

The Shortcomings of Achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty) in South Asia: A Focused Study on India

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Abstract

Poverty is a complicated and diversified problem that has an impact on many parts of people's lives, including their ability to acquire essentials like housing, schooling, food, and medical care. The core causes of poverty in the region can be found and effectively addressed by identifying the flaws and difficulties in accomplishing SDG-1 in South Asia. This information can help in the development of focused policies and actions that cater to the population's unique requirements, which will aid in the fight against poverty.

For attempts to reduce poverty to be successful and durable, policy development must be put together through evidence. Policymakers may better comprehend the causes of poverty and the obstacles to eradicating it by researching the failures and difficulties in reaching SDG-1 in South Asia. This can help develop and apply evidence-based regulations and initiatives, which are more likely to produce desirable results because they are founded on reliable data and analysis. SDG-1 must be accomplished with significant monetary resources, individuals, and multi-stakeholder cooperation. Finding the gaps in resources, capability, and concerted effort among various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the corporate sector, and global organizations, can be aided by researching the deficiencies and difficulties in achieving SDG-1 in South Asia. This can make it easier to gather resources and form powerful alliances to combat poverty in the area.

To make sure that initiatives are on track and to hold stakeholders accountable for their commitments, monitoring progress towards attaining SDG-1 is essential. This paper addresses the issue in detail and explores the complexities in the process of achieving the goal of no poverty in India. The paper will first tend to explain the significance of the SDGs

and their situation in South Asia. Then it will proceed to highlight India's commitment to the cause, and how it has approached the issue at a national level. Finally, the last section will address the shortcomings in India's approach toward attaining the status of No Poverty.

Keywords- SDGs, South Asia, India, Poverty, United Nations

Introduction

In September 2015, after a 3-day meeting between the Head of States and government representatives of countries around the world, the United Nations (UN) embarked on a rather ambitious journey with the unanimous support of its members. The meeting held at the UN Headquarters in New York put forward the vision of a sustainable future, and it made a historic decision to create an expansive, profound, and human-centred set of universal objectives and revolutionary targets, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (United Nations, 2015)

This agenda is unmatched in its extent and importance. It is embraced by all nations and is relevant to everyone while respecting local policies and goals and diverse national realities, capacities, and stages of development. These global objectives and targets apply to developed and developing nations all the same. They balance the three facets of sustainable development and are indivisible and integrated.

The goals and objectives are the product of extensive public discourse with civil society and other global stakeholders over a period of more than two years, with special attention dedicated to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable people. The Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals of the General Assembly contributed important work to this consultation, along with a synthesis report provided by the Secretary-General of the UN. The newly adopted mission is governed by the objectives and tenets of the United Nations Charter, including complete observance of international law. (Markus Loewe, 2015) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration, and the 2005 World Summit Outcome serve as its foundations.

The updated agenda endorses the conclusions of all significant United Nations conferences and summits, which have contributed to laying the groundwork for and determining the path toward sustainable development. These consist of the Beijing Platform for Action, the United

Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the World Summit on Social Development, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. (United Nations, 2015) Additionally, the continuation of these conferences' outcomes—including those of the Third International Conference on Small Developing Nations, the Second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Nations, and the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction—is reaffirmed.

Many nations have significant obstacles and difficulties in gaining universal access to basic services, including education, water, health care, and cleanliness. Effective leadership, well-planned administrative setups, and ample human and financial resources are essential for delivering these social services. However, inclusive and facilitating policies and programmes were frequently insufficient, and government-led structures for coordination frequently soured from a lack of sufficient monitoring and assessment. Certain regions within many nations are lagging behind others due to their landscape, social marginalization, conflict, or catastrophes of nature. In such circumstances, it can be challenging to reach the most vulnerable people in distress. In contexts like these, regional growth should be integrated into the process of national development. Initiatives should generally guarantee equitable access to schemes that provide food and nutrition support as well as good jobs, unemployment benefits, and services for education and health.

Utilizing various safety and support measures, nations that prioritised the needs of individuals who are vulnerable to various shocks, such as economic crises, natural catastrophes, and conflicts, achieved better progress in decreasing poverty. Social safety nets are frequently useful resources for assisting vulnerable communities. Additionally, efforts to reduce poverty ought to aim for long-term success. It has been noticed that prosperous nations include sustainability as a key goal for upcoming public sector initiatives and investments. Investments in agriculture, employment growth, the extension of social safety nets, programs for nutrition, as well as the promotion of education and gender equality are frequently the focus of policies that aim to reduce poverty and hunger.

Considering the shortcomings and the lapse in the attainment of these development goals, this study sets out to assess and analyse the status of the same concerning India. The study will assess in detail the plans, policies, and the state's initiatives to achieve these targets and how far they have been able to do so successfully. The Sustainable Development Goals were put forth by the UN in 2015, and consequently, each country went through a process to include these goals in their national policies, as their attainment is deemed a top priority by all countries alike. Therefore, this study would aim to shed light on such policies, the expenditure incurred, the role of the government in materializing these policies, and the hindrances and lapses in the process of achieving the targets. The primary focus of this study would be to study the status of SDG-1(Poverty), and how India fares regarding the challenge of eradicating poverty, as envisioned by the United Nations and their Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

SDG 1 and South Asia

Among the SDGs, the foremost goal that we come across is the reduction of poverty, and that is precisely the goal this study will be dissecting in detail. In order to end severe poverty by 2030, SDG-1(the first Sustainable Development Goal) is geared toward eradicating poverty in all of its manifestations. Poverty is still a major problem in the world, and many people live in poverty in South Asia, which includes nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

In South Asia, poverty is a multifaceted problem with complicated and interconnected causes, including but not limited to a lack of access to economic opportunities, clean water, sanitary facilities, and healthcare. Poverty in the area is made worse by issues including rapid population expansion, high unemployment rates, inequality, and social prejudice. Given the extreme prevalence of poverty in the region, SDG-1 has a particularly important place in South Asia. Over 20% of South Asia's population, living on less than \$1.90 per day, is said to be in extreme poverty, according to the World Bank. (Asian Development Bank, 2021) In addition, a sizable portion of the population in the area is susceptible to poverty due to social, ecological, and economic shocks. Women, children, and marginalised populations are

disproportionately affected by poverty in South Asia, which feeds the cycle of inequality and poverty.

The aim is to eradicate poverty in all of its forms worldwide. In general, the goals have been carefully thought out and are substantial. But the goal's actual language is bad.

Ending poverty in all of its manifestations duplicates all of the SDGs that address the various facets of poverty, including decent work, freedom from violence, voice, nutrition, education, and health. It is an extremely ambitious objective to eradicate poverty in all of these categories by 2030. Five targets and two implementation options are included in the goal. In general, the targets related to poverty are well-defined and quantifiable. Despite this, the targets that correspond to vulnerability are not necessarily quantifiable. Additionally, SDGs 5 ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls") and 11 ("Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable") correlate with SDG 1.

A paper by (Markus Loewe, 2015) explains in detail the requirements and expectations of these targets. According to Target 1.1, extreme poverty for everyone worldwide, which is defined as individuals surviving on less than \$1.25 a day must be eradicated by the year 2030. The OWG's target preparation is greatly appreciated because it explicitly allows for a new definition of severe poverty. According to Target 1.2, the aim is to "reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women, and children of all ages living in poverty" by the year 2030. However, SDG 1 itself calls for poverty to be abolished completely, in contrast to Target 1.2's requirement that it be cut in half. Focusing solely on poverty in terms of income would be much more appropriate and consistent. Target 1.3 stipulates that a nationally appropriate social protection system and measures for all, including floors, must be implemented, and by 2030, the poor and the vulnerable must receive substantial coverage. Social protection is a tool for reducing a person's vulnerability and impoverished status. There isn't much of a need for social protection to be an objective unless it helps reduce poverty, in which case it is just a means to attaining Targets 1.1 and 1.2. The inclusion of SP as a stand-in for vulnerability, which would otherwise be exceedingly challenging to evaluate, makes perfect sense. To achieve Target 1.4, all people must have the same entitlements in terms of economic resources, as well as the ability to access basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, heirlooms, natural assets, suitable technological advances, and

economic services, including microfinance. by the year 2030. Surely having these equal privileges is ideal. However, it is very challenging to determine them. To meaningfully track progress toward any of these, three to four indications would likely be needed. Target 1.5 emphasizes building the resilience of the poor and those in unstable circumstances and reducing their susceptibility and vulnerability to extreme events caused by climate change and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters," which is the aim that must be met by 2030. The target appears to be those risks that are usually not protected by social protection programmes. These programmes may offer security from life medical hazards (longevity, disablement, diseases, etc.) and some bizarre financial dangers (such as joblessness), but they seldom cover some more plausible risks (such as currency crisis, financial crisis), political risks (such as violence, civil war), hazards caused by nature (such as earthquakes, droughts), or environmental risks (river pollution, deforestation, floods, etc.).

SDG-1 implementation in South Asia necessitates thorough and focused solutions that tackle the underlying causes of poverty. This involves encouraging equitable economic growth, ensuring clean water, granting access to excellent educational and healthcare facilities, and increasing rural development and social protection programmes. Additionally, addressing issues such as corruption, conflict, and governance challenges is critical to tackling poverty in the region. In addition to being essential for reducing poverty, achieving SDG-1 in South Asia has greater repercussions for sustainable development. Other SDGs, such as SDG-2 (Zero Hunger), SDG-3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG-4 (Quality Education), SDG-5 (Gender Equality), and SDG-8, are strongly related to the fight against poverty. (Decent Work and Economic Growth). As a result, the region's equitable and long-term development depends on efforts to end poverty in South Asia.

SDG-1 is highly relevant in South Asia because the region continues to struggle with issues related to poverty. To achieve SDG-1 in South Asia, multisectoral activities are needed to address governance, economic, social, and environmental issues as well as to promote inclusive and sustainable development that leaves no one behind. The elimination of poverty must be given top priority as a key objective in South Asia's development plan in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of the region's citizens and encourage inclusive and sustainable progress.

India's resolution at the first SDG Summit

India has been an active participant at the SDG summits ever since the first one held in 2015. India acknowledges that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an appropriate framework that draws the spotlight on the difficulties in constructing an environmentally friendly future for the planet and all of its life while providing a chance to seek agreement and cooperative action. One-sixth of the world's population lives in India, which is essential to the 2030 Agenda's sustainability. It has made a deliberate transition to a "whole of society" approach by involving all significant stakeholders in the joint adoption, execution, and monitoring of the SDGs, including subnational and local governments, civil society, communities, and the commercial sector. India's dedication is demonstrated by the SDGs' basic premise of "leaving no one behind,"—which perfectly aligns with India's motto, Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas (Collective Effort for Inclusive Growth)—and the country's development strategy. (NITI Aayog, 2020) India has created a reliable SDG localization model based on data from the SDG India Index, a government-led subnational indicator of SDGs.

Drawing from the inspiration of the Father of India, Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the SDG Summit of 2015 by releasing an official statement for The United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The statement began by quoting Gandhi- "One must care about the world one will not see," reiterating the idea that humanity has always prospered when it has realized the moral and ethical responsibility to tackle global issues with a collective and united approach. Mr. Modi also expressed his gratitude to the United Nations and the Secretary-General for initiating this much-needed agenda and emphasized its vital importance. He further noted the necessity to include environmental goals, especially climate change and sustainable use of resources would also help the challenges faced by the ocean ecosystem due to our prevailing negligence of the same.

The Prime Minister added that India has established a new personalized sector of micro firms and microfinance, leveraging on the strengths of digital and mobile apps, and spoke to the expanding global discussion regarding both the private sector and the government.

He clarified the need for everyone to have access to the fundamentals of accommodation, water, electricity, and hygiene, noting that the country has established goals for these things

with a specific deadline rather than just a wishful dream. He continued by addressing the unfairness of society's treatment of women and emphasised the importance of empowering women to address problems at the source.

To build a more pragmatic and solid base for the struggle to achieve SDG 1. No Poverty, the Prime Minister of India specifically addressed the issue in his official statement for the summit. He pointed out that completely eradicating poverty from the face of India is one of the country's top four SDG priorities. India's population amounted to 1.3 billion at the time, which has now risen to over 1.4 billion, (Esha Roy, 2023) and hence, tending to the needs and grievances of the poor people becomes increasingly difficult. Thus, the Prime Minister observed that it wasn't a mere question of survival anymore, but a moral and ethical responsibility of the state to uplift the poor from the abysmal lifestyle. To ensure a peaceful and sustainable future for the country and its people, addressing the challenge of poverty was of utmost importance.

The Prime Minister's statement further committed to a comprehensive attack on poverty which included revision of existing development schemes, which were rather conventional in nature. A pledge to turn far-fetched dreams into ones that could be materialized was taken up with an expansive and robust skill development programme to mark the beginning of a new period of empowerment and social inclusion. Furthermore, the statement mentioned setting up over 180 million new bank accounts to facilitate direct transactions for the benefit of the people. It was also stated that the funds would be unbanked and, insurance and pension for people would be ensured in a timely and efficient manner.

India's attempt to achieve SDG 1

All around the world, developing efficient plans to swiftly alleviate poverty has proven to be difficult. This has been the main focus, especially in low- and middle-income nations where multi-dimensional poverty and income poverty are more prevalent than in other areas of the world. Such impoverishment indicates fewer prospects for employment and high-quality education, restricted ability to utilize resources, social prejudice, and susceptibility to harsh weather occurrences. Through rapid economic progress and expanded social safety nets, India is adopting an integrated development approach to alleviate poverty in all of its forms.

Numerous initiatives have been put into action to encourage productive employment, provide livelihood chances, and increase citizen access to essential amenities like infrastructure, utilities, and the provision of health, nutrition, drinking water, and sanitation. (Surjit S Bhalla, 2022) The systems for providing targeted social assistance to those in need are continually being upgraded.

The fundamental goal of India's national development programme is to reduce poverty and to achieve that aim, a multifaceted strategy has been put in place. A key component of the strategy for creating well-paying jobs for new workers as well as those experiencing redundancy in the agricultural sector or other sectors, includes sustaining an average annual GDP growth rate of 8% in real terms. (NITI Aayog, 2019) Secondly, through building infrastructure for agriculture and support services, producing productive assets, developing skills and entrepreneurship, and creating productive assets, some targeted initiatives have been instituted to help the economically disadvantaged increase their income. Unexpected circumstances are prevented from impeding the endeavour to reduce poverty through social protection measures and risk mitigation from natural and other disasters. Hence, India approaches this challenge with a three-pronged strategy; understanding the issue with reference to the multidimensional poverty aspect, providing social protection and safety nets, and ensuring access to basic services.

Multidimensional Poverty in India

The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) together introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in 2010, which measures multidimensional poverty across over a hundred countries that are developing. It tracks poverty across three facets and ten indicators, as listed below, going beyond money as the only indication of poverty:

- Education: Years of education and no. of children enrolled (1/6 weight each, total 2/6)
- Health: Good nutrition and infant mortality (1/6 each, for a total of 2/6)
- Standard of living: electrical power, floor covering, drinking water, sanitization, fuel for cooking, and possessions (1/18 weightage each, total 2/6).

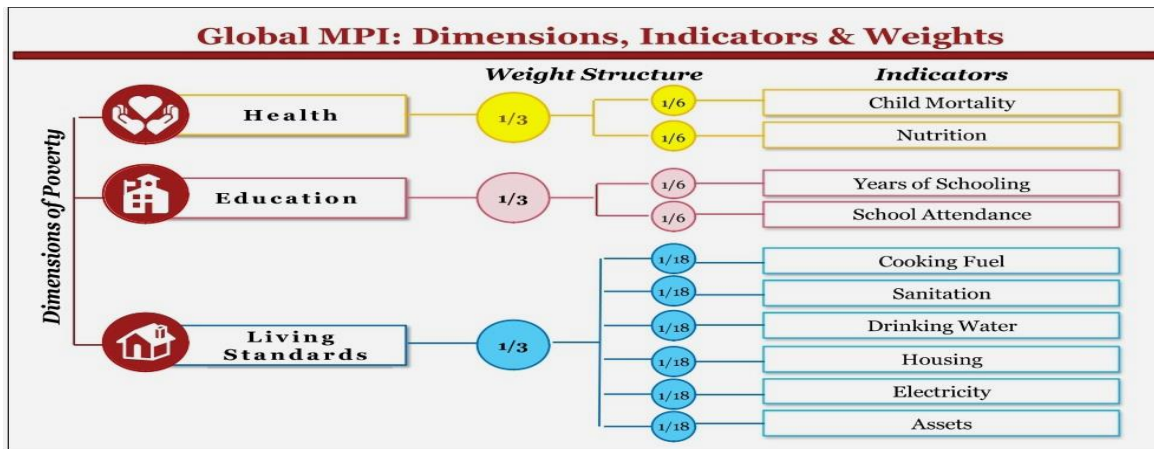


Figure 1 Global MPI

Source:

https://rural.nic.in/sites/default/files/WorkingPaper_Poverty_DoRD_Sept_2020.pdf

A person is considered to be multi-dimensionally impoverished if they are deficient in one-third (or 33% or above) of the measured 10 indicators. (Dr. Seema Gaur, 2020) Severe multidimensional poverty is defined as having at least one-half of the weighted indicators met. MPI is calculated on a scale of 0-1, with higher numbers indicating greater poverty. It is the result of poverty's incidence (the percentage of the population who live in poverty) and intensity (the average deprivation score of those in poverty). In comparison to the traditional methodology, which evaluates poverty primarily in terms of income or money, it is now the most comprehensive assessment of multidimensional poverty.

A Multidimensional Poverty Index Coordination Committee (MPICC) has been established by NITI Aayog with representatives from the pertinent Line Ministries and Departments. For their knowledge of technology, specialists from OPHI and UNDP, the publishing organisation, have also been added. A State Reform Action Plan (SRAP) is currently in a highly developed phase of growth, as is the creation of an MPI Parameter Dashboard to rank States and UTs. The competition between states is meant to motivate states to adopt drastic measures to reduce poverty. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of the UNDP is also anticipated to be influenced by the results. (Dr. Seema Gaur, 2020)

Extreme poverty, as determined by the World Bank's International Poverty Line, has decreased as a consequence of ongoing efforts, falling from 21.2% in 2011 to 13.4% in 2015.

Between 2005–2006 and 2015–2016, the percentage of people living in multifaceted poverty decreased by half, to 27.5%, helping more than 271 million individuals escape poverty. All 10 indicators of deprivation—nutrition, child mortality, years of education, participation at school, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, power, housing, and assets—saw considerable reductions. (NITI Aayog, 2019) At the subnational level, India showed a blatantly pro-poor pattern; the rate of poverty reduction in rural areas was higher than that in urban areas. The bottom 40% of the population saw an increase in average achievement in all of the aforementioned 10 metrics, outpacing the overall population.

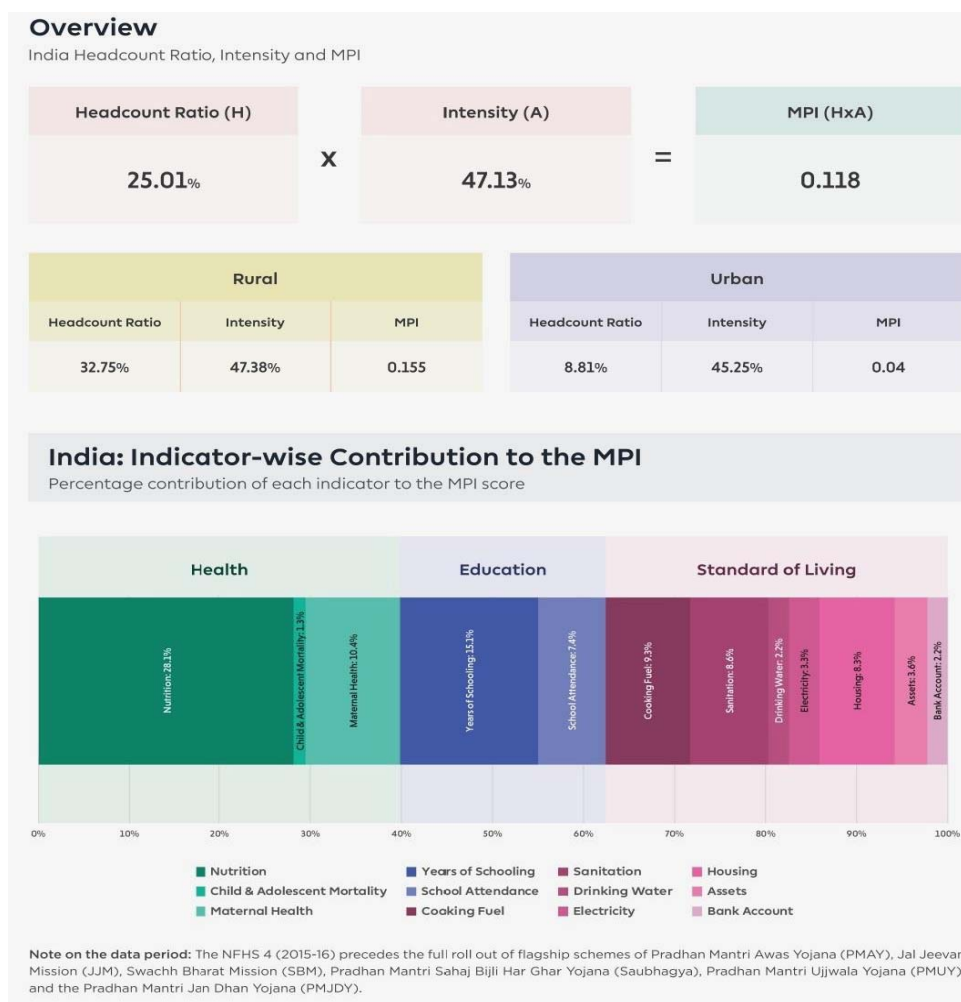


Figure 2 Multidimensional Poverty Index of India

Source: (NITI Aayog, 2021)

India is ranked 62nd out of 107 nations in the Global MPI 2020 Report with an MPI score of 0.123, with 27.9% of the population being classified as multi-dimensionally poor, with 36.8% of the population living in rural India and 9.2% in urban areas. States varied greatly from one another. (Dr. Seema Gaur, 2020) Data at the district level show significant poverty in some areas but also remarkable progress nationwide. A more detailed image of who is destitute, how they are deprived, and where they reside is being painted by the Indian MPI Reports. They also demonstrate the remarkable strides India has made in eradicating multifaceted poverty throughout the nation. The Government of India has chosen to track the performance of the nation in 29 specific global indices, and this includes the Global MPI.

Social Protection and Safety Nets

The second prong of India's three-pronged approach is the institution of Social Protection and Safety Nets to tackle various aspects of poverty with specialized care and recognition. Through several targeted pension plans under the National Social Assistance Programme, India's social security system protects the most vulnerable groups, including the aged, people with disabilities, children, women, and widows. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) also provides a sizable portion of India's rural population with protection from joblessness in the form of 100 days of guaranteed paid work opportunities per household annually. The MGNREGA Scheme has so far given 136 million job cards. 2.64 billion person-days of employment were produced in financial year 19–20, an increase of nearly 12% over the 2.36 billion person-days produced in financial year 16–17. This job programme has been utilized by around 55 per cent of women, along with 38 per cent of beneficiaries belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes background. Moreover, a supplementary INR 400 billion (USD 5.33 billion) was allocated for the welfare of daily-wage workers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. (NITI Aayog, 2019)

Access to Basic Services

India has put in place several other policies and plans to ensure its people the access to basic services, in an attempt to improve their lifestyle. These policies ensure that even the people

living in the remotest of areas receive the benefits of governmental welfare schemes and thus, the hope to eradicate poverty survives. One such scheme is the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) which gives vulnerable communities access to a variety of financial services, including banking, credit, insurance, and pension. Up to 377 million accounts have been opened so far, and 1079 billion INR worth of deposits have been made. The PMJD Y also enhances the efficiency of social security provisions by allowing direct benefit transfer to beneficiaries' accounts. (NITI Aayog, 2019)

With the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) project, the goal of universalizing basic healthcare is enhanced. By 2022, about 1,50,000 Sub-Centres and Primary Health Centres will be turned into Health and Wellness Centres, assuring inclusion and equity while delivering complete, reasonably priced, and high-quality primary care close to the neighbourhood. Ayushman Bharat, the program's supplemental portion, seeks to offer health insurance benefits for both secondary and tertiary organizational treatment up to INR 5,00,000 per family per year to 500 million individuals from over 100 million poor and vulnerable families. 89.4 million people have already signed up for the project, and 3.4 million have made use of the services already. (NITI Aayog, 2019)

Pensions were made available to marginalised and vulnerable people, such as the elderly, widows, and those with disabilities, through the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), which distributed INR 200 billion to 243 million beneficiaries in 2018–19. Programmes have been started to make it easier for employees in the unorganized sector to get pensions, life insurance, and personal accident coverage. (NITI Aayog, 2019) The initiative "Housing for All by 2022" ensures access to secure residences, which is a crucial component of vital services. The monetary support is given to those who are economically deprived so they can build residences with the bare necessities. Under the Saubhagya plan, all families in the nation now have access to energy.

Shortcomings in India's Approach

India has made considerable progress in reducing poverty during the past 20 years. Even if we concede that some of her accomplishments are the result of statistical manipulation, her success cannot be entirely disregarded. The UNDP's goal is to eradicate poverty, not just in

terms of numbers but also from all aspects of life and in all of its manifestations. Additionally, poverty must be permanently eradicated. Three 'e' must be ensured in order to completely eradicate poverty. Employment, equality, and empowerment are the three 'e's. NITI Aayog stated that a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy must be growth-oriented because growth generates employment. The Niti Aayog has advocated for a development strategy that emphasises employment, using China and South Korea as examples. (Somnath Hazra, 2020) Unfortunately, the same NITI Aayog failed to take any indication specifically related to employment into account when creating the SDG index for India.

Other than that, regional disparity in India is another big hurdle when it comes to realizing the goal of No Poverty. Rural parts and economically disadvantaged states in India account for a large portion of the country's poverty. Chhattisgarh has 39.9% of its population living under the poverty line, compared to Andaman & Nicobar Islands matching the statistic of 1%. This great disparity in poverty rates between the States is evident. In Goa, the proportion of persons living in poverty has considerably fallen from 13.8% to 5% between 2004-05 and 2011-12. Chhattisgarh, on the other hand, has only experienced a slight decline, from 40.9% to 39.93%. (NITI Aayog, 2020) Additionally, the case of rapid urbanization has had many positive effects on the economy, but it has also created significant problems. Most notably, shortages of accommodation, infrastructure, jobs, and other goods and services due to excess demand and limited supply.

Then there's the obvious century-old problem of the implementation challenges. This challenge is not new to India, despite that, the country still struggles to tackle this problem. If state and union territory initiatives result in country-level action, the government's promise to end poverty can be realized. The schemes sponsored or institutionalized by the Central government, the State government, and Local Development Initiatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies need to coordinate in a better way to fight this issue together.

India's accomplishments in tackling multidimensional poverty are crucial for the achievement of the ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are designed to ensure that no one is left behind on a global scale as well. As the use of evidence-based policy-making has gained widespread support, it is crucial to gather and use reliable data and pertinent insights

to inform the creation of welfare initiatives and determine their effectiveness. The poor's political empowerment is also necessary to eradicate poverty from its source. The prevalence of poverty is often observed among marginalised communities. These individuals, by experiencing the realities of their own lives, are better than others at understanding the core causes of poverty and the issues associated with it. Regardless, India has made remarkable progress in reducing absolute poverty since the 2000s and hopefully will continue to do so.

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