

## **Sustainable Development Goals in India: A Strategic Policy for Economic Growth**

**Dr. J. Ramadevi<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. S. Sivasankar<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1\*</sup>M. Com Ph.D Lecturer in Commerce, SMT NPS Government Degree College, Chittoor.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor(c), Department of Commerce, SV University, Tirupati.

### **ABSTRACT**

In the broadest sense, sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time. In business and policy contexts, sustainability seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for the long term. The 17 SDGs and 169 targets are part of a transformative agenda - the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by 193 Member States at the UN General Assembly Summit in September 2015, and which came into effect on 1 January 2016. At the core of this global agenda for 2030 is the principle of universality: 'Leave No One Behind'. Development in all its dimensions must include all people, everywhere, and should be built through the participation of everyone, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised. This comprehensive agenda recognises that it is no longer sufficient just to focus on economic growth, but on fairer and more equal societies, and a safer and more prosperous planet.

**KEY WORDS:** Sustainable Development, Concept, Goals, India Progressing and Economic Growth.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals adopted by United Nations member states to address the world's most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. These goals aim to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development, and ensure a better future for all. The SDGs cover a wide range of areas, including poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, gender equality, climate action, and more. By 2030, countries are committed to achieving these goals through targeted actions, policies, and international cooperation. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for sustainable development, guiding efforts to create a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable world for present and future generations.

In India, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been embraced as a roadmap for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. The country has made significant progress in various areas aligned with the SDGs. Efforts to reduce poverty have resulted in a decline in the poverty rate, lifting millions of people out of poverty. India has also made strides in improving access to education, achieving near-universal primary school enrolment. Maternal and child health indicators have improved, with a reduction in maternal and under-five mortality rates. Access to clean water and sanitation facilities has increased, enhancing the quality of life for many. India's commitment to the SDGs is evident through policy initiatives, partnerships, and data-driven approaches to track progress and accelerate efforts towards achieving these goals.

Of many factors that have contributed to this success, social capital, which refers to the networks, relationships, and norms that facilitate cooperation and collective action, has played a crucial role in achieving the SDGs in India. It enabled communities to come together, share resources, and work towards common goals. Social capital facilitated the implementation of development programs, enhanced community participation, and promoted inclusive decision-making processes. It also helped in mobilising resources, fostering partnerships, and promoting social cohesion, which are essential for sustainable development. By leveraging social capital, India has and can further harness the collective

efforts of individuals, communities, and organisations to address various challenges and achieve the SDGs effectively.<sup>1</sup>

## **OBJECTIVES**

- 1.To know the concept of sustainable development
- 2.To observe the sustainable achievement goals in India

## **THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ was formulated in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, popularly known as the Brundtland Commission. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1983. In the eighties of the 20th century, world leaders became acutely aware that the environment was fast deteriorating due to over exploitation of nature by human beings. In his ‘Chairman’s Foreword’ Gro Harlem Brundtland. The present decade [the eighties] has been marked by a retreat from social concerns. Scientists bring to our attention urgent and compelling problems of survival: a warming globe, threats to the Earth’s ozone layer, deserts consuming agricultural land

The report entitled Our Common Future (United Nations, 1987) makes a scathing criticism of our social and political practices which had negatively impacted on planet Earth. Some of these are as follows:

- Infant mortality is declining. Human life expectancy is increasing. But the number of hungry people in the world is increasing. (Art 5&6).
- Increase in desertification, widespread destruction of forests, acid rain, burning of fossil fuel causing global warming (Art.7).
- A major cause and effect of global environmental problems is poverty (Art.8).
- The arms race has led to a rise in global military expenditures (Art.20).

The Brundtland report concluded that there was growing realization among national governments and multilateral institutions that ‘it is impossible to separate economic developmental issues from environmental issues; many forms of development erode the environmental resources upon which they must be based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic development’ (Art.8).

The Brundtland Commission had three objectives:

- 1) to re-examine the environment and development issues and formulate a ‘realistic proposal’ to solve these issues
- 2) propose new forms and co-operation on these issues
- 3) to ‘raise the level of understanding and commitment of a wide spectrum of people, businesses, governments voluntary organizations, and institutes.

The concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ emerged from the deliberations of the Brundtland Commission. The Commission defined ‘Sustainable Development’ as to ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Art27).Among the recommendations made by the Commission are a) limit population growth) ensure food security ; c) ensure safe energy; d) control export of hazardous industrial chemicals; good city management ;(Art 40-74) e) there is the grave threat of nuclear war ; to achieve peace and security , there is need to improve relations among major powers (Art.88).<sup>2</sup>

## **INDIA PROGRESSING TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, the world is one family (Upanishads) In Values of India, they imagine a world where no one is left behind modern India. Realizing hopes resurgent full of aspirations pursuing modern India vision of collective effort and inclusive growth for all hoping economy booming millions of jobs will be added and the numbers of those living in poverty hoping will be halved. India is constantly innovating to include most citizens in its relative economic prosperity the country pioneered self-help groups that brought thousands of women into the banking system these accounts are used to support social security systems like job security, pension, insurance, etc., India desires

dignity for all citizens, comprehensive health services through national health mission, hunger is a crucial food security mission guaranteed food security system -mid-day meals, etc., women empowerment reflecting through various government programs and prioritizing their rights. India's commitment to inclusive sustainable development extends in international developments of the international solar alliance, Mangalyaan, India's mission to mars, etc. Despite all these above-mentioned programs tasks goals still the largest number of people are living below the international poverty line. India is undergoing economic growth during the demonetization period from 2013, a lot of confusion in GST, Corvid 2019 Pandemic, etc. Sustainability is a challenge and in spite of this India has shown leadership in meeting Sustainable development. India's immediate priority is to provide basic livelihood and employment opportunities through creating sustainable economic opportunities at the micro and macro levels to increase single-digit GDP to double-digit.

### **India's poor run-in sustainable development**

The past record indicates that we have been not very successful in setting relevant indicators to measure outcomes. Quality education has not successfully been defined. India's myopic definition of "safe" drinking water (with hand pumps and tube wells considered as safe as piped water supply) means that official data suggests 86% of Indians have access to safe drinking water and, as a result, we are "on track" for the MDG goal on drinking water. Failure in reducing carbon footprints and in environmental Issues like - Degrading Air Quality Index, Rampant Environmental Degradation, Loss of Biodiversity, Urbanization in the Himalayas, Loss of Resilience in Ecosystems, Lack of Waste Management, Depletion of Resources (land, air, water) Growing Water Scarcity, etc. In India Still, 18 crores are malnutrition, 51.4% of women are anaemic in reproductive age, 24.7% are underdeveloped, 34.7% are disabled under 5 years of age.

### **Indigenization practices and sustainable development goals in India**

The greatest threats to sustainable development on earth are population growth and urbanization, energy use and global warming, excessive waste generation and the subsequent pollution of soil, air, and water, transportation in cities, and limited supply of resources. Many of them are interrelated. The 3 pillars of sustainable development are Social, Environmental, Economic.

### **Social Development:**

The ability of a community to develop processes and structures which not only meet the needs of its current members but also support the ability of future generations to maintain a healthy community, quality of life, education, equal opportunities, Law and ethics, environmental law, public involvement in social development. Social workers work as change agents with individuals and institutions, community organization, policy analysis, social planning, and administration. Working according to the Indian constitution with the cultural aspects for the development of the society for the social development. Working for the rights and equality of every citizen.

### **Environmental Development**

Sustainable development aims at promoting the kind of development that minimizes environmental problems and meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. For example, before our ancestors were Planting sacred trees across the city and roads. - banyan tree peepal tree, neem tree, tamarind jackfruit tree, mango tree, etc. What did we plant on the sides of the road? - Now we plant ornament plants – Gul Mohar, copper pod, fancy flower tress, etc. There are many cultural aspects India needs to come back. The protection of the environment is an essential part of sustainable development. Without adequate environmental protection, development is undermined; without development, resources will be inadequate for needed investments and environmental protection will fail. The strong environmental policies complement and reinforce sustainable development.

## **Economic Development**

Sustainable development in India encompasses a variety of development schemes in social, cleantech (clean energy, clean water, and sustainable agriculture), and human resources segments, having caught the attention of both Central and State governments and also public and private sectors. Sustainable development aims at creating sustainable improvements in the quality of life of all people.

(ii) Increase in economic growth: Sustainable development aims at increasing economic growth through meeting basic needs i.e., raising the standard of living. The benefits of Sustainable Economic Development impact more than just those in poverty.

For example, reducing energy use and expanding public transit options leads to less air pollution, which can improve asthma and heart conditions. Efficient homes and businesses will be more comfortable and safer. Thus, economic growth will be sustainable if the stock of capital assets including land remains constant or increases over time. It may, however, be noted that future economic development and quality of life crucially depends on the natural resource base and quality of the environment i.e., the quality of land, water, and air, the Indian government must also relentlessly pursue the development of world-class indigenous technologies in multiple sectors as a native full-stack advantage for its citizens. India can more deterministically secure its digital and material interests with such a strategic moat in place, through the make in India concept.

## **Responsibility of Social workers in sustainable development**

Social workers facilitate and foster partnerships within communities and between various partners, at local, national, and international levels, to translate UN SDGs in various ways (social, economic, and ecological) and design together with new knowledge of sustainable solutions for the implementation action. There are three types of sustainability in social work: social, economic, and environmental. Social workers are familiar with social sustainability, which recognizes that individual health and well-being, nutrition, shelter, education, and cultural needs must be met.

Social Workers are often involved in teaching people about resources and how to develop particular skills such as budgeting, the caring discipline of children, effective communication, the meaning of a medical diagnosis, and the prevention of violence.<sup>3</sup>

Financial resources are a key driver to various other capital and human resources. Therefore, the availability and management of finance is one of the initial steps for achieving the post-2015 development agenda. This report is written with the aim of conducting a financial assessment for India to achieve the SDGs. The study assesses the public resources already available within various government programmes and policies. In particular, it looks at programmes and policies that are aligned with the SDGs to estimate the additional finance required and gaps for India to achieve the SDGs. With the breadth of 17 Goals and 169 Targets drafted by the Open Working Group on SDGs, this study must be interpreted as only a foundational exercise providing minimalist estimates; the actual finances required may be much higher.

## **GOAL 1 ASSESSMENT**

Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere implies attention to both completely eliminating extreme poverty while attending to other key socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental dimensions of poverty, and monitoring progress in social protection and inequality. The intricate nature of poverty with various social, economic and environmental components makes an independent assessment of this goal difficult. Many issues relating to poverty are covered under various goals like food security (Goal 2), access to healthcare (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), water (Goal 6), and energy (Goal 7) for all. Additionally, Goals 9 and 11 aim for infrastructure development that can enable capital formation and generate job opportunities. Goal 8 aims for inclusive economic growth models that can enable income opportunities which will contribute towards poverty reduction. Scientific literature (ICSU, ISSC, 2015) on the relations among climate, sustainability and poverty suggests that the targets of Goal 1 need to be at the centre of all other targets, in order to avoid an inequitable transformation to a low carbon future. Apart from the basic need's fulfilment schemes, attention to national and international processes of wealth creation, redistribution and regulatory regimes will be instrumental

in poverty eradication. Persistent poverty is often due to global as well as national and local power relations that enable dispossession, unequal treatment and disrespect to people's rights and human dignity. Enabling institutions to address such issues of poverty may require additional investments.<sup>4</sup>

### **GOAL 2 ASSESSMENT**

Food security is influenced by a number of factors, including those that determine food availability—domestic food production and the capacity to import food—as well as determinants of food access, including the distribution of food among various segments of the population. The financial requirement for India to meet its costs for food security is around INR 46 lakh crores (USD 729 billion) from 2015-24. This cost includes the financial requirements for providing access to safe and nutritious food for all. It also includes investments in irrigation, soil and water conservation, wasteland regeneration and rain-fed farming. Of the finances required for ensuring food security from 2015-24, the financial gap that India is estimated to face is of the order of INR 18.5 lakh crores (USD 293 billion) for access and distribution costs of food and for financing sustainable agricultural production systems.<sup>5</sup>

### **GOAL 3 ASSESSMENT**

Goal 3 includes health and well-being for all, which depends on health status of the population, health infrastructure, access to health insurance, etc. It also includes to achieve this goal, India would need to increase its Health Index, which includes health status of population, quality of healthcare institutions and financial instruments for access to healthcare (insurance, etc.), to 0.9. As of 2011, India's Health Index was 0.702. India is estimated to require around INR 55 lakh crores (USD 880 billion) till 2030 to achieve the target value of its Health Index. A gap of around INR 19 lakh crores (USD 305 billion) is estimated. Health outcomes of the population are closely linked with the access to and availability of nutritious food, clean drinking water and healthy and hygienic environment. Goal 3 is therefore closely related to India's position of food security (Goal 2), water and sanitation for all (Goal 6) and green infrastructure systems (Goal 11), clean air, water and environment (Goals 12, 13, 14 and 15).<sup>6</sup>

### **GOAL 4 ASSESSMENT**

Goal 4 calls for universal access to all levels of education and skill development, starting from pre-primary education, early childhood care and development, primary and secondary education, all the way to tertiary education, and skill development. With respect to expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, in 2012, India spent 3.8 per cent, while South Africa spent 6.2 per cent, Japan spent 3.8 per cent and Germany spent 5 per cent (in 2011) (World Bank, 2007). While India has achieved near-universal enrolment in primary and secondary education (Pratham Education Foundation, 2014), the learning levels of children are low. For example, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014 indicates that of all the students in rural India enrolled in Standard VIII in 2014, about 25 per cent could not read a Standard II level text.<sup>7</sup>

### **GOAL 5 ASSESSMENT**

The goal calls for ending achieving gender equality by ending all forms of discrimination against women, and empowering women in all spheres of life. In India, discriminatory attitudes towards women have existed for many generations. This is visible in a multitude of indicators: India's child (aged 0-6) sex ratio as of 2011 is 914 females per 1000 males, declining from 927 in 2001 (Times of India, 2011).<sup>8</sup> Although literacy rates are increasing, women still lag behind men; the female literacy rate as of 2011 is only 65.46 per cent, compared to 82.14 per cent for males.<sup>12</sup> Social attitudes and mindsets discriminate against women in a variety of contexts. No country in the world has achieved complete gender equality yet, but some countries are getting close. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2014, Iceland ranks number 1 in the global ranking, with a score of 0.8594 in 2014 (highest possible score is 1, which indicates perfect equality). India, on the other hand, ranks 114 out of 142 countries. In fact, the trends observed in the Global Gender Gap Reports

indicate that the year of gender equality in the workplace is at least 8 decades away (World Economic Forum, 2014).<sup>9</sup>

### **GOAL 6 ASSESSMENT**

Goal 6 deals with all aspects of water availability, access and use. The targets within this goal are closely linked to one another and also to other goals. For example, universal provision of drinking water (Target 6.1) and sanitation coverage (Target 6.3) can only be achieved if existing water bodies are sustainably used (Goal 12) and the quality of water in these bodies is kept at an acceptable standard (Target 6.3). Maintenance of water quality is in turn dependent on the way industry, agriculture and other sectors use and dispose of water. Industrial effluents and sewage are major sources of water pollution, but are also consequences of uncontrolled industrialisation and urbanisation. Goals 9 and 11 (on industrialisation and urbanisation respectively) must address these concerns. The current government has announced an ambitious target of providing universal water and sanitation coverage to India by 2019. While India has almost achieved universal coverage of drinking water, it is far from achieving universal access to piped water supply and providing a quantity of water that is consistent with international norms. Similarly, sanitation in India is a major concern, with roughly 60 per cent of the rural population not having access to toilets. The government has a mammoth task set out for itself, not only in constructing toilets for all but also creating behaviour change so that people understand the risks of open defecation and begin to use these toilets.<sup>10</sup>

### **GOAL 7 ASSESSMENT**

For ensuring access to energy in the Business as Usual (BAU) scenario, that is, a fossil fuel dominant energy mix, India would require finances of the order of INR 28 lakh crores as capital investment in production capacity. India may opt for two other scenarios. If India moderately increases the share of renewable energy and reduces the fossil fuel component from the current 60 per cent to 50 per cent, the financial requirement increases to INR 34 lakh crores of capital investment in production capacity. India may also opt for an energy mix with net-zero emissions by 2050, for which by 2030 it must reduce the fossil fuel energy component further from 50 per cent to 27 per cent. Such a scenario would cost INR 42.5 lakh crores as capital investment in production capacity. Additional investments have been estimated for transmission and distribution, and clean cooking fuel. The overall finance required is estimated at INR 54 lakh crores (USD 854 billion) with an expected gap of INR 26 lakh crores (USD 406 billion).<sup>11</sup>

### **GOAL 8 ASSESSMENT**

India registered a GDP growth rate of 7.17 per cent in 2014 over the previous year (Statistical). Prospects in terms of the growth rate look promising; the World Bank has predicted a growth rate of 8 per cent for India by 2017 (Press Trust of India, 2015). Target 8.1 calls for a sustained per capita economic growth at a level that is appropriate given national circumstances. Economic growth rate is controlled by a large number of factors not limited to the business cycle, investment, demographic changes, income equality, productivity of the workforce etc. Each of these factors is in turn dependent on other factors. Productivity of the workforce is dependent on the health, education and level of skills of the workforce as well as technology and the input mix used in production. Investment is dependent on factors such as political institutions, policy environment, ease of access to credit, ease of doing business and an endless list of other things. Economic growth also depends on fiscal and monetary policies of the government, as well as international trade. It is impossible to account for such complexities and provide a number for finance required to sustain economic growth, and therefore the exercise has not been attempted here. However, the study suspects that the achievement of all other SDGs – providing for universal education, healthcare, food security, skills, energy, sustainable industrialisation, urban and rural infrastructure etc. – would contribute substantially to the economic growth of the nation.<sup>12</sup>

### **GOAL 9 ASSESSMENT**

Infrastructure projects are complex, capital intensive, and have long gestation periods that involve multiple and often unique risks to project financiers. Due to its non-recourse or limited recourse financing characteristic (i.e., lenders can only be repaid from the revenues generated by the project), and the scale and complexity, infrastructure financing requires a complex and varied mix of financial and contractual arrangements amongst multiple parties including the project sponsors, commercial banks, domestic and international financial institutions, and government agencies. India's overall infrastructure needs will require financial investments of the order of INR 119 lakh crores (USD 1900 billion). The Indian Government is expected to invest 50 per cent of the total requirement and raise the additional INR 59.5 lakh crores (USD 950 billion) through other sources of finance, like investments by private sector, commercial banks etc. The finance expected to be raised by other sources may increase depending on the possible availability and allocations of public expenditure.<sup>13</sup>

### **GOAL 10 ASSESSMENT**

A financial assessment of Goal 10 has not been attempted in this study because of the close link of the targets under Goal 10 with the targets in remaining goals. Inequality is multi-faceted in nature. There is inequality in income; but there is also inequality in educational attainment, health status, employment, access to food, access to water, access to social security and in general access to opportunities and choices. These different aspects of inequality are interlinked; improved access to water and sanitation may help reduce inequality in health outcomes, improved educational attainment may help people find better jobs and reduce the inequality in employment and incomes, and so on. Therefore, the achievement of Goal 10 will be closely linked to the achievement of all other goals. The links between Goal 10 and other goals are as described below. It is important to note that each one of the below goals are, in a way, efforts to increase access of all to opportunities, which can serve as both the consequence and cause of reduced inequality.<sup>14</sup>

### **GOAL 11 ASSESSMENT**

Goal 11 calls for the sustainable development of cities and human settlements. Urbanisation in India has been on the rise. Population residing in urban areas in India, according to 1901 census, was 11.4 per cent. This count increased to 28.53 per cent according to 2001 census, and crossing 30 per cent as per 2011 census, standing at 31.16 per cent. People migrate to cities in the hopes of finding better economic opportunities, access to a larger range of public amenities and services, and prospects of a better life than in rural areas. Unfortunately, a large section of the population is marginalised, resorting to dwelling in slums without access to basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation and proper housing. Congestion in Indian cities is clearly visible, particularly in metropolitan cities such as Mumbai and Delhi. This necessitates proper urban planning with provisions for necessary urban infrastructure and services, including urban water supply, urban transport, sewage, solid waste management, roads, traffic control, maintenance of public spaces etc.<sup>15</sup>

### **GOAL 12 ASSESSMENT**

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) is a pre-requisite for the world's development to remain within the safe limits of growth and planetary boundaries. It is fundamental in order to achieve sustainable development. [All facts from Planning Commission Report (Planning Commission, GoI, 2014)] India emitted 1,728 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent of GHGs, making it the sixth largest emitter in the world. India is, however, conscious of its global responsibility, and in December 2009, it announced that it would reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20 to 25 per cent, from the 2005 levels, by the year 2020. This voluntary commitment, which India has made to the international community, shows India's resolve to ensure that its growth process is sustainable and based on low carbon principles.<sup>16</sup>

**CHALLENGES:** There are a number of challenges for achieving SDGs such as lack of effective leadership, coordinated partnerships, investments, implementation, and indicators with effective data collection. Leadership is essential for progress in relation to policy change, legislation, investment,

implementation, advocacy, and popular representation.<sup>1112</sup> SDGs demand an increasing interface with global governance for health among those institutions and processes that directly and indirectly impact on health in the context of globalized trade, security, migration, and environment. To adopt a universal post-2015 development agenda with sustainable development at its core, all countries need to recognize the profound transformation required to address the emerging challenges of sustainable development. These include economic shifts to sustainable patterns of production and consumption, effective governance and renewed global partnership and means of implementation. Another set of challenges is lack of social inclusion, widespread regional disparities and urban-rural gaps, gender inequality between men and women. A key challenge is to adopt a meaningful standard of basic needs worldwide, i.e., access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, primary health services, and basic infrastructure including electricity, roads, and connectivity to the global information network. The global economic downturn, violent conflicts in some countries, biodiversity loss, degradation of water, drylands, forests, and climate change are the challenges to the peace and prosperity as they threaten to reverse the achievements to date and undermine any future gain.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the present status of India's primary SDGs is analyzed with the help of a composite index. A cluster analysis was performed to examine the region-specific and issue-specific problems of sustainable development in India. The study highlights that India has to overcome numerous hurdles to achieve the universal targets of sustainable development by 2030. At the sub-national level, 14 out of 29 states have performed well in the PSDG index, while the other states need to focus on developing the quality of life of their people and provide infrastructure services and utilities to both their rural and urban population.<sup>18</sup> The PSDG Index throws light upon the basic goals of sustainability that a country needs to achieve by 2030 and assessing its progress prior to 2015 recognizes the direction in which government interventions and policies are most required. The study adds support to the existing literature on issue-specific problems affecting India at a sub-national level. India needs to protect and restore terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems, especially forests, mountains, wetlands and dry lands. The rate of employment growth about economic growth has suffered stagnation at various time periods from 2000 to 2015 (Papola, 2013),<sup>19</sup> and therefore a positive shift in this sector is required to help India achieve inclusive and productive economic growth in the coming years. Financial incentives related to water, sanitation and improvements in health sector have already been initiated by the Government through Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission and Jan Arogya Yojana. With the help of National Skill Development Agency, employment focusing on infrastructure projects and skill development projects will be implemented. Thus, India may seem distant in achieving sustainable development by 2030, but effective policy implementation, capacity building and financial assistance (Bhamra, Shankar 2015) will help India fulfil these ambitious SDGs by 2030.<sup>20</sup>

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