

BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Edited by
Sujit Kumar Paul
K. Giresan



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राज्यपाल पश्चिम बंगाल
Governor of West Bengal
राज्यपाल, पश्चिमबङ्ग

17.01.2025

MESSAGE

Humanity is on the fast track path to achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030. It is said rightly that we have not inherited the Earth from our forefathers. We have borrowed it from our children. What we borrow from our children we are bound to repay, if possible, with interest.

Mahatma Gandhi's observations hold water now. He said, "The Earth has enough resources for everyone's need, not everyone's greed." Rachel Carson, in her momentous book 'Silent Spring,' which first exposed the evils men have committed on Mother Nature, starts with a quotation from Albert Schweitzer. "Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall; he will end by destroying the world." In this context, any attempt, anywhere in the world, to create awareness among human beings about the need for sustainable development is more than welcome.

I see the present book, 'Best Practices in Sustainable Development Goals', edited by Dr. Sujit Kumar Paul and Dr. K. Gireesan, in this global context. The purport of the book is the message, "A stitch in time saves nine." I am sure this book will serve as an eye-opener for anyone who is interested in the future of mankind, the future of the environment, and the future of Mother Nature. I wish the book all the very best.

Dr C.V. Ananda Bose

RAJ BHAVAN
KOLKATA

Foreword

As global challenges intensify, the urgency for sustainable development has never been clearer. The concept of “sustainable development”, first introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, seeks to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. At the core of sustainable development is the balancing act between ecological, human, and economic well-being, with an emphasis on stewardship of the planet’s finite resources. This forward-thinking principle requires us to act responsibly, ensuring that the earth’s resources are preserved for future generations.

This *Best Practices in Sustainable Development Goals* as an edited book highlights successful models, approaches, and experiences from various regions around the world. It brings together contributions from institutions, organizations, and individuals dedicated to sustainable development. This book emphasizes that achieving the SDGs is a collective effort requiring commitment, adaptability, and resilience from all stakeholders. It calls for a steadfast belief in the potential for creating a sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for both people and the planet. This book urges readers to adopt an ecosystem-based approach in their daily lives and stresses that the time for action is now, with limitless possibilities for a better future.

The United Nations' adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 represents a global commitment to address issues like poverty, inequality, climate change, peace, and prosperity by 2030. The SDGs are a call for global collaboration and urgent action across nations to eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and create equitable societies. However, achieving these goals requires innovative strategies, accelerated action, and partnerships that span across governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals.

This book provides a valuable compilation of best practices, transformative models, and lessons from diverse communities striving toward sustainable development. It highlights not only global initiatives but also local projects and grassroots efforts that exemplify the power of inclusive development, gender equality, peace, and environmental sustainability. One such example is Rabindranath Tagore's "Sriniketan Experiment", which presents a model for holistic rural development. Tagore's vision emphasizes education, health care, agricultural reforms, and vocational training, all of which align closely with the SDG agenda, particularly in terms of empowering marginalized communities.

Youth empowerment and education for peace-building also play a central role in achieving the SDGs. As the world faces increasing socio-political tensions, the youth are emerging as catalysts for change, fostering understanding in a divided world. Their engagement is essential to achieving global peace, justice, and equality, all of which are integral to the SDGs. This book underscores the importance of education as a means of nurturing leadership, critical thinking, and social responsibility among young people.

Additionally, the book delves into the role of indigenous knowledge and practices in sustainability, particularly through the lens of academic perspectives such as those offered by sociologist Andre Beteille. His argument that sociology, like sustainability, must be rooted in indigenous knowledge is especially pertinent in today's global context. Emphasizing indigenous ways of life fosters

more contextually relevant and culturally sensitive approaches to development, which are crucial to the SDGs.

Women's leadership is another key focus of this collection. Gender equity is not only an SDG in itself but also a foundational element for achieving other SDGs. Women, especially in leadership roles, bring unique insights that can drive transformative change. Empowering women at the local level is critical for advancing sustainable and equitable development. When women are involved in decision making and leadership, they contribute to broader community development, including improvements in education, health, and economic participation.

The articles within this volume provide practical insights into overcoming development challenges through both innovative projects and lived experiences of communities facing unique struggles. From the Solar 2002 project in Belgium, which incorporates renewable energy and ecologically intelligent building techniques, to India's push for inclusive social security, the chapters emphasize context-specific solutions for sustainable development. These contributions explore the challenges faced by marginalized farmers in India's border regions, the sociocultural livelihood of the Santhal tribe, and the impact of microfinance in lifting communities out of poverty.

These diverse case studies highlight that sustainable development is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Each community faces distinct obstacles that require tailored approaches, whether it's the impact of climate change on agriculture, the role of social security systems in poverty reduction, or the empowerment of indigenous populations through cultural preservation and economic opportunities. The importance of considering local contexts and involving communities in the decision making process is underscored throughout the collection.

Ultimately, this volume reinforces the idea that true sustainability can only be achieved when no one is left behind. Whether addressing poverty, environmental degradation, or social inequality, the SDGs call for a comprehensive, inclusive approach

to development. This collection is not just an academic reflection on sustainable development but a call to action for policymakers, practitioners, and communities to engage with the complexities of global development challenges and work toward innovative solutions. By embracing diversity and inclusion in our approaches to the SDGs, we can create a more equitable, sustainable, and peaceful world for future generations.

This book will remain a seminal work in this field of development management. I congratulate the authors and the editors Professor Sujit Kumar Paul and Dr K. Gireesan.

Dr W.G. Prasanna Kumar

Former Chairman

Mahatma Gandhi

National Council of Rural Institute (NCRI)

Ministry of Human Resource Development

Government of India

Preface

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, represent a comprehensive framework aimed at fostering peace, prosperity, and sustainability for people and the planet. With seventeen interlinked goals encompassing a wide range of social, economic, and environmental dimensions, the SDGs provide a roadmap for governments, institutions, agencies, and individuals to navigate through the complexities of sustainable development.

Over the years, different countries have shown considerable success with vast number of development initiatives and interventions by the state and non-state actors. The innovative approaches, strategies, experiences and practices lead to sustainability in reaching out to the most marginalized sections of the society. Considering the significance of these initiatives and their importance as replicable models, it is pertinent to formulate a compendium of case studies, success stories and best practices in SDGs.

This book *Best Practices in Sustainable Development Goals* serves as an important resource for academicians, researchers, professionals, administrators, practitioners and students committed to advancing sustainable development. It synthesizes innovative approaches, successful strategies and diverse experiences from different sectors and drawn from different countries. This book

captures some of the case studies, success stories, and best practices highlighting the significance and application of SDGs.

The different chapters in this book have been classified into four parts. Each chapter of this book delves into specific goals, illustrating how diverse actors, from grassroots organizations to multinational corporations, are implementing effective strategies. Readers will encounter case studies that reflect a broad spectrum of initiatives, including community-led conservation efforts, innovative educational programmes, and sustainable business practices. These narratives not only provide insight into what works but also offer practical guidance for those seeking to replicate or adapt these initiatives in their own contexts.

Furthermore, the book emphasizes the significance of partnerships. The SDGs are built on the premise that sustainable development requires collective action across sectors and borders. The authors explore the role of public-private partnerships, civil society engagement, and international cooperation in achieving these ambitious goals. Through collaborative efforts, stakeholders can leverage resources, knowledge, and expertise, amplifying their impact and fostering a shared commitment to a more sustainable future.

In the face of mounting global challenges, the time for action is now. The SDGs represent not only a framework for addressing pressing issues but also a call to envision a better world for future generations. As one embarks on this exploration of best practices, the authors encourage readers to engage critically with the material, reflect on their own role in this transformative journey, and consider how they can contribute to the realization of the SDGs in the community and beyond.

Let this book serve as a source of inspiration, a practical guide, and a catalyst for action as one works together to achieve the SDGs for all. It is essential to recognize the diverse perspectives and voices that shape our understanding about sustainable development. I do hope that the book *Best Practices in Sustainable Development Goals* will contribute towards enhancing better understanding of the

approaches, experiences and practices on sustainable development.

We express our sincere gratitude to all the contributors round the globe for their contribution to this volume. We are extremely grateful to Dr W.G. Prasanna Kumar, Former Chairman, National Council of Rural Institute (NCRI), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India for writing the Foreword for this edited volume. Finally, we express our appreciation to the publisher in bringing the book on time.

Sujit Kumar Paul
K. Gireesan

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Introduction

Sujit Kumar Paul and K. Gireesan

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” in its 1987 Brundtland report. Sustainable development is the “organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend”. Countries all over the world envision suitable practices that support ecological, human and economic health and vitality. Sustainability presumes that resources are finite and should be used wisely and optimally with a view to long-term priorities. In simplest term, sustainability is about our children, grandchildren, and the world that we will leave for them.

All member states of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Also known as the “Global Goals”, it as a global call of action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee that everyone lives in peace and prosperity by 2030. Global partnerships are expected to strengthen the combined actions for achieving the goals. Achievement of the SDGs are envisioned by several countries and mainstreaming the SDGs in national development strategies and programme are attempted by international organizations, international funding agencies and the countries themselves, in

order to make a remarkable progress in this direction. Countries are adapting several programmes and initiatives that would directly contribute to advancement of the SDG agendas. Progress is being made in many places and countries, but overall action to meet the goals is not yet advancing at the required speed or scale.

Over the years, different countries have shown notable success with vast number of developmental interventions by different stakeholders, especially the governments and civil society organizations. They have demonstrated creative methods, successful tactics, enduring influence, and sustainability in interacting with the most marginalized segments of society. Given the significance of these programmes and their value as trustworthy reference models, a compilation of the best SDG practices shall be created, documenting case studies on diverse aspects and from different regions. In line with the principle of cooperative federalism and devolution of funds to the local government institutions, all spheres of government are key stakeholders in realizing the SDGs. In this regard, specific, innovative and best practices for achieving SDGs from different parts of the world are documented here.

Here, the primary goal is to showcase the models, approaches, practices and experiences that are unique, sustainable, and replicable by making suitable variations along with synthesizing lessons for the future to improve quality of life of the community. It can be viewed as a sourcebook to provide information regarding the approaches and practices for achieving SDGs all over the world. In the progress of SDGs, every single contribution of the government, local government institutions, civil society organizations, corporates, including the individuals, in spite of its magnitude and scale, is valuable. Underlining the significance of the subject, academicians, researchers, professionals, administrators, and practitioners were requested to contribute the best practices, field initiatives, case studies, experimented models and perspectives, contributing towards the SDGs. This edited book captures the status of SDGs and its practices from the global, the regional, the national and the local, with inputs from number of institutions, organizations and

individuals who are “working with and working for sustainable development”.

I

The SDGs are designed to address interconnected global challenges by recognizing that progress in one area can impact progress in others. They aim at a wide range of objectives, including ending poverty and hunger, promotion of health and education, gender equality, environmental sustainability, etc. By integrating these goals through acknowledging the interdependencies between social, economic, and environmental factors, it aims to promote holistic and sustainable development worldwide. Prioritizing progress for those who are left behind, especially among marginalized communities in remote rural areas, is crucial for achieving the SDGs. In India, these commitments involve addressing various forms of inequality, discrimination, and exclusion, particularly targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups such as Scheduled Tribes, minorities, women, and girls residing in rural areas where people living in poverty and those affected by conflict or disaster. Rabindranath Tagore’s “Sriniketan Experiment” exemplifies a proactive approach towards addressing the challenges faced by rural communities, reflecting the broader aim of SDGs. Tagore, being a humanist, recognized the profound suffering endured by the villagers living in conditions of acute poverty, malnutrition, ill-health, and illiteracy. Through the Sriniketan Experiment initiated in 1922 within Visva-Bharati, Tagore aimed to uplift and empower the villages focused on holistic development, encompassing aspects such as education, health care, agricultural reforms, vocational training, and cultural enrichment. Similar to the SDG objectives and approaches, Tagore’s “Sriniketan Experiment” sought to cultivate self-reliance, community engagement, and sustainable practices, fostering a sense of dignity and well-being among the villagers. **Professor Sujit Kumar Paul and Sulagna Datta** in their article “Tagore’s Sriniketan Experiment: An Ideal Model for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals” tried to investigate

Rabindranath Tagore's Sriniketan Experiment as a paradigmatic example of sustainable development practices and how it is proven to be an ideal model for achieving the SDGs. Through a rigorous scrutiny of historical records, scholarly literature, and contemporary approaches, the study aims to demonstrate how Sriniketan Experiment embodies the principles and objectives of the SDGs. This research also contributes to the discourse on sustainable development by elucidating the practical implications of Tagore's vision for contemporary global challenges. The paper emphasizes the importance of integrating localized approaches like the Sriniketan Experiment into broader strategies for achieving SDGs worldwide.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stands as a beacon, advocating for rigorous efforts across nations to address pressing global challenges. At its core lies a fundamental truth that peace and sustainable development are intrinsically intertwined. The 2030 Agenda's statement, "Without peace, there's no sustainable development, and without sustainable development, there's no peace", really hits home, showing how these things rely on each other. It's like a wake-up call, urging us to work together to tackle issues like violence, insecurity, and other problems that hold back progress. As we strive for a world that's fairer, more just, and more peaceful, it is very important to look at the best ways to make progress on goals like peace, justice, and ensure everyone gets a good education. Thus, it is imperative to explore the best practices and strategies that can push us towards realizing these interconnected aspirations. In a world increasingly polarized, where opinions clash and divisions deepen, the youth emerge as catalysts for change, weaving threads of understanding through the fabric of controversy. **Asmaa Sleem** in her article "Fostering Growth and Well-being: Best Practices for SDGs, Leadership, Peace Education, Inner Development, and Lifelong Learning" tried to explore the pivotal role and the best practices of youth education for peace building, as part of peace education, SDGs and inner development goals. Shedding light on the integral role of peace education and the

involvement of youth in peace building illuminates the pathways to achieve the SDGs. And In the pursuit of a more equitable and prosperous world and within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development lies a profound acknowledgement of the deep relationship between peace, justice, and quality education.

Sreyasi Ray and Professor Ramanuj Ganguly in their paper “Sustainability: An Alternative Approach—Andre Beteille’s Thoughts on Developing Sustainable Sociology”, tried to understand sustainability on Andre Beteille’s perspectives. Andre Beteille, with his inquisitiveness to ensure sustainability of the discipline of sociology, developed an interest to comprehend sociology, its nature and significance through his academic endeavours. Generally, the word “sustainability” is associated with environment and natural resources. It also stands as the quality of being able to continue over time. Beteille found that delving into research and study of subjects related to current affairs has gained tremendous parlance in sociology. However, to sociologists like Beteille, “interest in current affairs can stimulate sociological enquiry and investigation”. But the “long-term growth of an intellectual discipline becomes distorted and even jeopardized when it allows itself to be driven entirely by the interest in current affairs to the exclusion of all other interests”. Over dependency on the Western methods and lack of innovation of indigenous methods to study our own society are some of the flaws that have engulfed the subject. He further mentioned that turning away of sociologists from the concepts, methods and data in the long run, will impoverish and affect the enrichment of sociology in India. Beteille suggested that researches getting influenced by government and NGOs should not restrict themselves to provide immediate practical solutions only. It is certainly true that research with its attention in current affairs at the cost of theory will impact its sustainability. To Beteille, it is this increasing concern with current affairs that has led to the development of myopic view to study the fundamental features of Indian society and sociology, thereby impacting the sustainability of the subject.

“Role of Women Leaders at the Local Level to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” by **Dr K. Gireesan** is an attempt made to achieve the SDGs highlight the role of women leaders at the local level by analysing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It is viewed that identifying, analysing and practising various practical and strategic functions with a gender perspective could contribute significantly towards addressing the existing gender gaps and achieving the SDGs at a faster pace. The author puts forward a number of suggestions that could be considered by the leadership, especially by the women leaders at the local level, towards achieving the SDGs. The author advocates that policy formulation in multiple domains shall be made for meeting the needs of future generations with due thrust and weightage on diverse demographic segments, keeping in view the principles of “equity” and “empowerment”.

II

Professor Mark Tappan, Jakob Erle and Alan Furth in their article “Trauma Responsive Equitable Education: A Model for Communities Seeking to Bring the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals to Life” described an innovative and empowering education programme, Trauma Responsive Equitable Education (TREE). It enables the ideas and issues that are in the minds of students, including early elementary school students, to make school life attractive and relevant to them. The authors assert that a local initiative such as TREE, with its impacts and approach, are strengthened and compounded when they understand them and stitch them effectively to the SDGs. The TREE project contributes to the achievement of the national obligations of the SDGs, especially in education. The integrated agenda of the SDGs gives the scope for learning and reflection for educators, students, families, and communities to understand their work in the context of the world they live in. At the same time, it provides a framework for dialogue on why learning environments, as exemplified by TREE, are needed to cope with and shape our hyper-complex world.

Advancing indigenous peoples education contributes greatly to break the historic discrimination, marginalization and inequalities experienced by indigenous persons. Providing them context-based basic literacy and leadership formation, equal opportunity to quality and culturally-sensitive formal education and alternative learning systems, recognizing and respecting their indigenous knowledge systems and practices are fundamentals to enhance their full potentials and uplift their self-esteem. From this point of view, **May Rendon-Cinco** in her article “LAKAS High School in the Philippines: Advancing Indigenous People’s Education toward Sustainable Development” tried to explore the LAKAS High School (LHS) Model for sustainable development of the indigenous people. As the education system discriminates and marginalize the indigenous persons, advancing indigenous people’s education is a pathway to empower them. This was shown in the experience of the Aeta, the indigenous people around Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines. Through the collective effort of their elders and leaders of their organization called LAKAS, the indigenous persons were able to negotiate with the government’s Department of Education to build their own school which they named LHS. Thus, it becomes an institution of mainstreaming the Aeta knowledge systems and practices in the basic formal education. In this context, sustaining other forms and modes of learning to enrich their life and environment that meet the development of the Aeta at present without compromising the needs of the future generation of their tribe becomes significant.

Dr Heenakshi Bhansali, Dr Shamim Mohammad, and Devashree Desai in their article “Accessibility and Affordability of Mental Health Services in India” tried to explore the current landscape of mental health services in India, with a focus on the challenges associated with accessibility and affordability. Despite increased awareness of mental health issues, a significant proportion of the Indian population continues to experience difficulties to receive adequate mental health care. This chapter analyses the socio-economic, geographical, and cultural variables that contribute

to the limited availability of mental health services, particularly in remote rural and marginalized populations. Affordability emerges as a critical concern, as a considerable segment of the population struggles to bear the financial burden associated with mental health treatment. The 2015-16 National Mental Health Survey (NMHS), that was done in twelve states, exposes India's massive burden of mental health disorders. According to the report's findings, the proportion of mental health issues to the country's total disease burden doubled between 1990 and 2017. One in seven Indians, were thought to be affected with mental illnesses of varying severity, the most common being depression and anxiety. This chapter examines the existing mental health infrastructure, public policies, and initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges. It also examines the effectiveness of current interventions in promoting accessibility and affordability. The authors analysed data gathered from mental health professionals, policymakers, and individuals with lived experiences on the economic implications and regional disparities in utilization of mental health services. They highlighted number of technological advancements and the role of telemedicine in bridging the accessibility gap. Despite the efforts made by the governments to provide universal and affordable mental health care shortage of mental health specialists, inadequate infrastructure, and stigma still remain as the major reasons for the huge treatment gaps for majority of disorders. The findings highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach that includes policy reforms, community engagement, and increased public awareness campaigns. Recommendations for enhancing mental health education, integrating mental health into primary health care, and developing innovative financial models for affordability are presented. The article highlights how critical it is to address these issues in order to develop an Indian mental health care system that is more responsive and accessible.

Moumita Sarkar, Titas Ghosh, and Vinoj Manning in their paper "Enhancing Agency of Young Women and Girls for Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" presents the findings and insights gained from a project aimed at enhancing agency and

improving young women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes in selected districts of Jharkhand and West Bengal. The primary goal of the project was to help achieve the "SDG-3.7 (Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and information) and SDG-5.6 (Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, under gender equality)". Recognizing the diverse challenges faced by this demographic segment, the project adopted a comprehensive approach towards building a sustainable SRH ecosystem supporting the rights of adolescents and young women. This involved engagement not only with adolescent girls and young women but also engaged a diverse array of stakeholders, encompassing male partners, family members, and community influencers. To enhance the provision of SRH services, the intervention focused on strengthening youth-friendly SRH services within public health facilities. A mixed-method evaluation design was used to assess the outcomes of the intervention. The assessment focused on understanding the barriers and facilitators that influence SRH decision making, access to SRH information and services, and the agency of adolescents and young women.

Ganesh Mane and Dr Shamim Mohammad in their article "Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition: Practices and Approaches in Malnutrition Reduction in India" discusses the relevant SDGs, measurement indices and methods, policy and legal aspects and community practices to reduce the hunger and malnutrition across India. Hunger is a major concern in developing countries and SDG2 exclusively deals with the eradication of hunger. It covers the different macro and micro indices used to measure the progress across the globe on hunger, food security, and malnutrition. The chapter analyses India's position on these indices which continue to be a serious cause of concern. India's ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI) was 131 out of 191 countries in 2021-22; Global Multidimensional Index (MDI) was 66 out of 109 countries in 2021, and Global Hunger Index (GHI) was 111 out of 125 countries in 2023. At micro level, the chapter

deals with anthropometric nutritional status measurement such as Weight, Height, Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC), Head Circumference, BMI, and Waist Hip Ratio. In SDGs' ranking, India (112) continues to be far behind from its neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka (83) and Bangladesh (101). Stunting (35.5%) and wasting (19.3%) in children and anemia in women of reproductive age (57%) continues to keep India behind in all possible measurement indices. Interventions like Community Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) are needed to facilitate across the country. The authors advocate for a multisectoral approach, bringing stakeholders from health care, agriculture, water and sanitation, land reforms, PDS system, etc. is required to address this multifaceted issue comprehensively.

Dr Banasree Das, Ravikant Kumar, and Sujata Tripathy in their article “Water for People India: Assessing Interventions and Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 6” focused on the interventions by Water for People India (WFPI) in its mission to provide sustainable water and sanitation solutions, aligning with the SDG-6. The paper aims to ensure the availability and sustainability of water and sanitation for all, by proper management. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) concluded in 2016, ushering in the Agenda of Sustainable Development, which includes total seventeen SDGs by including every field of development. Out of this, SDG-6 focuses on clean water and sanitation facility accessibility for all. In India, significant challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where water contamination and inadequate sanitation persist, the WFPI aligns its mission with SDG-6, promoting sustainable water and sanitation solutions. Since 2007, the WFPI has implemented community-driven programmes across several states, enhancing access to water and sanitation, fostering local ownership, and addressing climate resilience. Innovative approaches like leveraging local art for behaviour change have proven effective in promoting WASH practices. Scaling efforts and integrating climate adaptation strategies are crucial for achieving long-term impact and reaching 100 million

people by 2030. Through partnerships, technological innovations, and community engagement, the WFPI continues to make significant strides towards SDG-6 in India. The paper highlights the effectiveness of community-based approaches, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programmes. This paper puts forward suggestions to achieve significant improvements in water accessibility and sanitation coverage, contributing to enhanced health outcomes and socio-economic development.

III

Contemporary India is faced with the co-existence of critical and unsustainable developmental challenges (such as environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, gender-based violence, etc.), which have underscored the *status-quo* approaches to human development, will no longer suffice. This scenario demands for a deviation from the business-as-usual approach, from all institutions and sectors, especially Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), who are recognized as public institutions. Its research function is expected to be “more engaged” with social issues, in being able to address the developmental challenges, while also helping HEIs to fulfil their social responsibilities. Although HEIs have traditionally contributed to knowledge creation through their research function, the contemporary, multi-level, varied and cross-sectoral challenges call for an innovative approach to research. This new approach is expected to be responsible, engaged and result in the production of “new knowledge”; one which transcends disciplinary boundaries, is co-produced and has the potential to address the challenges of unsustainability. In lieu of this, it is essential that HEIs embrace a renewed and responsible approach to research, and one of the ways to do so is to adopt the practice of “Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)”. **Wafa Singh, Professor Raisuyah Bhagwan, and Professor Manju Singh** through this chapter entitled “Adopting Community Based Participatory Research for Advancing Sustainable Development: Lessons from Indian Higher Education Institutions” explores the conceptual framework of CBPR, while

shedding light on its practices and positioning in the Indian higher education landscape. The chapter complements this exploration by capturing some of the institutional best practices in CBPR, and closes with concrete reflections on the potentials, promises, and way forward in this area of work, for attaining the global goals of sustainable development.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) plays a key role in providing the workforce with knowledge, skills, and competencies to facilitate the transition to a greener economy and engage with the complexity to transform into a more sustainable and greener societies. The paper entitled “Practical Partnership between TVET in Denmark and Kenya” by **Dr Niels Larsen** is about a partnership between three vocational centres in Denmark and one in Kenya working with co-learning within the umbrella of SDG and the subject of carpentry and joinery woodwork. The aim was to get more experiences and reflection on how it was possible to work cross culturally between the Global North and the Global South and to develop a didactical model for this kind of work.

Local government institutions, such as municipalities and panchayats, are instrumental in advancing specific SDGs. They are responsible for various essential services and development projects that align with the SDG targets, including clean water supply, waste management, and sustainable urban planning. The vast and diverse socio-economic, cultural, and environmental landscape of India necessitates a tailored approach to SDG localization. This process involves adapting global objectives to address specific local challenges and opportunities. Localization is crucial for effectively addressing multidimensional poverty and inequality, and it requires a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach. Key elements of successful localization include effective multi-level governance, inclusive decision making, and active participation of sub-national governments. Local governments are pivotal in the effective localization and implementation of SDGs, bridging global policies with local realities. Through this paper entitled “Role of Local Governments in Accelerating Sustainable Development

Goals in India: Achievements, Challenges, and Strategic Actions”, **Dr Jaya Bhalla, and Dr B.K. Pandey** examined the critical role of local governments in India in achieving and accelerating the SDGs by 2030. It explores the impact of local governments on SDGs, highlights key successes, identifies challenges faced, and provides actionable strategies for enhancing local government contributions to meet the SDG targets.

Participatory structures have existed at the grassroots level in India since ancient times, in the form of local assemblies known as *sabhas* and *samitis*. These structures were later found in the medieval history as village assemblies called *mahasabha*. Endowed with the constitutional status, the *grama sabha* could prepare developmental plans at the grassroots level, fostering self-governance within their area of jurisdiction. The SDGs play a vital role to ensure the developmental gaps are noticed and addressed at various levels. SDG-16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is an important goal that focuses on promoting inclusive societies, building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels along with promoting peace and justice for all. This case depicts the impact of various participatory structures as democratic institutions in a village panchayat. **Prabakaran M. and Inbarasan K.G.** through their article “Impact of Participatory Structures at the Grassroots: A Case Study from Prathabaramapuram Village Panchayat, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu” delves into the significance of various participatory structures, including *gram sabhas* and other *sabhas* such as the Ward Sabha, Women’s Sabha (Magalir Sabhai), Sabha for the Differently Abled (Matruthiranalai Sabhai), and Children’s Sabha (Balar Sabhai). It discusses about the decentralized decision making through various *sabhas* in the Prathabaramapuram Village Panchayat, Keelaiyur Panchayat Union, Nagapattinam district, which can serve as a developmental model.

IV

Solar 2002 is a demonstration project in Belgium that serves both as a visitor and educational centre. It aims to promote alternative

and sustainable techniques in secondary education and demonstrate the possibility of ecologically and intelligently designed buildings. The project emphasizes the importance of renewable energy and the need to raise awareness among various stakeholders. Solar 2002 incorporates innovative techniques such as moisture-regulating thermal insulation, heat recovery, water extraction from rainwater, waste water treatment, and efficient use of solar energy. It focuses on reducing primary energy consumption and achieving a zero balance on secondary energy. The project highlights the relations/linkages between human actions and their global impact, encouraging a shift toward harmonious living with nature. **Guido-Henri De Couvreur**, in his paper titled “A Solar Realization with Connections to SDGs” provides insights into the technical aspects and priorities for rational energy consumption. Overall, Solar 2002 represents a case study of a bio-ecological house striving for energy efficiency and environmental responsibility.

The SDGs are largely attained in developing countries like India by providing adequate social security coverage to the underprivileged. For a long time since Independence, the biggest obstacle to the country’s inclusive development has been the large rural population’s exclusion from social security coverage. The two most important steps India has taken in the last ten years to achieve the SDGs are its push for financial inclusion and its integration with social security programmes. In order to claim its progress towards the SDGs, the union and state governments shall jointly develop a strong social security system for inclusive progress throughout the nation and among all groups. The paper “Significant Approaches Towards Social Security Leading to Sustainable Development Goals in India: A Study” by **Dr Soumen Sarkar** looked at the traditional methods for categorizing social security systems and tried to address the origins and fundamental ideas of social security from a global viewpoint. Based on the review of related literature, the limitations of implementing social security have been discussed. In order to provide a clearer understanding of their goals, the author attempted to group all these activities under particular headings.

The important steps taken by the Union government to advance the nation's social security programme were discussed in the paper. It highlighted a wide range of projects, their shortcomings, and their efficacy in promoting sustainable development in society, and put forward suggestions.

Farmers living along the international border face tough restrictions. They are not allowed to grow crops taller than 3 ft, and they can't easily access their own lands for farming. And, they have to rely on the BSF personnel to open the gates in the fencing whenever they need to work on their land. Adding to these challenges, there is a lack of irrigation system in the border areas, making it even harder to the farmers for agricultural practices. Coupled with the issues of climate change, the weather in places like Cooch Behar has become highly unpredictable, making farming even more difficult. SDG-1 aims to eliminate poverty in all its manifestations worldwide. It seeks to eradicate extreme poverty globally, ensuring universal access to essential needs such as food, water, shelter, health care, and education. However, human-made challenges often exacerbate the hardships faced by farmers, making their lives miserable. Consequently, these challenges affect the well-being of future generations of those particular areas, perpetuating the cycle of suffering and deprivation. All these issues have a serious negative impact on agriculture in the border areas like Cooch Behar, making it difficult for farmers to make a living from their land. Under these peculiar circumstances, the local population adopt unconventional and ill-healthy economic options. Many of them take up unsafe migration to other states in search of a job. Some of them adopted even dangerous options like cross-border smuggling. SDG-8 emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, along with decent work for all individuals. Regrettably, there have been challenges in ensuring hassle-free agricultural activities to the impoverished farmers in the border villages, where efforts of the state and union governments have fallen short. Significantly, the United Nations has special statute about ensuring Rights of Peasants and Other People

Working in Rural Areas. **Riya De and Arkadeep Goswami** in their paper “Cross-border Smuggling, Livelihood and the Question of Sustainable Development in the Indo-Bangladesh Border” tried to pinpoint the primary factors contributing to the current situation and to explore potential alternatives aimed at resolving or mitigating these issues.

The Santhal tribe, one of the largest indigenous communities in India, embodies a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with its socio-economic livelihood practices. Situated predominantly in the Bankura district of West Bengal, the Santhals have sustained their unique way of life amidst a rapidly changing sociocultural landscape. This study seeks to delve into the intricate fabric of Santhal livelihoods, examining the various sociocultural factors that shape their existence and exploring its implications on the SDGs. By shedding light on the lived experiences, traditions, and challenges faced by the Santhal community, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of indigenous cultures and informed strategies for sustainable development in alignment with the SDGs. **Sanjoy Karmakar** in his paper titled “Exploring the Sociocultural Livelihood of the Santhal Tribe and Its Implications for SDGs: A Study in Bankura District” captures the sociocultural livelihood of the Santhal tribe in the study area, offering a comprehensive examination of their unique way of life. Focused towards understanding the intricate interplay between tradition and adaptation, the paper explores the tribe’s rituals, festivals, and performances, revealing a profound connection to nature and agricultural cycles. Furthermore, this paper contextualizes the sociocultural livelihood of the Santhal tribe within the framework of SDGs. By analysing the implications of their practices, particularly those related to poverty alleviation, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, it contributes to a broader understanding of how indigenous communities can play a vital role in achieving global sustainability objectives. The study brings out valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers, facilitating a more inclusive, and culturally sensitive

approach towards sustainable development initiatives that align with the unique sociocultural context of tribal communities like the Santhals.

Microfinance has a long history, with Irish loan funds dating back to 1720 and later regulated by strong regulations, courtesy goes to Jonathan Swift. Credit cooperatives were established in Germany in the 1850s to serve those whom traditional banks were hesitant to serve. Various forms of microfinance, such as Susus in Ghana, Tandas in Mexico, Cheetu in Sri Lanka, Hui in China, and Chit Funds and Maroops in Manipur, have been providing credit to the underserved populations for generations. While these initiatives have helped meet the credit needs of the poor, there has been a focus on the purpose of the loan and repayment strategies. Microfinance has gone far beyond micro savings and microcredit, taking up micro leasing, micro insurance, micro pensions, etc. in order to examine the linkages of microfinance to the SDGs. **Dr Saibal Paul** in his paper entitled “Microfinance and Its Role in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with Reference to Indian Microfinance Sector” tried to assess the influence of microfinance on the lives of the borrowers. The data analysis of the impact of microfinance on a global scale, along with other sources, reviews the data set compiled by Sa-Dhan to identify the impact of the microfinance sector on the various parameters of the SDGs.

As we navigate through the complexities of sustainable development, it is essential to recognize the diverse perspectives and voices that shape our understanding manifested through different chapters, classified under four parts. This book incorporates insights from various disciplines, cultures, experiences, and regions by reflecting the multifaceted nature of sustainability. By embracing diversity and promoting inclusive dialogue, we can ensure that our approaches to the SDGs are equitable and just, leaving no one behind.

Cross-border Smuggling

Livelihood and the Question of
Sustainable Development in the
Indo-Bangladesh Border

Riya De and Arkadeep Goswami

India's economic stability relies significantly on agriculture, with nearly 70 per cent of the rural population engaged in agricultural activities. This paper will primarily examine the agricultural issues prevalent in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. The district is located in the Sub-Himalayan plains and belonging to the Terai-Agro climatic zone of West Bengal. Out of 3345 sq. km geographical area of the district, 2353 sq. km (70.3% of geographical area) is under cultivation. The district experiences a typical sub-tropical pre-humid climate with high annual rainfall (higher than 3000 mm), high relative humidity (average maximum and minimum of 95 per cent & 65 per cent respectively) and moderate temperature. Tobacco,

Maize and Jute are the major cash crops of Cooch Behar. Beside that paddy, vegetables are also cultivated here.

Putting forth their concern about cross-border smuggling and national security along the densely populated Indo-Bangladesh border, the district administration, as per the suggestions of the

Border Security Force (BSF), has enforced Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Chowdhury, 2023). This means that movement and agricultural activities are tightly regulated in the area.

Farmers living along the border face tough restrictions. They are not allowed to grow crops taller than three feet, and they can't easily access their own lands for farming. Instead, they have to rely on the BSF to open the gates in the fencing whenever they need to work on their land.

Adding to their challenges, there's a lack of irrigation system near the border, making it even harder for farmers to grow their crops. In addition, with climate change, the weather in places like Cooch Behar has become more unpredictable, making farming even more difficult.

SDG-1 aims to eliminate poverty in all its manifestations worldwide. It seeks to eradicate extreme poverty globally, ensuring universal access to essential needs such as food, water, shelter, health care, and education. However, human-made challenges often exacerbate the hardships faced by the farmers, making their lives miserable. Consequently, these challenges also affect the well-being of future generations of those particular area, perpetuating the cycle of suffering and deprivation. All these issues combined have a really negative impact on agriculture in the region, making it difficult for farmers to make a living from their land.

Under these peculiar circumstances, the local population has opted for unconventional economic options. To be very specific, they were taking up unsafe migration to other states in search of a job. Many of them have opted for even a dangerous option like cross border smuggling.

SDG-8 emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, along with decent work for all individuals. Regrettably, there have been challenges in ensuring hassle-free agricultural activities for impoverished farmers in bordering villages, where both state and central governments' efforts have fallen short. In addition, the United Nations also talks

about ensuring the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

The chapter examines the primary factors contributing to the current situation in the study area and to explore potential alternatives aimed at resolving or mitigating these issues.

Objectives

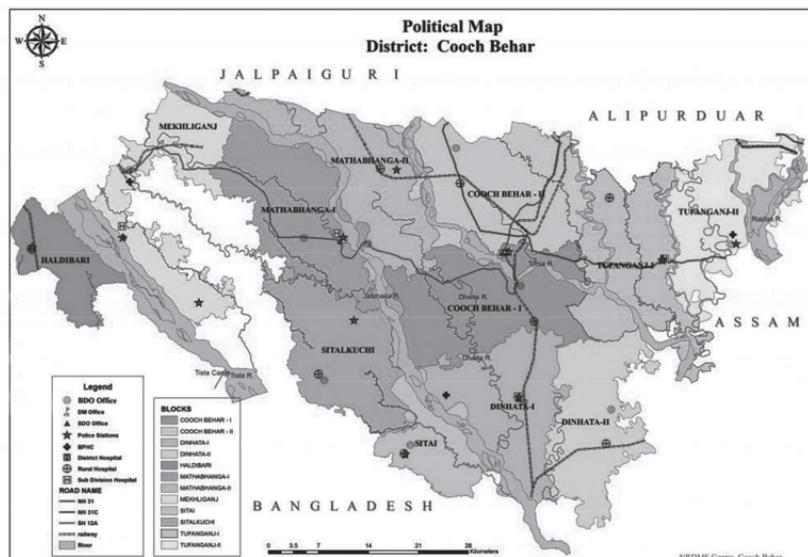
The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the hindrances to the agricultural activities for the villagers residing near the Indo-Bangladesh border in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal.
- To explore potential strategies to address and alleviate these challenges.
- To solicit input and recommendations from various stakeholders, including farmers, BSF personnel, *panchayats*, and the district administration, in order to formulate comprehensive and inclusive measures.

Through these objectives, we aim to develop a holistic understanding of the issues faced by border communities and propose actionable steps towards sustainable agricultural development and improved livelihoods in the region. This is expected to keep the community from putting their lives at peril by undertaking unsafe migration and other dangerous and illegal employment options.

About the Study Area

Cooch Behar district is located in the north-eastern part of West Bengal, bordered by Alipurduar district to the north and north-west, and Jalpaiguri district to the north-west. To the east, lies the state of Assam. Notably, the district shares a lengthy international border (549.45 km) with Bangladesh to the south-west, south, and south-east. Additionally, Cooch Behar district was home to a total of 110 erstwhile enclaves, which were integrated into the Indian mainland following the Land Boundary Agreement of 2015.



Cooch Behar district comprises of 12 blocks, namely Cooch Behar I, Cooch Behar II, Dinhat I, Dinhat II, Mathabhanga I, Mathabhanga II, Sitai, Sitalkuchi, Tufanganj I, Tufanganj II, Mekhliganj, and Haldibari. The district is enriched by the presence of several rivers running through its land. The main rivers are Dharla, Dudua, Gadadhar, Ghargharia, Jaldhaka and Kalijani.

Total population of Cooch Behar is estimated to be 39,74,912 (estimates as per Aadhar data in 2024). As per 2011 census, Cooch Behar has a population of 28,19,086 out of which 14,51,542 were male and 13,67,544 were female. Among the total population, about 18,50,504 are literates out of which 10,28,733 are male and 8,21,771 are female. In Cooch Bihar, 11,27,977 are workers that includes 8,45,308 men and 2,82,669 women. Among the workers, 3,12,014 depend on agriculture that includes 2,83,599 men and 28,415 women. About 2,72,435 persons work as agricultural labourers which includes 2,12,822 men and 59,613 women. Sex ratio in Cooch Behar is 942 females per 1,000 of males. (India Growing, n.d.).

Literature Review

Availability of secondary data related to border areas was very scarce due to the limited number of studies conducted in these domains. In addition, gathering data from the border areas was very challenging. One of the biggest difficulties of dealing with any issue related to the questions of Indo-Bangladesh border is the unavailability of literature. Thus, the authors had to use whatever limited literature has been available in the public domain. Jamwal has dealt with the question of border management, but the human condition has been off the focus (Jamwal, 2004). Datta has worked on the question providing us with a better understanding of the situation (India Quarterly, 2018).

But, the study posed us a big challenge as the authors had to travel in a solo path. The contradiction between the question of livelihood and the question of national security in the study area was another major factor. All these forced the authors to proceed with the limited secondary data and rely more on the data gathered from the field.

In “Bangladesh-India Border: Issues and Management”, Col. Mahbub-ul Alam confirms as:

The identical Bangladesh-India border gave rise to number of issues such as cross border smuggling, terrorist activities, border fencing, human and drug trafficking, border killing, etc. that often vitiated friendly relations between the two neighbours. More importantly, millions of people living in the border continue to suffer economic hardships and physical restrictions due to frequent incidents along the border. Currently, it has become a common phenomenon that Bangladeshi people are harassed, tortured and even killed by the Border Security Force (BSF) of India. Moreover, the BSF asserts that its personnel fires at smugglers and hostile migrants of Bangladesh, but Bangladesh argues that BSF personnel kills innocent people.

This very statement can be a great entry point in the study. Though limited availability of relevant literature posed a significant challenge, the availability of government policy papers, reports, etc. could provide several useful inputs for the study. The sections related to Indo-Bangladesh border from the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee was especially of significance. The initiatives like Border Area Development Programme (BADP), and Border Haats will have a significant role to play in the sustainable development of the border area.

Methodology

This study aims to uncover the underlying issue and explore mutually beneficial solutions for all parties involved in the border area management. As part of the study, efforts were made to gather multiple perspectives, dimensions, and dynamics of cross-border struggling as well as to seek a balanced outcome that benefits the key stakeholders.

Cooch Behar district in West Bengal was identified for the study as issues of persons engaged in agrarian activities near Indo-Bangladesh border was quite varied and significant to examine. The villages within close proximity to the Indo-Bangladesh border fence were included in the sample to capture the localized challenges faced by agricultural communities. Specifically, the focus was on Balabhut, Jhaukuthi, and Krishnapur in Tufanganj I block; Rajar Bari and Gadopota in Sitalkuchi block; and Notun Basti, Hemkumari, Dorjipara, and Sardarpara in Haldibari block, as well as Paschim Sahebganj, Purba Sahebganj, and Kalmati in Dinhata II block. All these villages are situated within a 5-km radius of the border fence.

Due to financial constraints and time limitations, the focus was given to the areas accessible via public transport where the mentioned issues are prevalent. Sitalkuchi is particularly sensitive politically and socially, and it is prone to illegal activities, including cattle smuggling. The survey included 300 households in Tufanganj I block. Additionally, twelve focus group discussions (FGDs)

across all the aforementioned villages were also held. Primary source of data was made by conducting FGDs. Through separate meetings with both male and female farmers organized in villages, the challenges confronting agricultural activities in the border region were the focus of the discussions. These sessions served as a platform for participants to share their first-hand experiences and insights. Importantly, at the culmination of each FGD, participants collaboratively formulated actionable suggestions aimed at addressing the identified issues.

Due to the sensitive nature of the issues involving national security and bureaucratic processes, the researchers relied on informal discussions with various government authorities, including BSF personnel. The data collection process was completed within fifteen days. Most of the FGDs were conducted in the evening, while daytime was dedicated to filling out the baseline survey format through door-to-door visits. Structured observation techniques enabled the researchers to cross-verify the data collected through other sources.

Discussions

FGDs enabled the authors to delve deep into the challenges confronting agricultural activities in the study area. To grasp the core issues of the area, it is imperative to consider the geographic layout of the villages. As previously mentioned, all the villages are located within a 5-km radius from the Indo-Bangladesh border. However, there is a crucial point. The barbed wire fencing has not been positioned directly on the actual border line. Instead, there is a gap between the International Border Pillar and the barbed wire fence, ranging from approximately 150 m to 500 m. Remarkably, in some areas, this gap exceeds even 1 km or more.

(a) Security-related Issues

Within this expanse between the barbed wire fence and the International Border Pillar lie vast hectares of Indian land, owned by the local community. There is a serious misconception among the

populace that this area constitutes the “no man’s land”. However, in reality, these lands belong to the farmers of the bordering villages. Towards accessing these lands for farming activities, the farmers are to travel through the fencing gates, which are regulated by the BSF personnel. Generally, there are designated times for operating these gates, including morning slots from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. However, there are instances where the gate timings could not be maintained due to inadequate staffing within the BSF.

Especially during the winter season, when visibility is impaired by fog, the BSF may refrain from opening the gates for the morning slot. This inconsistency in gate operations further complicates farmers’ access to their lands and exacerbates the challenges they face in managing agricultural activities along the border region.

Furthermore, due to the persistent visibility challenges, the BSF personnel, in collaboration with the district authorities, impose certain restrictions on farmers regarding the cultivation of crops exceeding a height of 3 ft. Consequently, farmers are prohibited from cultivating cash crops such as jute or maize, despite the district’s favourable weather and soil conditions for these crops. This restriction further affects agricultural productivity and deprives the local farmers of the opportunity to capitalize on crops that could potentially enhance their economic prospects. This pattern of “prohibition” extends not only to the land situated between the International Border Pillar and the barbed wire fence but also to the lands adjacent to the barbed wire fence within the “main territory”. Cultivating crops exceeding a height of 3 ft, including jute or maize, is strictly forbidden in these areas. This blanket restriction severely limits farmers’ choices and options for crop cultivation, regardless of their land is located within the border region.

As per the national security protocols, these farmers are required to obtain written permission for the transportation of agricultural equipment and vehicles within the specified area. However, navigating the bureaucratic process to obtain such permissions poses numerous challenges to farmers, adding unnecessary hassles to their daily activities.

(b) High Input Cost for Agriculture

As expressed, the agricultural land located between the International Border Pillar and the border fence face significant challenges related to irrigation. In many cases, there are either inadequate or no irrigation facilities available for cultivation in the area. Compounding this issue, these lands lack access to electricity, thereby necessitating the use of diesel-operated pumps for irrigation. Relying on diesel pumps not only adds to the operational costs but also contributes to environmental concerns as well as bring additional financial burden to the farmers. Consequently, the overall cost of agricultural production in these areas escalates significantly, placing additional strain on the livelihoods of farmers who are already grappling with various restrictions and limitations. Moreover, to combat cross-border smuggling activities, the BSF imposes restrictions on the transportation of fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds. Though these restrictions are being made in line with the concerns of border security, such measures limit the application of these essential inputs for agricultural production at the “right time”. As a result, farmers face considerable difficulties in procuring vital supplies, hindering their ability to effectively cultivate their lands and sustain their livelihoods.

There is no doubt that the national security of our homeland cannot be compromised. At the same time, it is important to address the adverse impacts of such security measures/restrictions on the farmers in carrying out the agricultural activities in the border areas.

(c) Ecosystem Imbalance Factors

Positioning of search light masts near the fencing are made to enhance surveillance, which also leads to certain difficulties to the farmers. The intense and dazzling light emitted by these searchlights can severely affect crops, often resulting in burns or complete destruction of the produce. Moreover, the continuous illumination throughout the night disrupts the local ecosystem. Insects are attracted to these bright lights, leading to infestations that ravage crops in the surrounding areas. This ecological imbalance further

exacerbates the already challenging conditions faced by farmers in border regions.

Balancing the imperative of national security with the need to mitigate the unintended consequences on agricultural livelihoods is very much essential. Exploring measures to minimize the adverse effects of these searchlights in the productivity of agricultural crops while maintaining effective border surveillance is essential for fostering sustainable development in these border areas.

(d) Illegal Trespass

The distance between the International Border Pillar and the border fence leads to another serious issue. The inhabitants of the neighbouring country illegally traverse the border and encroach upon Indian territory unhindered until they reach the fencing. This unrestricted access poses serious challenges for Indian farmers residing in the border areas.

Farmers lament that instances of crop destruction in the border areas is a routine matter. Bulk movement of cattle from the neighbouring country often leads to extensive damage to the standing crops in the farm land. Compounding these issues, farmers find themselves unable to safeguard their land effectively due to restricted access during scheduled times for the opening of fencing gates. Due to the presence of an international treaty, neither the BSF nor the State Police wish to take strict action in such instances.

(e) Diplomatic Issues

The personnel stationed outside the fence for border security, within Indian territory, are unable to intervene effectively to protect the crops of Indian farmers. This regulatory constraint further enhances the vulnerability of the farmers to incursions and damages perpetrated by individuals from across the border.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes bolstering border security measures, enhancing surveillance, and facilitating timely interventions to

safeguard the interests of Indian farmers and protect agricultural lands from encroachment and destruction.

(f) Lack of Information

The farmers are not well aware of the modern techniques of agricultural activities. They are even unaware of the different government schemes which are available for them to develop agricultural productivity.

All these challenges have compelled many farmers to seek alternative livelihoods, often resorting to inappropriate or unsustainable means of income generation. Faced with dwindling agricultural prospects, coupled with the inability to protect their lands and sustain their livelihoods, farmers are left with few viable options. In some cases, this dire situation pushes individuals towards unsafe migrations in search of better opportunities, increasing their vulnerability and perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability.

Findings

Due to operational restrictions for carrying out agricultural activities in the border areas that resulted in reduction of livelihood opportunities and sources of income, the farmers from the bordering villages have been changing their professions. Sometimes, they get themselves engaged with certain jobs due to the pressure. Without considering the consequences, they move to different parts of India with very little information about the job providers or the risk factors of the job. Many of them have no clue about the basic safety measure, if they met with an accident or face certain difficulties away from their home. Even the Public Distribution System (PDS) facilities, medical facilities and many other basic amenities are not available to them. The education of the children of these migrant labourers are being hampered to a large extent as they accompany the adult family members who migrate in search of alternate livelihood opportunities. There are several incidents where the migrant workers could not get their wages properly. As they go to the informal sector to work, they could not receive any

social security cover or get any legal support on several occasions at their workplace.

To understand the gravity and extent of unsafe migration issues and the response of the state, the authors communicated with the district administration. Visit to the local government offices in the border areas revealed that the *panchayats* do not keep any records related to migration. They even do not have any idea about which part of India the people of their areas are going to. To deep dive into the matter, the authors tried to collect some basic information about the migration status of the district through RTI. Unfortunately, none of the authorities could provide us with a single data about migration. All the authorities agreed about the seriousness of the issues but did not have any plan or understanding to mitigate the issue.

All the key stakeholders including government agencies who deal with the long-term and day-to-day activities in the border areas could play a crucial role in mitigating this issue. A core committee shall be formed where BSF personnel, District Magistrate; elected representatives from local government, legislative assembly and parliament; office of the Assistant Director of Agriculture; office of the irrigation and waterways department; office of the labour commissioner of distinct, representatives from farmers and other major stakeholders. Such a step is very important to protect the rights of the farmers as well as ensure the national security of the country. The interests of all the parties shall be taken care properly so that they are not forced to change the profession or the place of work and pushed away from their native/social moorings.

Due to bureaucratic procedures, there is very limited scope for interaction between the farmers and the BSF personnel. Although the Border Security Force of each Border Out Post (BOP) arranges a meeting for the farmers once in a month, it does not result in any fruitful discussions, as gathered about the past experiences. Many factors contribute in this direction. First, the people living in the border areas have a discomfort to attend any meeting in restricted places like BOPs. Though the BSF personnel try to make the

environment of the meeting very comfortable by offering water and snacks, people still do not feel comfortable when the security personnel attend the meeting with live firearms. The language used in the meeting is another problem. In Cooch Behar district, very few farmers understand Hindi language. On the other hand, most of the BSF officials are not able to understand Bengali language as they are drawn from different parts of India. Women of the villages do not participate in the meetings as the meetings are held at BOPs and the timing of the meetings is also inappropriate for the women. Keeping the seriousness of national security in mind, BSF personnel restrict access to the border gate. However, this restriction can create challenges for farmers to conduct agricultural activities.

As visibility issues persist in the border area, BSF personnel restrict the cultivation of crops exceeding 3 ft in height.

Suggestions

It is suggested that the monthly meeting of all stakeholders in the border areas shall be held inside the village, maybe in the local school, local club premises or community halls. It can give enough confidence to the villagers to attend the meeting. The BSF personnel shall avoid carrying live firearms to the venue for the meeting. Participation of the women farmers shall be ensured by revising the timing of the meeting accordingly. Among the BSF personnel, those who can speak the local language shall be engaged to represent their views during the meeting or else a neutral translator may be engaged to do the translation. Such an attempt will enable to make the environment friendlier so that free and frank discussion could be held. It will lead to informed decision-making, after detailed deliberations among all those present in the meeting.

Timings for opening and closing of the gate shall be fixed by the BSF personnel in consultation with the farmers, considering the suitability of timings for agricultural activities. If possible, the gate can be left open by regulating the movement from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Agriculture department shall take the initiative to introduce alternative cash crop cultivation that are less than 3 ft in height in the border areas, keeping in view the security measures (PIB., n.d.). Proper guidance is required for farmers to conduct agricultural activities scientifically. The office of the Assistant Director of Agriculture (ADA) office can play a role in this (Dash, 2024). If possible, low-yield maize or jute seeds can be introduced through proper testing. The office of the ADA can also take responsibility for conducting extensive awareness camps to make the farmers aware of the different government schemes available for the farmers and guide them to avail of those schemes. In this context, it is pertinent to note that

active involvement and participation of youth in agriculture with enabling policy and programmes will rejuvenate the “Agro Eco System” in the country, in line with its strides towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, earlier than anticipated. (Gireesan, 2020)

Irrigation and waterways department shall take necessary initiatives such as setting up solar pump machines, maintaining the water bodies to enhance their storage capacity, etc. to ensure adequate water supply for agricultural activities. In this context, it is suggested that “water budgeting” in the border areas shall be undertaken by the state government of West Bengal which aims to ensure sustainable water management in the area.

Water budgeting is the process of managing water resources effectively in a given area. It involves assessing water availability, estimating usage for various needs like agriculture and industry, and promoting efficient use and conservation practices. (Gireesan, 2023)

This will enable the farmers and other stakeholders to optimize the utilization of water, modify the agricultural practices and if necessary, diversity the agricultural crops.

As those areas are situated close to the India-Bangladesh border, the Government of Bangladesh has a crucial role to play in mitigating the issues where the Bangladeshi people or cattle are involved. Regular flag meeting between the security personnel from both the sides shall be made to address the issues of illegal trespass of human or cattle.

A programme must be implemented with a balanced attitude towards national security as well as the strengthening of local economy. Hence, it is important to mention that before taking up any development initiative in the border areas, deliberations with the all stakeholders shall be made. A special working group may be formed with representation from state government, BSF, local government institutions, etc. to implement such programmes. NGOs working in the field of holistic development can also be consulted and be entrusted with specific tasks during its operationalization.

Conclusion

The international border between India and Bangladesh is significant for several reasons. It is a contiguous border where people residing on either side have been socially, economically and culturally connected for centuries till the demarcation of border took place in 1947. This is a major factor to be kept in mind, while addressing various needs, concerns, issues and problems in the border areas. As discussed in this article, the life and livelihood of the people in the border areas have been caught in a standstill. The stagnancy in the local economy forced many persons to take up illegal option like cross-border smuggling or undesirable and unhealthy option like unsafe migration, to earn a livelihood. It will not only socio-economically emancipate the people of these villages, it will also curb the tendency of looking for alternative economic sources of livelihood by resorting to illegal, undesirable and unhealthy options and extra-economic activities. The generation of income and creation of local markets can be a positive approach to deal with the peculiarities in the area.

The authors wish to advocate for the initiation of a specific policy for the border areas, especially in the Indo-Bangladesh border, leading to the comprehensive development of the region, without compromising the national security, foreign relations and considering the burning livelihood issues of the local community.

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