



## SDG 4 & NEP 2020: A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### Abstract

*NEP 2020 will help to bridge the gaps in the current education system and making it accessible to all. UGC (University Grants Commission) is the primary regulating body that advises government, enforces standards and facilitates coordination between center and states. NEP 2020 has replaced the age old NPE 1986, aiming to drastically reform the education. Based on five pillars, namely, access, quality, equity, affordability and accountability, it aims to prepare young population to handle national and global challenges. SDG 4 aims to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education for all and NEP is aligned with it. The current study aims to provide an overview as to how NEP and SDG work together to support inclusive and equitable development in India. It also aims to study the implications and challenges in higher education.*

**Keywords:** SDG, NEP, higher education, government.

### Introduction

Worldwide, corporate social responsibility, or CSR, has become a key component of company strategy, and India is no different. Indian businesses have been more involved in promoting social, environmental, and community projects since the Companies Act of 2013 introduced CSR requirements. Meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own is the main aim of sustainable development. United Nations Brundtland Commission (1987) defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Universities and other higher education institutions need to implement strong corporate strategies in the current, highly competitive environment in order to maintain a positive reputation and obtain a competitive advantage. Integrating CSR in their operational frameworks encourages ongoing development within these organizations in addition to being in line with societal norms. Both internal and external factors contribute to this progress, which promotes effectiveness and efficiency in management.

After the Paris Conference, 184 member governments came together and the education sector to promote sustainable development worldwide, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were unveiled in January 2016. In order to accomplish the goals, all



countries in the globe have to assist with implementation, coordination, funding, and monitoring. The global community has established 169 targets and 17 goals for sustainable development. In the sustainable Development Goals, education is placed as Goal 4 (SDG 4). The stated goal of SDG 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” CSR can be applied in higher education in many ways. Likewise, National Service Scheme (NSS) is a community service program launched under UGC in universities and colleges. The students join as volunteers and engage in community services in the society. The implementation of various programmes and activities allow students to engage in the society and work in sectors like, health, education, cleanliness etc. As a result, the execution of CSR initiatives in this kind of community empowerment program emphasizes community participation in the execution of activities to ensure that the program's goals are met appropriately and in line with community needs. UGC has also issued guidelines for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in India 2.0.

**Table 1: UGC Guidelines for Social Responsibility & Community Engagement 2022**

The goals of ‘fostering social responsibility and community engagement in Higher Education Institutes’ can comprise of:	
1	Improving the quality of teaching/learning in HEIs, by bridging the gap between theory and practice through community engagement
2	Promoting deeper interactions between higher educational institutions and local communities for identification and solution of real-life problems faced by the communities in a spirit of mutual benefit
3	Facilitating partnerships between local communities and institutions of higher education so that students and teachers can learn from local knowledge and wisdom
4	Engaging higher education institutions with local communities in order to make curriculum, courses and pedagogies more appropriate to achieve the goals of national development
5	Catalyzing acquisition of values of public service and active citizenship amongst students and youth, which would also encourage, nurture and harness the natural idealism of youth
6	Undertaking research projects in partnership with local community through community-based research methods

*Source: Guidelines for Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in India 2.0, UGC 2022.*

**Table 2: SDG 4 Education Goals & Targets in UNESCO Report 2016**

Goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



Target 4.1	By 2030, ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
Target 4.2	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
Target 4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
Target 4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
Target 4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
Target 4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
Target 4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural and diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
Target 4.a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
Target 4.b	By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing states and African countries for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.
Target 4.c	By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states.

Source: UNESCO (2016) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016*.

### Status of Higher Education in India



According to AISHE Report 2021-22, there are 4,32,68,181 students enrolled in higher education institutions overall, of which 96,38,345 attend universities and their constituent units, 3,14,59,092 attend colleges, and 21,70,744 attend stand-alone schools.

India had over 4.3 crore students registered in around 1200 institutions as of May 2024, representing a gross enrolment ratio of 28.4% in higher education. But compared to the current global average of 36.7%, this is much lower. The NEP has made a strong recommendation to increase the GER for higher education to 50 per cent by 2035, which requires a significant expansion of higher education else the targets of SDG 4 will be missed.

**Table 3: GER In India**

Year	GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in Higher Education
2014-15	23.7
2020-21	27.3
2021-22	28.4

Source: AISHE Report 2021-22.

### NEP & SDG

The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, which has been in place for thirty-four years, is replaced by the NEP 2020, the first education policy of the twenty-first century. With an educational system based on Indian culture, it aims to drastically alter schooling. Access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability are its five guiding principles. This will prepare our youth to deal with the different domestic and global concerns of today and tomorrow. The SDGs represent a daring pledge to complete the task at hand and eradicate poverty in all of its manifestations by 2030. This entails assisting communities impacted by conflict and climate-related disasters, focusing on the most vulnerable, and expanding access to essential resources and services. "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDG) include 17 goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) of the UN are aligned with the NEP 2020. SDG 4 aims to guarantee inclusive, equitable, high-quality education and encourage opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone. NEP seeks to make India a thriving knowledge society in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Literature Review

Godonoga and Sparn (2023) studied thorough literature review of renowned HE journals spanning 30 years was used in the study. The results demonstrate that SR is a broad notion that has changed throughout time, moving from a moral obligation to serve society to involving outside parties in universities' basic operations and, more recently, demonstrating social impact. Institutional and organizational variables impact the degree to which SR is adopted and accepted as a fundamental HE function.



Alzyoud and Bani-Hani (2015) investigated that how universities could achieve competitiveness, sustainability and development by application of University Social Responsibility (USR).

Veidemane (2022) studied the factors related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) have received comparatively less attention in sustainability rankings like the UI Green Metric and THE Impact ranking. To create these indicators for U-Multirank, the multi-dimensional transparency and ranking tool, we conducted a poll among practitioners, studied the literature, and spoke with experts. The article discussed the relevance, validity, and viability of indicators while summarizing the prospects and difficulties for creating globally comparable ESD indicators in the higher education sector.

Stukalo and Lytvyn (2021) studied as to how quality assurance in higher education contributes to the accomplishment of sustainable development objectives in Ukrainian universities. The study concluded that at the national, institutional, and study program levels, the SDGs should be implemented and enforced. Through suitable teaching strategies, learning resources, course material, and working and learning settings, every study program can help achieve the SDGs. The development of responsible citizens who are accountable for their children's and humanity's future should be a goal of higher education.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

1. To study the role of SDG 4 (quality education) in NEP 2020.
2. To study the potential of aligning NEP into Higher education.

In India, the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Higher Education (MOE) is responsible for the basic infrastructure, policy and planning of Higher Education. It oversees the growth of access and enhancement of quality in higher education through prestigious colleges, universities, and other establishments. According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, “The purpose of the education system is to develop a good human being capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution”.

#### **Role of NEP 2020 in achieving SDG 4**

1. Enhance GER

By 2035, NEP 2020 intends to increase the GER to 50%. Higher education institutions will receive at least 3.5 crore seats, if not more, to make this ambition a reality.

2. Holistic Education



It gives students the freedom to integrate occupational courses with interdisciplinary disciplines. Undergraduate programs can be three or four years long. The new feature is that students will receive 'multiple exit options and the proper 'certification' during their graduation period.

### 3. Inclusive and Equity

By attending to the needs of disadvantaged populations, such as girls, low-income families, and students with disabilities, the policy emphasizes the need of promoting fairness and inclusivity in education. Giving children from all socioeconomic backgrounds equal chances is another goal.

### 4. Skill Development and Vocational Education

It recognizes the importance of skill development and vocational education in preparing students for the labour market. To help students acquire the skills they need, it recommends integrating work-integrated learning activities and internships into regular education.

### 5. Collaborations with International Universities

It aims to promote internationalization by forming alliances with foreign universities, attracting international students, and enabling teacher and student exchanges. The strategy also calls for the establishment of a National Education Exchange Program (NEEP) to promote educational exchanges among states.

### 6. Open Distance Learning

The government will open up digital repositories, introduce online courses, provide funds for research, and implement credit-based education as part of its efforts to guarantee the best possible education.

### 7. Online and Digital Education

It also aims to address student demands and maximize learning outcomes, a specialized team will be established to construct digital infrastructure, such as digital libraries and e-content.

## Implementation of NEP 2020 in Higher Education Institutes

Environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic growth are the three primary pillars of sustainable development.

1. Community Engagement
2. University and Industry Collaboration
3. Centers for Distance learning
4. Increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

### Benefits of aligning NEP 2020 & SDG 4

#### 1. Inclusive Education

NEP 2020's integration with the SDGs can advance inclusive education by guaranteeing that all children have access to high-quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic



status. By doing this, mutual support may be fostered and the educational gap between rich and poor pupils can be bridged.

#### 2. Improved Quality of Education

When NEP aligns with the SDG's, the concept of equity, sustainability and inclusion can be incorporated into the curriculum of higher education, thus raising the educational standards.

This can provide pupils with the information and abilities needed to tackle the problems of the twenty-first century.

#### 3. Global Recognition

The linkage between NEP 2020 and SDGs can enhance the reputation of India as a responsible member of the international community which is committed to achieve the SDGs in future. This could increase foreign investment in the field of education and strengthen India's standing as a world leader in this field.

#### 4. Sustainable Education

Sustainability education is being integrated into the education systems, research, and outreach initiatives of numerous Indian higher education institutions.

#### 5. Innovation & Entrepreneurship

In India, a large number of universities encourage its staff and students to be innovative and entrepreneurial.

#### 6. Sustainable Development

The SDGs and NEP 2020 can promote sustainable development through encouraging environmental sustainability and social responsibility within the classroom. Students can benefit from this by becoming more responsible citizens who can support sustainable development.

#### Challenges Ahead:

##### 1. Lack of infrastructure

Access to quality education is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Opportunities to learn may be challenged by the absence of basic amenities like classrooms, electricity and sanitary facilities. This gap may hinder the policy's objectives of development of internet and encouraging growth of vocational education.

##### 2. Internet Gap

Despite NEP 2020's emphasis on integrating technology into education, India continues to have a major digital break down, with shifts in internet connectivity, digital literacy, and access to digital devices. In order to have better access to high quality of education, it is important to close this gap.

##### 3. Inequality & inclusion

Geographical location, gender, and other socioeconomic factors disparities in access to education continue to be problems. Specific measures are necessary for inclusive



education. Even though NEP 2020 puts an enormous focus on inclusivity, it can be difficult to ensure that all students, particularly those from disadvantaged families and those with impairments, get fair access to high-quality education.

4. Financial constraints

Adequate finance is critical for increasing access, upgrading infrastructure, and raising educational standards. Many nations, particularly those with little resources, struggle to raise sufficient funds to meet SDG 4's complete goals. The implementation of NEP 2020 requires huge funding. Any budget restrictions may impede the effective implementation of planned improvements at different levels of education.

5. Consistency & commitment

The commitment of governments to prioritizing education and maintaining uniformity in policy over time may have an impact on the effective execution of SDG 4. Political commitment is necessary to achieve the essential changes proposed in the NEP 2020. To ensure long-term progress, guidelines for policy must be consistent in governments.

6. Resistance to change

Progress may be affected by conflict to teaching and academic reforms. The attainment of SDG 4 may be hampered by traditional methods and unwillingness to adopt innovative methods of teaching. Teachers, administrators, and parents are among the stakeholders who may oppose the implementation of a new education policy because it involves a change in outlook as they are used to the existing system.

**Conclusion**

The key to finding a balance between safeguarding the environment and economic growth is education for sustainable development. HEI's should adopt sustainability as a core value and integrate the SDGs into their institutional strategies for teaching, research, and day-to-day operations. They can't work in isolation and ought to be closely linked to socioeconomic growth, where every action and transaction has an important impact on the SDGs. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, NEP 2020 seeks to establish India as a growing knowledge society and a global leader in knowledge. The potential of administrators to recognize challenges and make an effort to solve them will determine how well NEP 2020 is implemented. NEP 2020 will have an impact on Indian education going forward by bringing our system closer to international standards.

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