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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### BEYOND SDG LOCALISATION: A POLICY ANALYSIS

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#### Abstract

In the wake of the transition from Millennium Developmental Goals to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the United Nations Agenda 2030, India finds a shift in policy focus towards integrating SDGs in policy planning and implementation. This policy analysis explores the effectiveness of this shift in the form of SDG Localisation. SDG Localisation addresses several challenges ranging from behavioural and planning to prioritisation. It incorporates local governance units in a nationally coordinated and locally-relevant policy planning. It attempts to see alternate governance approaches to solve diverse problems in India. This analysis utilises a comparative approach within four alternative models: Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model, Centralised Governance Model, Market-Driven Solution Model, and Sectoral Governance Model. It employs twelve criteria for the comparative analysis. The analysis finds that while the SDG Localisation Model is flexible to regional conditions, it suffers from a Top-Down state of decentralised decision-making in India. The Centralised Governance Model excels in nationally coordinated actions but lacks local responsiveness. Market-Driven Solution Model uses market forces to improve innovation but is unresponsive to equity and inclusiveness. The Sectoral Governance Model boasts a specialised focus on targeted goals but is ineffective in inter-sectoral policies. The policy analysis concludes that the Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model offers the most strategic Plan of Action towards localising SDGs in local policy planning. It recommends amplifying the focus on SDGs by prioritising them and improving educational indicators, improving bottom-up decision-making, and promoting experimentation.

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#### Introduction:-

##### SDG Localisation

While adopting the Agenda 2030, the United Nations and its member states collectively committed to work with local governments for policy integration and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. India has shown its commitment towards SDGs on several occasions.

"Much of India's development agenda is mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals. Our national plans are ambitious and purposeful; sustainable development of one-sixth of humanity will be of great consequence to the world and our beautiful planet."

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (2015)

To achieve this, India has adopted the SDG Localisation Model. Spearheaded by NITI Aayog since 2018, it aims to integrate SDGs into local policy planning and implementation by using the decentralised policy machinery in a nationally coordinated manner. By improving local capacities, it aims to strengthen capabilities across India. This model comes in response to several challenges. These stem from the premise of the growing need for sustainability.

## Overview of Challenges

### Planning Challenges

#### 1. The nature of the Rigid Indian Centralisation

India is a diverse nation. As a result, a one-size-fits-all approach is becoming increasingly difficult over time as Challenges are becoming more complex and nuanced. <sup>[1]</sup> A country-wide polio vaccination program is easier to apply because of the uniformity of its treatment across all cultures. The focus on economic growth appears more nuanced with the diverse background of Indian states, leading to inefficiencies with a centralised approach.

#### 2. The nature of Indian Fiscal Decentralisation

Even after the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, <sup>[2]</sup> devolution of powers and finances to local bodies remains restricted concerning policy autonomy.

#### 3. Inconsistencies in the National and State Planning

The problem of centralisation worsens when we consider the overlapping schemes announced and conflicts between State and Union Governments on their application. It arises from a lack of coordination in planning.

#### 4. Lack of Adequate Indices

Several long-term policies lose out in public discourse as they are harder to quantify. This lack of quantification makes advocacy and discourse around these issues harder. As a result, local planning diverts back to short-term policy orientation.

#### 5. Weaker local capacities

It hampers a local government's capacity in data processing and service delivery. Consequently, avenues like local policies and penetration of social welfare schemes get harmed. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### 6. Concentration of Capabilities

The concentration of Policy resources around Metropolitan India results in lop-sided public policy growth in India.

### Behavioural Challenges

#### a. Policymakers

##### 1. Voter incentives

Often, local policymakers hesitate to take up long-term projects which cross their tenure to avoid any unnecessary risk of failure. It reduces innovation and promotes policies with immediate visibility.

##### 2. Lack of relatability of SDGs

The agenda is perceived as an external policy imposition unless local actors can't see their ownership in the SDG. Such external impositions divert local efforts away from pro-SDG actions. <sup>[4]</sup>

##### 3. Restricted Innovation

Without explicit incentives to innovate, local bodies often fear uncertainty and step away from innovations.

#### b. Politico-bureaucratic relations

In several localities, clashes exist between local representatives and administrative officials due to overlapping jurisdictions and different skill sets, duties, and power. Such clashes reduce the application of SDGs in the localities. Additionally, the final control over application rests with street-level bureaucrats. These actors have discretion over service delivery.

#### c. General Public

##### 1. Public Goods

Since SDG service delivery is non-exclusionary for the participation of the whole society, it often gets treated as a Public Good. Instances of people not perceiving the importance of reforms discourage local actors from further adding SDG considerations to their policy planning.

## 2. Trust Deficit

Often local government doesn't seem credible enough to generate higher tax revenues for service delivery. It is because of the lack of influence local governments have on SDG agendas and service delivery.

## 3. Lack of Involvement of Other Stakeholders

Actors in civil societies work closely with marginalized sections. The private sector and academia possess the technical expertise to augment policies. There's a lack of meaningful ways of involving them in policy planning.

### A. Prioritization Challenges

#### 1. Education

SDG 4 (Quality Education) has the highest linkages with other SDGs and is crucial for their success. However, there is no specific prioritisation of SDGs in the order of linkages in the Status Quo.

#### 2. Comparability vs Uniqueness

While indices are necessary to track progress, over-reliance on indices crowds out the diversity of district-wise aspirations.

### Current Policy Intervention | The Indian Model of SDG Localisation

The model prescribed by NITI Aayog focuses on functional decentralisation of service delivery. It implies that the nature of Indian localisation currently is that of nationally coordinated local SDG actions while holding the grassroots governance units accountable for the progress. It aims to start from a 'whole-of-the-government' approach and transition towards a 'whole-of-the-society' approach.

The model has four fundamental pillars: <sup>[5]</sup>

#### 1. Creating Institutional Ownership

The current framework to achieve institutional ownership is divided into national and sub-national institutional frameworks.

##### A. National Framework

The overall supervision of all efforts is anchored on the NITI Aayog. The Parliament of India provides oversight, with the Comptroller and Audit General reviewing SDG preparedness.

##### B. Sub-national Framework

Presently, Nodal departments in states and UTs are entrusted with the application and monitoring of SDG initiatives and the creation of vision documents and strategies under the supervision of the State Legislature.

#### 2. Establishing a Robust Review and Monitoring System

To foster a healthy "collaborative competition" within sub-national governments, several indices and dashboards are created with the assistance of NITI Aayog. These include the National Indicator Framework with 308 indicators, the SDG India Index, which ranks states and union territories on a composite index per goal and a cumulated ranking of all goals, and the zonal iterations like the SDG Urban Index and the North Eastern Region District SDG Index.

#### 3. Developing Capacities for Integrating SDGs in Planning and Monitoring

NITI Aayog works with the State governments to generate capacities. These efforts manifest themselves as vision documents for states and data dashboards at the sub-national level. The vision documents guide state policy-making supported by a monitoring framework. The dashboards act as data repositories and give time-sensitive information of official indicators.

#### 4. Adoption of a 'Whole-of-the-Society' Approach

States have adopted a multi-sectoral approach in consultation and partnerships with several stakeholders, like the civil societies, the private sector, and the United National agencies.

For citizen-centric institutional interventions, we use several frameworks in the model:

##### a. Sector-Gap-Action-plan

It utilises the machinery of SDG localisation to identify lower SDG scores and use relevant departmental officers to operationalise SDGs by monitoring progress and getting projects socially audited.

b. Process re-engineering Framework

Similar to the sector-gap-action plan, it uses the machinery of SDG localisation to hold officials accountable to re-engineer targets, with stakeholder consultations where performance is low.

c. Geographical prioritization framework

It uses the SDG localisation machinery to identify and improve the least-performing districts. The Aspirational District Program of NITI Aayog launched in 2018 is an application of this.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Contextual Research

The Agenda 2030 by the United Nations on Sustainable Development Goals is an ambitious task which progressively becomes complex as diversity increases. The following questions reflect present limitations in India and other complexities:

A. Extent of Policy Centralisation and Coordination between National and Sub-national Governments

1. What is the present extent of Policy Decentralisation?
2. What is the nature of the coordination between national and state policies without SDG localisation?

B. Impact of Lop-Sided Policy Resource Distribution

What is the impact of resource distribution on policy planning between metropolitan cities and other smaller towns and villages in India?

C. Prioritisation of SDGs in Indian Policy Planning

What is the nature of the prioritisation of Sustainable Development Goals in India?

D. SDG Indices and their Interaction with Local Policy Planning

1. What is the role of measurement of Indices in policy planning?
2. What are the status and limitations of the use of indices for SDGs?

E. Behavioural Dimensions

1. How do people perceive SDGs locally?
2. How do local and higher government actors interact for the implementation of SDG Localisation?

F. Involvement of other Stakeholders in Policy Planning

How are several stakeholders like civil societies and private sectors interacting with governments for policy contribution?

### Existing Literature, Observations, and Inferences on the Indian SDG Localisation Model

#### Evolution of Sustainable Development Goals

In 1987, the United Nations defined sustainable development as development that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In pursuit of such development, the 193 member states developed an agenda named the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It consisted of eight anti-poverty targets for the world to reach by 2015. The MDGs tackled several issues including hunger, poverty, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Despite considerable progress in MDGs, they suffered from a lack of more specific targets. For an all-compassing development agenda, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged, with 169 targets and 17 broad goals. The goals are as follows:<sup>[5]</sup>

SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water), SDG 15 (Life on land), SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

#### Extent of Policy Centralisation

Indian governance currently exists as a quasi-federal or centralised federalism. The model follows a prescriptive approach to enforce obedience to the 2030 Agenda. It uses increasing bureaucratic control from the centre, and increasingly detailed frameworks for regular reporting and compliance.<sup>[7]</sup> However, the approach runs into the limitation of the local need for customisation. SDG localisation requires establishing specific local targets consistent with the local policymakers and actors. However, increasing localised unique targets leads to a lack of comparability. This is crucial because comparability is the tool SDG localisation uses to hold local actors accountable. An extreme focus on comparability reduces the ability of districts to diversify their solutions. The trade-off between comparability and uniqueness is inevitable. Additionally, this model perceives localisation as a

top-down process. This may appear as an imposition of external policy considerations on local actors, stifling localised innovation.

The application of centralised policies often results in rigid policies. It stems from the delay in adequate feedback from the grassroots. The problem worsens when we factor in the diversity of India. Policy initiatives working well in one part of the country do not necessarily imply a positive response from others. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't cater to a diverse India anymore.

Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment, the status of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is reduced to mere receptors of government programs. The extent of Fiscal Dependency on the PRIs and local governments highlights their suffering in India. PRIs have limited powers in terms of imposing cesses and taxes. Such lack of fiscal decentralisation leads to ineffective and untimely completion of set developmental plans. This becomes graver when we see the inconsistent extent of decentralisation at the grassroots levels in different Indian states. This is due to the operationalisation of decentralisation design being limited only to the states.<sup>[8]</sup> Even municipalities find it hard to keep up with the quality of productivity.<sup>[9]</sup> This reduces the capacity of local bodies to improve innovation and service delivery. There seems to be a direct correlation between autonomy and high levels of own sources of revenue in local governments of Australia, China, and Cambodia.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Importance of Coordination between National and Sub-national Planning in Service Delivery: The Case of Social Protection / Welfare Schemes**

Welfare schemes, also called social protection schemes, are crucial to achieving several SDGs.<sup>[11]</sup> Most welfare schemes align with SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). These programs provide basic guarantees for essential health care and basic income security. Indian Social Protection infrastructure regularly struggles with efficiency. Many programs struggle to reach the actual beneficiaries. This is a result of inconsistent coordination between national and sub-national policies. Vague targets, poor statistical capacities, and weak institutional arrangements ensure that the identification of beneficiaries and delivery of social protection schemes remain sub-standard.<sup>[3]</sup>

To enhance the effectiveness of social welfare schemes, the inclusion of local actors and stakeholders, along with national and sub-national governments, is instrumental. Monitoring the application of welfare schemes requires constant feedback from Gram Sabha and other grassroots-level governing bodies. This aids in minimising exclusion errors and increases the beneficiary coverage scale. Exclusion errors become more impactful when we observe their interactions with unequal rural societies. These involve socially disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

### **Lop-sided Policy Resource Distribution**

A concentration of resources lies around large metropolitan cities compared to smaller towns and rural India. This results in the lop-sided growth of public policy favouring the few regions with ample resources to complement it. These resources range from data analysis to civil societies and private sector enterprises. For successful outreach of SDG in India, capacity building requires an overall push across the nation.

The impacts of such distributions are visible in poor data infrastructure and lack of data processing centres in districts. This became a very significant reason for the policy failure of SDG Localisation in Bangladesh.<sup>[4]</sup> To address these issues, the current model of SDG Localisation in India is focussing on capacity building under the guidance of NITI Aayog.

### **Need for Prioritisation amongst Sustainable Development Goals**

In the Indian context, India saw variable progress across all MDGs. This reflects the need for prioritisation in Indian policy planning for effective work on SDGs.

Using Interpretive Structural Modelling on all 17 SDGs<sup>[12]</sup>, there is a hierarchy of SDGs that are dependent, independent, and interdependence of SDGs. A tabular representation of the hierarchy is as follows:

Level of Influence	SDG
1	SDG 11, SDG 14=SDG 15
2	SDG 3

3	SDG 2, SDG 13
4	SDG 6
5	SDG 1, SDG 7
6	SDG 9
7	SDG 10–SDG 17
8	SDG 12–SDG 16
9	SDG 5, SDG 8
10	SDG 4

SDGs in the same level and depicted as SDG X=SDG Y imply that they are inter-linked and influence each other. An SDG's influence over others increases in descending order. This suggests SDG 4 (Quality Education) is a crucial SDG to focus on for other SDGs to be simultaneously impacted. Education is highly relevant for the success of other SDG goals due to its higher degrees of linkages with others.

### Indian Context of Quality Education

The Indian context of education is lopsided towards initial levels of enrolment.<sup>[1]</sup> As the New Education Policy of 2020 reports, the gross enrolment ratio for classes 6-8 was 90.9%, while classes 9-10 and 11-12 were 79.3% and 56.5% respectively. This suggests that higher classes aren't able to sustain a lot of the student population. The problem worsens when one considers the constant decline in learning outcomes throughout elementary, secondary, and senior secondary education.<sup>[13]</sup>

This leads to the under-employability of the Indian youth, which restricts SDGs like SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) focusing towards full and productive employment. Additionally, there is a need to shift the focus of human capital from just being education-centric and include cognitive and non-cognitive skills.<sup>[14] [15]</sup> These skills include self-confidence, self-esteem, group collaboration, empathy, emotional strength, and others. They contribute heavily to the linkages SDG 4 shares with other SDGs. These linkages include:

1. In the growing service-oriented globalised world, overall human capital is necessary for India to tap into emerging markets and expand employment. This directly impacts SDGs like SDG 8 and similar goals. This increases in importance when we acknowledge the further linkages SDG 8 shares with the rest of the SDGs. Without economic growth, industrial innovation (SDG 9), sustainable cities (SDG 11), stronger institutions (SDG 16), and global partnerships (SDG 17) are hard to reach effectively.
2. Public perception of climate action (SDG 13) and several long-term SDGs without immediate effects show that the success of policies is heavily contingent on human capital. A higher overall human capital increases the receptiveness of advocacy-related actions and long-term policies.
3. There exists a hidden form of gender inequality in education quality, reflected by the gender stereotypes in discourse and learning materials.<sup>[16]</sup> This undermines many public awareness and capacity-building initiatives. A stronger and more empathetic human capital is a step towards ensuring mutual respect and other positive responses.

The current Quality Education indicators used in the SDG India Index<sup>[17]</sup> do not include an expanded definition of Human Capital. Tracing such traits is the first step to bringing cognitive and non-cognitive skills under policy planning.

The SDG planning needs to step up from indicators and focus on prioritisation. The current policy discourse at national and sub-national levels does not focus on the prioritisation of SDG goals and work towards long-term policy planning.

### SDG Indices and their Interaction with Local Policy Planning

Generally, untargeted policy planning at both national and sub-national levels suffers from temporal conflicts regarding the effects of policies and their impacts on voter incentives. It manifests as short-term policies pursued to show immediate effect to the voters.<sup>[1]</sup> This leads to a lop-sided development in SDGs. As SDG 9 on infrastructure is easier to perceive, several levels of government focus on infrastructure over longer-duration projects like education. Several long-term policies lose out in public discourse as they are harder to quantify. This lack of quantification makes it harder for advocacy and discourse around these issues. As a result, local planning diverts back to short-term policy orientation.

There are several contributions of such indices. <sup>[5]</sup> These include:

A. Facilitate comparative analysis and peer learning.

States and UTs can benchmark their progress and see it about each other. It aids in prioritisation in pursuit of enhancing performance.

B. Compliment decision-making.

These indices make data-driven decision-making more feasible for all national and sub-national actors. It improves targeting and resource allocation.

C. Promote SDG Localisation.

Such indices lay the foundation for district-level monitoring. It significantly boosts local policy-making towards SDGs.

D. Highlight Data Gaps.

The preparation of such indices forces local statistical systems to identify and reduce their data gaps to be more effective.

### **Behavioural Dimensions**

While the Model shifts accountability of service delivery to the local bodies, local representatives and bureaucrats perceive uncertainty as an obstacle in service delivery. While representatives don't wish to pursue SDGs that surpass their tenures, local administrators avoid overambition due to fear of natural calamities exasperated by the COVID-19 Pandemic <sup>[4]</sup> and overlapping areas of jurisdiction.

One of the challenges local governments face during decision-making is under-representation and lack of agreement on a shared vision in case of adequate representation. Their contribution to policy planning is crucial for filling this trust deficit between several stakeholders. It further creates a virtuous cycle of accountability and the ability to generate 'own sources of revenue' by gaining more confidence from the general public. <sup>[10]</sup>

The relationship between Politicians and Bureaucrats can be categorised into two: <sup>[10]</sup>

a. Collaborative: The interests of both parties converge.

b. Adversarial: both parties compete for power which may result in the non-achievement of SDGs

A lack of capacity of local politicians shifts power towards bureaucrats. While bureaucrats are present to aid local representatives in policy planning, such a skewed power balance often leads to power struggles. In cases where politicians and bureaucrats in one department create collaborative relationships, they are likely to turn adversarial towards other departments. <sup>[18]</sup> A direct correlation between the education levels of politicians and bureaucrats is probable to exist. <sup>[19]</sup> It raises the effect of SDG 4 (Quality Education) even further in implementation. Incorporating local leaders into agenda-setting is crucial for them to take ownership of customized SDG policies.

Street-level bureaucrats are the actual enforcers of laws and public policies. They apply their discretion in gaps between policy guidelines and popular demands. Due to a rise in e-governance, exercising this discretionary power has become tougher. This discretionary judgement is necessary for the on-ground targeting to reduce exclusion errors. <sup>[20]</sup> There is a growing need to incorporate their feedback into higher levels of policy planning.

### **Voter Incentives**

As local governments focus on providing public goods, it's easier for them to focus on smaller projects that reach many people. <sup>[4]</sup> It shows in small infrastructural investments, which are visible to the people. When coupled with uncertainty, this tendency reduces their ability to take up more sustainable and innovative SDG initiatives.

### **Alternate Policy Models**

Besides the SDG Localisation Model, several alternate governance models are used globally for progress towards the Agenda 2030. In the Indian context, these alternatives are:

1. Bottom-up Decentralisation Model
2. Market-driven Solution Model
3. Sectoral Governance Model
4. Centralised Governance Model

### Alternative 1 | Bottom-up Decentralisation Model

In a slight distinction from the centralised agenda-setting SDG Localisation Model, this model rests on the premise that agenda-setting should be a multi-directional process.<sup>[21]</sup> In this model, local bodies are not just recipients of policies from the top. Hence, the need for regional bodies to implement SDGs shows in the laws and the allocation of state ministries.

#### Theoretical Premise

This Model aims to give the local-level entities a sense of ownership of the agenda by making it an actor-driven process. These entities include local politicians, local bureaucrats, street-level bureaucrats, civil societies, the private sector, and academia. Reducing the existing vision-reality gap is vital as we move from national to sub-national levels.

Staying consistent with the trade-off of comparability and uniqueness, this model aims to make a compromise solution to measure measurable components without bureaucratic overreach and let the other components rely on local actors' capability to create diverse SDG solutions.<sup>[7]</sup> It depends on constant innovation to take steps forward to the 2030 Agenda. The innovative solutions can be scaled up using the inverted policy-implementation flow or the private sector-driven SDGs. Such cross-sectoral engagements are often better locally due to smaller scale and closeness.<sup>[8][22]</sup>

While there has been development in the creation of indicators over the years since the inception of the SDG India Index, implementation on a massive scale remains a challenge. The mere creation of dashboards isn't enough progress.<sup>[23]</sup>

The role of localisation in minimizing the SDG-target transition time depends on the following factors:<sup>[23]</sup>

- Resources Provided to Local Bodies
- Capacity of Officials of Local Bodies
- Strength of High Level (Global and National) Indicators
- Strength of Local Indicators

It shows that giving more autonomy in funding and decision-making also contributes to the success of SDG implementation, along with indicator mechanisms. The SDG Localisation Model is a centralised functional model in Agenda-setting and resource allocation. It reduces its functional efficacy. Stakeholder coordination requires financial resources to enable local governments towards voluntary policies for SDGs.<sup>[22]</sup> It occurs as a limitation in the relatively centralised SDG Localisation Model.

The model aims to progress towards the Experimental Governance Approach.<sup>[24]</sup> It is a virtuous cycle of provisional goal setting and revision based on learning from comparing various alternative approaches in several contexts. The experimental approach aims to increase deliberations in the lowest levels of governance to have diverse solutions to scale up. Stakeholders aid in knowledge sharing and technical support. Such participation increases transparency since they are regularly peer-reviewed by everyone in the community. Its strength lies in open negotiations among several actors, with or without central intervention. These negotiations open room for innovation. As a result, it avoids being politicised by higher politics.

#### Structure of the Model

In addition to the existing federal machinery in India, there are two components to the model:

##### a. Inverted policy-implementation flow

The local bodies identify the legal and policy provisions needed in the state for SDGs. They also review various state ministries to identify gaps and propose changes. States implement laws accordingly.

##### b. Private sector-driven SDGs

The private sector brings proposals to local bodies. The local bodies push such suggestions forth and get allocated resources for their implementation. The projects are regularly under social audit scrutiny. It utilises the private sector's systemic efficiencies to identify SDG proposals.

This model uses avenues for district coordination to determine community-defined sustainable development goals.<sup>[25]</sup> It prevents the over-standardization of indicators. Instead, it relies on mutually agreed common indicators by districts and the rest gets covered by their local innovations.<sup>[26]</sup> These avenues for district coordination can be



physical meetings or digital platforms where best practices and relevant materials for local governments are readily available. It also involves street-level bureaucrats and other relevant service providers in the principal agenda planning. Additionally, avenues of district discussions open up politicians and bureaucrats to mutually decide on initiatives and reduce conflicts.

Alternative 1 aims to improve fiscal devolution to PRIs and other local governance bodies. The financial allocation of funds can be on some minimum criteria over narrow bureaucratic or political considerations or by monetary incentives for taking up long-term SDG projects. It uses regular social audits to maintain a transparent system.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **On Indices**

The model aims to expand educational indices to include the extended definition of human capital to include cognitive and non-cognitive skills along educational indicators. These indicators can look like large-scale use of psychological testing tools.<sup>[27]</sup> Once treated as a mandated indicator, it measures the sensitivity towards SDGs, employability, societal tolerance and ethics, and others in students across India.

### **Application of Experimentalist SDG Governance**

The Chinese climate change policies follow a distinct approach from conventional democratic models of top-down control and conduct of local experimentation via implementation.<sup>[28]</sup> The policy cycle is as follows:

- a. Small-scale piloting
- b. Large-scale piloting
- c. National implementation

Small-scale piloting is dependent on voluntarism, capability, and diversity.<sup>[29]</sup> It gets incentives from financial, institutional, and local central benefits. This approach is congruent with the experimentalist SDG governance approach and spurs innovation. Such innovation also increases transparency and ownership of SDG policies when combined with an inverted policy implementation flow.

### **Alternative 2 | Market-Driven Solution Model**

Several models exist at the intersection of governance and economics. The 'New Public Management' approach links government inefficiencies and economic hardships to the incapability of bureaucracies and hierarchies.<sup>[30]</sup> This approach identifies good governance as a market-driven mechanism. It links the efficiency of actors to rewards via tools that motivate the participation of non-state actors and shift preferences. These tools include environmental taxation, tradeable carbon permits, and renewable energy levels.<sup>[31]</sup> It came as a collective effort from several global non-state actors like Non-Governmental Organisations to influence governmental policies. They began creating their incentive structures for impacting business practices. These range from environmental labels and recognitions to promises of market access.<sup>[32]</sup>

In this model, the private sector leads in SDG efforts, with minimal governmental regulation. It focuses on private investment, entrepreneurship, and technological innovation to address SDG challenges. Using market efficiency, it aims to reach scalable solutions in the most effective way possible.

### **Limitations**

The capacity-building paradox<sup>[33]</sup> in the interaction of good governance and market-driven governance refers to the belief of policy designers that any capacity-building efforts automatically trickle down to other aspects of good governance and solve several issues, with an equal possibility of reinforcement of powerful interests or prevailing conditions.

Applied Market-Driven Governance tools in global forest conservation efforts have reflected several externalities.<sup>[34]</sup> Powerful actors often profiteer from any such efforts. It marginalizes people and environmental advocacy organisations. Such exploitations have resulted in deforestation and failures due to informal transactions. It increases institutional governance challenges where jurisdictions overlap between several institutions due to its inherent lack of accountability. With weaker institutions, developing nations are more vulnerable to such harm. Other externalities include pollution and consumerist cultures.<sup>[35]</sup>

### **Alternative 3 | Sectoral Governance Model**

This model refers to the horizontal devolution of governance at the national level. These agents can be national agencies and ministries in chosen sectors or other private and public actors. It follows the pattern of reducing governmental avenues by shifting tasks to non-legislative or private actors involved in policymaking. No specific attempts exist to delegate this governance through localisation.

The central governments often delegate due to a lack of specialisation, political will, or to increase the policy credibility by separating it from the ever-changing legislative environment.<sup>[36]</sup> Due to increased specialisation, sectoral governance allows more targeted collaborations and research. It can potentially increase innovation and the number of available solutions for national application.

While central governments delink sectors from general planning, they still exercise necessary control over sectors by shadow hierarchies, or hierarchies which are not explicitly stated in the governance model, to maintain supervision.

#### **Limitations**

Compared to conventional democratic legislative planning, sectoral governance doesn't enjoy the flexibility of shifting resources from one sector to another as a reflection of prioritisation. Most sector-specific resources remain limited to the said sector, which makes it considerably inflexible.

To achieve the Agenda 2030, SDGs require constant assessment and reprioritisation of resources across several diverse districts. Limiting the ability to prioritise leads to sub-standard policies and the inability to create effective inter-sectional policies. It is crucial to utilise the inter-sectional nature of SDGs efficiently.

There exists an inherent imbalance of control in the model. While supervision is necessary for nationally coordinated planning, increasing control instruments reduces the agency of sectors. While constant progress monitoring is vital, it appears as a legislative threat to the sectors. Additionally, the ability to supervise reduces as the technological complexity of any sector increases. It is due to the lack of specialisation at the centre. Constant re-evaluations of policy control instruments like budget and resources are required to create meaningful control of sectors. However, this reduces the sectoral agency and is costly if done frequently.<sup>[36]</sup>

### **Alternative 4 | Centralised Governance Model**

Despite a federal structure, India continues to be relatively centralised. The centre has a higher constitutional power than states on most policy matters.

To improve policy integration of Agenda 2030, this model allocates resources and makes decisions from the centre. States and lower forms of government have limited autonomy in national planning and execution. It promotes uniformity in policy application, which may not contextually customize across the diversity of Indian districts. It drives monitoring across all sectors and units.

A central commitment is useful for streamlined hierarchical decision-making and quicker roll-outs of policies. It was reflected in the nationwide vaccination rollouts in several states during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After independence, Indian policy issues were relatively uniform. A one-size-fits-all approach is used considerably in such cases.<sup>[1]</sup> Centralised governance is structurally devoid of policy customization, especially in the Indian context, due to the diverse nature of the stakeholders involved. Despite a higher control over national resources, the central governments face a structural trade-off between hierarchies and inclusivity.

These hierarchies operate through routine vertical engagement assessments and policy instruments. It requires consistency and coordination. These networks aid in information for decision-making.

#### **Limitations**

A centralised governance is vulnerable to sudden shocks as it affects several stakeholders collectively. Due to the disconnect from the grassroots, it doesn't get real-time feedback and local ownership of local policies. Such public disinterest leads to implementation failures.<sup>[4]</sup>

A centralised system is structurally slow in areas like service delivery and innovation. It is due to a lack of decentralised experimentation, which can improve the overall policy climate.

### Criteria Specification

There are several criteria for a comparison between the following policy interventions:

- A. SDG Localisation Model
- B. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model
- C. Market-Driven Solution Model
- D. Sectoral Governance Model
- E. Centralised Governance Model

The following criteria contribute to making the comparison:

1. Effectiveness

It measures the ability of each model to achieve the goals of the SDGs of Agenda 2030.

2. Efficiency

It measures the cost-effectiveness of models with the given policy constraints of India.

3. Flexibility

It measures the adaptability of models, considering the diversity of local needs.

4. Inclusiveness

It measures the ability of models to include various stakeholders in their decisions.

5. Accountability

It measures the transparency and responsibility of each model in its operationalisation and the ease of accessing information by people.

6. Scalability

It measures the ease of models to be applied on a larger or smaller scale and replicated in such contexts.

7. Sustainability

It measures the ability of models to sustain long-term actions while minimizing the negative externalities.

8. Equity

It measures the ability of models of fair distribution of resources and benefits to address several stakeholders.

9. Innovation

It measures the models' ability to incorporate new ideas and work towards newer outputs.

10. Cultural Sensitivity

It measures the extent of the ability of models to cater to local cultures and public perception.

11. Resilience

It measures the ability of models to respond to internal or external shocks.

12. Political Feasibility

It measures the political support and consequent successful implementation of models.

With the context of SDGs and constraints in India, these criteria get ranked in the following ways:

1. Effectiveness

It measures the primary goal of achieving SDG policy integration. Hence, it is the most relevant criterion.

2. Sustainability

Long-term success and minimizing negative externalities are crucial for tangible impacts on SDGs. Hence, it ranks high on relevance.

3. Equity

Given the context of various forms of inequality in India, it ranks highly.

4. Efficiency

Cost-effectiveness is crucial for consideration of Indian resource constraints. However, it does not weigh over the sustainable achievement of goals.

5. Inclusiveness

It is important to include several stakeholders for greater policy integration and impact of SDGs.

6. Scalability

To increase the scale of impact, models need to be widely applicable and replicable.

7. Flexibility

Adaptability to local needs is crucial for policy integration and customization to different contexts. However, it isn't as important as the preceding criteria.

8. Accountability

Transparency and responsibility act more like enablers for higher criteria like effectiveness and inclusiveness.

#### 9. Resilience

Considering its importance, it is a secondary consideration to the inclusive and sustainable achievement of SDGs.

#### 10. Political Feasibility

It is notable for the implementation of SDGs. However, due to its relatively volatile nature, it is weighed lower.

#### 11. Innovation

It drives progress for SDGs. However, it rests on the foundation of the preceding criteria.

#### 12. Cultural Sensitivity

It contributes to the local acceptance of models. For relevance, it ranks lower as the primary policy issues revolve around achieving SDGs and engaging with broader systemic issues.

### Criteria Application

The following models are analysed and ranked based on each of the twelve criteria:

- 1) SDG Localisation Model
- 2) Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model
- 3) Market-Driven Solution Model
- 4) Sectoral Governance Model
- 5) Centralised Governance Model

#### 1. Effectiveness

##### **Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

It is highly effective in accessing and addressing local needs and directly involves all stakeholders in the national agenda-setting process.

##### **SDG Localisation Model**

It is effective in institutionally accessing diverse local contexts and giving them the needed competence for operationalisation.

##### **Centralised Governance Model**

While it isn't adequate in addressing local nuances, it manages to direct resources and general efforts of a nation towards SDG policy planning using its hierarchies.

##### **Sectoral Governance Model**

It is effective in the specialisation of the sector. However, it lacks the flexibility in prioritisation and isn't competent to address the intersectional nature of SDGs.

##### **Market-Driven Solution Model**

Its reliance on market interests without significant regulation reduces the uncertainty of SDG policy integration.

### Sustainability

#### I. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model

It ensures the long-term sustainability of SDGs by ensuring local ownership and incentives for regional involvement.

#### II. SDG Localisation Model

It enables local governments to enhance their capabilities and get directed policy support from higher governments.

#### III. Sectoral Governance Model

Due to specialisation, all sectors optimize their resources. It allows them to provide relatively sustainable SDG policy planning.

#### IV. Centralised Governance Model

It can sustain nationally coordinated actions due to its centralised decision-making. However, this comes at the cost of local sustainability.

#### V. Market-Driven Solution Model

While market efficiency leads to productive solutions, the more extensive pursuit of profit undermines local long-term sustainability.

### **Equity**

#### **I. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

It ensures fair distribution of resources by improved identification and better targeting by involving stakeholders like local governments, street bureaucrats, and others, focussed on improving mutual agenda setting and ownership among stakeholders.

#### **II. SDG Localisation Model**

It addresses local disparities and promotes equity using institutional involvement. It also aims to distribute the concentration of capabilities from metropolitan to smaller centres.

#### **III. Sectoral Governance Model**

While it works to acknowledge and address equity efforts on a sectoral level due to its increased specialisation, it misses out on broader intersectional inequalities.

#### **IV. Centralised Governance Model**

Since the model depends on a one-size-fits-all approach, it misses addressing local inequity concerns.

#### **V. Market-Driven Solution Model**

It increases inequity in areas of vulnerability, overlapping jurisdictions, and varying levels of development.

### **Efficiency**

#### **I. Market-Driven Solution Model**

It is highly efficient due to a profit-optimization-oriented approach.

#### **II. Centralised Governance Model**

It is efficient in national coordination and resource management.

#### **III. Sectoral Governance Model**

While there can be various levels of efficiencies across sectors, they optimize due to sectoral-specialisation.

#### **IV. SDG Localisation Model**

The needs of local aspirations challenge efficiency.

#### **V. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

Increased localised inputs further increase challenges to efficient allocation.

### **Inclusiveness**

#### **I. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

It helps create self-sustaining local policy communities and stakeholders in decision-making.

#### **II. SDG Localisation Model**

It includes a diverse set of stakeholders for implementation of SDG policies.

#### **III. Sectoral Governance Model**

Due to specialisation, it is inclusive within sectors. However, its applicability is limited in a broader intersectional context.

#### **IV. Centralised Governance Model**

It can involve nationwide stakeholders. However, it is structurally less inclusive of local opinions.

#### **V. Market-Driven Solution Model**

In pursuit of profitable avenues, it often excludes marginal communities.

### **Scalability**

#### **Centralised Governance Model**

It is easily scalable across a nation due to its top-down approach and use of hierarchies.

#### **Market-Driven Solution Model**

Driven by market forces, it is easy to scale them rapidly due to their efficiencies.

#### **Sectoral Governance Model**

It is scalable within sectors. However, it is challenging for cross-sector scalability.

#### **SDG Localisation Model**

It faces challenges in scalability due to the need for constant local adaptations.

**Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

Due to increased local participation and customisation, it is a highly resource-intensive approach. Such complexities and inconsistent outcomes reduce the scalability of the model.

**Flexibility****Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

It is highly adaptable to diverse needs and conditions due to significant stakeholder involvement. It allows policy customization as needed.

**SDG Localisation Model**

Its institutional design allows adjustments based on localised requirements.

**Sectoral Governance Model**

It is flexible in a sectoral design due to higher sectoral specialisation. However, inter-sectional customization of policies isn't possible.

**Market-Driven Solution Model**

It has some efficiency due to its market mechanism. However, it is primarily driven by market demands over local needs.

**Centralised Governance Model**

It has minimal flexibility due to a top-to-bottom approach.

**Accountability****Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

It has strong localised accountability mechanisms for oversight.

**SDG Localisation Model**

It emphasizes transparency due to its constant monitoring, making it relatively easy for communities to access information.

**Sectoral Governance Model**

Accountability is sector-specific. Transparency varies with the checks-and-balance mechanism of sectors.

**Centralised Governance Model**

A national accountability mechanism exists. However, its overall transparency is less due to lack of localised transparency.

**Market-Driven Solution Model**

Since it is driven by private interests, with minimal regulation, public accountability is minimal.

**Resilience**

## 1. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model

A grassroots localised setup allows it to absorb and respond to shocks from the foundational level.

## 2. SDG Localisation Model

The institutional setup allows it to respond to local shocks and gain stability.

## 3. Sectoral Governance Model

It is resilient within sectors. However, it lacks cross-sectoral resilience.

## 4. Centralised Governance Model

It is resilient at a national level. However, it suffers locally.

## 5. Market-Driven Solution Model

It enjoys economic resilience due to market efficiency mechanisms. However, it doesn't have systems to deal with societal shocks.

**Political Feasibility**

## 1. Centralised Governance Model

It enjoys strong political support at the national level.

2. Market-Driven Solution Model

It enjoys strong support in liberalised economies and nations with strong institutions.

3. Sectoral Governance Model

It enjoys support within sectors. However, cross-sectional support is severely limited.

4. SDG Localisation Model

It requires political support over various levels, which makes political support complex.

5. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model

Demands for decentralisation and local empowerment struggles to garner support across all levels of governments collectively.

### **Innovation**

1. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model

It encourages localised innovation through collective policy planning. In addition to its context-specific approach, its experimentalist approach allows it to expand innovative solutions.

2. Market-Driven Solution Model

Market competition incentivises innovation and new solutions for profit maximalization.

3. SDG Localisation Model

Innovation is encouraged within local context framework.

4. Sectoral Governance Model

Innovation occurs within specialised sectors. However, inter-sectoral innovation is limited.

5. Centralised Governance Model

Innovation is slower due to the adherence of bureaucratic processes.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

1. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model

It enjoys a deep understanding of grassroot local cultures and interactions.

2. SDG Localisation Model

It enjoys a strong alignment with local cultures and norms, leading to higher levels of local acceptance.

3. Sectoral Governance Model

It is sensitive to cultural norms with sectoral boundaries.

4. Centralised Governance Model

It can't cater to local cultural differences due to a top-down approach.

5. Market-Driven Solution Model

It doesn't focus on cultural factors as it prioritises market logic.

### **Recommendations:-**

Several policy frameworks exist and are analysed to meet the ambitious SDG expectations of the Agenda 2030.

#### **SDG Localisation Model**

Within this policy model, all policy options target a trickled-down policy integration of SDGs into local planning via existing and new institutions across all levels of governance, centralized planning, and decentralised service delivery.

#### **Monitoring Infrastructure and Capacity Building**

It aims to develop indicators to quantify policy progress at all levels of governance. It relies on institutional support from NITI Aayog and state statistical and nodal departments to provide technical support and policy guidance. Such endeavours allow governments to identify data gaps and work on them.

#### **Collaborative Competition**

It aims to increase collaborative competition between states and districts via indicators and constant policy guidance to create a virtuous cycle of progress and support.

**Whole-of-the-Society Approach**

It aims to bring civil societies, international organisations, the private sector, and academia into SDG policy planning to utilise their experiential and technical expertise. It allows multiple perspectives to reach central SDG agenda planning.

**Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model**

The policy options here target maximizing the inclusion of stakeholders and innovative policies for SDGs. It uses the existing federal machinery and strengthens its autonomy and capacity by promoting an Inverted Policy-Flow Framework.

**Monitoring with Trade-offs**

It aims to monitor goals with the bureaucratic systems while easing district control. It ensures that districts have the avenues to create diverse policy solutions outside the set indicators.

**Increased Local Autonomy**

It aims to increase fiscal decentralisation and autonomy for experimental governance at the local levels. It allows the maximized involvement of regional actors in policy planning and agenda setting. It gets established in voluntary SDG experimentation policies and community-defined SDGs.

**SDG Prioritisation**

In congruence with the inherent linkages of SDGs, it aims to prioritise SDGs like Education, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and expand Education indices to include extended definitions of Human Capital for better SDG implementation.

**Market-Driven Solution Model**

The policy options here aim to use market forces and tools like taxation, investment, and entrepreneurship to direct public policy and largely stay deregulated by governments.

**Incentive structures**

It aims to develop better incentive structures for corporates to foster pro-SDG initiatives. The recognition of Corporate Social Work by the state and non-state actors like NGOs works as an example.

**Efficiency**

Due to market efficiency and profit maximization, it aims to be resilient to economic shocks and improve innovation throughout the economy.

**Sectoral Governance Model**

The policy options in this model aim to devolve central legislative tasks to sector-specific agencies for sectoral optimization.

**Increased Specialisation led Optimization**

It aims to allow expertise to direct sectoral approaches and optimize the use of resources invested in them. However, this restricts the resources to a specific sector and shifts in prioritising sectors or inter-sectoral policies are difficult.

**Separation from Shifts in Legislature**

Often, it insulates from constant shifts in the legislature. It allows the creation of stable sectoral policies.

**Centralised Governance Model**

The policy options in this model aim towards a nationally coordinated collective action for SDG implementation.

**Uniform Planning**

Centralised decision-making allows for faster policy implementation across the nation. A nationally coordinated vaccination program is an example. It is only relevant till Challenges are general and uniformly applicable across diverse contexts.



**Institutional Oversight**

It aims to use its institutions and bureaucracy to monitor and implement policies in a top-down approach. It allows significant centralised guidance for every level of governance.

**Analysis of the SDG Localisation Model**

The SDG Localisation Model aims to galvanise Indian policy-making to the last mile of governance. For this, it uses central oversight of the decentralisation of service delivery while holding the local governments accountable. This central oversight involves monitoring and capacity building at regional levels. This nationally coordinated approach aims towards a greater SDG policy integration in various diverse contexts concerning the UN Agenda 2030.

**Strengths**

The model ranks high in accountability, cultural sensitivity, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, innovation and resilience due to its highly adaptive nature across diverse local contexts. It allows the model to factor in local needs during policy implementation. It aims to increase the implementation of long-term SDG policies, which otherwise don't find enough support in districts.

**Weaknesses**

The model ranks low on efficiency, political feasibility and scalability as it relies on mass public mobilisation, which is hard to achieve. Local customisation makes policy formulation and implementation more complex. It reduces the scalability of the model. Additionally, an increase in devolution of powers doesn't find popular support across many levels of governance.

**Ranking of All Models**

The weightage given to each rank is as follows:

- 1st rank = 5 points
- 2nd rank = 4 points
- 3rd rank = 3 points
- 4th rank = 2 points
- 5th rank = 1 point

Based on the cumulating all ranks of all five models, the overall scores for every Model is as follows:

1. Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model  
53 points
2. SDG Localisation Model  
41 points
3. Sectoral Governance Model  
34 points
4. Centralised Governance Model  
31 points
5. Market-Driven Solution Model  
26 points

In conclusion, the Bottom-Up Decentralisation Model is the most appropriate model for achieving SDG policy integration as needed for the UN Agenda 2030. An increased focus on better educational indicators, experimentalism, and bottom-up community participation in decision-making is crucial for localising SDGs and their policy integration.

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