted access to education. For furnishing efficient education, Indian policies must include people from all walks of life, especially those from distant areas and underrepresented groups. Because the online practice is so fruitful to

pupils, it should be carried upon after the lockdown. A more detailed statistical analysis could be conducted for the same.

So we must learn from and encourage teacher, student, and community reactions since they hold the key to reforming education during and after the current crisis. In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, decisions made today will have long-term implications for educational prospects.