

Sustainable Development Goals: Realisation in Rural Assam

Dr. Pobon Kr. Gogoi

Gargaon College

Email: [pobongogoi\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:pobongogoi[at]gmail.com)

7002387042

Abstract: *At the end of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, the United Nations Organisation launched Sustainable Development Goals with 17 goals, 169 targets, and 304 indicators on 25th September 2015 under the official agenda “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The SDGs are comprehensive and broader in the sense that attempt to address all social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The UN member states have voluntarily accepted and adopted the goals and targeted to achieve the goals within a stipulated time. As a member state of UNO, the Government of India has framed the strategy and policies under the NitiAayog and asked the state governments to fulfill the goals. As such, the government of Assam as like as other states initiated different benevolent steps to fulfil the objectives of the goals. Out of the 17 goals, goals 1 and 2 related to the eradication of poverty and ending hunger are also addressed by the government of Assam through the Panchayat and Rural Development department in cooperation with other departments. The process started with the development of agriculture, infrastructure, employment, health care, education, women empowerment, rural development, entrepreneurship, and social assistance. Thus, this study is conducted to understand the state government initiatives to eradicate poverty and hunger under SDGs 1 and 2 in Assam.*

Keywords: Development goals, Government, NitiAayog, Rural Assam, eradicate poverty.

1. Introduction

Overall prosperity in development in all sectors leading to the growth of human beings is the demand of the 21st century. Every human being living on the earth is expected to develop their living standard with dignity and honour. Hence, the expectation of development is inevitable and race is predominant among human beings. The states are also in the pace of racing and expected to ensure better life and well-being of their citizens. As a result, existing resources are extracted in an uncontrollable manner which has killed the expectations of the future. The unscrupulous use of resources is a threat to human security and burning debates among statesmen, activists, academicians, and researchers who profoundly argued to restore it for future generations too. The restoration of resources for the future created the concept of sustainable development. Thus, sustainable development means the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (“Brundtland” report). To achieve sustainable development of prosperity and protect the planet by 2030, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been developed. There are 17 SDGs and there are specific targets for each.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the successors of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adopted in 2000 by governments to ensure global progress on poverty, education, health, hunger, and the environment. It was continued up to 2015. On 25th -27th September 2015 the member states of UN adopted new global goals for sustainable development consisting of 17 universal and transformative SDGs. The world leaders pledged their commitment to the new 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The UN General Assembly passed the resolution encompassing 17 goals with 169 targets and 304 indicators on 25th September 2015 under the official

agenda “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The member states of the UN are committed to framing their development agendas, socio-economic policies, and actions towards low carbon emissions for the next 15 years to achieve a sustainable world where no one is left behind. These are a universal set of goals, targets, and indicators accepted by all member states of the UN. Further, it is also committed not to compromise the sustainability of the planet. The SDGs are comprehensive and broader in the sense that attempt to address all social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

17 SDGs of UN are- 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) Reducing Inequality, 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, 17) Partnerships for the Goals.1

All the above pertinent issues are targeted to be achieved in 2030 within 15 years starting from 2015 in the world. India being a member state of the UN accepted the challenges to attain the goals and hence, different initiatives have been framed in 2016. India is also a federal state with 29 constituent parts i.e. states or provinces initiated different strategies to fulfill the goals of these states. Concealed competition is on the wheel amongst the states to achieve maximum success and become dominant partners in the growth and development of the nation. Assam is a constituent part situated in North northeast corner of India patronising the goals of SDGs with its process and as a part

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of national initiatives. Hence, this paper is an attempt to analyze the process and endeavours made by the Assam government since 2016 to fulfill SDG 1 and SDG 2 i.e. poverty eradication and food security.

Objectives

- a) To understand the Assam govt. initiatives to attain the SDGs 1 and 2 since 2016.
- b) To evaluate the Assam Govt. success rate of SDGs 1 and 2.

2. Methodology

The study is conducted on the process and initiatives of the government of Assam to fulfill the SDGs, so secondary sources are mostly applied to analyze the facts. This is a content analysis of the SDGs, so the contents related to development goals have been used to evaluate the process and fulfillment thereof. Relevant data sources are collected through internet sources and the Ministry of Rural Development information is given more preferences.

3. Discussion

Sustainable Development Goal 1 and II: Poverty Eradication and Food Security:

As per the goal-1 and II it is targeted to end poverty in all forms everywhere as well as food i.e. end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. In India in general and Assam in particular, in connection with poverty eradication in all forms, different strategies have been taken. They are:

- 1) Participatory approaches for poverty eradication: Under this approach, the Panchayats and Rural Development of Assam have initiated a participatory process to assess poverty, priority/need assessment and problem analysis, sustainable livelihoods assessment, empowerment assessment, and assessment of social capital.
- 2) Ensuring smooth functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for poverty eradication: In this process, the Assam government initiated to streamline the day-to-day functioning of PRIs, ensure equal participation of all the members in the activities of PRIs including ST / SC & women members, ensure proper record keeping in the Panchayats, Monitor & ensure proper implementation of the resolutions taken in the meeting of PRIs for poverty eradication, ensure holding of regular gram sabhas with massive people's participation particularly those living below the poverty line, marginalized section and women, and finally proper record keeping of gram Sabhas.
- 3) Strategy for poverty eradication by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development through PRIs and its convergence with other line departments: The initiatives undertaken are water conservation and water harvesting to help poor farmers in increasing agriculture production, micro and minor irrigation for increasing production and productivity in agriculture and horticulture sector, renovation of traditional water bodied to enhance fish production by poor fish farmers, tree plantation and horticulture for increasing fruit production and enhance the income of the rural horticulturist and land development/wasteland

development for enhancing production and productivity among small and marginal farmers.

- 4) The Gram Panchayat (GP) with different stakeholders will work for the social inclusion of poor & marginalized sections of the society including women to bring equality and equity: The process are Panchayat will mobilize rural poor to help them overcome exclusions like geographic, economic social and political, ensure access of the poor and marginalized sections including women to the institutions that delivers services for livelihoods and development and Panchayat including GPs will work to remove the constraints that the poor face in accessing services
- 5) To ensure equal rights among poor and vulnerable groups to basic services following participatory process will be adopted for the smooth implementation of poverty eradication programmes: The edges are citizen report cards, citizen voice cards, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking/monitoring, family satisfaction survey, citizen monitoring of public service delivery, social audit, mobilizing rural poor and vulnerable section to reduce their vulnerability and facilitate their development, mobilizing rural people through GPs into development specific people's committees. The committees are as follows:
 1. Village water and sanitation committee, 2. Liquor prohibition committee, 3. Street light committee, 4. Local committee to sort out problems, 5. Nutrition Committee, 6. Health committee, 7. Siksha committee, 8. Youth Affairs Committee, 9. Forest and environment committee, 10. Natural resource management committee, 11. Electricity Committee, 12. Land and Water Resource Committee, 13. Child and Women Development Committee, 14. Vigilance committee, 15. Social audit committee, 16. Women Empowerment Committee.

Rural poverty scenario of Assam:

One of the 35 states and union territories of India and 8 Northeastern states connected with mainland India with a narrow 35 KM via Siliguri, Kalkata popularly called as 'chicken neck corridor'. The total geographical area of the state consists of 78,438 square kilometers with a total population of 3.12 cores as per the 2011 census. Assam is considered to be a rural state (almost 98% rural) and with 86% rural population. The state accounts for about 2.4% of the total geographical area and 2.6% of the total population of the country (census 2011). The state is unique in geographical location sharing borders with seven states and two countries i.e. Bhutan and Bangladesh, having 2,276.3 kilometers interstate and 529 kilometers of international borders. The Assam economic resources backbone is based on oil, coal, and tea but agriculture is the mainstay among the majority population.

As per a newspaper report referring to NitiAayog's 'National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review 2023' the rural areas of the state witnessed a remarkable decline in poverty from 36.14 percent to 21.41 percent and in the urban area it declined from 9.94 percent to 6.88 percent. Assam has witnessed a significant decline in poverty from 32.65 percent in 2015-16 to 19.36 percent in 2019-2021. It is estimated that 46.87 lakh people have

escaped multidimensional poverty in Assam during the period from 2015 to 2023 (The Sentinel).¹

Government initiative to eradicate poverty to accomplish SDG 1 and 2:

The government of Assam from 2016 onwards different strategies and endeavours have been taken to eradicate poverty. During these periods different schemes have been launched to reach the SDGs 1 and 2. Such as²-

- 1) Financial Assistance Schemes
 - a) Chief Minister Krishi Sa-Sajuli Yojana:
 - b) Swami Vivekananda Assam Youth Empowerment Yojana:
 - c) PradhanMantriAwasYojana – Gramin (PMAY-G):
- 2) Healthcare Schemes
 - a) AtalAmritAbhiyan
 - b) Chief Minister’s Free Diagnostic Services
 - c) SwasthyaSathi Scheme
- 3) Education Schemes
 - a) The SarbaSikshaAbhiyan scheme,
 - b) The RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan (RMSA)
 - c) The Chief Minister’s Special Scholarship Scheme
 - d) The PradhanMantriKaushalVikasYojana (PMKVY)
 - e) The Swabalamban scheme
- 4) Employment Schemes
 - a) Chief Minister’s SamagraGramyaUnnayanYojana
 - b) Chief Minister’s Startup Fund
 - c) MukhyaMantriKrishi Sa-Sajuli Yojana
- 5) Women Empowerment Schemes
 - a) The Mahila Shakti Kendra Yojana,
 - b) PradhanMantriMatruVandanaYojana (PMMVY), outcomes.
 - c) Tezpur University Centre for Women’s Studies (TUCWS).
 - d) The Chief Minister Women Uddamita (entrepreneurship) Abhiyan,
- 6) Infrastructure Development Schemes
 - a) Assam State Road Project
 - b) Fakuruddin Ali Ahmed Paki Path NirmanAchani.
 - c) Mukhyamantrir Paki Path NirmanAchani
 - d) Rural Infrastructure Development Fund

- e) Asom Mala (Connecting state road to National Highways)
- 7) Rural Development Schemes
 - a) The DeenDayalUpadhyayaGrameenKaushalyaYojana (DDUGKY),
 - b) The MukhyaMantriKrishiSa-SajuliYojana (MMKSY)
- 8) Entrepreneurship Development Schemes
 - a) PradhanMantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY),
 - b) Stand-Up India Scheme, and
 - c) DeendayalAntyodayaYojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

Impact of the Assam Government Schemes to fulfill the target of SDGs:

The initiatives undertaken by the government of Assam from 2016 to 2023 to accomplish the SDGs are commendable and have seen notable progress in various sectors. Its impacts could be traced to both the economy and social welfare of the state. There are five pertinent areas where the Assam government deeds are specifically observed. They are-

- 1) **Agriculture:** The Assam government has given more priority to agriculture because almost 70% of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The Assam government. Schemes like KrishiSamridhiYojana and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Swavalamban Yojana have provided financial assistance and training to farmers, helping them increase their yields and income. This has not only improved their economic condition but also reduced poverty in rural areas.
- 2) **Education:** The education sector has received major support from the Assam government. Initiatives like Gunotsav and Prerona have boosted school education in Assam and have led not only to an increase in school enrolment rates but also to improved learning outcomes and quality of education.
- 3) **Infrastructure:** The Assam government’s initiative to foster infrastructure development has engulfed better connectivity within the state and the rest of India. Projects like the National Highways Development Project (NHDP), PradhanMantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and Asom Mala (roads) have improved road networks. This has not only boosted trade and commerce within Assam but also contributed to its economic growth.
- 4) **Healthcare:** The Assam government schemes like AtalAmritAbhiyan, Chief Minister’s Free Diagnostic Services, and Swasthya Sathi Scheme ensure better health facilities for the people living below the poverty line.
- 5) **Employment:** The youth who seek jobs in service and tertiary sectors get better opportunities through different government schemes like Chief Minister’s SamagraGramyaUnnayanYojana, Chief Minister’s Startup Fund, Chief Minister AtmanirbharAxomYojana and MukhyaMantriKrishi Sa-SajuliYojana. Furthermore, the youths are getting training facilities through these schemes to engage in self-employment.

¹According to data shared by the Chief Minister's Office, the Hailakandi district has registered a decline in multi-dimensional poverty from 51.07 per cent to 36.22 per cent, Karimganj district witnessed a decline from 46.02 per cent to 32.93 per cent, from 42.29 per cent to 30.58 per cent in Cachar district, from 51.06 per cent to 26.02 per cent in Dhubri district, from 38.22 per cent to 23.65 per cent in Darrang district, from 36.75 per cent to 22.46 per cent in Morigaon district, from 30.51 per cent to 20.84 per cent in Nagaon district, from 29.46 per cent to 19.16 per cent in Udalguri district, from 25.32 per cent to 19.94 per cent in Sonitpur district. It declined from 39.41 per cent to 19.12 per cent in Barpeta district, from 32.14 per cent to 18.92 per cent in Kokrajhar district, from 40.15 per cent to 18.34 per cent in Goalpara district, 36.70 per cent to 17.66 per cent in Tinsukia district, 33.77 per cent to 17.39 per cent in Bongaigaon district, 36.20 per cent to 16.79 per cent in Chirang district, 37.59 per cent to 16.20 per cent in KarbiAnglong district, from 23.59 per cent to 15.60 per cent in Baksa district, from 20.60 per cent to 14. See also: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/46-87-lakh-in-assam-escaped-multi-dimensional-poverty-in-5-yrs-niti-aayog-report/articleshow/101983008.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

² Panchayat and Rural Development, Govt. of Assam.

4. Conclusion

The sustainable development goals adopted by all member states of the UN are to improve and enhance the basic requirements of the people of the world. Being a part of the UN, India was no exception and targeted to achieve complete success of 17 SDGs. As such, from 2016 onwards the NitiAayog distributed the responsibility to its federal units, i.e. states to accomplish the entire goals on or before 2030. Hence, the Government of Assam has also initiated different new schemes and activities to fulfill the goals. Due process undertaken by the state government has impacted positively on both the economic and social welfare of the needy. For instance, during 2016-2023, 27 lakhs Auyushman Cards (health-related) were distributed, 40 lakhs people got free rice, 4 lakhs bicycles to the senior secondary students, 33,800 scooty to the girls' students, 3,41,663 students get book grants and more importantly 3,92,612 students are covered under fee waiver schemes. The government has already distributed more than 10,000 tractors to the peasants and targeted to cover the entire 26,000 villages of Assam. For this scheme, the Assam government has allocated 1000 crores in the budget. Under the National Social Assistance program, during these years 9,47,035 pensioners have received the benefits.³ Thus, it is observed that the government of Assam has started the process to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2.

The success story of attaining SDGs 1 and 2 in the case of Assam in this stage is very premature to summarise the result. As per SDG India index 3.0⁴ in Goal 1, Tamil Nadu and Delhi are positioned at the top while in Goal No. 2, Kerala and Chandigarh are in the top position. In the same index the performance of states and Union Territories is concerned, India's index is 66 while Assam's index is 57. Kerala is in the top with 75 index points more than India's index points.

Finally, it can be said that during the last 8 years of SDGs of the UN overall India's progress is encouraging and the states are progressing towards the fulfilment of the targeted goals. The Assam is in the transition period of the journey and the progress is hopeful. The initiatives are cheering with success but still miles to go.

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³ NSAP- IGNOAPS- 7,85,836nos, IGWPS- 1,11,477 nos, IGNDPS- 42,264 nos and NFBS- 7458 no. of people got the benefit.

⁴ SDG India: Index & Dashboard 2020-21, NitiAayog, Govt. of India.

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