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One earth, one family, one future

India is striding towards its next goalpost of becoming Vikasit Bharat by 2047 in the ongoing Amrit kaal. The theme of the G20 dialogues in India encompasses Social Justice in its truest sense – One Earth, One Family, One Future. Social justice is delivered when there is respect for diversity, when there is equality, and equal opportunities for all. India has been consistently demonstrating her large vision of social justice by leaving no stone unturned to establish parity.

A good start

The G20 India presidency and its unifying theme is a great platform for much needed narratives and actions where world leaders are engaging in constructive dialogues; and also, an opportunity for India to showcase her affirmative actions on priorities. This could be landmark start of conversations and action needed particularly among the south globe nations.

The government of India has been prioritising transformation at the very last mile, where the most marginalised and vulnerable live. Examples being the aspirational districts program in 112 districts and the recently launched aspirational block program, across 500 blocks; both anchored by Niti aayog. Prioritisation is evident with the Central TB Division having launched the multi-partner “Aashwasan” campaign to address and eliminate deeply prevalent TB in tribal population; and the increase in establishment of Eklavya model residential schools to ensure access to quality education to children from tribal communities. The budget allocation of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has also been substantially increased (by a whopping 190.01 %) from Rs. 4295.94 crore in 2013-14 to Rs. 12461.88 crore in 2023-24.

It is encouraging that socially, economically and geographically challenged regions are being prioritized to improve quality of lives through partnerships with many hyper-local NGOs.

The most revolutionary accomplishment has been the leveraging of digital technology as a big equaliser to ensure quality of life at the last mile. The Aadhar, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Cowin, the recently launched Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) and Direct Benefit Transfers are noteworthy instances of inclusive development that is leaving no-one behind.

Exits that bode well

India is making multi-pronged moves to meet its commitment towards Sustainable Development Goal 1 that aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. It is heartening to note that the recent UNDP report on multidimensional poverty (2022) reaffirms that 415 million people exited from poverty in India.

The focus on inclusive growth leading to social justice is evident from the implementation of several

schemes, bringing to life what Nelson Mandela expressed, “Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice.” Common service centres set up in villages and panchayats pan-India, and introduction by some states of initiatives like “Sarkar Aapke Dwaar” are bringing services and grievance redressal to the doorstep of the underserved. Several flagship schemes have covered much ground in ensuring access and a better quality of life – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, National Urban Livelihood Mission, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, Antyodaya Yojna, to name a few. Campaigns like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao are not just addressing the problem, but also changing mindsets which is critical to bring parity and social justice.

Sweet spots towards social justice

Progress in the lives of the poor in underserved geographies needs to be a continued top priority for states and the centre.

Last mile convergence: Winds of change are gathering speed as inter-ministerial and inter-departmental convergence are proving to be gamechangers in bringing benefits to all. The need is to establish effective structures, processes, and capabilities for last mile convergence at panchayat, block, and district levels. Encouraging examples are evident in aspirational districts where Aspirational Districts Collaborative, (Piramal Foundation in partnership with NITI Aayog, states and district administrations) is working on last mile convergence to achieve citizen-focussed goals.

Drivers of growth – Elected Women Panchayat Representatives and SHGs: India has 1.4 million women elected panchayat representatives, the largest in the world and over 82 lakhs self-help groups across India. These hold vast potential to be gamechangers in socio-economic development. Elected women representatives could bring in greater efficiency to their daily functioning. District Administrations could set up structures to leverage voices of community women leaders for strengthening implementation across multiple sectors.

Taking responsibility: If boundaries have to dissolve, if we have to be Vikasit Bharat by 2047, by addressing complexities of our social order and building confidence, India needs to consistently prioritise and drive more platforms, partnerships and multi-sectoral collaboration in underserved geographies and communities, something that has already started through the philosophy of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikash, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas.

The corporate sector can play a crucial role in creating economic opportunities by reimagining business in backward regions through leveraging existing momentum built by One District One Product, Vocal for Local, etc. This would not only create more jobs, but also make these regions economic accelerators, and inspirational hotspots.

While the state has a responsibility towards its people, it is also about individual responsibility and a reawakening of our social consciousness, where each one of us pledges to see what I can do, with the selfless, enduring spirit of Sewa Bhaav.

This G20 year is also an opportunity to showcase our nation as a role model of democracy. A country that has a vision of equality, prosperity, with an inclusive and developed society, distinguished by a human-centric approach at its core. An India where, as Rabindranath Tagore said, “Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high, where knowledge is free – an India that is a heaven of freedom”; and a global model of social justice. Let’s all work together to build an India of our aspirations.