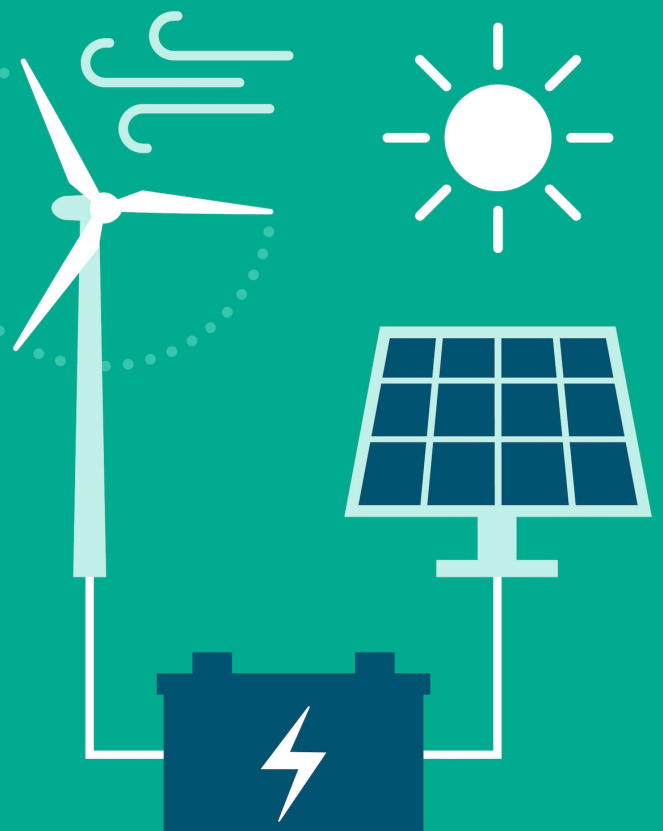
The background is a vertical collage of four horizontal panels. The top panel shows a sun, a circular arrow, and a wind turbine. The second panel shows a farm with a house, a field, and a wind turbine. The third panel shows silhouettes of a cow, a chicken, and a pig. The bottom panel shows two hands shaking. The right side of the page is a solid teal color with white text.

The ORF SDGs Young Influencers Programme 2.0: Report from Three Workshops

Shoba Suri, Nimisha Chadha, and
Oommen C Kurian



Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)^a as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. These became effective on 1 January 2016, and by ratifying them, nations committed to enhance their efforts against inequality, poverty, and climate change over the succeeding 15 years.

The SDGs, also called Global Goals, extend beyond eradicating poverty. They offer a comprehensive framework for economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. This approach is captured in the concept of “irreconcilable trinity,” which highlights the need to find a balance between equity, efficiency, and sustainability. Recognising the interconnectedness of global challenges, the SDGs emphasise solutions that address aspects of economic, social, and environmental challenges simultaneously. This multifaceted perspective of navigating complex interdependencies and trade-offs is central to the SDGs.

Attribution: Shoba Suri, Nimisha Chadha and Oommen C Kurian, *The ORF SDGs Young Influencers Programme 2.0: Report from Three Workshops*, October 2024, Observer Research Foundation.

a While nations are not legally obligated to achieve the SDGs, they are expected to take charge and design national frameworks to accomplish the 17 goals to improve overall welfare of their people. Following up, monitoring, and evaluation is primarily the responsibility of the individual countries that have ratified the goals. The importance of timely, high-quality data at the regional level is key to analyse the progress made and shift focus to support the global goals. In total, the 17 goals comprise 169 targets and 231 unique indicators in the SDG framework, 92 of which are connected to the environment. See: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Youth and Their Role in Sustainable Development

There are 1.8 billion young people aged between 10-24 worldwide, with 90 percent of them living in developing nations.¹ An estimated 1.9 billion young people are expected to turn 15 between 2015 and 2030.² This demographic dividend, especially in countries like India, is expected to last until around 2055-56 and could drive the 2030 Agenda. India's potential for human-capital-induced development relies on its youth, who can contribute to their communities by advancing social justice, spurring political change, and finding innovative solutions to enhance community resilience. Their role as change agents is pivotal in promoting the SDGs.³

Youth empowerment can catalyse solutions to global challenges related to the SDGs. Integrating SDGs in their educational curriculum, as well as providing platforms for exploration and addressing SDG-related issues, can cultivate a generation of well-informed and motivated change-makers. Additionally, it is necessary to create inclusive and supportive environments that encourage intergenerational dialogue while recognising young people's role in the policy and development spheres.

To translate the 2030 Agenda into regional, national, and municipal policies, youth-led groups need support and increased agency. Young people aspire to contribute and should have avenues to engage in SDG-related programmes. They should be encouraged to seek solutions to SDG challenges through activities, such as study tours, hackathons, learning and teaching programmes, and student leadership programmes. Events, campaigns, and projects should be used to mobilise them to tackle the SDGs.

The Youth and the SDG 2030 Agenda

The following points outline the strengths of the youth that make them suitable as drivers of sustainable development.

1. **Critical thinkers:** Growing up involves questioning the world and making sense of one's personal experiences. Young people have the capacity to recognise and challenge power hierarchies and impediments to transformation and highlight inconsistencies and prejudices that impede progress.
2. **Change-makers:** Young people can inspire their peers through their actions. Indeed, there are indications that increased connectivity and access to social media have contributed to a global surge in youth activism.
3. **Pioneers:** Young people typically have first-hand knowledge of, and insights on important issues. They can provide fresh perspectives on challenges facing their community, country, and the world.
4. **Communicators:** The SDG goals are a historic and comprehensive agreement aimed at improving human well-being and the environment by 2030. Young people can share the Development Agenda with their communities and peers, locally, nationally, and internationally.
5. **Leaders:** Young people in India, who constitute more than half the population, can drive change when empowered with knowledge of their rights and taught leadership skills. Youth-led networks and organisations should be encouraged as they help young people, particularly those from marginalised communities, develop civic leadership abilities.

Rationale and Objectives of ORF's Programme

To harness the potential of the younger generations, ORF initiated an SDGs outreach programme, called the ORF SDGs Young Influencers Programme, in 2023. It consisted of two workshops engaging high school students on SDGs-related policy issues while offering insights into the workings of a think tank. After a successful first year, ORF expanded the initiative, hosting three more schools.

The objective was to stimulate students' interest in the SDGs and show how they can actively contribute to achieving them. It was customised to explain the goals, discuss their implementation within the community, and provide exposure to ORF's research work. A crucial takeaway for the students was the opportunity to gain insights into the policy-related work of a think tank.

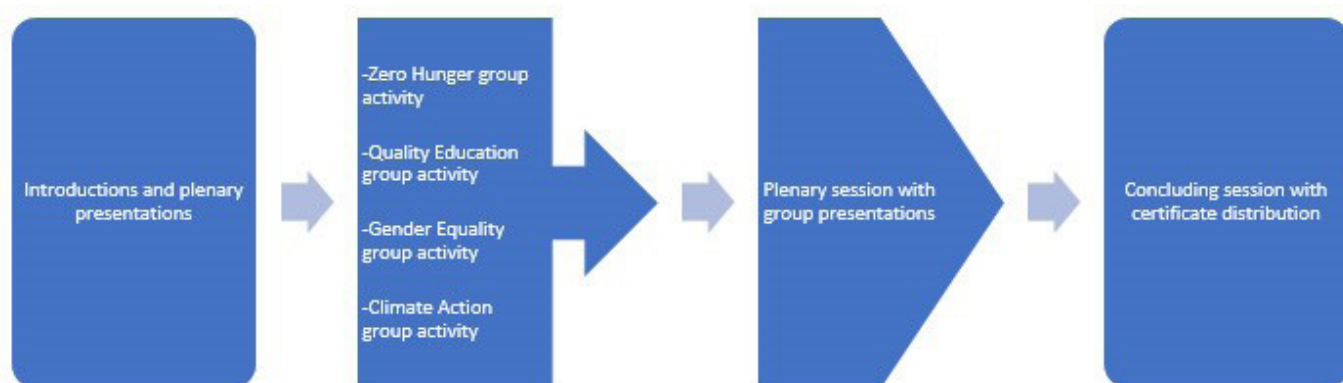
Workshop Design

The workshops were held at the ORF headquarters in New Delhi, India. Each four-hour long workshop was conducted for each of the three schools, with around 35 students from grades 8-12, along with two senior teachers. The workshop began with an introductory session, followed by a presentation by ORF faculty, customised for students. The presentation covered the 17 SDGs, their connection to the predecessor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and their interlinkages, as well as recent developments and national programmes that seek to address each goal. Students were then divided into four groups, each selecting one of the following SDGs to discuss and propose solutions for:

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)
- SDG 4 (Quality Education)
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
- SDG 13 (Climate Action)

All the groups were given 90 minutes to brainstorm their chosen SDGs, discuss current challenges, design a plan to achieve the goals, and illustrate their ideas in a visual presentation. Each group received a brief on their SDG including a progress report, current policy gaps, relevant statistics, and stimulating prompts. After the group work, a representative from each group made a presentation of their actionable points and key recommendations.

Figure 1: Workshop Design

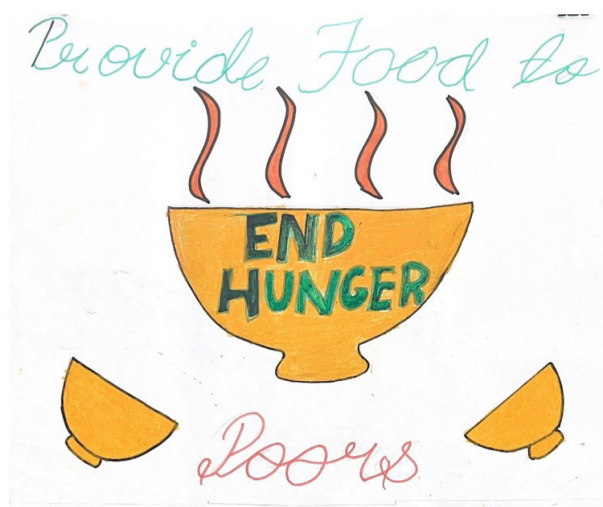


Highlights from the Workshops

Workshop 1

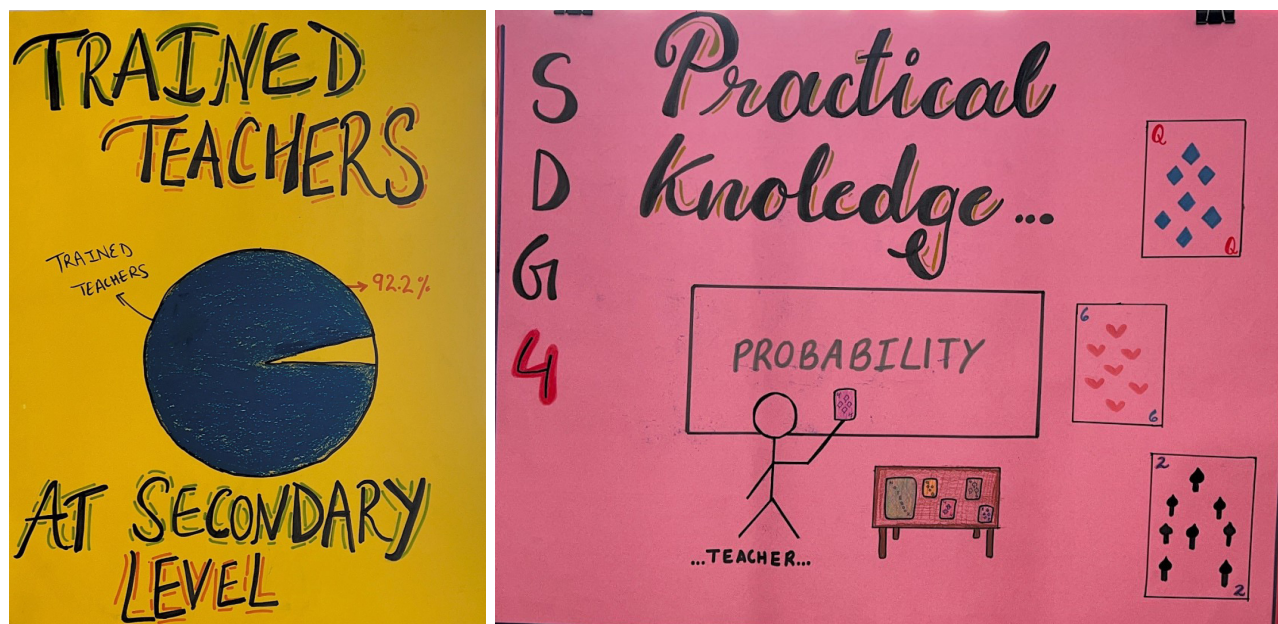
SD Public School, Patel Nagar, Delhi
7 May 2024

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)



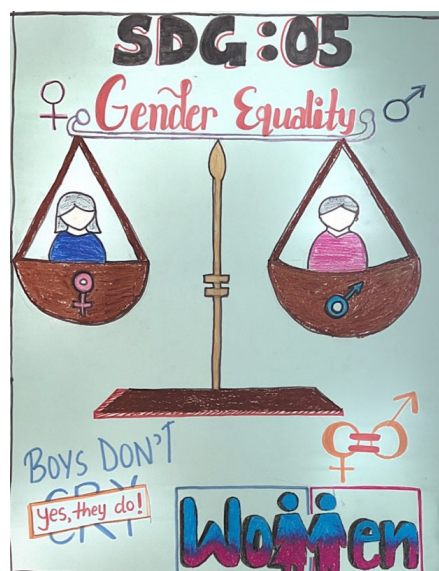
The students demonstrated a strong understanding of the topic, emphasising the complexities of achieving zero hunger, particularly with the growing food demands of increasing populations. Their proposed solutions included improved food management to reduce wastage, support for poor and malnourished mothers and children, and assistance for key stakeholders such as farmers. They also stressed raising consumer awareness and promoting nutritious food in schools. The presentation reflected an understanding of the various factors impacting food security and the need for a multifaceted approach to achieve zero hunger.

SDG 4 (Quality Education)



The group showed keen interest while discussing the importance of quality education and equity in access. The students shared their perspective and proposed solutions they hoped to see implemented. Their suggestions were based on statistical data on relevant indicators. They emphasised extending economic support to all students who may need it, not just the ones who were academically or otherwise gifted and advocated for incorporating practical knowledge and technology to enhance educational experiences. Furthermore, they reflected on the necessity to increase the desirability of teaching roles in the country.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)



This group, comprising girls, began their presentation by highlighting key data points to showcase workplace inequality, spousal violence, and female infanticide along with associated mental health challenges. Their passion was evident in their use of original poetry. The students emphasised that equality starts at the grassroots, such as in homes and schools, beginning with breaking societal stereotypes around girls and women. They also discussed the importance of equal opportunity, equal wages, and safe, supportive work environment. Overall, the group displayed passion and a clear understanding of the topic, discussing its multiple facets in detail.

SDG 13 (Climate Action)

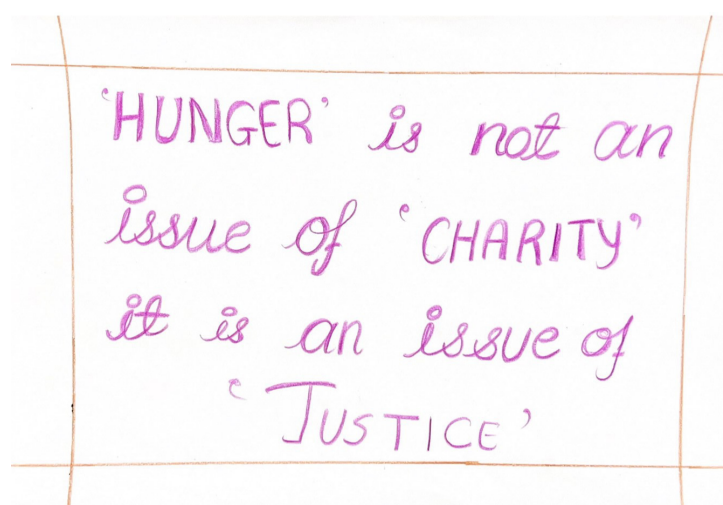


The students shared their personal experiences with extreme weather conditions, called for urgent action to reduce pollutants like plastic and fossil fuels, and advocated for clean and renewable energy sources. They also recognised the importance of laws, strict governance, and incentives in ensuring effective action, along with the need for increased awareness. The discussion reflected the students' recognition of the urgency and complexity of addressing climate change.

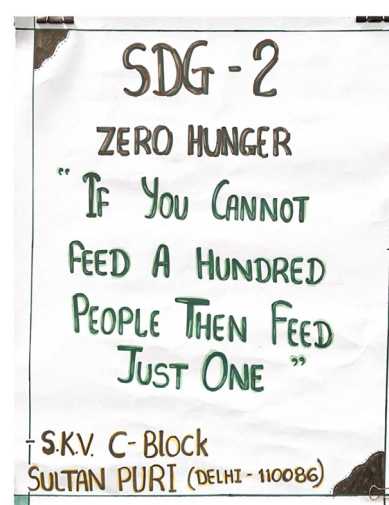
Workshop 2

Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Sultanpuri, Delhi
12 July 2024

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)



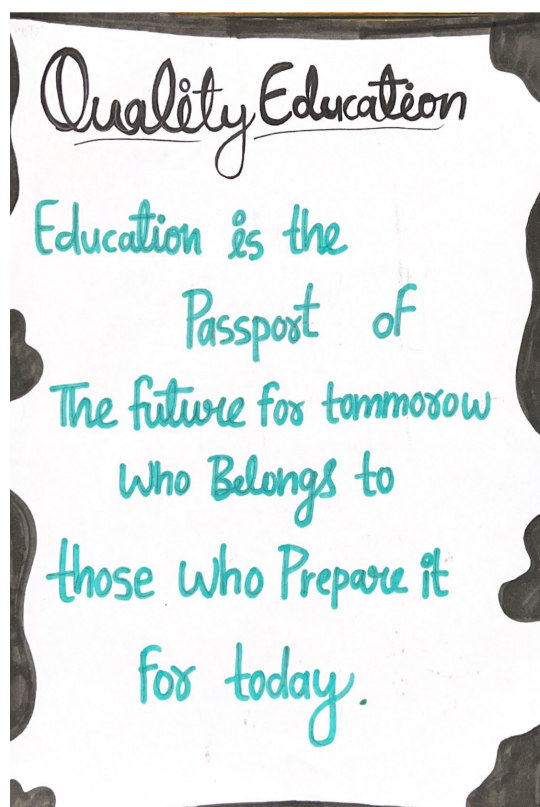
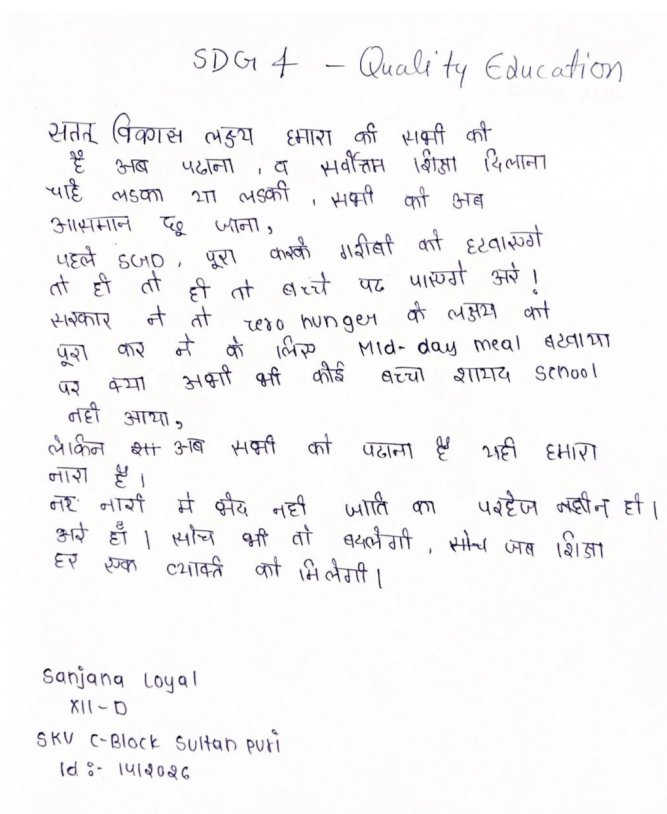
'HUNGER' is not an
issue of 'CHARITY'
it is an issue of
'JUSTICE'



SDG-2
ZERO HUNGER
"IF YOU CANNOT
FEED A HUNDRED
PEOPLE THEN FEED
JUST ONE"
S.K.V. C-Block
SULTAN PURI (DELHI-110086)

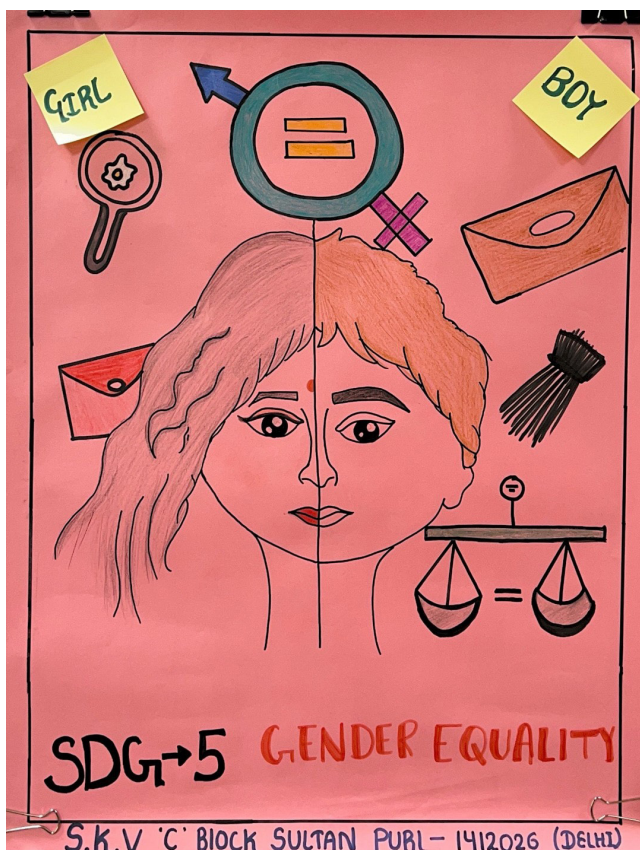
The group began by presenting statistics, which highlighted the causes of persisting global hunger including food inflation, lifestyle changes, wars, and political conflicts. They reflected on 'zero hunger' being crucial for improving human productivity, achieving other SDGs and overall development. Proposed solutions included taking responsibility as global citizens, cultivating kitchen gardens, reducing wastage, and philanthropy. The group emphasised the value of continued participation in platforms such as the ORF SDGs Young Influencers Programme to promote productive dialogue and encourage students to apply their learnings and integrate sustainable practices into their daily lives.

SDG 4 (Quality Education)



Four presenters from the group led a discussion on quality education, addressing mental, social, physical and cognitive development, and the importance of equity in attaining them. They pointed out that gender-based data on education did not include transgender individuals, highlighting broader equity concerns. They also discussed the impact of COVID-19 on education and the importance of incorporating technology and making accommodations for absentees and dropouts in regard to the provision of mid-day meals. Finally, they highlighted the importance of mental health support to help students manage the pressures of schooling. Overall, the group showed a deep understanding of the role of quality education in cognitive development and in combatting poverty.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)



हर बँटी पढना -चाहती हूँ,
हर बँटी बढना -चाहती हूँ।
हर बँटी पढना -चाहती हूँ,
हर बँटी बढना -चाहती हूँ।

जब - जब बँटी होने की घरो में खुशियाँ लाती हूँ,
न जाने क्यों लोगों के चेहरे पर मुस्कान नहीं आ पाती हूँ।
हर काम में आगे बढ़ती हूँ,
हर काम में लगन लगाती हूँ,
न जाने क्यों फिर भी वो बँटी से कम ही जाती हूँ।
हर बँटी पढना -चाहती हूँ,
हर बँटी बढना -चाहती हूँ।

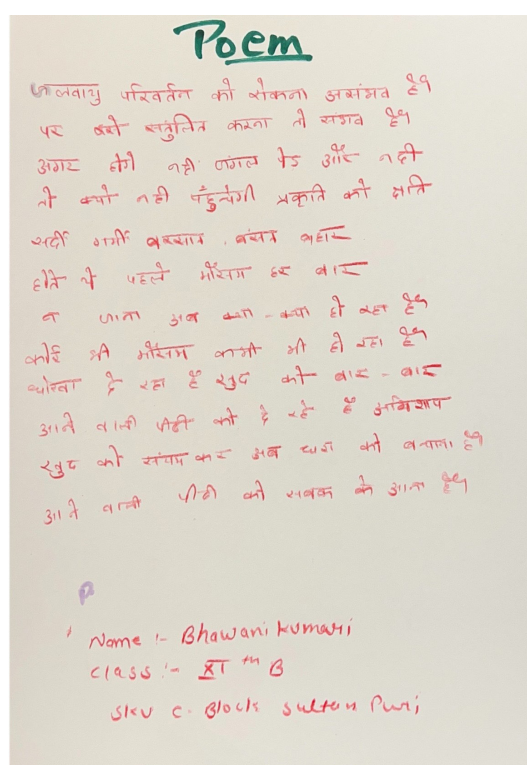
मों-वाम के बुराये का श्रम भी बन जाती हूँ।
हर घर में खुशियाँ लाती हूँ,
हर मकान को घर बनाती हूँ।
हर काम में आगे बढ़ती हूँ,
हर काम में लगन लगाती हूँ।

पर महान हूँ यह समाज हमारा हर दिन थकी बात बताता हूँ।
हर गली में हर चौराहे पर बँटी बचाइयो फैलना हूँ।
फिर भी जब बँटी - - - - - आती हूँ,
न जाने क्यों लोगों - - - - - आ पाती हूँ।

Stu Name :- Sneha, Geeta, Janvi, Murti, Anshu,

The group discussed the need for equal rights and opportunities, socially and economically, not only for women but also transgender individuals. Their concerns included unequal distribution of domestic work, unequal pay, child marriage, unsafe workplaces, female infanticide, and sexual harassment. They said that all students should “be the change they wish to see in the world,” and sang a heartfelt song for their audience. They highlighted that achieving the SDGs by 2030 would be nearly impossible if half of the global population is not given the opportunity to contribute.

SDG 13 (Climate Action)

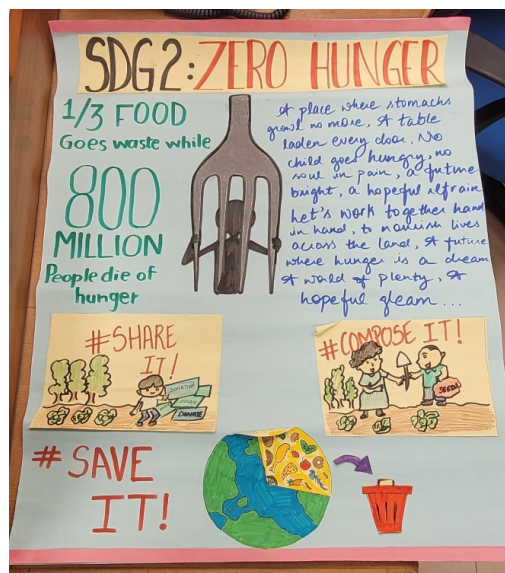


A group of four presenters introduced the topic by identifying the primary sources of pollution and linking these concerns to India and Delhi. They acknowledged the complexities of addressing climate concerns and the adverse impacts of stringent measures on industries employing low-income workers, while still aiming to reduce pollution and deforestation. Their solutions included both individual and national level actions, such as using public transportation, creating environmental clubs in schools, reducing plastic use, implementing regulations against stubble burning, and encouraging sustainable practices to mitigate climate change. They wrote a poem that discussed their observations and first-hand experiences with the impacts of climate change.

Workshop 3

G.D. Goenka Public School, Sec-9 Rohini, Delhi
22 August 2024

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)



“A place where stomachs growl no more

A table laden at every door

No Child goes hungry, no soul in pain

A future bright, a hopeful refrain

Let us work together hand in hand

To nourish lives across the land

A future where hunger is a dream

A world of plenty, a hopeful gleam”

The group rapporteurs emphasised on Zero Hunger being a global concern that affects 800 million people worldwide. Hunger can result from factors such as crop failure, floods, inflation and unemployment, and food wastage. It leads to malnutrition in children, which impedes overall growth. While government programmes like Mid-Day Meals aim to overcome hunger, the group stressed that young innovators and change-makers must find more lasting solutions. Their proposal is three-pronged: ‘Save It, Share It, and Compost It’.

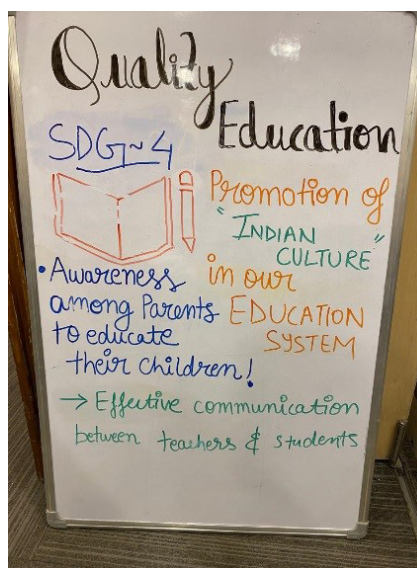
Save It: This involves proper food storage techniques to extend the shelf life, prevent wastage of food, and portion control. Businesses and individuals can minimise their leftovers.

Share It: This includes donating excess food to shelters, food banks, and other community organisations. They also proposed food-sharing community initiatives to minimise food waste.

Compost It: This focuses on recycling organic waste into fertilisers and compost to improve soil health and reduce water usage. The group suggested supporting educational programmes on composting techniques to raise awareness about effective food recycling. The group also wrote an original poem to express their sentiments.

SDG 4 (Quality Education)

Children here and there, a will to study interrupted by many
 Education, which is crucial, a problem that hides potential
 Children having a will, are set to stay still
 Issues of family, inequality and disparity, Should be addressed with proper clarity
 In a world full of hopes, wide and vast
 Help to educate, as it will ever last.

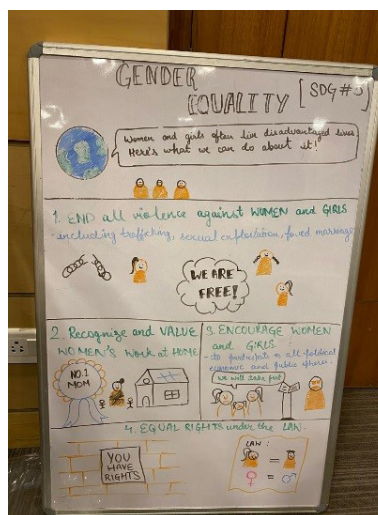


The group started their presentation by reciting a Sanskrit shloka: ‘अलसस्य कुतो विद्या, अविद्यस्य कुतः धनम्। अधनस्य कुतो मित्रम्, अमित्रस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥’—broadly meaning: “those who are lazy cannot gain knowledge, those who do not have knowledge cannot earn money, those who are poor do not have friends and without friends one cannot achieve happiness.”

The group emphasised the importance of education in building a better future and argued for providing quality education to all. Tools can include the promotion of Indian culture in education to counterbalance the legacy of colonialism, like teaching and learning Sanskrit and spiritual texts like the Vedas and Upanishads to instil moral value systems. Raising awareness among parents about the significance of education among young minds is important, as parental attitudes often influence children. Governments should initiate steps and send volunteers to rural and remote areas for awareness of the advantages of education. Lastly, they stressed the importance of effective communication between students and teachers to create a supportive environment and improve school attendance. They ended their presentation by quoting Nelson Mandela’s words: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”⁴

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

Girls and boys, side by side
 Equal dreams we hold with pride
 No more limits, no more walls
 Fair chances given to us all
 Every voice deserves a say
 Let’s build a brighter world today
 Gender fair and truly free
 That’s the way it is meant to be



The students observed that gender bias undermines the social fabric and devalues everyone. Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also an economic and social game-changer. Empowered women contribute to thriving communities and growing economies. Recognising that gender differences are ingrained at a young age, the students suggested discouraging gender segregation in schools. Additionally, they understood the importance of representation of all genders in all aspects, ranging from pictography in textbooks to representation in male-dominated leadership roles, inspired by their school president, Draupadi Murmu. They also focused on girls' safety while increasing employment for women, such as through the deployment of more pink taxis reserved for women. Lastly, they believed that equality must start at the grassroots with equal distribution of household responsibilities, and proposed establishing committees to ensure implementation of gender equality laws.

SDG 13 (Climate Action)

Under the vast and open sky
 The earth calls out, her voice a sigh
 Her forests burn, her rivers plead
 A world in pain, its clean indeed
 Now is the time, the signs we see
 To stand for all that's wild and free
 So let us rise, with hope alight
 To chase away endless nights
 For climate's sake, we must unite
 To save our earth, to make it right



The group named air pollution as a critical concern, resulting in unpredictable seasonal changes, shifts in atmospheric temperatures, and adverse impacts on ecosystems. Battling air pollution should be prioritised rather than channelling investments to non-essential infrastructure like shopping centres. They recommended more investments in green parks and nature conservation. Where infrastructure is necessary, they suggested focusing on sustainable projects, which include the use of biophilic architecture and biogas plants. They also proposed that universities and schools incorporate courses and subjects on reducing, reusing, and recycling waste. Lastly, they suggested that policy support be heightened to promote the manufacture and use of electrical vehicles, and that big corporations should invest in cost-effective, eco-friendly solutions to combat pollution.

Discussion

The youth can be agents of change for social and economic growth. The Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs by 2030 calls for “accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world’s biggest challenges — ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap.”⁵ This calls for global action, local action, and individual action. India could potentially benefit from its so-called demographic dividend by harnessing its young population through quality education, skills training, and employment creation.⁶ With a median age of 28.4 years, 26 percent of the population under 14, and a predicted 1.04 billion working people by 2030, India has an edge to unleash the potential of the youth.⁷ Investing in quality education can bring a 9-percent annual return for every extra year of schooling.⁸ According to the 2023 ASER report, only 20 percent of females, compared to 44 percent of males, have their own smartphones.⁹ Table 1 shows the percentage of youth using smartphones, indicating lower rates for females.

Table 1: Use of Social Media by Youth in India

	Setting an alarm	Browsing for information	Using Google maps	Finding YouTube videos	Of those who could find the video, % able to share it
Male	74.7	72.0	48.9	85.2	92.5
Female	58.0	69.7	25.3	77.9	85.8
All youth	66.4	70.9	37.1	81.6	89.3

Source: ASER 2023 Evidence Brief Digital Readiness of India’s Youth¹⁰

India ranks 129th among 146 countries on the gender gap, having closed 64.1 percent of its gender gap in 2024.¹¹ For SDG 5, India scores 49, with Odisha at 39 and Nagaland the highest at 74.¹² Investing in women’s empowerment—through education, skills development, and other initiatives—is essential to achieving both short- and long-term SDG targets related to health, nutrition, and social protection.¹³ With India experiencing what is referred to as ‘youth bulge,’ investing in youth development is critical for achieving multiple SDGs.^b

ORF’s workshops raised awareness on the SDGs, and built a platform for discussion and active engagement among peers to put forth sustainable and innovative solutions to meet the 2030 agenda.

b This includes: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Inequality), SDG 8 (Employment and Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality), SDG 11 (Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements), SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns) and SDG 13 (Climate Change) See: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, ‘Youth in India-Overview,’ 2022, https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Youth_in_India_2022/Overview.pdf

The Way Forward

Learning from the pilot phase, ORF adopted an inclusive, comprehensive approach for these three workshops that accounted for the varied backgrounds and capabilities of students, aiming for a more equitable and effective educational experience. The sessions were redesigned to ensure that all students, regardless of background, would have the opportunity to learn about and contribute to the SDGs. While most students were aware of the SDGs, they were less familiar with latest developments, current gaps, and recent policy changes.

In this context, the interactions organised by ORF helped shed light on the latest developments, providing students with more practical, hands-on understanding of the subject. The sessions were conducted in a mix of English and Hindi to improve engagement across the broader group. Going forward, ORF plans to engage a diverse set of schools, both private and public, from across Delhi NCR. A Young Influencers' SDGs Manifesto will then be published after conducting 10 such workshops. [ORF](#)

Annexure

Workshop Agenda

ORF Conference Hall, New Delhi

09:00 am to 12:30 pm

09:00 am Arrival of Students

09:30 – 09:40 Welcome & Introduction - Shoba

09:40- 10:00 Presentation on the SDGs & ORF's research footprint

10:00 - 10:20 Group Work Division – A, B, C, D followed by briefing to each group

10:20 - 11:20 Group Work Begins

11:20 - 11:50 Presentation by Group Rapporteur/s

11:50 - 12:20 Closing – Group Photo & Distribution of Certificates

12:20 - 12:30 Refreshments & Dispersal

Guidelines for Group Work

- Understand and strategise the issue
- Analyse and ideate solutions for challenges in achieving the respective SDGs
- Discussion points:
 - Identify key challenges and strategies related to the SDGs.
 - Explore innovative solutions and practices observed globally.
- Formulate actionable recommendations (2-4) (make infographics and drawings)
- One person from the group to be the Rapporteur to present the key recommendations

Prompts for the SDGs

SDG	Prompt	Recent Developments
Zero Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting Kitchen Gardens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Poshan 2.0 focuses on diet diversity, food fortification and promoting millets. It aims at developing sustainable health and well-being through wholesome local foods. Lack of access to food in conflict areas such as war zones in Ukraine. Similarly, the civil conflict in Manipur last year threatened food supplies.
Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to research, beyond grades, the social skills learned in school also impact future earnings. However, COVID heavily reduced the social interactions. What can we do now to reduce the impact of COVID on social skills? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Education Policy Draft for 2023 recommends greater flexibility in subject choices for Class 11 and 12 and doing away with streaming into Science, Commerce and Humanities. Additionally, board exams will be conducted twice a year. 2023 onwards, over 300 colleges nationwide are to incorporate 4-year undergraduate programs as opposed to 3-year programs. Schools in Nagaland and Assam have started accepting plastic bottles as school fees.
Gender Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can representation of females in positions of power help promote gender equality? What can boys in schools and other areas do to help promote gender equality? Inequality in distribution of domestic responsibilities in the household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secret communications and signals used in Canada during COVID to convey domestic violence.

SDG	Prompt	Recent Developments
Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% of electricity comes from coal in India. Are Electric Vehicles truly a green solution in India? Promoting Circular Economy Using Biophilic architecture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Supreme Court ruled that people have the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, recognised under article 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Alternate uses of stubble (instead of burning it) - Bio Gas, Bio Oil, Manure

Photo Gallery

SD Public School, Patel Nagar



Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Sultanpuri



GD Goenka Public School, Sec-9, Rohini, New Delhi



Endnotes

- 1 Shoba Suri, Oommen C. Kurian and Arundhatie Biswas Kundal, *The ORF SDGs Young Influencers Programme: Insights from the Pilot*, February 2024, Observer Research Foundation, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-orf-sdgs-young-influencers-programme-insights-from-the-pilot>
- 2 UNDP at the ECOSOC Youth Forum, April 20, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/undp-un-ecosoc-youthforum#:~:text=April%2020%2C%202023&text=New%20York%2C%2020%20March%20%2D%20The,population%20will%20reach%201.9%20billion.>
- 3 Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 'National Youth Policy,' 2023, <https://yas.gov.in/sites/default/files/DRAFT%20NATIONAL%20YOUTH%20POLICY%2025july23.pdf>
- 4 Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00007046>
- 5 UN Decade of Action to Deliver the Global Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/#:~:text=The%20Decade%20of%20Action%20calls,and%20closing%20the%20finance%20gap.>
- 6 UNFPA India, 'Reaping India's Demographic Dividend,' January 13, 2022, <https://india.unfpa.org/en/news/reaping-indias-demographic-dividend#:~:text=Home.%20News.%20Reaping%20India's%20demographic%20dividend.>
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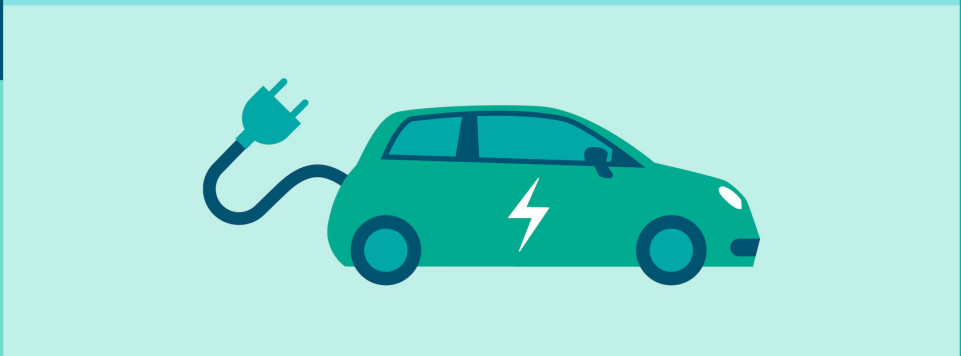
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