# The Sustainable Development Agenda: Evaluating the G20 as a Stage for National and Collective Goals

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**ABSTRACT** This brief examines the contribution of the G20 in facilitating the implementation of its member countries' sustainable development goals. It reviews the G20 priorities over the years, its informal governance mechanisms, and the progress made so far by the member countries in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The brief finds that even as the G20 has aligned its priorities and initiatives with the SDGs, the responsibility for fulfilling these goals lie with the national governments. All G20 countries appear to be falling behind the SDG targets, and India ranks the lowest.

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# INTRODUCTION

The founding of the G20 was a breakthrough in international cooperation: it was one of the first multilateral forums to give both emerging market economies and developed countries an equal footing.[a] This is reflected in the G20 agenda, which has evolved over the years to include issues of pertinence to both developed and emerging economies. Sustainable development is one such priority issue for the G20 members.

Over the last few years, countries across the globe have witnessed advances in various dimensions of material well-being. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in real terms, has more than doubled in low- and middle-income countries since 1990, life expectancy has increased from 63.2 years to 68.6 years in developing countries, and in some cases, the gap in gender parity in primary education has narrowed.[1] At the same time, however, economic progress has come with negative social and environmental outcomes. The global population is touching 7.2 billion, with around 75 million people getting added every year,[2] and a huge chunk of the world continue to live in poverty and deprivation.

The concept of "sustainable development" is hinged on three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars: economic development, social development, and environmental protection. It calls on human societies to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own.[3] The idea dates back to 1972, when the Club of Rome, a think tank composed of people from the academia, civil society, diplomacy, and industry came out with a report, *The Limits to Growth*. They argued that the trajectory and mechanisms of the economic growth at that time could no longer continue indefinitely because of the limited availability of natural resources. The principle gained greater salience at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in the same year, which arrived at the consensus that it was possible to achieve economic growth and industrialisation without sacrificing the environment.[4]

Since then, there have been a series of multilateral dialogues and debates on tackling the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the global community. One of the most significant breakthroughs came with the adoption by the UN of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000; the targets were set for 2015. In 2015, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda remains the most comprehensive blueprint of sustainable development for the global community. While the main objective of the SDGs was to support the poorest of the world's nations, today they offer a tool for all countries to do better on issues of common importance. As a forum of the largest economies of the world, the G20 bears a unique responsibility to ensure that critical global systems respond to

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a    The G20 was founded in 1999. Members include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

the environmental, social and economic challenges that continue to hamper the pursuit of sustainable development.

## THE G20 AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The initial summits of the G20 were focused on responding to the financial crisis and carving a path to economic recovery and restoring growth. The first G20 Summit, which took place in Washington in 2008, was called upon by the then president of the United States, George Bush, to discuss issues related to financial markets and the global economy.[5] The Summit also discussed issues related to global health emergencies,[6] and declared a desire to eradicate hunger and promote their security interests. Moreover, in the Summit Declaration, the G20 leaders reaffirmed the importance of the MDGs, and underlined the role of development assistance commitments made by developed countries and emerging markets in achieving these. They also recognised other critical challenges such as energy security and climate change, food security, the rule of law, terrorism, poverty, and disease.

In the subsequent summits in London (2009), Pittsburgh (2009) and Toronto (2010), the G20 members repeatedly affirmed their commitments to achieve the MDGs, including the country-specific commitments with respect to development assistance, aid-for-trade and debt relief, among others.[7] The *Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth* launched at

the Pittsburgh Summit—and carried forward under the Toronto Summit—renewed the focus on strengthening support for the most vulnerable populations and extended the discussion to other developmental issues such as finance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and food security.

The first few summits discussed developmental goals, with focus on the responsibilities of developed countries towards developing countries, rather than experiences and actionable plans. This was evident from the repeated emphasis on the role of developmental assistance in achieving the MDGs.

A turning point came in 2010 under the presidency of South Korea, the first country outside the G8[b] to preside over the G20. Under South Korea's presidency, the G20 placed development issues firmly on its agenda, with the intention to work towards finding an agreement.[8] A key outcome of the 2010 Summit was the establishment of a Development Working Group (DWG) to deliberate upon the developmental issues facing the G20 members and enable partnership between the wealthier and poorer countries among them. The G20 released the *Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth*, which attempted to add value to the development commitments, particularly with respect to the MDGs.[9] It laid out six development principles: economic growth, global developmental partnership, global and regional system issues, private sector participation, complementarity, and

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b    G8 members include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia (which was later suspended), the UK, the US, and the European Union.

outcome orientation.[10] A Multi-Year Action Plan on Development with nine pillars was also released, outlining concrete actions and outcomes to be delivered over the medium term;[c] the DWG was tasked to work and monitor progress of these and report it to the Sherpas.[d]

Following this, the DWG met every year to discuss issues of importance to the G20 members and reported to the G20 and tracked progress of each country in the nine pillars. Table 1 lists the key G20 priorities under the different presidencies.

Apart from identifying the priority areas, the DWG also established a framework for administering the progress of the G20 members on achieving the objectives and commitments laid out by the working group. This was a key executive contribution of the G20 in meeting the member countries' development goals. Specifically, under Russia's presidency, the DWG began the process of ensuring assessment and accountability of the development commitments. The Working Group began its first accountability exercise, partnering with the relevant international organisations and global initiatives—it proved to be a useful tool and platform for meeting the development objectives of the G20 members.[11] It also engaged with non-G20 developing countries, the private sector, and civil society. Building on the accountability initiative of the Russian Presidency, under the Australian Presidency, the DWG established an 'Accountability Framework', which required the G20

**Table 1: Key Priorities under DWG (2011-2015)**

| Presidency | Year | Focus |
|---|---|---|
| France | 2011 | Commitments were made under each of the nine pillars. It also established the Agriculture Ministerial, with close linkages with DWG. It focused on issues such as ensuring food security and addressing food price volatility. |
| Mexico | 2012 | Food security, infrastructure development and green growth |
| Russia | 2013 | Financial inclusion, human resource development, infrastructure, and food security |
| Australia | 2014 | Financial inclusion, domestic resource mobilisation, and investments in infrastructure |
| Turkey | 2015 | Inclusiveness, Implementation and Investments; DWG focused on representing the priorities of developing and least developed countries |

*Source: Compiled from the reports of Development Working Group for various years.*

c    These pillars were: infrastructure, trade, private investment and job creation, financial inclusion, food security, human resource development, growth with resilience, domestic resource mobilisation, and knowledge sharing. This outline was the first tangible contribution of the G20 towards the development goals.

d    Since the G20 does not have a permanent secretariat, the G20 Sherpa, represents the Leader in the Chair.

members to prepare a comprehensive accountability report every three years, as well as an annual progress report.[12] Considering that the G20 priorities varied with each presidency, the framework also has the provision for setting up an Accountability Steering Committee to support the G20 presidency in implementing the DWG accountability framework. Thus, apart from setting goals, the G20 also established an institutional mechanism for tracking the progress of the G20 members with respect to the commitments made under the DWG.

In 2015, the United Nations member states agreed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.[e] It became one of the core agenda items for the DWG thereafter. Indeed, the final communique of Turkey's presidency in 2015 highlighted the importance of the SDGs. During China's presidency in 2016, the G20 members reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of the Agenda, through three key dimensions: promotion of strong, sustainable and balance growth; protection of the planet from degradation; and furthering cooperation with low-income and developing countries. The G20 members agreed on an Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and issued the *High-Level Principles on the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Agenda* to guide the member countries.[13] This entailed working across the different G20 working groups such as those on agriculture and climate sustainability, in order to contribute to the sustainable development agenda and by collective action through the accountability process, as established under Australia's presidency. It also required that the G20 members individually report on the implementation progress in the context of the UN's follow-up and review process. In other words, to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the G20 members adopted both a collective and national action approach.

In doing so, the DWG identified common concerns across the G20 members and framed collective actions around certain Sustainable Development Sectors (SDS). These sectors were then mapped against the goals laid out under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. (See Table 2). Select G20 initiatives have been reported against each sector. These initiatives have been launched by the G20 under different presidencies through various Working Group (WG) and Ministerial meetings.

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e    The Agenda had 17 goals: 1) no poverty, 2) zero hunger, 3) good health and well-being, 4) quality education, 5) gender equality, 6) clean water and sanitation, 7) affordable and clean energy, 8) decent work and economic growth, 9) industry, innovation and infrastructure, 10) reduced inequalities, 11) sustainable cities and communities, 12) responsible consumption and production, 13) climate action, 14) life below water, 15) life on land, 16) peace, justice and strong institutions and 17) partnerships for the goals.

### Table 2: Mapping G20 Sustainable Development Sectors (SDS) with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

| Sectors | G20 Priority | Relevant SDG | Selected G20 Initiatives |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Infrastructure* | New investments in sustainable infrastructure | SDG 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12 | - Launched Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance Initiative |
| | Spill over impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation and combating climate change | SDG 1, 3, 8, 13 | |
| *Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition* | Sustainable agricultural practices and their impact on food security, nutrition, health, employment, environment and economic development, among others | SDG 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15 | - Set-up the Agricultural Ministerial in 2011, which facilitated discussions on agriculture and food security issues at the Ministers-level<br>- Launched Technical Platform on the Measurement and Reduction of Food Loss and Waste in 2015<br>- The G20 launched other initiatives in partnership with international organisations, such as Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), Tropical Agriculture Program, Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Geo-Monitoring Initiative, Platform for Agriculture Risk Management and International Research Initiative for Wheat Improvement, among others |
| *Human Resource Development and Employment* | Promote more, decent and quality jobs | SDG 8 | - G20 established Employment Working Group under the Turkish Presidency in 2015<br>- Adopted Multi-Year Framework for Policy Coherence and Coordination on Human Resource Development<br>- Adopted Framework on Promoting Quality Jobs, Skills Strategy, Training Strategy and the Policy Principles for Promoting Better Youth Employment<br>- In line with the SDGs, the G20 also made policy recommendations on promoting equitable and sustainable social protection and enhancing employability under the Chinese Presidency |
| | Human resource development through education and training for skill-building | SDG 4 | |
| | G20 has set its own target to reduce unemployment among youth by 15% and reduce gender gap | SDG 4, 5, 8 | |
| | Ensuring sustainable, inclusive and job-rice growth | SDG 10 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Financial Inclusion and Remittances* | Providing full and equal access to financial services for all to help reduce poverty and inequality | SDG 1, 10 | - Established the Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, a platform for G20 members |
| | Foster inclusive growth | SDG 8 | |
| | Reduce transactions cost of migrant remittances | SDG 10 | |
| *Domestic Resource Mobilisation* | Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, international cooperation on taxes and checking corruption | SDG 17 | - G20 and OECD are working together on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project and Automatic Exchange of Information |
| *Industrialisation* | G20 has focused on industrialisation in Africa and least developed countries | SDG 9 | - Under Japan's presidency, the G20 launched G20 Africa Partnership in line with the SDGs.<br>- Ongoing efforts including G20 Initiative on Supporting Industrialisation in Africa |
| *Inclusive Business* | Inclusiveness was a priority under the Turkish Presidency, with particular focus on SMEs | SDG 1, 8, 9, 10, 12, 17 | - G20 through its agenda and action plans has focused on SME engagement<br>- Business 20 (B20) Taskforces and recommendation on inclusive business for supporting G20 efforts<br>- G20 has launched Global Platform on Inclusive Business |
| *Energy* | Access to energy, clean energy and energy efficiency | SDG 7, 9, 12, 13 | - Under Russia's presidency, the G20 established an Energy Sustainability Working Group<br>- In 2014, the G20 leader endorsed Principles for Energy Collaboration<br>- Subsequently, the G20 released Action Plans on Energy Efficiency, Energy Access and Renewable Energy, among others |
| *Trade and Investments* | Role of trade and investment in economic growth | SDG 8 | - G20 established Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) under China's presidency in 2016 |

| | Contribution of trade and investments in job creation and reducing inequalities | SDG 10 | - Various issues were discussed during the meetings of the TIWG, including role of multilateral trading systems, global value chain, impact of trade and investments on job creation, etc. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Role of trade and investments in sustainable development through SME focus and global value chains, among others | SDG 17 | |
| *Anti-Corruption* | G20 2017-18 Anti-Corruption Action Plan focuses on international efforts for reducing corruption, stolen asset recovery, enhancing transparency and reducing illicit financial flows, among others. | SDG 16 | - G20 established the Anti-Corruption Working Group under the South Korean Presidency in 2010<br>- Releases Anti-Corruption Action Plan every alternate year for dedicated engagement on anti-corruption issues such as anti-bribery rules, combating money laundering, extradition and asset recovery and protecting whistle blowers, among others |
| *International Financial Architecture* | Advancing financial sector reforms, including reforms at IMF and the World Bank | SDG 10 | - The G20 Finance Track through the finance ministers' meetings has been working to create a stable and resilient global financial architecture<br>- G2o engages with global financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank |
| | Promoting financial stability in low income and developing countries | SDG 17 | |
| *Growth Strategies* | Lifting collective GDP of G20 members | SGD 1, 8, 10 | - Published the country-wise G20 growth strategy under Chinese Presidency |
| *Climate Finance, Green Finance* | Combating climate change and its impact | SGD 13 | - G20 established the Climate Sustainability Working Group under the Russian Presidency in 2013<br>- Established G20 Climate Finance Study Group (2012) and Green Finance Study Group (2016)<br>- In 2017, G20 Green Finance Study Group (GFSG) developed a set of seven options to enhance the ability of the financial system to mobilize private capital for green investment[14] |
| | | | - Issues such as marine litter, climate innovation, biodiversity, etc. have been discussed over the year, which are aligned with SDGs. |

| Innovation | Role of innovation in long-term sustainable development | SDG 8, 9 | - G20 established Digital Economy Taskforce under the Chinese Presidency<br>- G20 agreed upon the Blueprint on Innovation Growth and Innovation Action Plan<br>- Established the Science and Technology Ministerial was also established under the Chinese Presidency |
| | International cooperation on innovation, role of new industrial revolution and digital economy | SDG 17 | |
| Global Health | Recognises the role of health for socio-economic stability | SDG 1, 3, 5 | - G2o established the Health Ministerial under the German Presidency in 2017<br>- Issues such as anti-microbial resistance have been discussed under Agriculture Ministerial |

Source: Compiled from the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2016/g20-action-plan-on-2030-agenda.pdf) and other Summit Documents accessible at http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/summits/index.html

To be sure, the role and responsibility of the G20 varies across issues and initiatives. It leads, for example, initiatives such as the OECD/G20 BEPS framework, where the G20 is deeply involved in tracking progress and country-wise implementation. In other issues—for instance, trade and investment, as well as climate change, which are led by the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), respectively—the role of the G20 is limited to facilitating discussion and building consensus. There are also initiatives such as the Technical Platform for Measuring Food Loss and Waste, which were launched by the G20 and managed by international organisations.

Some of the G20 initiatives—such as the OECD BEPS framework, Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance, Technical Platform for Reducing Food Waste and Loss, and G20

Initiative on Supporting Industrialisation in Africa—are likely to contribute to economic growth, either directly or indirectly, by improving domestic practices and supporting development.

Overall, the role of the G20 is to foster cooperation between its member countries. However, in the past few years, certain G20 priorities like reducing protectionism and climate change mitigation, have become more contentious and the G20 is unable to build consensus. The G20 presidencies have shifted their focus to less contentious agendas like digital trade and promoting global value chains.[15] At the same time, in the case of the Paris Agreement, in 2017, a G-19 agreement was reached,[f] showing that the group can still keep afloat its broader agenda.[16]

The key contribution of the G20 has been to facilitate discussion and coordination

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f    Since the US backed out, in the G20 Leaders' Declaration under Germany's presidency, the G20 Leaders took note of the US' decision and reiterated the importance of the Paris Agreement.

between ministers in-charge of the issues that were later listed under the SDGs. The G20 mechanism provided a platform for its members to interact in smaller grouping, align their policies, share their experiences and learn from each other.

At the same time, the sustainable development sectors as conceived under the G20 are selective in nature and they do not represent a comprehensive coverage of the SDGs. While quantifiable targets have been outlined under certain sustainable development sectors, these are not set across the board. Moreover, since different G20 members are at different levels of development, as a collective body, they often work to find the lowest common denominator.[17] Subsequently, the progress made by individual members vary.

## TRACKING PROGRESS IN SDGs

The UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) takes the lead in the review of countries' efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. HLPFs are held every year under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which invites countries to share their experiences, strategies and lessons learnt.[18] These reviews are voluntary and country-led, and reflect each country's approach towards the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.[19] Since 2016, all G20 countries, except the United States, have presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at least once at the HLPF. (See Table 3) A few G20 countries, including India, have presented their VNR twice.

Further, in order to gauge the performance of countries on the 17 SDGs, the *Sustainable Development Report 2019* provides an SDG index by estimating country-wise SDG scores, in the range of the worst (0) and the best (100) outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates these SDG scores for all G20 countries (excluding European Union).[g] It is clear that no country is on-track to achieve the targets, as even the high-performing ones have an SDG score significantly below the maximum score of

**Table 3: Submissions of VNRs by G20 countries (2016 – 2020)**

| 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| China France Germany Korea Mexico Turkey | Argentina Brazil India Indonesia Italy Japan | Australia Canada Mexico Saudi Arabia | Indonesia* South Africa Turkey* United Kingdom | Argentina* India* Russia |

\* Presenting for the second time

*Source: Compiled from Voluntary National Review Database of the UN accessible at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/*

g    Some of the large EU members states are already included in the list as individual G20 members.

**Figure 1: SDG scores across G20 countries - 2019**
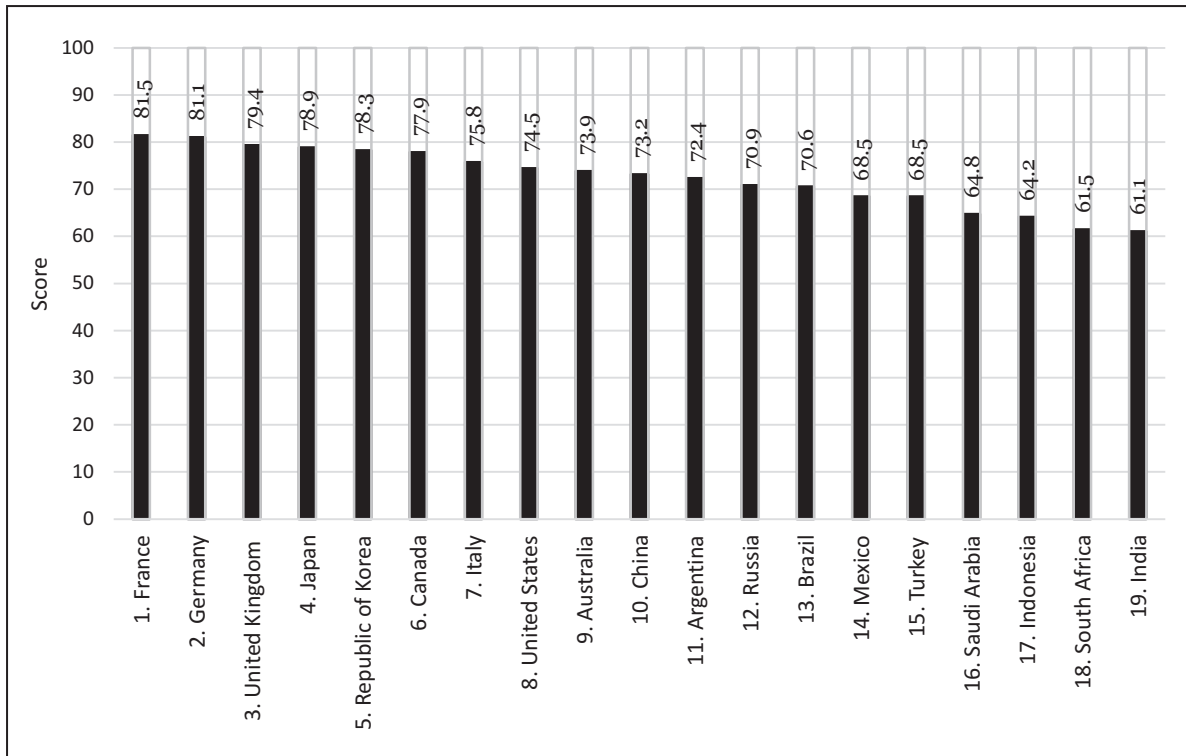
100. Unsurprisingly, low-income countries tend to have lower SDG index scores, partly owing to the fact that most of the SDGs focus to a large extent on ending poverty and on access to basic services and infrastructure. Amongst all G20 countries, India is found to have the lowest SDG score of 61.1, suggesting that the country severely lacks adequate infrastructure and instruments to manage key environmental issues.

Globally, various indicators to measure countries' progress against the 2030 SDGs have been put forward. The World Development Indicators of the World Bank include many of its official SDG indicators as well as other data that are relevant to the SDGs. The UN Global SDG Database provides access to all the data and information compiled by the countries through their respective national statistical offices to measure progress on the SDGs. The Social Progress Imperative, a global non-profit based in Washington DC, launched a Social Progress Index (SPI) in 2014 as a comprehensive measure of real quality of life independent of economic indicators. Further, each SPI has been calibrated according to the SDGs by standardising each indicator, scaled from 0 to 100, weighing to align with the SDGs.[h] The SDG calibrated SPI evaluate the same concepts as the SDGs. According to these estimates, amongst all G20 countries, Germany is the closest to reaching the target, scoring 98.21 on the SDG-calibrated SPI, followed by Japan, with a slightly lower SPI score of 96.38. Meanwhile, India is falling short by a sizeable margin, with a score of 64.65.[21]

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h    A score of 100 represents fulfilment of the 2030 SDG target.

Overall, the G20 countries suffer certain deficiencies and limitations in terms of agenda setting, implementation and monitoring, reflected by their sluggish progress towards the SDGs. These shortcomings relate to both, the national actions by individual members as well as the collective ones on issues such as climate change. The reporting by countries on SDGs as shown in Figure 1, is asystematic as there is weak accountability mechanisms in place. Further, there seems to be a problem of asymmetric information, as the developing countries often lack information on SDG management and financing. There is also a significant mismanagement in the process of directing financial resources for the achievement of SDGs. For example, although G20 countries have managed to build consensus and agreements on the issue of protecting the global commons,[i] they are still not adequately managed and protected.[22]

The COVID-19 pandemic is posing a more serious threat to the progress made so far by G20 countries and threatens to reverse them. At the same time, implementation and achievement of SDGs can go a long way in reviving economic growth and improving economic conditions globally. Since SDGs align well with the G20's agenda of "promoting strong sustainable and balanced growth", there is a great opportunity for the G20 to benchmark their domestic and collective growth strategies to the SDGs. In order to revive their respective economies, governments globally are ramping up their efforts to promote more sustainable and inclusive business practices. The SDGs can serve as a yardstick to guide the restructuring of the countries' respective strategies.

## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIA

India, home to around one-sixth of the world's total population, plays a crucial role in the success of the 2030 Agenda. The earlier discussions clearly show that India lags significantly behind the other developed and developing G20 countries in terms of progress made in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. The coordination of SDGs has been delegated to the Government of India's premier think tank, the NITI Aayog. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has been tasked with the responsibility of developing national indicators for the SDGs. NITI Aayog launched a composite SDG index in 2019, covering 16 out of the 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on SDG 17. The index tracks the progress of all states and union territories (UTs) on a set of 100 national indicators derived from the National Indicator Framework, measuring their progress on the outcomes of interventions and schemes of the Government of India.[23]

India's overall score on the index was 60, steered largely by improvements in clean water and sanitation, with a score of 88; peace, justice and strong institutions (72); and affordable and clean energy (70). Among all Indian states, Kerala and Chandigarh scored

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i    Referring to those resource domains that do not fall within the jurisdiction of any one particular country, and to which all nations have access such as ocean and climate. See https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/thinkpieces/24_thinkpiece_global_governance.pdf (accessed on 25 October 2020).

the highest on the index (70), whereas Bihar fared the worst (50). While India has made significant progress on a number of human development indicators, such as health, water and sanitation, there is plenty that remains to be done in the areas of poverty, hunger, gender, and climate change. A huge variance in the performance of states is particularly observed in case of SDG 2, 'zero hunger'. While Kerala, Goa and some parts of the Northeast have scored higher than 65 on the index, the other 22 states and UTs have scored below 50. In fact, a few Central Indian states, like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar have scored below 30, reflecting alarming levels of hunger and malnutrition.

India's worst performance across all states is in SDG 5, 'gender equality', where almost all states perform abysmally, and merely three states breach the score of 50: Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala. Indeed, with an overall sex ratio of 896 females per 1,000 males and with a female labour force participation rate of 17.5 percent, India fares poorly on gender equality. On the other hand, India is recording impressive scores on SDG 6, 'clean water and sanitation', driven mainly by initiatives such as the *Swachh Bharat Mission*; SDG 7, 'affordable and clean energy', owing to expanded access to clean cooking fuel and a wide-ranging electrification drive by the government; and on SDG 9, 'industrial innovation and infrastructure', due to a marked improvement in rural road connectivity and increased mobile-phone penetration. Improvement has also been seen in SDG 11, 'sustainable cities and communities', driven mainly by better access to housing through the *Pradhan Mantri*

*Aawas Yojana* and the adoption of door-to-door waste collection and processing. While such progress gives hope, much needs to be done, especially in certain areas, such as health, poverty, hunger, gender and climate change. Focused attention is needed in these areas as these challenges will only aggravate in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

Over the years, the G20 has aligned its own development agenda with both global priorities, and the development needs and targets of G20 members. The G20 has an existing framework to coordinate on developmental issues through interactions of specialised ministers from its members. With the adoption of the SDGs, their roles and responsibilities were aligned with the global agenda. Thus, the G20 provided a common platform for countries to undertake collective actions and learn from each other in making individual progress towards fulfilling the SDGs. In some cases, the G20 process of reviewing individual progress involves self-assessment by countries rather than a third-party enforcement mechanism. Nonetheless, as a multilateral forum, the G20 supports initiatives by international forums. Since 2016, all G20 countries, except the US, have presented their VNRs at least once at the UN's HLPF.

While some progress has been made by the G20 members in achieving the goals, both individually and through their collective actions and commitments, no country is on-track to achieve the SDG targets. Of all G20 countries, India ranks the lowest on the SDG index.

Overall, the G20 has been instrumental in launching new initiatives and tracking progress of countries in the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The role of the G20 in global policymaking was conceived differently. The purpose has been to bring countries together to cooperate on issues of common interest. In that respect, the G20 as a forum can set actionable targets, facilitate discussion and track progress. Actual implementation, however, remains in the hands of individual nations. ORF

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