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Governance of Cities, Villages and Beyond

Decentralisation and Localising SDGs Agenda 2021



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Governance of Cities, Villages and Beyond: Decentralisation and Localising SDGs Agenda

Abstract

The paper makes an attempt to look at the overall picture of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in India and particularly in Maharashtra and the SDGs Agenda. Further, the paper discusses how the SDGs can be localised at the local governance level. The paper goes on to emphasise people's participation and the Leave No One Behind narrative within localising SDGs framework and highlights the rationale and relevance of the same. The paper concludes with recommendations from CSOs and experts that needs to be taken into consideration to ensure equal representation, people's participation in localising SDGs through both these Amendment Acts and much beyond.

1. Background to Local Governance in India

Article 40 of the Constitution lays down that the state would take steps to establish autonomous bodies in the form of village panchayats and the idea of planning from below was made in the 3rd five year plan with three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) recommendation by Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957). Following that, in the 6th five year plan a committee on Panchayati Raj headed by Ashok Mehta was appointed by the Government of India, to draw up the block level planning, one of the major recommendations of the committee was to strengthen financial resources of the PRIs. The process of discourse and deliberations on local governance and decentralisation took further three decades till 10th five year plan (GoI, n.d).

Since the late 1980s, the world has been witnessing a wave of decentralisation globally, which was founded upon the idea of making governance more participatory and inclusive. In 1992, India too embraced this wave and amended its Constitution with the intent to strengthen grassroots-level democracy by decentralising governance and empowering local political bodies. The outcome was the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which marks a water-shed in the history of local self-government. The overall objective was to create local institutions that were democratic, autonomous, financially strong, and capable of formulating and implementing plans for their respective areas and providing administration to the people. It is based on the notion that people need to have a say in decisions that affect their lives and local problems are best solved by local solutions (Jagtiani, 2020).

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts 1992 were passed by Parliament in December, 1992. The local bodies - 'Panchayats' and 'Municipalities' came under Part IX and IXA of the Constitution, it enjoin upon the states to establish a three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels and Municipalities

in the urban areas respectively. These Acts provide a basic framework of decentralisation of powers and authorities to the Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies at different levels:

i) The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 aims to provide a three tier system in the Local Self Government constituted through elections held regularly every five years. The Act also provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women. Moreover, the Act provides for a State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute a District Planning Committee to prepare a draft development plan for the district. Provision has also been made to constitute a State Election Commission in every state to supervise, direct and control the regular and smooth elections to Panchayat bodies. In addition, there is also the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 which for the extension of the 73rd Amendment (with certain modifications and exceptions) to tribal and forested areas across 10 states of India, excluding tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, which are governed by District or Regional Councils (Jagtiani, 2020).

ii) The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 proposes to constitute a uniform structure of Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats in transitional areas. This Act granted the Urban Local Government a constitutional status. Presently, the Urban Local Government has three categories-(a) Nagar Panchayat for a transitional area, i.e., an area in transition from a rural to an urban area, (b) Municipal Council for smaller urban area and (c) Municipal Corporation for a large urban area. An area is designated as ‘a transitional area’ or a ‘smaller urban area’ or ‘a larger urban area’ on the basis of size and density of population of that area, the revenue generated for local administration, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities, the economic importance or such other factors. The Governor of a state can provide, by a notification that a Municipality may not be created in an industrial township if the municipal services are provided by an industrial establishment. Another type of town which does not come within the scope of above categories is the army cantonment. The seats in the Municipalities are filled by persons who are elected directly by the people from the territorial constituencies within the municipal area. These territorial constituencies are known as wards.

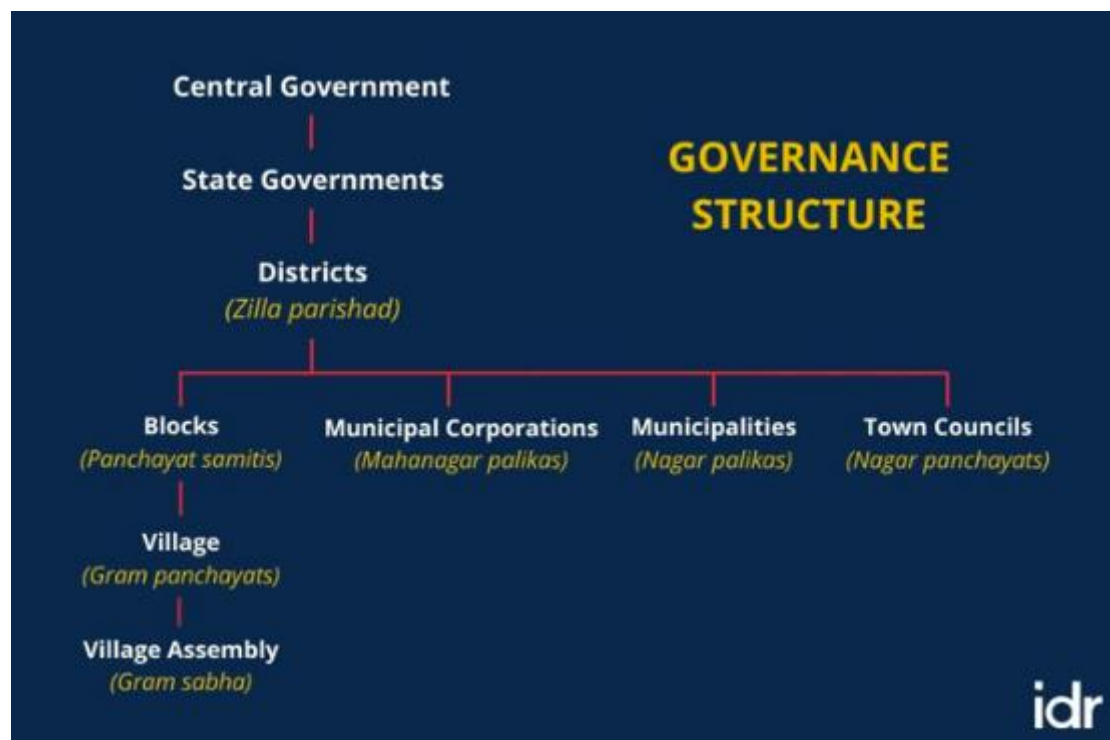


Image 1: Decentralised Governance Structure in India [Source: IDR]

2. Why are SDGs important? How can Local Governance in India be linked to SDGs?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were born at the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The objective was to produce a set of 17 universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are a bold commitment to tackle some of the more pressing challenges facing the world today. All 17 Goals and associated 169 targets are cohesive, integrated meaning success in one affects success for others and transformative. They are ambitious in making sure **no one is left behind**. More importantly, they involve us all to build a more sustainable, safer, more prosperous planet for all humanity by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

SDGs are based on certain universal values and principles -the major one is Leave No One Behind (LNOB). This is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. (United Nations, 2015).



Image 2: Pictorial view of 17 SDGs [Source: United Nations]

Many of the barriers people face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but rather the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people further and further behind.

The Indian society is structured along various social exclusion fault lines with caste, ethnicity, religion and gender being the major cues. Additionally exclusion vectors include disability, sexual orientation, age, occupation, life-style, language and many others. Such exclusions are multiple and intersectional and localising the discourse on SDGs will facilitate representation and inclusion of these Socially Excluded and Vulnerable Groups (SEVP) in several diverse contexts (WNTA, 2019).

There is no doubt that SDGs are globally recognised and acknowledged but it is even more crucial to localise the SDGs which means more than just “landing” internationally agreed goals at the local level. It means making the aspirations of the SDGs become real to communities, households and individuals particularly to those at the risk of falling behind. Local governments are critical in turning Agenda 2030 of SDGs from a global vision into a local reality and local communities and stakeholders, who know individual and collective needs and capacities best are equally critical partners in implementing and realising SDGs (Steiner, 2017). In order to realise the “localisation of SDGs” in India the 73rd and 74th CAA becomes important as they form the blueprint to bottom-up participatory governance.

SDGs are not external to the policy and governance process, it is very interlinked. Infact, monitoring and tracking of SDGs based on indicators or matrices is possible when one takes into consideration analysis of the schemes and policies in respective countries by linking them to SDG indicators to measure and monitor progress. The localising agenda also supports the achievement of the SDGs through bottom-up action -participatory planning,

implementation and evaluation which can best be realised through 73rd and 74th CAA - participation of people, elected representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), district administration and frontline functionaries in the action agenda.

Empowering local self-governance institutions is effective in ensuring community ownership and integration of SDGs at grassroots level, as its members are directly elected by the people, and are mandated to undertake planning exercises in consultation with the community. Local governments (both rural and urban) are best placed to “put people first” and ensure “no one is left behind”. In India twenty-nine functions related to socio-economic development are devolved to local governments as identified in the sub-national laws. As a result, out of the 17 SDGs, 15 are directly related to activities carried out by local governments in India (SDG 14 on marine resources and SDG 17 on global partnerships fall outside the ambit of local governance institutions). Effective localisation would also need to involve developing mechanisms for building rural-urban synergies. This is particularly important since many of the challenges in the years to come for cities would come from increased migration from rural areas. Effective localisation of SDGs requires linking budgets to the local plans which in turn requires an approach that fosters vertical as well as horizontal convergence. It also requires devising strategies for effective monitoring to allow for course correction at the local levels. The capacities of institutions that are responsible for capacity building at local levels need to be augmented as they may not have adequate resources for building capacities on SDGs embedding CSOs and other institutions early on can help localising SDGs and in identifying hotspots for targeted intervention by all actors (Niti Aayog, 2019).

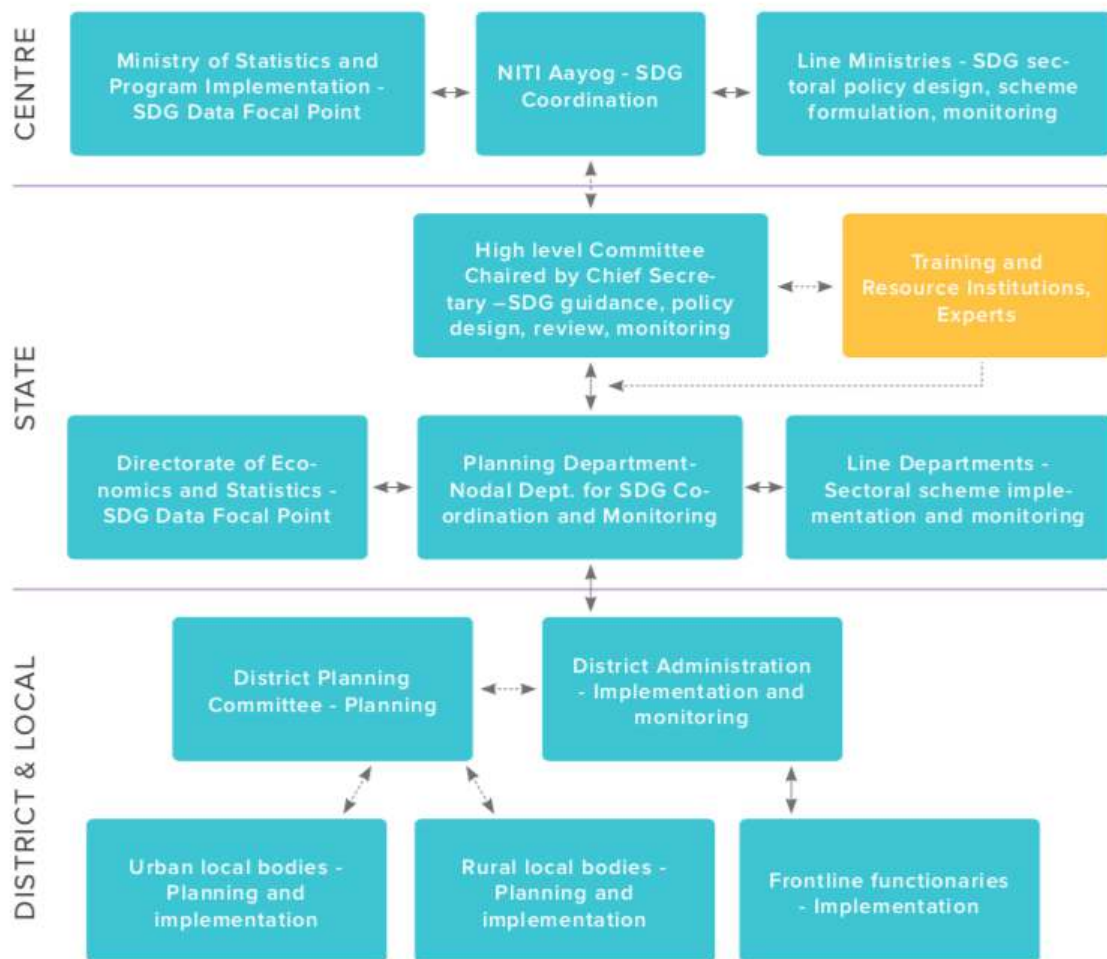


Image 3: How India is delivering on the SDGs [Source: Niti Aayog]

The experience of India in localising the SDGs can be viewed as an ongoing process in three phases, often occurring simultaneously (Niti Aayog, 2019). Niti Aayog alongside the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has developed a National Indicator Framework to monitor SDGs and this was done through a participatory and consultative process with multi stakeholders. Additionally, they have taken a number of initiatives on SDGs taken up actively by Niti Aayog but that only is the tip of the iceberg and there is a lot more that still waits to be done.

Most importantly, the implementation of 73rd and 74th CAA continues to be poor in most Indian states and there is a pressing need to integrate and localise SDGs at the bottom most level and encourage people's participation in the decision-making process -their right to express their opinions on issues related to the development of their area.

3. Why is Participation important?

Success of democracy is impossible without participation of the people. In a democratic system like India, citizen participation is one of the key components of an inclusive, egalitarian, accountable and transparent decision making process -meaningfully involving the broad public in issues that matter which in turn is a reflection of good governance. The SDGs

recognise the essence of good governance and the need for participation at all levels -local, national and global to ensure integrated and sustainable development.

Elections and universal adult suffrage are seen as a fundamental method of participation in representative democracies like India. However, this concept has not yet been fully realised in everyday practice. There are two kinds of participation -organic and claimed participation which includes social movements, NGO led participation that fight for greater democratic expression and for the rights of the underprivileged to improve their livelihoods and living standards (Mansuri and Rao, 2013 as cited in Menon and Hartz-Karp, 2019) . Another kind of participation is induced participation which is promoted through policy actions of the state and implemented by bureaucracies and comes from two forms -decentralisation and community-driven development. In India, the most consequential have been the 73rd and 74th CAA, creating institutions of local self-government in villages and urban areas across the country, with elected councils which further involve civic groups and the general public meaningfully in deliberation on difficult issues (Menon and Hartz-Karp, 2019).

Critically, unlike the 73rd CAA that created gram sabhas in rural areas, the 74 CAA has not created a structure for direct democratic participation in cities, there were proposals made by various CSOs to create area/mohalla sabhas in urban areas. Subsequently, under the Government of India's Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission that was launched in 2006 -state governments were asked to include the provision for community participation as a precondition for receiving funding from the central government. A provision for area sabha was enacted by at least 12 states but very few have constituted these. Now, to localise and achieve SDGs community participation is non negotiable and the role of 73rd and 74th CAA is significant to ensure partnerships and safeguard that no one is left behind. This process must involve raising awareness among people so that they are able to claim their rights, keep their opinion and make decisions on critical and specific issues that concern them.

4. Performance of the 73rd & 74th CAA: National Scenario

The 73rd and 74th CAA are path breaking amendments because they aimed at the creation of local government and dissolution of powers to them in the respective states. Overall, certain states like Kerala, Karnataka, West Bengal and Delhi have taken innovative steps to implement and empower local government. Specific impressive successes include all-women panchayats in Maharashtra which has a fine record of adopting need-oriented, ecologically sustainable programmes, outside the purview of traditional politics. They have also played an important role in facilitating basic services in villages. The all-woman panchayat of Kultikri in West Bengal has played a leading role in the literacy campaign of the district, effected a substantial improvement in the primary health infrastructure, raised a large sum of money by leasing some village ponds for pisciculture, and set up training-cum-production centres for women (UNDP, n.d)

Through 73rd and 74th CAA political space is provided for marginalised groups and women and their subsequent exposure to decentralised governance, planning development

governance and capacity building through impartial training. The CSOs at the local level in partnership with government in certain cases have actively engaged in empowering these groups, leadership challenges and in facilitating economic development and social justice at the grassroots level. A visible change is noticeable in certain states -there are reduced numbers of 'proxies', women have taken charge of their responsibilities and they are encouraging more women to stand in election. For example: one of the significant achievements of the 73rd CAA is reservation of seats in favour of women and the disadvantaged sections in the rural community, it has improved their awareness and perception levels and has created an urge in them to assert their rightful share in the decision making process at the local level (Pal, 2004). Further, several studies which have surveyed the changing perceptions of women representatives, have found that they are conscious of, and pleased about, the perceived enhancement of their status in the family and the local community. Many women have said that their husbands and family members too have gained in prestige (UNDP, n.d)

The Government of India has set up mechanisms with the help of institutions like Niti Aayog and MoSPI to track and monitor SDGs at the local level and indicators (not all) under National Indicator Framework has been set up for each goal to track progress and help identify data gaps more from a schematic lens. Niti Aayog has also developed a vision document aligned with sub-national governments to embed what is being regarded as the 'whole of government approach' and certain states have taken up this approach (including Maharashtra) to implement SDGs at the local level. There is no doubt that the government is taking interest but the reporting by the government data is primarily based on meta data and aggregations and they do not adequately reflect the status of the SEVP groups. Currently, there are no disaggregated data or adequate insights on the barriers these groups face in accessing the development provisions or enjoying their mandated rights (WNTA, 2019).

Despite the impact of local governance and gradual steps towards localisation, there are substantive issues which are unsettled. Major ones are listed below:

i) Centralised decentralisation: The paradox of the 73rd and 74th CAA is that though aimed at the decentralisation it is an act promulgated by the central government, made mandatory for the state governments. It is to be implemented through the same hierarchy that it aims to do away with. Though the state governments are left to work out the details of the act in their states themselves, the rigidity of the authority has not let that to materialize either. An argument worth noting here is that when it comes to understanding the basics of decentralisation is that the very word implies the centralized authority in place. Decentralisation is crucially influenced by the political relationships between 'centre' and 'locality', and by configurations of local power, which mean that very similar decentralisation schemes can have different purposes and outcomes - sometimes serving to extend central power downwards through patronage, or to break potential sources of opposition. There is in fact an 'ironic paradox of decentralisation': strengthening the capacity of local government may actually mean that the government at the centre has to play a stronger role in certain critical respects (Hamid, 2004).

ii) Lack of financial autonomy and the curious case of Local Budgets: Devolution of functions is meaningless without transferring adequate funds to carry out said functions. After almost 28 years of decentralisation, local government expenditure as a percentage of GDP is only 2 percent -miniscule as compared to other major economies. Most local bodies both in the urban and rural do not enjoy enough autonomy to raise their own source revenue and heavily depend on external sources for funding. They also lack capacity to properly impose taxes, due to ambiguous taxation norms, lack of reliable records and so on and under common scenarios state governments are reluctant to devolve taxation powers to local bodies (Jagtiani, 2020). The State Finance Commissions' (SFCs) recommendation for financial devolution have not led to any substantive transfer of resources to ULBs or PRIs that match their responsibilities (Jha, 2020)

iii) Functional challenges and the role of parastatals: The capacity of local bodies to carry out their mandate is often circumscribed by state government officials. Additionally, the secretaries of local governments are grossly under-staffed and under-skilled, and therefore unable to provide the required support to the elected body. Their capacities need to be further strengthened through training of existing personnel and the recruitment of new staff. Though local bodies are authorised to recruit staff, this is prevented by limited funding (Jagtiani, 2020). Additionally, especially in cities and towns there are a whole range of parastatals, these became the means of further embedding the powers of the states in the performance of ULB functions. The reason given was the weak capacity of the cities requiring functions to be handled by a superior band of officials. These parastatals are controlled by the states and they affect the autonomy of municipal bodies to a great extent. Additionally, they effectively usurped functions and revenues that ought to have been the domain of ULBs. Further, in many states local bodies both at the rural and urban level have become weak and ineffective on account of a variety of reasons, including the failure to hold regular elections, prolonged supersessions and inadequate devolution of powers and functions. As a result, local bodies (mostly in the urban) are not able to perform effectively as vibrant democratic units of self-government, there are times they lack awareness and are not capacitated (Jha, 2020).

iv) Beyond the 73rd and 74th CAA (local governance of Small Towns/Peripheries): The definition of 'urban' and 'rural' in India has its own drawbacks and there is ambiguity when it comes to the local governance of the 'in between' -rurban areas emerging along industrial corridors, Census Towns and villages with urban characteristics. They constitute rural-urban gradation, and are not designated as administratively urban by the state, and continue to be governed by the appropriate gram panchayat. However, socio-economic changes in these rapidly transforming spaces make them appear quite similar to formal urban areas in terms of economic activities, human capital and the nature of services required by the citizens. This administrative classification also results in differences in functional domains and financial incentives to the rurban areas

and smaller STs. The 11th Schedule of the Constitution places important functions like agriculture, irrigation and housing under the ambit of Panchayats, while the 12th Schedule places urban planning, land use, water supply, roads, bridges, health sanitation and slum improvement under the purview of municipalities. But, the states are not obliged to transfer these functions to local bodies and there is variation across states as to the extent of transfer. This functionally distinct structure of rural and urban means that a panchayat may not be able to pursue policies that respond to the changes happening in its jurisdiction. At the union government level, where the focus is more on financial incentives and grants for development, there is historically a sharp differentiation between rural and urban, where Union schemes have given preference to rural over urban in centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) (Naik et al., 2019)

v) Lack of adequate integration of SDGs at the local level (with 73rd and 74th CAA): SDGs continue to be a global and national level dialogue. It is yet to be localised in true sense of terms, integration is yet to be implemented at the local level in congruence with the 73rd and 74th CAA. The local level functionaries as well as people are still alien to the concept of SDGs. Although efforts have been made by the government to promote SDGs in regional languages, it is yet to reach the ones at the last margin. The SEVP groups are still excluded from the mainstream SDGs narrative and their role is crucial in SDGs tracking and disaggregated data continues to be a distant dream. Community level engagements are indispensable when it comes to realising SDGs. Efforts are being made by some state governments like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Assam, Maharashtra (to name a few) anchored by Niti Aayog and respective state governments to localise SDGs but proper implementation of the Acts and its integration with SDGs is still awaited.

5. Performance of 73rd & 74th CAA: The Case of Maharashtra

As per the Census 2011, the total population of Maharashtra was 11.24 crore. Under the 73rd CAA so far 14 subjects from 11th schedule and under 74th CAA 12 subjects from 12 schedule have been assigned to ULBs by the state of Maharashtra. **The overall challenges listed in the previous section are also applicable in case of Maharashtra. In addition to that we will look into some of the state specific positive measures and challenges with respect to decentralisation and implementation of the Acts. Also, highlighted are the initiatives taken up by states to localise SDGs at the local governance level:**

i) Maharashtra's Initiative for Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act: The state has 13 PESA Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) districts with 59 blocks. All PESA districts are TSP areas but all TSP areas are not PESA districts. Maharashtra is known to have initiated a unique model of TSP to recognise the rights of the people in the backward region and to the neediest and deserving persons. The Government of Maharashtra in agreement with the Rural Development Department (RDD) took the decision to devolve 5% of the TSP funds to PESA gram panchayats. The objective of this decision was to empower tribal communities for informed decision-making on issues that pertain to the welfare of tribal people, through gram sabhas and gram panchayats. It gives the gram sabha an opportunity to weigh the best possible solutions for matters related to infrastructure, the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the

PESA Act, health, water, sanitation, education, conservation of forests and wildlife. Over 15,000 representatives were trained in this regard by Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASADA) Government Training Centre. The decision to release 5% of the TSP funds directly to the tribal panchayats was an experiment in the strengthening of democracy. This initiative allowed communities to make informed decisions and in turn improve the responsiveness of the government in bringing accountability, efficiency and equity (Deshmukh et al., 2019).

ii) Ward Committees and Citizens Participation: Despite signing the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the Union Government for JNNURM, which specified the timelines for implementation of conditionalities such as Community Participation Law in the year 2008. In Maharashtra, the approach of the government is flawed and the state saw the law only as an instrument to ensure continued funding under JNNURM. Further, the state has not initiated many measures to enhance citizen participation in urban governance. For example not all municipal corporations have constituted ward committees (19 out of 23 in the state) and even if they exist very few are actually functional in true sense (Kuruvilla and Waingankar, 2013).

iii) In addition, there is a need to hold free, fair and regular elections in certain pockets especially in the rural areas. Devolution of adequate human resources is also pending in certain rural and urban regions of Maharashtra. For example: the issue is the same with budgets even in big municipal corporations like Nagpur and Navi Mumbai -there is very little scope in the Municipal Budgets for ULBs to raise their own source revenue. There still continues to be a growing gap between policies, implementation and the localising SDGs agenda (which mostly follows a schematic lens) and innovations are needed in this regard. The situation is no different in case of PRIs. Additionally, Gram Sabhas needs to be strengthened and a similar three tier system in the form of area sabhas should be implemented.

Steps taken by Maharashtra to Localising SDGs:

- i) In Maharashtra, the Action Room to Reduce Poverty was set up in collaboration with United Nations in India and is tasked with monitoring of SDGs. It pilots the initiative for decentralised Planning and Monitoring of SDGs at Block level.
- ii) The state government and YASHADA, i.e. The Administrative Training Institute of the state government has recently completed an extensive study to estimate the Human Development Index at the Block level which will provide important baseline information.
- iii) The state government has recently announced the setting up of an independent SDGs Implementation and Monitoring centre expected to be functional in 2019-20
- iv) In Maharashtra, 1595 state schemes have been mapped to the goals and the targets using the online tool Maharashtra Plan schemes Information Management system.
- v) In Maharashtra, awareness generation has been undertaken through knowledge and information sharing about SDGs by providing access to relevant documents on SDGs. Additionally, booklets on SDGs that list out the goals and targets have been translated to the

local language, Marathi, and have been shared widely with all departments of the state government.

vi) In Maharashtra government has taken measures to ensure that a sustainable stream of funds is available at the district level for continuous training and capacity building on SDGs.

vii) Additionally, the government has directed YASHADA, the state level Administrative Training Institute, to incorporate academic curriculum on SDGs in their existing training modules for government officers.

viii) In Maharashtra, a Comprehensive SDGs Checklist has been designed to monitor the extent to which new project proposals are compliant with the framework of SDGs. The SDGs Checklist consists of five categories of assessment viz. Leave No One Behind, Positive and Adverse Impact on the Three Pillars of SDGs, Marker of SDGs and Targets, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Extent of SDGs Awareness. Further, it has been directed that all proposals under the Human Development Programme covering 125 Backward Blocks should be vetted against the SDGs Checklist, prior to issuing Administrative Approvals by the District Administration. Programmes are also being designed, such as the livelihood Programme for Rural Women, to reach the most marginalised (Niti Aayog, 2019).

Despite some commendable initiatives and drawbacks there is a lot that needs to be done at the local level to strengthen the institutions, ensure participation and link SDGs.

6. Recommendations

i) The Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are to be empowered to become self-governing institutions. States would have to shed their supervisory and operational roles vis-a-vis these institutions and assume a more strategic role in envisioning their empowerment. The functional (functionaries and functions) and financial (local budgets) domains should be well-defined and mandated with freedoms to exercise them without hindrance by the state. Further, the role of parastatal agency may create hindrance to autonomous functioning and lead to compromise on coherence when it comes to governance. This holds true for most of the states but also for Maharashtra and states in the Western Region.

ii) There is also a need to overcome rural-urban binaries when it comes to governance framework and integrate a variety of interlined rural-urban functions on both the union and federal levels of government. Efforts should be to make the functional domain flexible especially in case of rural spaces especially in the context of local governance (73rd and 74th CAA) (Naik et al., 2019)

iii) The time lag when it comes to transfer of funds from SFCs to local bodies (rural and urban) need to be addressed and local bodies should be given the autonomy to raise their own source revenue and be self-sufficient when it comes to drawing their budgets.

iv) Although in states like Maharashtra, the government is taking interest in local elections especially at Gram Panchayat level, in several pockets elections are not held regularly and the State Elections Committee should ensure this regularity.

v) Greater weightage and importance needs to be given to ensure the participation of District Planning Committees and alongside participatory planning and budgeting it is important to

ensure participatory monitoring of various schemes at the local level by integrating key SDGs indicators for different goals in the urban and the rural. No one should be left behind.

vi) Urban and rural management can no longer be assumed to be static, top-down and state-centred and same goes with SDGs they need to be localised and the dialogues should involve one at the last margins. Therefore, an interlocking matrix needs to be adopted so that SDGs and participatory local governance are closely working together towards inclusive and sustainable development.

vii) Much like the the three tier system in the 73rd CAA, the essence of ward committees and area sabhas should be recognised as they can play an important role in generating disaggregated data and promote accountability through community based monitoring mechanisms in line with the SDGs national/sub-national framework. Further, a system of social audit by citizens can also be another tool to track progress.

viii) Further, in order to integrate and localise SDGs at the local governance level, an important step is to build partnerships and capacities of people and local functionaries and CSOs must engage at their level in facilitating such workshops on relevant themes keeping in mind the specificities of each region.

7. Conclusion

This paper makes an exploratory attempt to broadly situate local governance in the country and their local integration with SDGs -past, present and way forward. India recognises the 2030 SDGs Agenda for Sustainable Development and it has made efforts to involve multiple stakeholders in the dialogue to ensure that no one is left behind and this was evident when we take into consideration the participation of CSOs through Wada Na Todo Abhiyaan (WNTA) and representation of socially excluded vulnerable groups in the India Voluntary National Review 2020 process. However, it is important to note that this is just the beginning and deeper integration efforts toward localisation is still awaited and a lot needs to be done at the local governance level to strengthen the same.

SDGs are an informative and participatory system which binds core values of human rights and sustainable development, it provides a global platform of representation and at the same time sets scope for local level involvement. The role of SDGs become even more indispensable when we take into account the global pandemic which is a global crisis with ramification beyond health, it also is a social, economic and governance issue so we must recognise the value and platform that SDGs have to offer, there is a greater need for government (centre and state) to engage at the community level and form deeper linkages with the already existing blueprint i.e 73rd and 74th CAA. The Government should set up mechanisms at the grassroots and involve their participation in the process but also CSOs can utilise SDGs as a proxy indicator and demand government accountability. Amongst all of this we should not forget the principle of Leave No One Behind which is unique to SDGs.

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