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Advancing sustainable development goals through practices and perspectives from India and Bangladesh

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Abstract
The study analyzes the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are approached and taken by Bangladesh and India as major nations amid the South Asian continent which have a significant impact on the sustainability aspect of the world. The progress in likes of gender equality, poverty reduction, sustainable energy and climatic action are being researched with the help of descriptive synthesis which is founded on the comparative descriptive analysis with attaching statistical observations. Besides all these attempts of Bangladesh to alleviate poverty and community-oriented processes, it highlights the achievements of India in digital governance and development of renewable energy. Although successes have been made by the two countries, both countries still have the challenges of institutional capacity, funding, and data infrastructure, which does not allow persistent improvement. To address structural limitation, the study focuses on the importance of regional cooperation, innovation in policies, and sharing information. The report has ended by indicating how Bangladesh and India have to work together to ensure that inequities are done away with and faster achievement of SDGs, as well as ensure that they have played an important role in ensuring that the world has done more for the global 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: Sustainable development goals, Bangladesh, India, poverty reduction, renewable energy, regional cooperation

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Global Imperative

The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development included a global and universal vision of world peace and prosperity, a plan that was endorsed by all the members of the UN in 2015 (Rana, 2024) [17]. This high-level framework, referring to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aims at eliminating critical challenges confronting the world, such as poverty and inequality and environmental management and climate change, by the target year (Sultana *et al*., 2023) [6]. The difference between the 2030 Agenda and the previous 2030 objectives, which are based on the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is that the objectives are an indivisible and integrated wish to achieve a balanced world development (Rana, 2024) [17].

Most significantly, the world is at a crossroads that is the midpoint review, which displays a worrying deficiency in global development. With issues of governance and external crises, including international wars and robust geopolitical and socioeconomic challenges, the speed of accomplishment of these transformational goals already has significantly decreased (UNDP, 2023). Because of that, the so-called Decade of Action that takes place in 2020-2030 has been demanded to accelerate its sustainable solutions and initiate the previously unseen monetary and political participation (Khatun & Saadat, 2021) [5]. The national and regional measures are already taken, scaled up, and targeted and are important to put objectives back on track at the international level because a postponed implementation can threaten the major focus of the agenda now (UNDP, 2023; Khatun and Saadat, 2021) [5].

1.2. South Asia's Pivotal Role

The high population of countries is vital along the way to the success of the 2030 Agenda, and thus South Asia, in particular Bangladesh and India, are important participants in the world system (Rana, 2024) [17]. The combination of these two countries constitutes over half

of the global population, which means that the SDGs cannot be fulfilled only locally but are also necessary to achieve sustainable results on the planetary level in general (Sultana *et al*., 2023; Rana, 2024) [17, 6]. Bangladesh displayed the first steps by incorporating the SDGs into its national planning right at the onset, while India is one of the rapidly expanding big economies in the globe, playing a key role in shaping the discussion of sustainable development (Rana, 2024; Sultana *et al*., 2023) [17, 6].

These two countries share agendas in significant proportions, partly making it a serious roadblock to growth despite their recent growth of the economy. The authors cite that it is the high population density and deeply rooted regional inequalities that exacerbate development disparity already at high levels, such as the extreme socioeconomic inequality and persistent poverty (Panda, B. K., and Mohanty, S. K., 2019) [3]. Moreover, both nations are highly susceptible to climatic changes that put the livelihood of the coastal population at risk and worsen food and water security issues (Khatun and Saadat, 2021) [5]. These interconnected domestic problems that need to be eradicated in the region through the implementation of holistic, cross-sectoral, and context-specific policies are key to unlocking the huge potential of the region and ensuring the successful implementation of the numerous SDGs globally (Khatun and Saadat, 2021) [5].

1.3. Problem Statement and Research Gap

Problem Statement

This is despite the fact that both Bangladesh and India have succeeded in nationalizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which can be reflected in the way the two countries have incorporated the SDGs in their national development policies and have also demonstrated a strong political will towards the 2030 Agenda, but yet the situation on the ground is totally unequal. This national problem is largely manifested in the form of blatant regional inequalities in India. States and Union Territories have big disparities in terms of achievement rating, which is causing intra-statistical division since sometimes the achievement of viable states is hiding the deep-rooted flaws that have yet to be eliminated in other states. This imbalance exposes some underlying issues in regard to decentralization of governance and equitable allocation of resources, as well as translation of federal policy into local action. Conversely, another significant aspect of the implementation problem in Bangladesh is sectoral delays. The goals of the country towards environmental sustainability, climatic resilience, and institutional quality remain stagnant even though the country has had numerous achievements in other sectors such as poverty reduction and some degree of health improvements. This tendency of skewed development endangers the overall schedule and overarching and comprehensive spirit of the 2030 Agenda since it masks critical sub-national risks and areas of subpar themes in nationalized statistics.

Research Gap

The current literature of the academic and policy study is highly dismal, although geographically almost close and sharing a common geographical setting, which is vast population density, extreme vulnerability to climatic adversities, and socioeconomic inequality, which persistently exists. Most of the contemporary studies can be translated to the domestic boundaries and are either sector-based or country-based success stories. The need to carry out a consistent, cross-national study of the policy processes in Bangladesh and India with a focus on the cross-national learning processes is evidently methodologically deficient. Without such an inter-country framework, the probability of discovering and scaling out regional high-impact solutions is forfeited. A comparative prism is needed to determine which policy innovations, e.g., the financial inclusion tactics of Bangladesh or the state-based concepts on poverty alleviation in India, can be effectively translated to cause development leaps in the partner country and release mutual and faster growth across the developmental bottlenecks of South Asia.

Research Objectives

- To assess the development of Bangladesh and policy fit against that of India on some key and commonly shared SDGs (e.g., SDGs 1, 5, 7, and 13).
- To analyze the domestic barriers to implementation of institutional, financial, and data-related aspects within both countries.
- To locate useful sector-specific policies and practices in any given country that offer opportunities for cross-learning regionally and bilaterally.
- To offer the policy recommendations to enhance better collaboration (SDG 17) to hasten the completion of the 2030 Agenda of the sub-region.

2. Methodology: A Comparative, Mixed-Methods Approach

The research employs a mixed method with a comparative case study design, which focuses on systematizing the activities of literature and policy analysis. The design would be appropriate in the examination of how Bangladesh and India have handled the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in various yet similar forms.

The research study does not involve gathering of primary data, but it relies on secondary data measures. They can be broken down into the following: Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the two countries (as a proxy of policy commitments and self-assessment of progress); external sources (World Bank databases, Global SDG Index reports, and UNESCAP) (quantifiable performance measures); and the uploaded academic sources (policy papers, meta-analyses, and bibliometric studies) (deep and contextualized understanding of what the countries are prioritizing, where the institutions are limiting themselves, and what gaps exist in the current research) (Sultana *et al*., 2023) [6]

The framework of the analysis relies on the three benefits of sustainability, including economic, social, and environmental. This grid will guide the cross-country comparison, as it will allow making a systematic comparison of specific goals and policy interventions (reducing poverty under the Social Pillar or combating climate change under the Environmental Pillar) between Bangladesh and India. The outcomes obtained will have direct correlation to the research gap identified in the field of cross-country learning (Gupta, K. K., and Chirayath, S. (2013) [1].

3.1. National SDG Index Comparison and Governance

Their presence in the world as competition but challenging journeys of the two South Asian giants is emphasized in a

comparative overview of data on their sustainability performance across the world. As per the latest rankings on the Sustainable Development Report, Bangladesh ranks lowly at position 63.88 (Rank 114) on global positioning, whereas India is ranked top at position 66.95 (Rank 99). The improvement of the two scores indicates that differences still exist on a broad basis.

Their internal SDG governance arrangements are the most differentiating areas. The main element of the Indian system is cooperative federalism, which is spearheaded by the SDG India Index of NITI Aayog. Having substantially altered the policy strategy in India since the MDG period, this mechanism directly can resolve the central issue of the country, namely, the state disparities, because it allows balancing and assessing the performance of states (Kumar, S., *et al*., 2016) [2]. Bangladesh, instead, has to depend on the approach of multi-sectoral institutional mapping, which will streamline the multiple ministries there and has a national blueprint of the 2030 Agenda (Ashraf *et al*., 2019) [4]. Although this political commitment is strong, institutional mapping that is focused on the center has been associated with the continued lag in sectors, especially in the areas of environmental and governance outcomes, which must be considered to be complex in terms of the manner in which the national-level political will can be converted into consistent and ground-level delivery in both countries.

Table 1: Comparative SDG Index Scores of India and Bangladesh (2016-2024)

Year	India Score	India Rank	Bangladesh Score	Bangladesh Rank
2016	44.4	118	44.4	118
2017	56.2	120	56.2	120
2018	59.3	111	59.3	111
2020	61.9	117	60.5	116
2023	66.95	99	63.88	114

Poverty and Hunger (SDG 1 & 2)

Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2024). Sustainable Development Report 2024. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://dashboards.sdgindex.org

The Indian effort toward poverty abolishment that is shown in the development of SDG 1 (No Poverty) can be greatly aided by the massive, all-inclusive poverty-mitigating initiatives that are part of the national agenda. Such a development is, nevertheless, covered with the thorny national issue of meeting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), in which the scores are still a point of critical concern. The most fundamental challenge is the struggle against governance problems and tremendous socioeconomic inequalities, which have a very strong restraining power on equitable access to resources, and rural regions are at a disproportionate disadvantage. The solution to these inequalities needs to be based on a comprehensive strategy that will enhance the institution and the even distribution of resources among the states. However, Bangladesh has shown remarkable success in its transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the present SDGs, with remarkable success in reducing poverty. Irrespective of this historical achievement, the future of Bangladesh out of the Least Developed Country (LDC) category poses a big danger since there is a lot of speculation that external funds that are required to support its SDG policy will reduce by a significant margin. The attainment of food security in the two countries also depends on the practice of food sustainability, such as the adoption of sustainable agriculture, which is essential to a vast agricultural economy such as that of India in food provision and sustainability of the environment.

Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Gender Equality (SDG 5) is another source of cross-learning, in which India has zero research coverage, and Bangladesh has hideous social application shortcomings. The thematic analysis of academic writings in India shows that there is a severe incongruity in priorities, and SDG 5 is one of the least reviewed ones, ranking second before SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Such a low level of research interest is one of the reasons why the levels of gender equality in the country remain very low, and the government should provide more policies to address social problems and supportive growth policies. Moreover, the socioeconomic differences really contribute to the inequalities in the access to the basic resources and opportunities in order to develop the country in balance. On the contrary, Bangladesh faces harsh, grounded issues; first of all, the problem of high teen birth rate and the existence of gender inequality. The problem is evidenced by the fact that the number of women who are wedded at an earlier age of 18 remains high, which is one of the main signs of gender inequality. To address such pressing problems, it is important to enhance knowledge connectivity in South Asia. This partnership solution may be used to establish a regional initiative to create awareness and fight the increase in gender-based violence, thereby speeding up the implementation of SDG 5 by all.

3.3. Deep Dive: Environmental and Economic Goals (SDG 7, 8, 13)

Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7) Near-universal access to electricity is noted as one of the best practices of developing SDG 7 in India. Such achievement is deeply enshrined into strategic incorporation of renewable energy, and this is essential in supporting increased energy demand without affecting the environment negatively but enhancing the security of energy (Vision IAS, 2024; Sindhu Kartha, 2024) [19]. By comparison, Bangladesh has been experiencing a booming growth in its energy sector characterized as of good political intent to incorporate SDG 7 goals into national development agendas. Nonetheless, institutional barriers are a higher issue, especially in policy alignment and regulation systems, and those complicate the creation of sustainability (Moazzem & Preoty, 2024; CPD, 2024) [14]. In the case of South Asia, which is comprised of all stakeholders, the spread of the services to sustainable energy requires the integration of infrastructure within the region to accelerate the process of achieving the 2030 targets.

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) India the SDG 8 agenda in India has had the largest amount of research attention of all the sustainable development goals and thus reflects its leadership in the academic and policy discussion in the country. Such a high degree indicates the inclusion of sustainability in the business strategies and economic models and direct correlations between SDG 8, SDG 12, and SDG 13 (K.R. Mangalam University, 2024;

Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2024). In the meantime, Bangladesh is susceptible to its export-based development model, especially in the textile-apparel sector, which is shifting to the ideas of the circular economy to minimize the amount of waste in the material state and generally conform to the principles of responsible consumption (Khatun *et al*., 2024; CPD, 2024) [11]. In expanding to the regions, it is essential to remove the geographical barriers and align the economic policies as a way of establishing connectivity and joint well-being in South Asia.

Climatic action (SDG 13) SDG 13 is another critical goal that should be shared in both India and Bangladesh since their climatic vulnerability is high. The institutionalization of commitment is done through the aims and targets of strategically focused Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and a strategic plan that focuses on resilient infrastructure, water management, and disaster preparation in India (Bhalla & Pandey, 2024; Manjunatha and Dolli, 2024) [8, 12]. The susceptibility of Bangladesh is so high that houses are struck by floods, cyclones, and other disasters regularly. Other frameworks by the government to respond to climate change include the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), which aims to enhance adaptation and resilience (Muna, 2024; BIPSS, 2024) [15]. Climate action can be successfully implemented in South Asia through regional cooperation, especially with regard to employing common mechanisms on clean energy and infrastructure.

4.1 Governance and Institutional Hurdles

Both Bangladesh and India are challenged by governance problems that do not help achieve successful SDG implementation. Lack of coordination of the policies across ministries is sometimes attributed to poor coordination and duplication of tasks and time lag during the implementation process. The coordination is still lacking between the federal and the state levels in India, although NITI Aayog tried to align state and district indices to state national goals. Bangladesh has been trying to bring closer the SDGs to the upazila (subdistrict) level, but the lack of institutional capacity and limited resources prevents this. In order to overcome these barriers, enhanced interministerial cooperation, augmented transparency, and more power within the local governments are essential. Unless these institutional gaps are tackled, the two countries run the risk of inequity in the manner of achievement of the objectives, especially those that involve cross-sectoral approaches like climate action and gender equality (Sultana, Pala, Mohammad, and Tasnim, 2023) [6].

4.2 Data, Monitoring, and Research Gaps

SDG monitoring is completely based on quality data, yet there are the issues of quality and unavailability gaps in Bangladesh and India. Bangladesh is greatly challenged to collect and report the 232 UN indicators because of the differences among various ministries and technical incompetence. It is this paucity that threatens accountability systems and makes it difficult to make evidence-based policy. India has misalignment in research, although the country has more resources; such SDGs as 5 (Gender Equality) and 14 (Life Below Water) are yet to be researched in academic and policy literature. As there is a lack of adequate monitoring and scrutiny of development in these areas, this imbalance will lead to blind areas in national plans. There are also different approaches to monitoring used by different states that slow down comparative research and lead to inconsistent reporting. To reduce these gaps, competitive investment in statistical competence, standardization of the data systems, and greater collaboration in the government, academia, and civil society are needed. Without reliable data, both countries risk committing the error of allocating resources and not finding areas that can be assisted as the priority (Ramana, Nair, Lathabai, and Nedungadi, 2025) [22].

4.3 Financial Constraints

Funding is yet to be viewed as one of the biggest challenges towards achieving the SDGs. The two countries, Bangladesh and India, heavily rely on mobilization of resources domestically in order to fund development projects, and the global financial deficit is estimated to run into trillions of dollars every year. India has also tried to apply green funding practices as well as the public-private approach, but due to limited finances, the money that can be allocated to social welfare, to sustainable energy, and to infrastructural development is limited. When it is ready to come out of the Least Developed Country (LDC) category, which will restrict its access to preferential trade expanses as well as concessional finance, Bangladesh will face additional challenges. A lot of financial resources are required to sustain the social services and keep abreast during this transition. To bridge the gap, the two countries should explore innovative sources of finances like blended finance, climate funds, and regional cooperation systems. Without adequate funding, ambitious objectives in aspects such as climate resilience, renewable energy, and poverty reduction would be impossible. Thus, in order to speed up the achievement of SDG, there is an urgent need to enhance budgetary systems and recruit foreign aid (Rana, 2024) [17].

Table 2: Key Implementation Challenges in India and Bangladesh

Challenge Area	India Context	Bangladesh Context
Governance	Regional disparities, weak coordination across states	Centralized mapping, poor coordination among ministries
Data & Monitoring	Research gaps in SDG 5 & 14	Acute data scarcity for 232 UN indicators
Financing	Reliance on PPPs, fiscal constraints	LDC graduation reduces concessional finance
Corruption/Accountability	Local-level inefficiencies	Persistent corruption in development projects

- NITI Aayog. (2024). SDG India Index & Dashboard 2023-24. Government of India. Retrieved from https://www.niti.gov.in/reports-sdg
- UNDP India. (2024). National Workshop: Accelerating Finance for the SDGs - Concept Note. Retrieved from https://sdgknowledgehub.undp.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Concept-Note-National-SDG-Finance-Workshop-7th-Oct-2024.pdf

5.1 Identification of Successful Practices (Case Studies)

India has already proven to be very successful in implementing targeted government programs that have been in line with the SDG ambitions. Although the Swachh Bharat Mission has covered sanitation, thus reducing health hazards and improving the well-being of communities, the Jal Jeevan Mission has boosted access to clean drinking water. Also, the utilization of digital technology through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Aadhaar frameworks has enhanced the effectiveness of the social safety net in India in ensuring transparency and reducing waste of welfare distribution. Bangladesh, in its turn, has recorded great achievements in the areas of poverty reduction, hunger decrease, and access to education, as a continuation of its successful transition toward MDGs-SDGs. The NGO and microfinance sector of the country, under the leadership of such organizations as BRAC and Grameen Bank, have been fundamental in ensuring inclusive economic development and empowering women entrepreneurs and the marginalized communities in the country. These plans reveal that these two countries have promoted the SDGs through grassroots efforts and creative policy that can inform how they can be applicable in the region (Sultana, Pala, Mohammad, & Tasnim, 2023) [6].

5.2 Fostering Regional and Bilateral Cooperation (SDG 17)

Regional collaboration in South Asia, where there is a common vulnerability and interconnected economies require action, is of utmost importance in achieving SDGs. The "Five Connectivity Model" that encompasses the economic, knowledge, infrastructural, cultural, and people-to-people has offered a framework for boosting bilateral and regional cooperation. The two countries can collaborate to invest in information exchange platforms, cross-border infrastructure, and sustainable energy steamerways in order to enjoy the benefits of synergies. International collaboration in research is also significant, in particular, in the case of little-studied goals such as marine sustainability (SDG 14) and gender equality (SDG 5). Collaboration with the Bangladeshi academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, which are rich in experience in community-based development, can assist India to achieve its goal of enhancing research productivity in the fields. Such collaboration will also enhance resilience to economic and climatic shocks in the regions due to the enhancement of the exchange of data and information. South Asia is one of the examples of group development that both countries can utilize to move towards the 2030 Agenda by incorporating SDG 17 in the bilateral agenda (Rana, 2024) [c].

5.3 Policy Synergies and Trade-offs

Although the attainment of one SDG in many cases results in a synergy with other objectives, great care should be taken when it comes to the issue of trade-off. The development of clean energy as a country goal under SDG 7 has enhanced health in India (SDG 3) and climate action (SDG 13) because of the reduction of carbon emissions and indoor air pollution. Similarly, the renewable energy programs in Bangladesh contribute to vulnerability resiliency due to climate change. But even greater inequality has been accompanied by a massive economic development of India under SDG 8, as was reflected by the stagnation of SDG 10. Since there is a tendency at times that urban dwellers receive the majority of the benefit due to infrastructure and industrialization at the expense of the rural areas, this trade-off shows that there is a challenge in balancing prosperity with equity. To turn around these conflicts, there is a need to have inclusive policies with social protection, equitable allocation of resources, and special interventions for disadvantaged groups. In order to continue working on the associated goals and avoid compromising the sustainability over time, it is crucial to find synergies and minimize trade-offs between both countries (Ramana, Nair, Lathabai, & Nedungadi, 2025) [22].

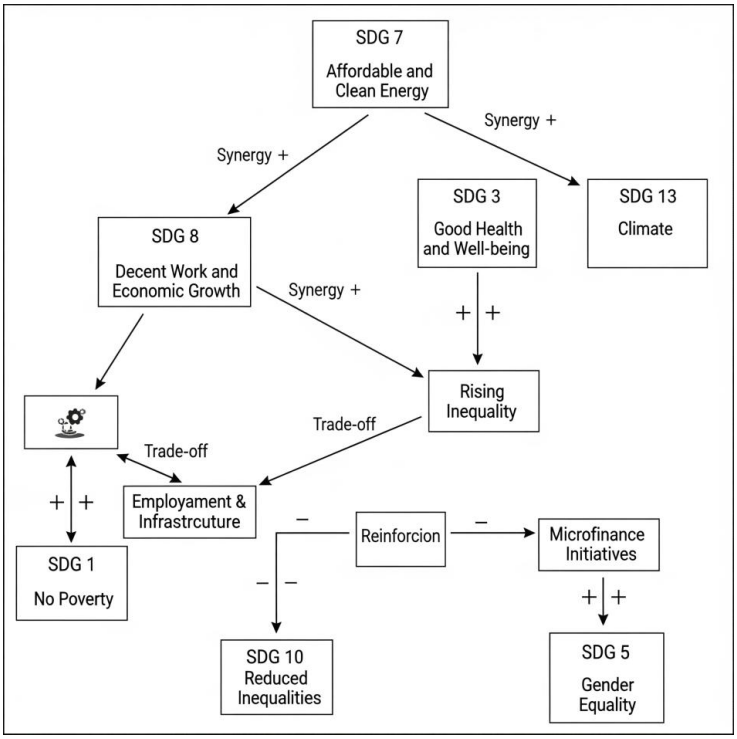

Fig 1: Synergies and Trade-offs Across Selected SDGs (India and Bangladesh)

6. Conclusion

The two nations are slowly working towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, but the rate of growth in both countries is too gradual to achieve the 2030 targets as the two countries are compared. The progress has great variation; some have achieved extremely well, whereas others have not. Bangladesh has managed to gain access to schools and reduce poverty through communal activities, whilst India has gone great miles in other sectors such as poverty elimination and availability of renewable energy. However, there is yet the problem of hunger eradication (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), and information infrastructure, all of which are essential in accountability and monitoring. The two countries are being affected by imbalanced regional performance, where they have states or districts performing better than others; hence the disparities, which pose a risk to the national averages. Having no successful data systems complicates the process of tracking developments and developing evidence-based policy. Beyond that, the findings point to the overall structural problems of institutional capability, finances, and governance limiting steady progress despite its high political interest. To ensure speed of achievement, there is a need to have regional policies that are responsive to local conditions. Both of the countries, Bangladesh and India, are threatened with the inability to meet their duties in case of the gaps being unfilled, which is why it is so important to develop collaborative solutions, targeting the specific steps.

Bangladesh and India should adopt cooperative policies that are high impact to ensure that they experience a faster pace to the SDGs. It would be possible to share the best practices with each other and realize the strengths of one another in the case of the bilateral SDG Knowledge Exchange Forum. An example of such is that the country of Bangladesh can adopt the digital governance tools of India in its monitoring and transparency, and probably India will gain more through Bangladesh's successes in community-driven poverty reduction. Most areas where there exists common vulnerability, with transboundary water resources and climate change being the two key ones, should put regional cooperation at the forefront. Besides making the system more resilient, these co-operations in the fields of renewable energy, disaster preparedness, and water management would reduce the amount of duplication of efforts. In order to address the lack of sufficient data, there is also a need to concentrate on the development of statistical capacity. In order to effectively monitor the progress and make a difference in policy decisions, the two countries should have stronger systems of collecting, assessing, and analyzing credible data. In combination with the mobilization of local resources, the international assistance could be used to bridge the funding gaps and strengthen the institutions. These recommendations emphasize the importance of collaboration, innovation, and diversity. India and Bangladesh can accelerate their SDG process and contribute greatly to the sustainable processes on a global level to focus on shared challenges and capitalize on the other capabilities.

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