

Achieving Sustainable Development for India: Fostering Partnerships

By Saurabh Sood

As the largest democracy in the world, India is an important partner in defining and the achieving a world development agenda. India's significant contribution toward realizing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) comes from the Government of India's commitment to promoting inclusive development. A key instrument of this transformation has been the government's ability to develop and sustain partnerships with each relevant stakeholder in the process.

Placing due thrust on sustained and inclusive economic development along with 193 countries, India adopted the Sustainable Development Agenda in September 2015. In addition to implementing several centrally sponsored schemes, the Government of India announced flagship programs for sustainable development of the country and its people on three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. With a much wider spectrum of goals and definitions, India is fast pacing toward the set targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, a country as diverse as India is bound to face challenges that also present themselves as opportunities to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, presenting civil society and industry leaders with an opportunity to contribute toward the common goal of developing India in a sustainable manner.

Civil society, with strong on-ground affiliations, is best suited for extending the government's outreach to rural communities. However, with multiple projects and disaggregated outcomes that are highly localized, consolidation must be sought for implementing and reporting outcomes that are relevant to sustainable development targets. India has the presence of national and international NGOs that follow national and international governance norms. The contribution of international NGOs (INGOs) to India's development is not merely an aggregation of their national-level activities; an important concern for INGOs is to be able to balance global and national missions.¹

Indian NGOs are collaborating more with other stakeholders to increase outreach and impact. Such a shift is not restricted to India. Strategies of NGOs in the global governance arena have shifted from being confrontational toward government initiatives to working more in collaboration with them.²

Through their commitment to social responsibility, industry leaders have a huge stake in achieving sustainable development targets in their respective social domains. The role of businesses is significant, as businesses have the economic means that is not always available with other stakeholders. Although private market players have a stake in global development, their role can be seen as problematic. An argument made against privatizing global governance for development is its fragmented nature wherein rules are framed at different levels, with each stakeholder having a variety of backgrounds and interests. The role of government control in the activities of this practice is highly relevant. A strong-handed government control has the power to provide a direction to governance as well as discourage investments due to lack of decentralized decision-making.²

Global goals present themselves as a lucrative opportunity for multinationals to take leadership and mentoring roles with local businesses and entrepreneurs to tackle local-level problems.³ A prerequisite for such a partnership is an enabling environment for

local businesses to thrive and connect with multinationals. Industry leaders also need to show trust in the start-up culture and invest in promising prospects.

Asian Development Bank's report on SDGs places special emphasis on policy coherence to foster partnerships to combat complex issues such as financial inclusion and food security.⁴ Existing linkages of industry and civil society present opportunities to achieve intended outcomes in line with SDG targets. Such a framework of action could hugely benefit the government in monitoring progress and refocusing its policies.

India has an encouraging view on global partnerships for sustainable development that is evident by its focus on revitalizing partnerships. In a recent review of progress on SDGs,⁵ the Indian government emphasized financial resource mobilization as a key element in partnerships. Special mention was also made of India's commitment to improve monitoring mechanisms of commitments and following international norms for expanding tax compliance. The latter is an initiative to mobilize domestic funds for investments in long-term public goods. In terms of fiscal decentralization, India has made progress under 14th Finance Commission that has increased tax devolution to states. Partnerships are also crucial in terms of capacity building and analysis of expenditures made under increased revenues.

India boasts of leading major international collaborations at both regional and global levels, such as the south-south cooperation, SAARC, ASEAN, and a more recent initiative, International Solar Alliance. In addition to these initiatives, with regard to SDG 6 (water and sanitation), India has been instrumental in ideation of the South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN). This government-led meeting has representation from civil society and corporates and has had an impact of national policy-making and action. SACOSAN III, held in 2008 in New Delhi, led to the Delhi Declaration that reiterated India's commitment to collaborate with its South Asian counterparts on issues related to water and sanitation. In a number of avenues, regional cooperation was sought, such as in promoting good hygiene behaviors through collaborative use of the media and ICTs (Delhi Declaration, 2008). With examples of such successful partnerships, India is set on the right path to achieve SDGs through partnerships and cooperation.

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