



Achieving SDGs Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

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Syllabus: Prelims GS Paper I : Economic and Social Development – Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives, etc.

Mains GS Paper III : Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Context

Length and width of the policy making focus on to enable the India's approach to localizing SDGs, and strengthening means of implementation in the COVID-19 days.

Background

COVID-19 pandemic hit at a time when the SDGs were gaining traction and a significant number of steps have been taken and were making good progress. As the world is seized with containing the spread of the virus and addressing its negative impacts, the reality is that country is resetting its priorities, and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic. This certainly is the right thing to do because the priority now is to save lives, and we must do so at all costs.

What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

List of SDGs

- SDG 1 No Poverty
- SDG 2 Zero Hunger
- SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4 Quality Education
- SDG 5 Gender Equality
- SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 10 Reduce Inequalities
- SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13 Climate Action
- SDG 14 Life Below Water
- SDG 15 Life on Land
- SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals

COVID-19, A Shift in Policy Making to Attain SDGs:

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up several challenges. These will be addressed in the shortest possible time. Our aim is to build a resilient system that will help us face the next adversity with confidence and with minimal human costs. Bringing the economy back on track, after the devastating consequences of the pandemic, to generate the necessary employment and business opportunities, thereby creating prosperity for everyone, is the most pressing task at hand.

There is a need to translate the coronavirus-led pandemic situation into an opportunity to meet the sustainable development goals - Rajiv Kumar, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman

India, with 17 per cent of the world's humanity and 2.4 per cent of the land area, is also home to a multitudinous array of development challenges that cut across sectors of health, nutrition, education, urbanization and climate action.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions to plans and timelines. Therefore, we have every reason to double or triple our efforts for achieving the targets of the Agenda 2030.

The government is leading a multi-faceted effort to revamp the public health infrastructure, protect jobs and livelihoods, ratchet up various economic sectors and break the siege of the pandemic.

While the pandemic has given some jolts to the process of achieving the Global Goals, it has also offered an opportunity for forging and strengthening partnerships among the State, civil society organizations and the private sector for creating a unified and robust response system to deal with the public health and economic exigencies.



Still grappling with these challenges, India continues to grow as an epicenter of some of the most advanced technological and digital solutions.

Localization of SDGs is crucial to any strategy aimed at achieving the goals under the 2030 agenda. Essentially, localizing SDGs involves the process of understanding, adapting, planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs from national to local levels by relevant institutions.



India's Move towards the SDGs

The country is focused on steadily accelerating Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate to sustain eight per cent growth between 2018-2023 to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025. While the recent COVID-19 pandemic has caused a setback, the economic growth rate in India has been broadly on an accelerating path, with India being one of the fastest growing major economies in the world.

Despite serious challenges, in the COVID-19 pandemic, India has made significant progress in improving food and nutrition security via schemes, such as Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Anganwadi Services scheme, Poshan Abhiyan (National Nutrition Mission) etc.

The global pandemic COVID-19 has thrown open India's health systems to multifarious challenges, which the country is combating with ground-breaking synergies among industry, civil society and different levels of the government.

Despite closing of educational institutions in COVID-19 days, the UNNAYAN BANKA SMART CLASSROOM MODEL made a remarkable success by increasing the learning outcomes at 90%, implemented in the Aspirational District of Banka, Bihar, is a modern technology based initiative, at which students can see comprehensive learning videos on TVs, mobile phones etc.

To check the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the expedited development of a contact and tracing application called 'Aarogya Setu', is one such outcome of India's efforts to exponentially increase capacity through the use of digital platforms.

India has put in place a 10 Year Rural Sanitation Strategy (2019-2029), which focuses on sustaining the sanitation behaviour change, ensuring that no one is left behind, and increasing access to solid and liquid waste management.

Given the uncertainty in the global economy, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, sustaining a high growth trajectory will be a challenge for India, as it will be for all nations across the world. However, the success of the economic growth strategy in the past five years and the learning from the same will inform India's growth plans for the next ten years, in alignment with the targets of SDG 8. A key pillar of the economic prosperity strategy has been entrepreneurship, at which India has secured the third largest entrepreneurship ecosystem, globally.

Domestically, India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic includes a USD 279 billion economic package, comprehensive health coverage for front-line workers and direct cash transfers for the most vulnerable.

Monitoring Progress at the National and Sub-National Levels

While measuring the country's performance on the SDG India Index and Dashboard, for SDGs and its disaggregated seven national indicators, while the floor of performance is relatively high, there is significant variation across States, pointing to the need for identifying and acting upon the factors responsible for such divergence.

India's Support to SAARC

The country has extended medical assistance to several countries and has operationalised the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund with an initial contribution of USD 10 million.

Challenges and Future Directions

Crucially, in many parts of the world, the pandemic and its effects are exacerbated by the crisis in achieving clean water and sanitation targets (SDG 6), weak economic growth and the absence of decent work (SDG 8), pervasive inequalities (SDG 10), and above all, entrenched poverty (SDG 1) and food insecurity (SDG 2). The World Bank estimates the crisis will push some 11 million people into poverty.

What is acutely needed is enhanced political will and commitment. India has the knowledge, capacity and innovation, and if we are ambitious enough, we can muster the resources needed to achieve the Goals. Buoyed by the spirit of solidarity, Central and the State Governments, businesses, multi-lateral organisations and civil society have in the shortest possible time been able to raise billions, and in some cases, trillions to support efforts to combat this pandemic. If we attach the same level of importance and urgency to the fight against poverty, hunger, and climate change, we will find success in this Decade of Action on the SDGs.

Connecting the Dots

Question for Prelims

Consider the following statements:

1. Sustainable Development Goals are the global goals adopted by the United Nations.
2. Sustainable Development Goals aimed to end poverty in all its forms by 2025.

Which of the statements given above is/ are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Question for Mains

Among several factors for India's potential growth, fulfilling Sustainable Development Goals would be the most effective one. Do you agree?