



COVID-19 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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The unprecedented crisis like COVID-19 which soon converted itself into a pandemic has been seen as a roadblock by many. COVID-19 has halted the progress of individuals and has made many countries revisit their health policies and bring about wanted changes. One such global goal adopted by all United Nations member States in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has also been impacted. COVID-19 has infected more than a 10 million people across the globe. It has greatly affected each of the goals of SDG 2030 - direct and indirect. The SDGs in a sense were the cornerstone of global governance, and governance at all levels even at the most micro-level of an institutional governance set-up.¹

The Sustainable Development Goals were born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. It was adopted as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The objective was to produce a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world. The SDGs are integrated that is, they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.²

The world is going through an unpleasant time with various restrictions on work and social interaction, COVID-19 has demanded a modification in the way of life of people across the globe, which may be the new normal. These restrictions have altered the progress of countries in achieving their SDG goals and targets. The year 2020 was supposed to be the Decade of Action. With just 10 years to go, plans were made to deliver the 2030 promise by mobilising more governments, civil society, businesses and calling on people to make the global goals their own.³ Around 51 countries had signed up to conduct the Voluntary National Review in 2020, which includes India. Voluntary National Reviews is a process through

which countries assess and present progress made in achieving the global goals and pledge to leave no one behind.⁴

The current health crisis has revealed the risks and vulnerabilities, both in humanitarian and social, economic and environmental terms.⁵ The pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in the global system. It has shown how the prevalence of poverty, weak health systems, subpar education, and a lack of global cooperation exacerbate a health crisis.³

The pandemic of COVID-19 has not just come in the way but also calls for rethinking the timeline. COVID-19 has affected the SDGs greatly across the globe, the very many targets laid out seem like they are far from being achieved. The pandemic has affected India and has become a setback in achieving the SDG goals and targets well within time. In 2019, SDG Global index rank and score for India was 115 and 61.1 respectively.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a situation of lockdown in the country which greatly hit the economic growth. The SDG-1 which sets a goal of 'no poverty' might have been affected due to this. People have lost their jobs especially those who were already below the poverty line. A UNU study which took into account three scenarios of per-capita income or consumption contractions, mentioned that the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic could increase global poverty by as much as half a billion people or 8% of the total human population. The concentration of the potentially new poor would occur in the poorest regions of the world, notably in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which would account for 80-85 per cent of the total poor.⁷ Many have lost their jobs, this has in turn led to individuals and their families remaining hungry which is the SDG-2. The Government of India has launched the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and few other schemes focuses on these two aspects. The SDG-3 which focuses on good health and well being, the lockdown in true sense was to maintain the good



health and well being of all its citizens but, it did put a strain on the others health care services being availed by the people, the mental health of many were greatly affected. Telemedicine, e-health and counselling initiatives of the Government were focusing on reducing the gaps if any in providing the care to the individuals. The SDG-4 which is quality education, the COVID-19 revolutionized the education system in India once again, online education took the lead. The problem with this was in the remote areas where, the child's family didn't have a mobile phone or internet to continue education.

The SDG-5 is about gender equality, there are some reports which mention domestic violence increased during the lockdown period. The SDG-6 is about the clean water and sanitation. The provision of clean water is essential in the COVID-19 situation as one of the messages for prevention was frequent hand washing with soap and water. The availability of clean water and less than 50 per cent of the population in India has access to safely managed drinking water makes one want to ponder how many were actually able to use this as a preventive measure. The SDG-13 which is about climate action, this is the goal which has greatly benefited during the COVID-19 lockdown situation; the air quality of many cities in India had greatly improved.

CONCLUSION

The SDGs are inter-dependent goals, the success of one will amplify the improvement in others; the downfall of one will affect the other. This COVID-19 situation has taught mankind many important life lessons and also has forced the improvement of health care infrastructure in many parts of the world. In the context of post-crisis reconstruction, more than ever, the implementation of this universal agenda is a necessity, particularly to reduce vulnerabilities to crises by optimising the interactions between the SDGs.

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