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Accelerating SDGs through Collaboration and Convergence: Lessons for EU and Indian Policy Stakeholders

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CRB CENTRE for
RESPONSIBLE
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1. Context

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres while presenting his report entitled, ‘Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet’, called on Governments and businesses at the UN High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (UNHLPF) in July 2023 in New York to drive bold, sustained and transformative actions going beyond the ‘business as usual approach’¹. He asserted that we are now blessed with unprecedented power of knowledge, technology, innovations and experiences to take audacious yet calculated strides towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in the remaining seven years.

Released in September 2023 in Delhi, the G20 leaders declaration² lamented that only 12% of the Global Goals have been met at the half-way mark, and calls G20 countries to leverage their convening power and influence, to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The declaration underlines four tenets to ensure efficacy and good governance, while pursuing this outcome³:

- Community-centric approach
- Technology-enabled ecosystem
- Future-readiness
- Global partnerships and innovative financing



2. The Need

India’s SDG performance like in most emerging economies has been a mixed bag. It has widely been realised that Government alone cannot achieve the SDGs anywhere, and a strong role-play by the business community, civil society and other relevant actors is an imperative. Public agencies, private sector, civil society, financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders need to act collectively and collaboratively, leveraging technology and innovation - in these remaining seven years period (2030 agenda for Sustainable Development).

Further, a ‘whole of society approach’ is considered one of the four pillars of the India model for SDGs localisation⁴. Therefore, policymakers and business leaders need to embrace and explore opportunities for collaboration while designing and delivering initiatives contributing to the SDGs. Mainstreaming SDG targets to assess efficacy of public and private sector initiatives is a necessity and not merely desirous, any longer.



¹ <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>

² <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf>

³ <https://t20ind.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Task-Force-6-ORF-digital-1.pdf>

⁴ The three other pillars are: (i) Creating institutional ownership; (ii) Establishing a robust review and monitoring system; and (iii) Developing capacities for integrating SDGs in planning and monitoring (https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-08/The_Indian_Model_of_SDG_Localisation_13072022.pdf)



3. EU and Indian Stakeholder Collaboration on SDGs

3.1 Partners committed to Sustainable Development

The European Union (EU) and India are like-minded partners, having committed to pursue specific sustainability objectives, while expanding trade and commercial relations through joint initiatives. Over the years, the European Union has implemented various initiatives with leading Indian partners related to sustainability, including in the areas of circular economy, sustainable cities and mobility, and energy.

Motivated by these experience, the Heads of both Governments raised the level of ambition on collaboration through the EU-India Trade and Technology Council established in 2022. This initiative aims to facilitate trade and technology cooperation for achieving long-term sustainability outcomes through technology sharing, innovation promotion, and sustainable business. The EU-India TTC focuses on three areas of common interest: (i) Digital governance and connectivity; (ii) Green and clean energy; and (iii) Trade, investments and resilient value chains.

All the three areas of the EU-India TTC will entail collaboration between relevant EU and Indian stakeholders including public agencies (Ministries), businesses, scientific and technological institutions, academia and civil society. Further, the implementation of the council’s work programme is expected to create an enabling environment for Indian and EU stakeholders to explore and strengthen partnerships within the overall TTC framework. Such collaborative initiatives should track and report on contribution towards specific SDGs (and SDG targets).

The upcoming Federation of European Businesses in India (FEBI) should offer opportunities for relevant businesses, industry, public and civil society stakeholders to periodically convene and dialogue on these issues, especially in specific sectors and supply/ value chains of common interest.

3.2 Pointers for Effective Stakeholder Collaboration

The Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) and the Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan (EU Delegation) co-hosted a series of workshops (four) in Kolkata, Guwahati, Pune and Bangalore – in partnership with local (host) organisations over the course of May-September 2023.



Based on CRB's experience and insights received from EU and Indian stakeholders in these four events, the following ten points emerge as critical design features for delivering effective collaborative sustainability initiatives, as envisaged under the EU-India TTC 2022:

Leverage existing (positive) experiences: Lessons from previous/ongoing collaboration initiatives linked to specific SDG targets, should be studied, shared and leveraged.

Partnership with State Government: Local actors and stakeholders should be encouraged to support State Government in collecting/analysing SDGs related data.

Shared Vision and Goal: stakeholders are mobilised around a common goal.

Value of local/community Knowledge (Inclusivity): Embrace local/community knowledge especially in pursuing specific SDG targets. This is critical for inclusive and sustainable development, and should be considered in design and implementation of planned activities.

Local capacity and ownership: local ownership of planned initiative can be achieved only by investing in building local capacity.

Gender mainstreamed: Mainstreaming gender is crucial to attaining inclusive development. Challenges faced by women and opportunities must be taken into consideration while designing and delivering programmes and policies.

Build Trust and Confidence: Breakdown of trust and confidence is commonly encountered, and should be avoided (by collaborating) parties.

Resilience and Future-readiness: The aim should be to ensure future readiness especially of vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Quality Over Speed: While achieving SDGs it is important that the focus remains on the quality of output and outcome or impact rather than merely the speed of achieving it. Actors will have to be agile and flexible and not constrained by rigid processes and systems.

Power of Digitalisation: A comprehensive understanding of digitalisation from an institutionalised perspective is necessary, rather than interpreting it as a process to convert physical entities into the digital form.

