

Evaluating the Progress of Indian Multinational Corporations Towards SDG's: A Theoretical Review

Alisha Arora, Swaraj Manchanda*

Assistant Professor, Inderprastha Engineering College, Ghaziabad, Delhi, India

ARTICLE INFO

*Correspondence:

swaraj9811579105@
gmail.com

Assistant Professor,
Inderprastha
Engineering College,
Ghaziabad, Delhi, India

Dates:

Received: 22-07-2025

Accepted: 25-11-2025

Published: 31-12-2025

Keywords:

Sustainable
Development, SDG's,
UNO, Globalisation,
Multinational
Corporations, India

How to Cite:

Arora, A., Manchanda,
S. (2025) Evaluating
the Progress of
Indian Multinational
Corporations Towards
SDG's: A Theoretical
Review. *DME Journal of
Management*, 6(2), 34-39.
doi: 10.53361/dmejm.
v6i02.05

Abstract

The notion of Sustainable development is gaining huge importance in the Contemporary world. In this era of Globalisation, we are continuously facing the threat of depleting stock of Natural resources, contamination of air, water and land, increasing income inequalities, unemployment and inflation, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and so on in certain parts of the world.

In such a scenario, the corporate entities or the business houses whether Domestic or International, can play a pivotal role in ensuring not only delivery of good quality products and services to their target markets, but ensuring the attainment of sustainable development for all.

The concept of Sustainable development can ensure inclusive and holistic growth of any nation, only when sustained and consistent efforts are made, not just by the National, state or local Governments but by all the concerned stakeholders including the Global Business Corporations.

This research paper shall focus on evaluating the progress of Indian Multinational Companies in attaining the sustainable Development and achieving the targets they had set under SDG's as per the UNO in 2015.

Use of descriptive and qualitative research methodology has been undertaken throughout the research based on extensive and detailed review of the existing literature and research articles in accordance with the theme, extracted from various journals, websites, news articles, blogs, etc.

The article will provide deep insights on the practices, challenges, strategic framework, policies adopted by the corporations in the attainment of achieving sustainability in their operations in accordance with SDG's.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development as defined in the Rio-Earth Summit of the UNO held in the year 1992 means "*the development which takes care of the needs of the present generation without compromising with the ability of the future generation to meet their needs*". (Majumdar, 2018)

In order to attain Sustainable development, many international organisations have been conducting seminars, conferences, workshops and summits involving representatives across the globe. One such summit was the United Nations

Sustainable Development Summit held in New York from September 25-27, 2015 which led to the announcement of Sustainable Development Goals or in short, SDG's.

The 17 Sustainable Development goals announced by the United Nations' General Assembly in 2015 brought about a global revolution and immense transformation in the understanding and interpretation of the entire concept and context of Sustainability and Sustainable Development in the 21st Century.

The creation and adoption of these SDG's integrated the aspects of economic growth, social inclusion, environmental and ecological balance and sustainability in the form of certain key objectives for every member nation.

Though as per the resolution "Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for Sustainable development" (signed between 193 nations on September 25, 2015 at New York, USA), the major forces for sustainable development shall be the govt authorities only (Central, state and Local), but this declaration also emphasised upon the immensely increasing importance of Domestic and Global Corporations in becoming key drivers for the attainment of these long term goals in the coming decades.

The modern day MNC's through their innovative production planning, intensely designed strategic framework, adoption of green and clean technologies, better quality products, environment-oriented manufacturing and operations can help in attaining the goals and objectives as laid down in the Agenda 2030 for Global Sustainable Development.

Since India is one of the emerging and rapidly growing economies of today, hence sustainable development is a crucial paradigm for its Government and Business houses.

Though India, is growing rapidly in IT, Healthcare, Outsourcing, and other service-based segments across the world and providing outsourcing to developed nations in these areas. But along with this growth, the nation is also facing certain peculiar challenges of environmental degradation, climate change, increased income gap between rich and poor, hunger, and unemployment in several regions. (NITI Aayog, 2020). As illustrated in the Figure 1, 17



Figure 1: The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Source: United Nations (2015) (Image Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/>)

SDG's were introduced by UN's General Assembly on 25th September 2015.

To overcome these challenges, support of India's Business houses is much needed, especially the global Indian Business Houses. Hence, the Indian Government has mandated the Indian Companies u/s 135 of the Companies Act 2013 must contribute at least 2% of their adjusted net Profits towards the upliftment of society and other stakeholders which is also popularly known as CSR- Corporate Social Responsibility. (Poddar et al., 2025).

The purpose of this is to foster the spirit of holistic, inclusive and sustainable development in the mindset of the Corporate managers who were earlier focused on increasing the returns on investment for their principal owners and shareholders for whom they act as agents.

As per the available literature, the norms of CSR and the intent to become an environment friendly brand name, is compelling the reputed and Global Indian corporations to become sustainable in their entire supply chain right from the purchase of raw material and commencement of the operations. To fulfil their long-term vision and mission, The Indian Corporations (which are now competing at par with foreign Multinationals), are adopting the vision of SDG's in their operations, production process, product manufacturing, distribution and marketing strategies, and other aspects of their business. (Sharma et al., 2025).

The empirical evidence shows that many Indian Corporations are incorporating the SDG's like SDG-

4-Quality Education for all, SDG-5- Gender Equality, SDG-7 Clean and Green Energy SDG-9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG-12 Responsible Consumption and Production while manufacturing their products, offering their services and creating their strategic framework for attainment of their long-term objectives. (Mhlanga, 2018)

But due to differences in regulatory and legal provisions across various sectors and Industrial segments, the fulfilment of CSR norms and attainment of SDG's shows asymmetry throughout the economy. Some sectors are showing tremendous success and others are still lagging in incorporating these goals as a part of the Broad strategic framework and planning process. (Ambadkar & Yadav, 2025; Khalique et al., 2021).

Though many business houses are now integrating the SDG's as a part of their CSR considering the mandate of Govt of India and legal compulsion, some reputed brand names have been socially responsible since the commencement of their operations. One such brand name is Tata Group.

Scholarly studies, existing literature and historic records suggest that Tata has been an active pioneer of holistic national development, inclusive growth, providing quality education, affordable healthcare, energy efficient appliances, better and affordable products. Tata Group is one of the oldest and reputed Indian Conglomerates and one of the leaders of sustainability since beginning. (Kumar & Sharma, 2013; Tata Group, 2017).

For example: One of Tata Group's subsidiary known as Tata Steel has been consistently allocating a certain portion of its net profits every year towards various aspects of Sustainable development of nation like Tata's contribution towards SDG- 3 which is based on good health and well-being of social stakeholders, SDG-4 that caters to providing quality education to rural and urban poor, SDG-8 which emphasises on decent work and economic growth for all (Kumar & Sharma, 2013; Tata Steel, 2020).

The research paper is focused on doing in-depth theoretical review of such Indian Conglomerates and MNCS's towards the attainment and incorporation of SDG's in their production, operations, marketing, distribution, logistics and other aspects of their commercial activities.

The paper is based on theoretical analysis of existing literature on Sustainability, SDG's and Indian Corporations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Sustainable Development goals have stated 17 Goals and 169 targets to facilitate economic, social, ecological well-being for all the citizens of the member nations. (UNDP, 2015). Multinational Corporations are being recognised as key actors and forces in achieving these targets because of their scale of operations, financial backing, global supply chain network, technological capabilities, innovation strategies, etc.

Research Scholars argue that the increasing role of the private sector in the economy is shifting the traditional form of philanthropy to CSR and strategic sustainability. In the context of India, this holds quite true because of developmental gaps, institutional constraints, lack of infrastructure, lack of adequate communication network, unawareness, etc. (Sharma et al., 2025).

Section 135 of Companies Act, 2013 has made CSR activities as a mandate for MNC's that have Net worth of at least ₹500 crore or Turnover of at least ₹1,000 crore. This mandate has shifted the focus of Indian corporations from being profit seeker entities to sustainable business enterprises. Further the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) have now become a unifying and standardised framework to align the CSR expenditures with long term development that can be measured through the targets and parameters covered in SDG. Research articles also state empirically that the mapping of SDG's is present but the results are inadequate as the strategic integration of these goals in the organisational and planning framework of modern corporations is still asymmetrical owing to certain technical disparities across various industrial segments. (Mishra, 2021)

To ensure compliance to SDG's as a part of strategic framework, SEBI introduced Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework in 2021. This BRSR motivates the business enterprises to follow ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) Framework that focuses on

different aspects of business enterprises covering the impact of their operations on environment, the society and their own internal practices and norms, is basically paving the way for the attainment of SDG's by internally restructuring the charter and constitution of the Company. The BRSR has shifted the impact of ESG from being merely a voluntary tool and reporting mechanism to a strategic, pivotal economic paradigm for modern day corporations. (Vats et al, 2025).

In order to encourage the achievement of SDG's by individual corporations at their scale and size of operations, certain Sustainability Reporting frameworks are also introduced. Some of the notable ones are: Global Reporting Initiative, UN Global Impact and SDG Compass. (Arora et al, 2023).

As a part of these frameworks, companies need to publicly report on attainment of various SDG's. Some SDG's related to education (SDG-4), innovation (SDG-9), creation of sustainable cities (SDG-11) are receiving a lot of attention, whereas certain SDG's like preservation of biodiversity (SDG-14 and 15) are neglected by many multinational corporations. As per Arora et al, reporting frameworks suggest that enterprises are engaged in what is called as "SDG cherry-picking". (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2015).

Sharma et al (2025) also reported similar findings for high and low emission Industries. The carbon emitting segments focused more on the attainment and reporting for SDG-6 (clean water), SDG-12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG-13 (climate action) ignoring the contribution towards SDG-1 (No poverty), SDG-2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG-5 (gender equality).

Bhatt and Gopaliya (2025) in their research findings concluded that IT sector firms like Infosys, WIPRO, TCS, are also focused on certain SDG's which connect with their sector like SDG-8 (providing decent work), SDG-9 (pertaining to industrial innovation) and SDG-12 (responsible production and consumption). The corporate initiatives like training for skill development, awareness amongst the masses related to digital, financial inclusion and literacy help in the attainment of the mentioned objectives.

But, even in the IT segment the reporting

frameworks and researches point out to the similar conclusion that vital and broad SDG's pertaining to the national economy like poverty, infrastructure, are somewhere overlooked or deliberately ignored. Though Ambadkar and Yadav (2025) mentioned that SDG-7, 12, 13, 14 and 15 which are related to affordable and clean energy (renewable energy), responsible consumption and production, climate action, preservation of aquatic ecosystem, and preservation of Land ecosystem are gaining strategic importance even in the IT segment enterprises mentioned and even in case of non-IT business enterprises like GAIL and IOC.

The CSR activities of organisations are now more focused on achieving social and economic well-being on the lines of SDG's. One of the reputed Indian Corporations that is focused on the same is the renowned and popular "Tata Group".

Since the commencement of its operations, Tata Group and its subsidiaries have been a leader in CSR and sustainable development-oriented activities.

After the adoption of SDGs by member nations, Tata became more focused towards social welfare and restoration of the ecological balance. Considering this vision and mission, Tata group created its own "Tata Sustainability Group" a dedicated entity specially created and curated to integrate Sustainable activities, SDG's, CSR initiatives and sustainability reporting mechanisms across its various product segments and subsidiaries.

The Tata Group's Annual Report of 2016 states that 45% of Tata's SDG contributions are now incorporated and embedded as a part of its core strategy and operating activities and the rest are a part of its traditional CSR activities and philanthropy. (Srivastava et al, 2012)

Tata Group unlike other enterprises have been focussed more on SDG-1, 3, 4, 5 and 10 which focus on elements of societal welfare like elimination of poverty, good standards of health and well-being for all, quality education for all, gender equality and reduced inequalities among masses respectively. The focus of Tata and its subsidiaries have always been more towards inclusive societal development apart from providing best in class products to its target market.

Certain popular initiatives like "Gaon Chalo"



under the brand name of Tata Tea aimed at reaching untapped and vast rural markets of India to provide livelihood opportunities to rural women so as to encourage women entrepreneurship, to deliver the consumer products like tea directly at affordable prices to the masses residing in those villages. By this project they reached millions of rural masses, encouraged the rural women to become financially independent, and increased the monthly income of the families residing in the backward and neglected areas and villages. SDG-5, 8 and 10 were targeted under this flagship program. (Poddar et al, 2025).

Targeting SDG-3, Tata Motors had launched a flagship initiative called as "Aarogya" in 2015-16 for addressing Child healthcare, malnutrition issues, increasing health related awareness among uneducated masses and adolescent women with focus on reducing the cases of anaemia, delivering affordable and reliable healthcare solutions, diagnosis and consultations. As per the press release by Tata Motors for FY 2024-25, the beneficiaries of "Aarogya" initiative reached around 7 lakh with the attainment of 87% reduction in malnutrition cases among infants and approx. 80% reduction of anaemia cases among women. Regions like Jamshedpur, Pune, Patna, Lucknow, Sanand and Mumbai were benefitted under the scheme (especially the rural and suburban communities with little or no access to decent healthcare). (Tata Motors Annual Report, 24-25).

Similarly, Tata Steel Foundation in collaboration with National Health Mission and American India Foundation launched *MANSI* (Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative) in 2009, to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in the rural areas of Jharkhand and Odisha. Under the public-private partnership model Tata steel trained several health workers to combat such cases. SDG-2 and 3 were the focused goals.

Like Tata, many reputed enterprises such as Mahindra and Mahindra, ITC are also undertaking such initiatives like Mahindra's Electric Vehicle segment (EV's) considering SDG-7, 11 and 13, the famous ITC's *e-Chaupal* initiative for providing robust internet infrastructure in rural areas under SDG-9 for the purpose of attaining sustainable development, State Bank of India's assistance to

Women self-help groups by providing funds at low interest rates (in accordance with SDG-5,8 and 10) but the researches reveal that that all these global multinational enterprises sooner or later get more focussed on certain selective SDG's only which correlate with their operations and production processes and this restricts the holistic development of the nation as a whole. (Bajpai, 2001)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on descriptive and in depth theoretical analysis of secondary data sources like existing research papers, annual reports of certain corporations like Tata Group, Infosys, WIPRO, other sources like news articles, conference proceedings and declarations signed by the nations, to understand the contribution of the Indian multinationals towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals as laid down, declared and adopted by the United Nations Organisation in the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York (from September 25-27, 2015).

The study is exploratory, with the detailed insights taken from the existing literature on SDG's, past and present efforts of multinational corporations towards the attainment of the same by modifying their operational and strategic framework.

Research has focused on creating a suitable linkage between the CSR mandate of the government for certain enterprises, the dimensions and parameters of SDG's, and the roadmap to sustainability in the long run.

Selection of the sources was based on their credibility, academic integrity and relevance with the theme of the research.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The detailed literature analysis concludes that SDG's are now a part of the overall operational and strategic framework and production processes of Contemporary Indian Multinationals and Conglomerates.

Their focus has now shifted from the profit seeking approach towards a long term, inclusive and holistic sustainable development-based approach especially after the introduction of SDG's and their

convergence with CSR activities by the govt through structured legislative framework.

Though certain reporting frameworks are also designed to ensure proper reporting of attainment of crucial SDG's by the organisations, yet there are certain limitations in the study.

The details and data provided by the companies in their annual reports and websites are often subject to bias.

Certain enterprises are just focussed on attainment of few specific goals in the name of sustainable development which ultimately defeats the objective of holistic and over all development and welfare of the society at large as crucial SDG's like SDG-1, 2, 3 are not being targeted adequately.

The success of initiatives as reported by the corporations in line with SDG compass and other frameworks can contain subjective and technical errors and reporting bias.

Though reputed Indian business houses are claiming that they are becoming more and more sustainable, still There is a lack of concrete evidence pertaining to empirical and quantitative assessment of the actual impact of major groups like Tata, Reliance, Mahindra and Mahindra in the concerned area along with lack of independent third-party investigation and evaluation, absence of standardised SDG performance parameters.

REFERENCES

Arora, H., Anwer, N., & Narula, S. A. (2023). A study of corporate sustainability reporting practices in the Indian energy sector. *Strategic Planning for Energy and the Environment*, 42(3), 529–562. <https://doi.org/10.13052/speel048-5236.4235>.

Bajpai, G. N. (2001). Corporate social responsibility in India

and Europe: A cross- cultural perspective. Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). <http://www.ficci.com>.

Goyder, M. (2003). Redefining CSR: From the rhetoric of accountability to the reality of earning trust. *Tomorrow's Company*, 1–20.

Group, T. (2017). WE DREAM OF A BETTER WORLD- TATA GROUP AND SDG's. TATA SONS. <https://www.tatasustainability.com/pdfs/Highlights/WeDreamofaBetterWorld-TataGroupandTheSDGs.pdf>

Majmudar, U. (2018). Corporate engagement with sustainable development goals in India. *Indian Journal of Corporate Governance*, 11(2), 105–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974686218801924>.

Mhlanga, R. (2018). Corporate sustainability reporting and SDGs: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Sustainable Finance & Investment*, 8(4), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20430795.2018.1471547>.

Mishra, A. (2024). Leveraging CSR to achieve Sustainable Development Goals in India by 2030: Opportunities and challenges for Indian companies. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4892654.

Nations, U. (2016). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNO. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

Poddar, A., Bagadeem, S., & Magry, M. A. (2025). Aligning corporate social responsibility with sustainable development goals in India across pandemic phases. *Discover Sustainability*, 6, Article 1355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-022234>.

Srivastava, A. K., Negi, G., Mishra, V., & Pandey, S. (2012). Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study of Tata Group. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 3(5), 17–27. <https://iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/vol3-issue5/D0351727.pdf>

Subramaniam, N. (2019). Sustainability reporting and performance measurement challenges in emerging economies. *Asian Journal of Sustainability and Social Responsibility*, 4(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41180-019-0029-4>.

Wood, D. J. (1991). Corporate social performance revisited. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(4), 691–718. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1991.4279616>.

