



## **THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE**

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# THE WORLD PERSPECTIVE

India's G20 Ascendancy: What it Means for Our Higher Education?



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## Introduction

Amidst the geo-political uncertainties and instabilities plaguing the global economy, the rise of the Group of Twenty (G20) marks a momentous occasion on the global economic horizon. G20 stands as a premier forum, one that connects the world's leading developed countries with the emerging economies on an equal footing in terms of voice and representation. Guided by the spirit of universal oneness (unity of voice and unity of purpose), the esteemed grouping aspires to foster international economic co-operation among its member States in the joint battle against international financial challenges. Soon after its formation in 1999 as an informal, self-styled consultative forum in the backdrop of the Asian financial crisis (1997-98), G20 was upgraded to the level of Heads of State/Government in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2007. The broad-based inclusive body currently comprises 19 member states along with the European Union representing nearly 90 percent of global GDP, 80 percent of global trade and 2/3rds of global population. The G20 Summit is held annually with a rotating presidency. The group for want of a permanent secretariat is supported by the previous, current, and future holders of the presidency, known as the troika. Beneath the rather loose and flexible style of governance G20 articulates a steady commitment to the principles of advancing "strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth". Its growth and resilience reflect in its evolving functional scope and agenda which embraces myriad socio-economic issues concerning financial markets, trade, climate

change, sustainable development, health care, agriculture, education, energy, environment, anti-corruption, women's development, skill building and youth promotion in addition to its original purpose of addressing economic predicaments.

## India at G20

At the very heart of India's engagement with G20 has been her proactive involvement in reshaping global economic governance and the global world order from the very beginning. India's positions in every G20 meeting have reiterated her deep devotion to the cause of multilateralism, UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The assumption of G20 Presidency (December 1, 2022-November 30, 2023) has brought India to the global center stage especially with respect to consensus-building efforts among the developed and developing countries on critical issues of global importance. The new role has seen India on a mission mode in shaping up a shared global future for all through the Amrit Kaal initiative and the LiFE movement seeking to promote environmentally-conscious practices and a sustainable way of living (Ministry of Earth Sciences, GoI). India's new G20 chair may also be viewed as a unique development for the country to rethink global governance processes and establish parity in international negotiations thereby firmly articulating its narratives on development and, as the fastest growing major economy, bringing forth its strengths to bear on the G20 agenda. However, the constraining realities of

the pandemic-retreating and deeply disrupted multipolar world have posed India a tough challenge to make her G20 presidency truly inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented as also to accelerate the pace of SDGs' attainment.

## India's Contribution to Advancing G20 Education Agenda

As part of the G20 decision-making process specialized working groups comprising experts and officials from relevant ministries have been formed to deliberate and discuss on a range of internationally-relevant issues. During Argentina's G20 Presidency (2018) the Education Working Group (EdWG) was established to strengthen learning outcomes and equitable access through digitalization, universal quality education, financing, educational partnerships, and international cooperation. EdWG also collaborates with Employment Working Groups and other relevant bodies to address several intersecting issues relating to skill development and school-to-work transition.

G20 EdWG has since emerged as an important multilateral platform to enhance and deepen cooperation among the G20 members on education-related issues which are critical to achieving the UN 2030 agenda. The prioritisation of educational technology for global growth immediately aligns with SDG 4 emphasizing ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. While under the past presidencies G20 EdWGs have focused on strengthening educational systems by making them more inclusive, equitable, accessible and innovative, the G20 Educational Ministerial under India's Presidency has boldly affirmed its cognizance of education as a fundamental human right and a transformative pathway with a vow to achieving the Presidency's goal of celebrating the universal sense of oneness- "One earth, One family, One future" (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam). Drawing upon the Upanishadic ideal of cosmic interconnectedness of diverse lifeforms, the chosen theme exemplifies LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment), thereby highlighting the importance of environmentally sustainable and responsible lifestyle choices, both at the individual and national level, for creating a cleaner, greener, and bluer planetary future. Throughout the G20 presidency a series of meetings and consultations were held across the length and breadth of the country to focus on ensuring inclusive, equitable, relevant and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all particularly for girls, women, and vulnerable groups. In the quest for widening the horizons of knowledge and using it for the good of humankind, collaboration was encouraged between

people, industries and societies. In a big way, the discussions have centered around the use of ed tech solutions for ensuring learning continuity, universal access, addressing the digital divide, and issues concerning data privacy, cyber security and responsible use of technology. By way of addressing the educational divides and discontinuities, special emphasis was laid on digital technology enablement initiatives which resonated with India's active pursuit of National Education Policy (NEP 2020). Accordingly, all G20 members recognized the value of improved distance/blended teaching-learning, professional development of educators, upgraded digital infrastructure and content, cyber security awareness, appropriate teaching methodologies and active learning to complement face-to-face learning.

## The Journey So Far

The recently concluded G20 Presidency summit has woven a tale of defining success by showcasing India's burgeoning economic and geopolitical clout. The progress made on building digital momentum is also commendable. The window of opportunity has enabled India to leave a lasting imprint on the global education agenda by pivotally drawing up a global roadmap and driving the pursuit of SDGs in a fragmented world order. Certainly, showcasing the country's strengths and potential has mirrored the nation's glowing face of resurgence amidst our rapidly expanding HE ecosystem (both in terms of the growing numbers of institutions and enrolments). However, the laudable G20 presidency promise of promoting inclusive education is still beset with a number of potent challenges hovering around the critical questions of 'quality' and 'access. Considering the degree of disparities in educational opportunities among the hitherto marginalized categories, bridging the digital divide and leveraging technology to ensure learning continuity for all remains a teething concern, particularly in the highly disruptive post-pandemic milieu. This apart, the yawning skills gap immediately calls for boosting skill development and vocational training for the purpose of creating a pool of future-ready workforce. Overcoming the aforementioned challenges necessitates a blend of comprehensive policies, investments and collaborations to revamp the higher education system in India. While NEP 2020 as an essential first step offers a conducive macro-level policy environment to begin with, the aspirational initiative needs to be backed by effective policy coordination efforts across various government departments and stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach to inclusive education. Besides allocating adequate fund support in favour of accessible infrastructure and inclusive education initiatives, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be

erected for the purpose of tracking progress and identifying areas of improvement at every stage. Macro-level reforms need to be complemented by targeted micro interventions. Transcending the passive culture of compliance, the institutions of higher learning must make proactive interventions with respect to improving their educational infrastructures, ensuring curriculum diversity/relevance, encouraging innovative teaching-learning practices, implanting a vibrant culture of research and innovation, strengthening faculty professional development programmes, attracting/retaining skilled educators and the like.

### The Sustainable Way Forward

The Delhi Declaration document, by upholding SDGs as a central theme in India's G20 presidency, has successfully propagated their importance for global stability and development. Adoption of the revolutionary Declaration is a diplomatic success, especially in terms of revitalising quality education delivery and international cooperation. However, as a key G20 member, India continues to encounter a plethora of challenges towards the advancement of SDGs. While the country's elevation as the second largest education ecosystem in the world reflects stirring progress in numeric expansion of access, the clarion call for quality improvement still goes largely unanswered. The concerns, being complex and interconnected, international cooperation coupled with domestic policy reforms may substantially contribute to global pursuits in this direction. While these have been prioritised and reinforced adequately during its presidency, meaningful progress on the pressing global issues calls for a multi-pronged approach involving close collaboration and consensus-building efforts with other member nations. In this context, the ambitious announcement by the presiding nation at the 18th G20 Delhi annual summit (2023) to create the New Economic Corridor connecting India-Middle East-Europe may be perceived as a silver lining- a strategic roadmap for a sustainable future. Also, the inclusion of the African Union as a member of the grouping is praiseworthy. Education diplomacy may be favourably used to position the country's education ecosystem to the forefront of the global arena. India's influence worldwide may be used to steer a G20-led global initiative by initiating policy dialogues and discussions among G20 member countries fostering the sharing of research, expertise, best practices and resources towards quality enrichment. Knowledge exchange endeavours could be facilitated through hosting conferences, workshops and forums to further the cause of inclusivity. This apart, India can also take the lead in advocating for transformative faculty empowerment programmes aimed at supporting educators with diverse

pedagogic innovations and the latest technology tools. The need of the hour is for the member nations to come together and collectively work on drawing up a globally relevant curricular framework incorporating new-age skills and competencies to promote holistic learning. Joint efforts towards developing appropriate quality assurance mechanisms and standards for educational institutions, promoting tech-driven educational transformation, mobilizing resources for infrastructure development, etc. can go a long way in fulfilling the cherished dream of inclusive and equitable education for all besides smoothening the pathway to achieving multiple SDGs. In sum, India's G20 ascendancy exudes a renewed vision of hope, paving the way for a brighter educational future marked by equity, adaptability and collaboration on a global scale.

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