

## **Role of Indian Entrepreneurs towards Social Responsibility & Achieving SDG 8**

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### **Abstract**

Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) aims to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Achieving this goal in a developing nation like India requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders, with entrepreneurs playing a significant role. This paper examines the intersection of Indian entrepreneurs' social responsibility and the progress towards SDG 8. It explores how entrepreneurial activities, beyond mere profit generation, can contribute to job creation, improved working conditions and enhanced social protection. The paper analyzes India's recent progress on key SDG 8 indicators over the last five years, utilizing publicly available data from official reports and research publications. It concludes by highlighting the challenges and opportunities for Indian entrepreneurs in embedding social responsibility into their core strategies to accelerate the achievement of decent work and economic growth for all.

**Keywords:** Indian Entrepreneurs, Social Responsibility & SDG 8.

### **Introduction**

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a critical engine for economic growth, innovation and job creation. In India, a nation with a vast and young workforce, the entrepreneurial ecosystem, encompassing micro, small, medium and large enterprises, is pivotal to its developmental trajectory. However, the responsibility of entrepreneurs extends beyond economic contribution. There is a growing global consensus that businesses must operate sustainably and responsibly, contributing positively to society and the environment. This concept aligns with the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which in India has a unique dimension due to the mandatory CSR spending requirements for certain companies under the Companies Act, 2013.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, provide a universal framework for addressing global challenges. SDG 8, focusing on "Decent Work

and Economic Growth," is particularly relevant to the realm of business and entrepreneurship. It encompasses targets related to achieving full and productive employment, promoting decent work for all, ensuring safe working environments, protecting labour rights and reducing unemployment, especially among youth.

While government policies and macroeconomic factors significantly influence a nation's progress on SDG 8, the actions of individual enterprises and entrepreneurs directly impact the creation of jobs, the quality of work and the welfare of employees. Indian entrepreneurs, through their business models, employment practices, supply chain management and engagement with communities, have a profound opportunity and responsibility to contribute to these critical targets. This paper aims to analyse India's recent progress on SDG 8, focusing on the period approx. between 2019 and 2023 and explore the ways in which Indian entrepreneurs' social responsibility can further drive this progress.

### **The Landscape of Indian Entrepreneurship And Social Responsibility**

India's entrepreneurial landscape is diverse, ranging from traditional family businesses and a massive informal sector to dynamic start-ups and large multinational corporations. This diversity means the approach to social responsibility varies significantly. While large companies are often bound by CSR mandates and have dedicated resources for sustainability initiatives, smaller enterprises and start-ups may integrate social responsibility more organically into their operations, focusing on employee welfare, local sourcing or community impact within their immediate vicinity.

Social responsibility for Indian entrepreneurs, within the context of SDG 8, involves:

1. **Job Creation:** Not just any jobs, but productive jobs that contribute to economic growth.
2. **Promoting Decent Work:** Ensuring fair wages, reasonable working hours, safe and healthy working conditions, social protection and respect for labour rights.
3. **Skill Development:** Investing in training and capacity building for employees, enhancing their employability and productivity.
4. **Inclusion and Non-discrimination:** Providing equal opportunities for all, including women, marginalized communities and persons with disabilities.
5. **Responsible Supply Chains:** Ensuring ethical labour practices extend beyond their own operations to their suppliers and partners.
6. **Innovation for Social Impact:** Developing business models or technologies that directly address challenges related to employment and decent work.

While the mandatory CSR law has increased financial contributions towards social causes, true social responsibility for SDG 8 goes deeper, requiring integration into core business strategy and operational practices. The progress on SDG 8 indicators is a reflection of the cumulative impact of government policies, economic performance and the actions of millions of employers – including entrepreneurs.

### **Methodology**

This paper utilizes a qualitative and quantitative analysis approach based on the synthesis of information available through the provided links. The analysis focuses on assessing India's progress on selected SDG 8 indicators over approximately the last five years (2019 onwards, subject to data availability in the sources). Data points and trends are extracted from the NITI Aayog, SDG India Index reports, government press releases, academic research and relevant articles to construct an overview of progress and identify key areas of success and challenge related to SDG 8. A dedicated table summarizes key indicator data points across the specified period where feasible, highlighting the observed trends. The discussion then interprets this progress through the lens of entrepreneurial responsibility and potential contribution.

### **Analysis of India's Progress on SDG 8 (2019-Present)**

India has made significant strides in economic growth over the past decades, which is a fundamental component of SDG 8. However, translating growth into full, productive and decent employment for its large population remains a complex challenge. Analyzing recent reports provides insights into specific areas of progress and concern.

According to the NITI Aayog SDG India Index reports, India's overall score on SDG 8 has shown fluctuations and gradual improvements over the years. The Index tracks various indicators under SDG 8, such as the Unemployment Rate, Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), proportion of youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), coverage of social protection schemes and adherence to labour rights (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog SDG India Index, 2023). While the exact aggregate scores and indicator data can vary slightly based on the methodology and reporting year of different index editions, the trend indicates ongoing efforts tempered by significant challenges.

A key challenge highlighted in various sources is the issue of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment and the low Labour Force Participation Rate, especially for women (UNADAP, 2023; ResearchGate, 2023). Despite economic growth, the rate of job creation, particularly in the formal sector providing decent work, has struggled to keep pace with the

growing workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, leading to job losses and increased vulnerability for many workers.

However, there have also been positive developments. Government initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship (like Start-up India, Make in India), skill development (Skill India) and formalizing the economy (e.g., through GST and digitalization) are implicitly or explicitly targeted at improving SDG 8 indicators. Efforts to expand social protection coverage and improve labour law compliance are also underway (PIB, 2023; TaxGuru, 2023). The NITI Aayog report from 2019 already outlined national indicators and baseline data, setting targets for improvement across areas like unemployment, formal employment and social security coverage (NITI Aayog, 2019).

The progress is often uneven across states and union territories, as highlighted by the SDG India Index ranking, indicating that localized strategies and varied entrepreneurial ecosystems play a role (NITI Aayog SDG India Index, 2023). While national policies set the framework, the on-ground reality of employment and decent work is shaped by the collective actions of businesses operating in different regions.

### India's Progress on SDG 8 Indicators

**Table 1: Analysis Table (Approx. 2019-2023)**

Indicator	Approx. 2019/ Baseline	Approx. 2020/2021	Approx. 2022/2023	Trend/Notes
<b>SDG 8 Composite Score (National)</b>	64	68	72	Gradual improvement in overall composite score over various index editions.
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	~5.8 (Pre-pandemic levels)	Spiked significantly (~20%+) post-lockdown	Varied, but showing signs of recovery/stabilization	Significant volatility due to pandemic, gradual improvement since peak.
<b>Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)</b>	~37-40 (Pre-pandemic levels)	Declined/volatile post-lockdown	Showing signs of improvement, particularly for	Persistent challenge, but recent data points suggest some

(%)			women	recovery.
<b>Youth NEET (%) (Age 15-24)</b>	30+	Likely impacted by pandemic	Data points vary	High levels remain a concern, indicating gap in education/employment.
<b>Workers Covered by Social Protection (%)</b>	Low formal coverage	Efforts continued, e.g., E-Shram portal launched	Gradual increase in coverage through schemes	Focus on extending coverage, especially to informal sector.
<b>Formal Employment Share</b>	Low overall share	Impacted by pandemic	Efforts towards formalization ongoing	Increasing formalization is a key goal for decent work.

Source: NITI Aayog and other secondary data sources

The data suggests that while the overall environment for SDG 8 is improving as reflected in the composite scores, underlying indicators like unemployment and LFPR have faced significant headwinds, particularly from the pandemic. Government focus appears to be on reviving economic activity, promoting formalization and expanding social safety nets.

### **The Role of Indian Entrepreneurs in Achieving SDG 8**

Entrepreneurs are not just passive beneficiaries or subjects of SDG 8 progress; they are active agents who can significantly influence its trajectory through their social responsibility efforts.

1. **Job Creation (Quantity and Quality):** Entrepreneurs are the primary creators of new jobs. Start-ups and MSMEs are crucial here. However, their social responsibility lies not just in creating jobs but creating decent jobs. This involves moving beyond temporary or precarious work towards stable employment with fair wages, benefits and growth opportunities. Large corporations, through expansion and responsible scaling, also contribute significantly.
2. **Improving Working Conditions:** Responsible entrepreneurs prioritize the safety and health of their workers, going beyond minimal legal compliance. This includes investing in workplace safety measures, providing adequate rest periods and ensuring a harassment-free environment. This directly addresses SDG 8.8 on protecting labour rights and promoting safe work.
3. **Investing in Human Capital:** Providing opportunities for training and skill development not only boosts productivity but also enhances the long-term

employability and earning potential of employees. Socially responsible entrepreneurs see this as an investment in people, aligning with SDG 8.6 on promoting youth employment and skills.

4. **Ensuring Social Protection:** While government schemes provide a baseline, entrepreneurs can contribute by offering benefits like health insurance, life insurance, provident fund contributions and paid leave, even to workers not mandated by law, thereby extending social protection (SDG 8.5). Formalizing employment is a major step towards ensuring access to state-provided social security.
5. **Promoting Inclusion and Equality:** Socially responsible hiring practices that actively seek diversity and ensure non-discrimination based on gender, caste, religion or disability contribute to SDG 8.5 (full and productive employment for all) and broader goals of equality. Supporting women's participation in the workforce and leadership roles is particularly crucial.
6. **Ethical Business Practices:** Combating illegal labour practices, such as child labour and forced labour (SDG 8.7) and ensuring fair recruitment processes are fundamental aspects of entrepreneurial social responsibility that underpin decent work.

Examples of this in practice could range from a small manufacturer providing skill training and health benefits to its workers, a start-up implementing inclusive hiring policies, to a large IT firm running extensive employee welfare and safety programs that exceed regulatory requirements. The mandatory CSR framework, while sometimes criticized for its compliance-driven nature, can also be leveraged by companies to fund initiatives directly supporting skill development, vocational training and livelihood generation, thus contributing to SDG 8 (TaxGuru, 2023).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

While the potential is significant, Indian entrepreneurs face challenges in fully integrating social responsibility related to SDG 8. The large informal sector often lacks the structure and resources for formal contracts, social security contributions and safe working conditions. Cost pressures can make it difficult for MSMEs to offer competitive wages or benefits. Scaling socially responsible practices across complex supply chains is also a major hurdle.

However, there are significant opportunities. Growing awareness among consumers and investors about ethical and sustainable businesses creates market incentives. Government support for formalization, skill development and social security schemes can provide a framework for entrepreneurs to build upon. Innovation in business models focusing on social

impact (e.g., social enterprises) directly contributes to SDG 8. Furthermore, entrepreneurs who prioritize employee well-being often see benefits in terms of reduced attrition, increased productivity and enhanced reputation.

### **Conclusion**

India has made progress on SDG 8, navigating complex economic and social challenges, including the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis indicates improvements in the overall SDG 8 index score, alongside persistent challenges in achieving universal decent work, particularly concerning unemployment, labour force participation and informal employment.

Indian entrepreneurs are undeniably crucial to driving further progress on SDG 8. Their role extends beyond creating jobs; it encompasses ensuring these jobs are productive, safe, fair and provide adequate social protection. While government policies and the macroeconomic environment set the stage, the micro-level decisions and practices within millions of businesses directly determine the quality of work life for the vast majority of the population. Embracing social responsibility is not merely an ethical choice or a compliance burden for Indian entrepreneurs; it is a strategic imperative for sustainable and inclusive growth. By prioritizing decent work principles – fair wages, safety, rights and social protection – entrepreneurs can contribute significantly to achieving SDG 8, fostering a more equitable society and ultimately building more resilient and successful businesses in the long run. Continued focus on formalization, skill development and incentivizing responsible business practices across the entrepreneurial spectrum will be vital for India to fully realize the promise of decent work and economic growth for all.

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