

“National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog and Achieving Gender Equality in the Sustainable Development Framework by the year 2030”

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to study the role of the National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of Women in India with special focus on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) number 5 – Gender Equality. The 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) formally adopted the resolution on “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprises of 17 goals and 169 targets and came into force on 1st of January 2016. The Government of India (GOI) has appointed the NITI Aayog as the nodal agency for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs in India. (United Nations, 2015) In India only 59.3% women are literate when compared to 78.8% of men whereas there is 100% enrolment in primary education only 75.5% of girls progress for higher education. In the Indian Parliament only 11% of women hold seats in both houses namely Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. In the sub-national level women hold only 8.7% of seats across the State Legislative Assemblies in India. The sex-ratio at birth is 919 girls for every 100 boys as per the 2011 Census of India. In India 48.5% of the population are women but only 27.4% of women are in the workforce in the country. (Social Statistics Division MoSPI, GOI, 2017)

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Gender Equality, NITI Aayog, Empowerment

Introduction:

The Vision, Strategy and Action Agenda exercise represents a departure from the Five-Year Plan process. “Maximum Governance and Minimum Government”, and

“Competitive and Cooperative Federalism” are critical to achieving the full potential and creating a modern India, which brings prosperity to all of its 125 Crore citizens. NITI Aayog has been entrusted with the role to co-ordinate ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (called as SDGs). (United Nations, 2015) Moving ahead from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SDGs have been evolved through a long inclusive process for achievement during 2016-2030. NITI Aayog has mapped the goals and targets to various nodal ministries as well as flagship programmes. To fast track this agenda, the Government of India has just released a draft Three-Year Action Agenda covering years 2017-18 to 2019-20. In parallel, work is in advance stages on a 15-Year Vision, which will also include a 7-year Strategy. (NITI Aayog, 2017)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Conceptual Framework:

The United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the year 1992 laid the foundation for the discussions on the conception of sustainable development. This conference was famously referred to as the Rio Earth Summit. The member countries agreed on a draft known as ‘Agenda 21’. In the year 2000, the Millennium Summit held at the UN headquarters in New York, USA saw the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 189-member countries. In the year 2002, a decade after the Rio Earth Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The outcome document of this summit was known as the ‘Johannesburg Declaration’. (United Nations, 2012)

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the year 2012. This conference was referred to as ‘Rio+20’ commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit (1992). The conference focussed on the ‘Post-2015 Development Agenda’. The idea was to evolve a global dashboard with goal-setting and targets to be achieved by member countries after the completion of the MDGs in 2015. The conference agreed to develop conceptual framework based on the ‘Agenda 21’ and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation agreed to by member countries in the 1992 and 2002 conferences respectively. The outcome document of this conference was ‘The Future We Want’. (United Nations, 2012)

In 2013, a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) was formed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and was tasked with the preparation of a draft proposal on the SDGs. India was also a member of this OWG. The group met over thirteen sessions

between March 2013 and July 2014. They came up with the final report titled ‘Open Working Group Proposals for Sustainable Development Goals’ and submitted the report to the UNGA in July 2014. The OWG Report was adopted during the 69th session of the UNGA in September 2014. (United Nations, 2015) The UN Summit for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was held in the headquarters of the UN in New York, USA in September 2015. The resolution titled ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ was formally adopted by 193-member countries in the UNGA. The SDGs comprised of 17 goals and 169 targets and came into effect from 1st January 2016. The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi attended the summit and delivered an address in the UNGA on the importance of SDGs and role of India in achieving the same. (United Nations, 2015)

The SDGs provide a broad set of goals and targets to be achieved by the year 2030 and have become international obligations with a potential to converge national policy framework and domestic spending priorities of the countries in the target period. In India there is some national convergence between the SDGs and the development goals with the government’s agenda “Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas” (collective efforts & inclusive growth). The National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has been identified as the nodal agency for the national SDG monitoring framework by the Government of India. (NITI Aayog, 2018) The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) (MoSPI GOI, 2016) is responsible for developing a National Indicator Framework for measuring the progress of the goals and targets by the governments at the national and state level.

National Strategy for Achieving SDGs:

In India the national strategy for achieving the SDGs is actively functional beginning with the Parliament, the nodal agency NITI Aayog and the Ministry for Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The core agenda in formulating the national level strategy by the NITI Aayog has been Mapping of Ministries and Programmes; Identification of Indicators; Consultation with stakeholders; Dovetailing the National Development Agenda with SDGs; Meticulous Implementation of schemes aligned with SDG targets and Rigorous outcome-based monitoring.

- a.) **The Speakers Research Initiative (SRI)** which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Aug 2015 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017) is an example of the efforts by the Members of Parliament (MPs) in contributing towards the national

strategy for achieving the SDGs. This initiative has so far organised three workshops in July 2015; Aug 2016 and Dec 2016 in orienting parliamentarians in the SDG goals and targets. The Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) discussions on SDGs were held in Aug 2015 and Aug 2016 respectively. In March 2016 a National Conference of Women Legislators was organised in New Delhi on the theme, “Women Legislators: Building Resurgent India”. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017) The conference was organised from a gender perspective in approaching the SDGs. The 2nd BRICS (an acronym for the association of five major economies of the world Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Women Parliamentarian Forum, which was organised in Aug 2016 on the theme, “Women Parliamentarians-Enablers for Achieving SDGs” came up with the “Jaipur Declaration”. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017) In Feb 2017 the South Asian Speaker’ Summit on SDG was held in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the summit declaration is called as the “Indore Declaration”. (IPU and Parliament of India, 2017) These initiatives showcase the convergence and initiatives taken by the legislature of the Indian Parliament and sets the platform for the sub-national level state governments to work towards achieving the SDGs. (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2017)

- b.) **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** is actively engaged as part of the national framework for achieving the SDGs. The ministry was entrusted with developing a National Indicator Framework (NFI) which will form an important source for monitoring and measuring the progress of the national and state governments in the coming years. A dedicated SDGs unit has been created in the Social Statistics Division of the Central Statistics Office for monitoring the progress under SDGs based on the indicator framework developed by the ministry. This unit will be a SDG data focal point for all stakeholders at the national level. (MoSPI GOI, 2016)
- c.) **NITI Aayog & State/Union Territories:** India comprises of 29 States and 7 Union Territories as its sub-national administrative divisions. NITI Aayog has held two consultations in Jan and Dec 2018 with representatives of the respective the state governments. The focus of the review meetings was on the mapping of schemes, indicators and monitoring of targets, capacity building, localisation of SDGs and challenges faced in the implementation of SDGs with state level policy goals. According to the review meeting 26 states/UTs have mapped respective departments and interventions with SDG targets; 15 states/UTs have developed a Vision Plan on

SDGs; 12 states/UTs have initiated the process to draft a Monitoring Framework; 4 states/UTs have set-up a task force for drafting the framework and 19 states/UTs have held consultations on SDGs for orienting local governments with the priority indicators, converging implementation perspectives, integration at the state level policy framework and budget allocation. (NITI Aayog, 2018)

SDG 5 – Gender Equality and India:

Women's empowerment is a pre-condition to achieve the targets of several Sustainable Development Goals like poverty eradication, inequality, good health and wellbeing for all, decent work and economic growth among others. The related targets of the SDGs are encompassing as these also cover major areas of concern like violence and discrimination against women, child marriage, reproductive and sexual health of women, effective participation of women at workplace, political role from parliament to local bodies and also in public life, ownership over land, and laws and policies to ensure effective implementation of these. This is in congruence with the Global Gender Gap index which measures the relative gaps between men and women across four key areas – health, education, economy and politics. (NITI Aayog, 2017)

India has remained committed to the goal of achieving equality among all its citizens. The Constitution of India conveys a powerful mandate for equality of women in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights and also Directive Principles of State Policy. India is also a signatory to a number of UN Conventions, like Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action and Convention on Rights of the Child where the nation's commitment to protect and empower its women and girls is evident. India has been striving to dispel discrimination against women in all forms. Laws against sex selective abortion, child marriage and sexual harassment at workplace are being implemented. One of the main areas of concern is falling female participation in the labour force. A 2016-15 report by the Labour Bureau reveals that Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India is 23.7%. Even on the indicator of Economic participation and opportunity, and labour force participation in Global Gender Gap, India has a low rank on female labour force participation rate though in some other areas like political empowerment it is ranked better. This is because of high representation of women in local governance institutions.

SDGs India Index 2018 – Developed by NITI Aayog:

The NITI Aayog has published the SDG India Index 2018 which is a baseline data for ranking the States/UTs in India for their performance in achieving the targets and indicators based on the Sustainable Development Goals. The report provides a proper analysis of the performance of the sub-national government of India with regard to action taken on 13 of the 17 SDGs for which information was available from across the country. This is the first of its kind attempt made by a national agency in India to develop an index of performance of the SDGs. Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have got the overall highest score of 69 out of 100. Uttar Pradesh scored the lowest overall: 42. On gender equality, the cumulative score of states and Union Territories was the lowest among the 13 SDGs mentioned in the report. (NITI Aayog, 2018) The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which was involved in the making of the report, set targets for 62 indicators across all the 13 SDGs included in this report. For each indicator, a national target value for 2030 was set, either by taking UN targets into consideration, or by the Indian government or it was calculated as the average of values of the top three performing States/UTs. To make data comparable across the country, the indicators were rescaled from raw data into a score ranging from 0 to 100. A score of 100 meant the state was an achiever, a score of 65-99 a frontrunner, from 50-64 a performer and from 0-49 an aspirant. Kerala and Sikkim, Andaman and Nicobar and Chandigarh were the only performers on gender equality. The overall average score of all states and Union Territories on gender equality was 36 out of 100. (NITI Aayog, 2018) Some of the observations that can be drawn from analysing the SDG India Index 2018 on the performance of the States/UTs of India on SDG 5-Gender Equality are:

- i.) One in every three women had faced spousal violence. Only 898 girls are born against every 1,000 boys on average – the SDG sex ratio target for 2030 is 954. (NITI Aayog, 2018)
- ii.) 32 per cent of India's workforce is female and they earn 30 per cent less than men on average. (NITI Aayog, 2018)
- iii.) Haryana (832), Maharashtra (876), Delhi and Rajasthan (both 857), and Uttarakhand (850) are the worst performers on sex ratio. The highest is from Chhattisgarh with 963 girls born against 1,000 boys, followed by Kerala which recorded 959, and Odisha with 948. (NITI Aayog, 2018)
- iv.) Only in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the female wage rate is higher than that of males. In the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the female wage rate is equal to males.

Puducherry, Madhya Pradesh and Bengal are among the disappointing performers.
(NITI Aayog, 2018)

Conclusion:

The Government of India has identified ending violence against women as a key national priority, which resonates with the Sustainable Development targets of the United Nations on gender equality. The prime minister's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative aims at equal opportunity and education for girls in India. In addition, specific interventions on female employment, programmes on the empowerment of adolescent girls, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana on girl child prosperity and the Janani Suraksha Yojana for mothers advance India's commitment to gender equality. Empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial to accelerating sustainable development. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also has a multiplier effect across all other development areas.

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