

Midterm Review of SDG4 : Progress status India

India has made significant progress towards implementing the scheme of Education for All. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) aims to reform the educational system which believes quality education is the base of sustainable development. India based on NEP 2020 targets focus on pre-primary to higher education along with curricular reform to institutional reform in a phased manner, which will help India to achieve SDG objectives.

India has also set its national benchmark values for SDG4 indicators in orientation on its National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 targets. The NEP itself has been oriented on SDG4 and emphasizes on the development of the creative potential of young population. The vision of the policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a global citizen.

SDG4 focuses on education and aims to “**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**” India has taken proactive steps to achieve SDG4 targets which are regularly monitored at the highest level. The present status of India w.r.t SDG4 targets is annexed at Annexure-I.

Target wise initiatives taken by India to achieve SDG4 goals by 2030 are as under:

SDG4 Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

- With a vision to furnish equitable access to education to all children irrespective to their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, India has introduced, the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009 and implemented in state/UTs in 2010. The Act came into force with an aim to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality elementary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. The RTE Act also ensures to cover out-of-school children and provide them age-appropriate admission. RTE Act has provided the easy access to free education to all children particularly those who were deprived from education because of their socio-economic disparities accompanying of ensuring the quality education with no hidden barrier.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has taken steps to universalize quality education delivery, as stipulated by SDG4. The Samagra Shiksha Scheme, Performance Grading Index (PGI), UDISE+ and National Achievement Survey (NAS) are the major data initiative to monitor the progress at the school level, which are accompanied by the All-India Higher Education Survey and annual publications on education expenditure as the main monitoring tools at the higher education level. The government of India has started focused attention on monitoring class/school wise dropout rate with an objective to reduce dropout rate to zero by 2030. The focused attention on class/ school will help to identify targeted interventions for the reduction of dropout. In this endeavor, Government of India has also initiated collecting individual student wise data from 2022-23 to track students, mainstreaming them in case of drop out and to monitor their learning outcomes. This initiative is expected to bring huge dividend in terms of retaining the students and improving the outcomes in future.

Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

The NEP 2020 outlined an expansion of early childhood education institutions, particularly referencing economically weaker regions to provide access to populations in need. The new education structure under NEP the early childhood care and education (ECCE) from age 3 has been included, which is not was not included before. The Ministry of Education through various initiatives like Vidya Pravesh, has recommended the development of ‘3-month play-based ‘school preparation module’ for all Grade 1 Students’ with and without preschool education. Moreover, itcontinuous professional development of teachers are also ensured from time to time. Numeracy and literacy, as stated as one of the main goals of the NEP, to be made foundational and redesigned for all curricula. These initiatives will help in achieving this goal by 2030.

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has also given special emphasis on vocational education through integration and mainstreaming of vocational education with general education which will help students in acquiring various skills to meet the needs of the industries and to improve the quality of education. NEP 2020 also emphasizes on vocational education from class 6 with internships. The policy revamps the undergraduate education with a flexible curriculum of 3 or 4 years with multiple exit options and appropriate certification. Also, Government of India has identified 80 different sectors for focused training and preparing the children with adequate vocational skills in collaboration with the schools to achieve this goal by 2030.

Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

NEP 2020 will integrate Vocational Education with general academic education in all Secondary/Senior Secondary schools which will enhance the employability and entrepreneurial abilities of the students. It provides exposure to work environment; and generating awareness amongst students about various career options so as to enable them to make a choice in accordance with their aptitude, competence and aspirations. Many schools have started tying up with prominent industry in their locality for on job training and subsequent absorption in the company post job training. This is expected to attract more youth to take up skill development as one of the vertical in their educational pursuit.

Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

The Government of India encourages the participation of girls in education and bridging the gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education. For this, financial assistance is being provided to girls and to ensure their safety, residential schools like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya which is unique initiative to attract girl child towards education, are also being opened. Special state specific projects for enhancing access, retention and quality such as enrolment drives, retention and motivation camps, gender sensitisation modules etc. is also been considered for the improving the quality of education for girls and eliminating gender disparity. The NEP is all about consideration to diversity that includes gender. It is expected that improved diversity considerations will translate into gender balance in upper secondary completion rate.

Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

NEP 2020 proposes on creating new National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF). Of the four curriculum frameworks that are being prepared, one of them is an outstanding adult education curriculum framework. The NEP 2020 document states that the curriculum framework for adult education will include at least five types of programmes, each with clearly defined outcomes: (a) foundational literacy and numeracy; (b) critical life skills (including financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, health care and awareness, child care and education, and family welfare); (c) vocational skills development (with a view towards obtaining local employment); (d) basic education (including preparatory, middle, and secondary stage equivalency); and (e) continuing education (including engaging holistic adult education courses in arts, sciences, technology, culture, sports, and recreation, as well as other topics of interest or use to local learners, such as more advanced material on critical life skills). Dedicated instructors and educators will be delivering the curriculum framework to mature learners for keeping in sync with the thought process. Towards this endeavor, Government of India has started "New India Literacy Programme" (NILP) for implementation during five years from 2022-23 to 2026-27. The programme aims to cover all adult illiterates who through programme will become learners during the five years under Foundational Literacy and Numeracy component. This will substantially improve the Adult literacy and numeracy and is expected to supplement to achieve the goal by 2030.

Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

The NEP 2020 envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The NEP 2020 encompasses the expectations of all stakeholders and is founded on the five guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. It will prepare our youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future.

Target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 ensures that all children have access to quality education with an equitable and inclusive classroom environment which should take care of their diverse background, multilingual needs, different academic abilities and make them active participants in the learning process. NEP emphasized that adequate and safe infrastructure, including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces, electricity, computing devices, internet, libraries, and sports and recreational resources will be provided to all schools to ensure that teachers and students, including children of all genders and children with disabilities, receive a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment and are comfortable and inspired to teach and learn in their schools. To achieve this, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha was introduced by Government of India to give financial assistance to overall development of school education including programmes related to Children with Special Needs (CwSN) in a continuum from pre-school to class XII and lays emphasis on inclusion or mainstreaming of CwSN into formal schooling. The scheme covers all CwSN with one or more disabilities as mentioned in the Schedule of disabilities of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016. In keeping with the principle of inclusion, CwSN are provided support through specific student oriented interventions i.e. aids and appliances, teaching aids, assistive devices, identification and assessment camps, teaching and learning materials, Braille books/kits, transportation allowances, escort allowances, uniforms (under RTE), stipend for girls besides training of general teachers, financial assistance for special educators, etc. These interventions are provided to address their educational requirements in general schools. With this, it is envisaged that Government of India will achieve its target by 2030.

Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Several online courses are offered through DIKSHA to develop the skills of the teachers and school heads. Moreover, the Government of India through NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) programme aims to build the capacities of teachers through continuous assessment of teachers. India is committed to achieve 100% teachers with required qualification set at the national level for achieving SDG4 target by 2030.

Conclusion

The Government of India is pledged to accelerate implementation to achieve the SDGs by 2030. In this endeavour, the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a revolutionary policy. It aims to make the education system holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, aligned with the needs of the 21st century. Also, the NEP has proposed to evaluate children's progress and learning competencies as an indicator of the health of the education system and for this, the Government of India has rolled down National Achievement Survey (NAS) to assess the performance of students. Moreover, to review the Mid Term performance of students, it is proposed to carry out Mid NAS so as to take remedial measures, if any. States have been advised to carry out State level assessment survey similar to NAS so as to improve learning outcomes of students. Further, The NEP is guided by a list of principles primarily centering on skills development in literacy and numeracy as well as various cognitive and behavioral skills with explicit mention of formalizing learning assessments.

The adequate financial resources and effective delivery mechanism with committed political leadership are the basis to achieve the benchmarks set by the government of India. Expecting an increase in funding to almost double the previous spending in relation to the GDP, and an emphasis on education quality with a strengthened teaching force, the country should be able to increase its learning outcomes as well as participation and completion rates across all levels.