

India VNR 2025 – Civil-Society Joint Statement

Thank you, Excellencies.

We, Indian civil-society organisations, grassroots movements, youth networks and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), welcome the opportunity to contribute to India's 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR). We appreciate the Government of India's efforts to engage diverse stakeholders in the review process and recognize key national gains:

India's SDG Index improved significantly in recent years; several flagship digital platforms like CoWIN, Aadhaar, and UPI have strengthened access to services; and India has doubled its renewable energy capacity since 2015. The National Multidimensional Poverty Index also recorded substantial poverty reduction.

However, the true measure of progress lies not only in national averages, but in how equitably benefits reach those historically excluded. This statement highlights **priority gaps** and **key recommendations** aligned with the SDGs under review (3, 5, 8, 14, 17), with cross-cutting emphasis on SDGs 2, 13 and 16.

Priority Gaps:

1. Leave No One Behind in localisation
There is a need to strengthen panchayats, urban local bodies, and aspirational blocks with predictable finance, capacity-building, and disaggregated SDG data. Marginalized groups, including Adivasis, Dalits, sanitation workers, LGBTQIA+ persons, migrants, and persons with disabilities, must be meaningfully included in local SDG planning and monitoring.
2. Dignity of labour
Despite legal prohibitions, hazardous practices like manual scavenging persist. Urgent steps are needed to ensure safe sanitation infrastructure, time-bound rehabilitation, and dignified alternative livelihoods.
3. Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3)
Mental health remains under-prioritized. There is a pressing need for increased public health financing, inclusive UHC, community-based mental health care, and gender-responsive SRHR services, especially for rural and underserved populations.
4. Learning recovery & inclusive education
ASER 2022 showed steep post-COVID losses, mainly in rural and tribal schools. Investment in teacher support, local-language content, disability-friendly infrastructure and digital-access subsidies is critical.

5. Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Gender barriers in access to education, employment, healthcare, and digital resources persist. Rising violence against women from marginalized communities is deeply concerning. Intersectional, survivor-centered justice systems and gender-transformative public services are essential.

6. Decent Work & Livelihoods (SDG 8)

Unemployment, informality, and lack of social protection affect youth, women, and informal workers disproportionately. There is need to strengthen green jobs, skills development, and rural entrepreneurship.

7. Climate and Ocean Action (SDGs 13 & 14)

Youth- and community-led solutions in climate-resilient agriculture, blue economy, and nature-based solutions need greater investment. Marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods must be protected, with attention to intergenerational equity.

8. Civic Space and SDG Accountability (SDG 16 & 17)

India's vibrant democracy relies on open civic space. Legal safeguards for youth, environmental defenders, and OPDs are critical. We also call for better financing, data transparency, and partnerships at all levels to localise and implement SDGs effectively.

Recommendations

- Annex/include shadow reports, community-generated data, and OPD submissions in the final VNR.
- Pass and enforce SCSP / TSP legislation ensuring ring-fenced funds for marginalized communities.
- Ensure disability-disaggregated SDG indicators and implement the RPwD Act 2016 in infrastructure and budgeting.
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- Increase gender-responsive, disability-inclusive public spending on health, education, climate, social protection and local climate resilience.
- Institutionalise youth & OPD seats on SDG councils from local to national level.
- Strengthen SDG 14 commitments on marine biodiversity, small-scale fisheries, and coastal resilience.
- Ensure transparent, participatory mechanisms under SDG 17 for civil society inclusion in implementation and follow-up.

Let this VNR reflect both the gains we celebrate and the gaps we must close, rooted in equity, dignity and partnership. We stand ready to work with the Government of India and the international community to realise the 2030 Agenda and truly leave no one behind.

Thank you.

References (keep as end-notes, not in the spoken text)

1. NITI Aayog, *SDG India Index Dashboard 2023-24*.
2. Government of India & UNDP, *National Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023*.
3. Lok Sabha Unstarred Q. #1176 (23-Nov-2023): Manual-scavenger enumeration.
4. National Health Accounts Estimates 2019-20 (NHSRC, 2023).
5. ASER Centre, *Annual Status of Education Report 2022*.
6. NCRB, *Crime in India 2021 – Chapter 9 (Crimes against SC/ST Women)*.
7. NSSO 75th Round (2018) & PLFS Quarterly Bulletin (Jan-Mar 2024): rural internet access.

All links resolve to official ministry or agency portals.