

THE MILLENNIAL

MANIFESTO

ASPIRATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE INDIA

15 AUGUST 2023

PREAMBLE

On the occasion of International Youth Day 2023 on 12 August, we, a group of 70 millennials and GenZ-ers from some of India's premier higher education institutions, undertook to draft a *Millennial Manifesto*. This manifesto articulates our vision and aspirations for building an exemplary new India.

With over 600 million citizens between 18 and 35 years of age, India is home to the largest number of young adults in the world and is therefore a formidable reservoir of talent.¹ By 2030, we will have a working-age population of 1.04 billion powering our economic growth, and in the decade ahead, young Indians like us will make up 24 percent of the global workforce.² It is our generation that will shape the future of work.

We recognise that 2030 is also when the global community is expected to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As societies confront global challenges, including poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, conflicts, migration, and climate change, we believe that the youth must be engaged as key actors in the pursuit of solutions. Our contribution to policymaking and the crafting of governance and development solutions could be pivotal for national progress.

The United Nations says that involving the youth as critical thinkers, innovators, change-makers, and leaders will be integral to the realisation of the SDGs.³ Indeed, while we must mobilise ourselves to advance each of the 17 SDGs, we are convinced that our ideas and actions could effect a more immediate change in a few specific Goals; the *Millennial Manifesto* focuses on these Goals. Our aim is to throw light on the ways by which we can, as the Mahatma exhorted, be the change we want to see.

India turns 76 today, 15 August, and our journey through the *Amrit Kaal*^a has just begun. There could not be a more consequential time to unveil the Manifesto and forge a new social contract between our country and our generation. We will no longer be "millennials" when India scores its century, but we are now, and this is our moment.

a The phrase 'Amrit Kaal' (glorious period) has been used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Indian leaders to denote the 25 years leading to the centenary of India's independence in 2047.

DECLARATION



SDG 1 No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

The eradication of poverty is important to us, and we believe that India's youth can combine vision, aspiration and compassion in a manner that effects lasting change.

- **Prioritising education and employment:** We have no doubt that access to quality education, health, and employment must be strengthened if we are to end poverty. Youth-driven skill development initiatives need to be envisaged, and more diverse kinds of employment opportunities must be made available for India's present and future workforce. We are keen to partner with young professionals to form volunteer groups that leverage social media and other mass communication channels to raise awareness about emerging avenues of employment.
- **Strengthening social protection systems:** We are eager to support local community development programmes that provide food security for the marginalised and vulnerable. The youth can build awareness about the means for ensuring stronger income security for the elderly, and facilitating smooth access to disability allowances. We would like to help sensitise the elderly as well as disadvantaged sections of society about social protection schemes and government benefits for which they may be eligible.
- **Building resilience against multi-dimensional vulnerability:** India's youth could play a transformational role in campaigning for better infrastructure with a view to ensuring quality education and skills development for the economically disadvantaged and historically marginalised. Disaster risk reduction and management is another area where we could make a difference—by sensitising at-risk communities about disaster preparedness and response, and building youth forums to act as support networks for populations, such as migrant workers, who bear the disproportionate brunt of disasters.

- **Undertaking cross-border youth cooperation:** Students in higher education institutions could build networks with peers in other countries, with a view to exchanging ideas and sharing strategies about poverty eradication, social protection, and the reskilling or upskilling of disadvantaged youth. We could then consider building on some of these templates, and exploring their adoption in India.



SDG 3

Good health and well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Recognising that the good health of individuals is fundamental to productivity and growth at all levels, we believe that we can make a significant contribution to advance measures to achieve SDG 3.

- **Prioritising maternal healthcare:** We have a strong role to play in supporting efforts to increase grassroots awareness about the nutritional needs of pregnant women. Second, voluntary youth action groups (YAGs) could work towards ensuring hygiene maintenance in maternal wards of public hospitals. Third, we could work closely with local civil society organisations to distribute essential medicines to target groups when and where required. Fourth, YAGs could help advocate for the need to increase the number of ASHA workers and improve their training; and could periodically work as volunteers with ASHAs to help bridge the gap between their potential and actual reach. These interventions could allay some of the prevailing challenges around access to nutrition, hygiene, and medicines, and strengthen India's overall infrastructural capacity for maternal healthcare.
- **Ensuring adequate childcare:** Every effort should be made to put in place robust tech-enabled health infrastructure that can adequately address child development after birth. Basic necessities like food and vaccines for newborns should be made more affordable. Youth can help combat malnutrition by initiating awareness programmes among the urban and rural poor about improved food and nutrition habits. YAGs could also sensitise citizens about ways to prevent common diseases among children by making simple lifestyle changes. More broadly, youth-driven initiatives could go a long way in educating target audiences—especially in urban slums—about the importance of cleanliness and hygiene for children's health.

- **Combating communicable diseases:** We are keen to organise educational campaigns and work as volunteers in healthcare organisations, with the support of institutions like The Global Fund, which is a worldwide movement to defeat HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria, in order to ensure a healthier and safer future. We aim to convene student-driven forums that support the prevention of communicable diseases by promoting hygienic practices such as handwashing, the consumption of safe water, and ensuring proper sanitation for the poor. We could also raise awareness about vaccination programmes and encourage regular health check-ups.
- **Strengthening infrastructure and programmes for better sexual and reproductive health:** There is much that needs to be done to educate citizens about the need for improved sexual and reproductive health, the use of contraceptives, and the need for family planning. In this regard, youth could organise rallies, workshops, street shows, and social media campaigns. We could also collaborate with both public and private healthcare institutions to organise health camps for free-of-cost services, and facilitate the distribution of contraceptives in underserved areas. Additionally, we could help conduct local surveys, use our findings to assess gaps in existing health policies, and formulate evidence-based recommendations for the consideration of policymakers. Finally, we are keen to partner with local health authorities in particular districts, and initiate crowdfunding campaigns to support improved access to healthcare for residents.



SDG 4

Inclusive education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

We have an enormous stake in helping build a quality education system that promotes a holistic and multi-dimensional learning environment.

- **Building effective learning environments:** Creating an effective learning environment is a prerequisite for promoting quality education. We see it as a personal responsibility to work closely with educational administrators, planners, academics, and other practitioners to design environments that are mindful of the physical, psychological, and digital dimensions required to optimise learning outcomes. This includes well-equipped classrooms, modern teaching resources, interactive technology, and spaces that accommodate diverse learning styles. Students and young educators should play a constructive role in promoting a culture of respect, inclusion and collaboration, where students feel safe to express themselves and engage in active learning.

- **Providing scholarships to less affluent students:** Scholarships could play a vital role in ensuring equitable access to education, especially for students belonging to resource-poor families. Student volunteer organisations and networks could help arrange for such scholarships. These would provide immediate financial support and, in the longer term, help break the cycle of poverty.
- **Developing quality educators and compassionate teachers:** The role of educators is paramount in delivering quality education. Quality educators inspire students, facilitate effective learning experiences, and nurture their all-round development. Teachers should undergo continuous professional development, and stay abreast of innovative new techniques for upgrading teaching methods. As a student community, we expect compassionate teachers who actively create a supportive and encouraging environment that is fundamental to nurturing students' self-esteem and love for learning.
- **Promoting education for sustainable development and global citizenship:** As students ourselves, we are convinced that education should not only focus on academic knowledge but also on nurturing responsible global citizens. More vibrant interactive platforms for students to discuss pressing global issues—such as climate change, technological shifts, the need to uphold human rights, and the importance of inclusiveness and cultural diversity—will be instrumental in fostering critical thinking and a dynamic exchange of ideas among students. We are keen to contribute actively to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world, and believe we must exercise empathy, sensitivity, and a sense of shared responsibility to do so.



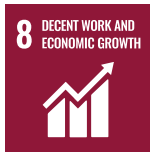
SDG 5 Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Promoting gender equality is a priority for us. This is where we urgently need to bring to bear our collective energy, our ability to think independently, and the progressive outlook we believe we possess.

- **Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls:** Public and private spaces should be made safer for women and girls. Better lighting in open public spaces, streets, and parking lots—especially those that are deserted at night—must be strictly

ensured. Youth groups in educational institutions could play a crucial role in spreading awareness about gender-based violence. Youth-led campaigns and sensitisation programmes on women's safety, and the popularisation of ideas such as forming self-defense groups could contribute towards positive long-term changes.

- **Eliminating harmful practices, such as child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation:** We take a strong stand against social practices such as dowry; and condemn child and forced marriages, recognising the dangerous and damaging repercussions they could have. We must act to stop these practices, and are resolute about conducting educational campaigns in the vernacular, supporting counselling centres as volunteers, and conducting youth-led forums to raise awareness about issues of violence against women and girls including rape and genital mutilation.
- **Recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work:** We recognise that women often assume the burden of most domestic chores and household responsibilities, and yet their work is unpaid and falls outside the ambit of any economic valuation. Daily wage earners, especially women labourers, are also at a great economic disadvantage. India's youth should begin by driving change in our own homes by being allies to the women in our families as they work to assert their rights.
- **Facilitating greater women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership:** We are deeply concerned about the prevalent cultural norms that often prevent women from fully participating in public and political life. In professional spaces, we are keen to mobilise support for paid menstrual leave and maternity leave; creating in-house crèche facilities; meritocratic appointments of women employees; and closing the pay gap that often exists between male and female employees working in similar positions. Youth representatives in government bodies must also push for greater gender equality in decision-making processes, and the establishment of frameworks that promote gender equality.



SDG 8

Decent work and economic growth: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

We believe that India's youth can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable economy that provides opportunities for all, through our active engagement, advocacy, and commitment to skill development.

- **Instituting fair and inclusive labour practices:** Young people could advocate for fair labour practices, including minimum wage standards, safe working conditions, and equal pay for equal work. Our collective voice could push for policy changes that promote decent work. We believe that private enterprises should be required to ensure that 5 percent of their workforce consist of persons with disabilities, as this would promote inclusiveness and equal opportunity. Simultaneously, accessible public services, better-equipped government schools, and inclusive vocational training centres ought to be set up, so that young persons with disabilities can participate in educational and economic activity and live a life of dignity.
- **Promoting financial inclusion:** Expanding financial inclusion in unbanked rural areas will be of crucial importance when operationalising SDG 8. In this regard, public banks must be revitalised, with a focus on mitigating non-performing assets, and their capacities for serving the underserved in these areas should be boosted. More broadly, awareness about the presence and functions of relevant public sector undertakings ought to be amplified. Citizens must be encouraged to use their services, and be further educated about how these institutions could support personal economic advancement.
- **Boosting local cultures:** Art and culture invigorate the core of society. Within the framework of SDG 8, we recommend the more widespread establishment of state-oriented frameworks focused on promoting arts-based livelihoods—like the “Biswa Bangla” model^b—that could also be supported by the central government.

^b The West Bengal Government's Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles has set up and promoted the Biswa Bangla Marketing Corporation to support the livelihoods of the state's handloom weavers, craftswomen and traditional artisans through the strategic marketing of handloom, handicraft and other heritage products. Biswa Bangla now operates several state-of-the-art showrooms at multiple locations, and the initiative has become synonymous with the idea of providing an authentic, hand-crafted experience of the art and culture of Bengal.

We are convinced that this approach enlivens local heritage and creativity, and infuses them with fresh energy. More online platforms, akin to artistic marketplaces, could bring together artisans and art enthusiasts, keeping traditional practices alive and promoting economic growth.



SDG 10 Reduced inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

India's youth can serve as change agents for the reduction of inequality, and contribute to the objectives of SDG 10, with a view to building a more just and equitable world.

- **Undertaking advocacy, sensitisation efforts, and activism:** Collectively, we have a strong voice and the power to raise awareness about issues related to the various forms of inequality that pervade our society. As such, we are keen to conduct advocacy, use social media platforms creatively, organise events and youth rallies, and collaborate with like-minded organisations, to spread awareness about the various dimensions of inequality. We are digital natives, and our familiarity with digital and media platforms should serve as an asset in this regard. We could use these tools to mobilise enthusiasts and supporters. Our social media campaigns, online petitions, and digital storytelling initiatives could help amplify marginalised voices and steer change.
- **Promoting education, skill development, entrepreneurship, and innovation:** Access to quality education and skill development is essential for breaking the cycle of inequality. We could volunteer as tutors, mentors, or educators to support marginalised communities. We would also like to help design and participate in programmes that provide vocational training and skill development to underserved populations. Moreover, young entrepreneurs can drive economic growth and job creation. By launching businesses that focus on addressing societal challenges—such as providing products or services to underserved communities—the youth can contribute to sustainable development, and the reduction of economic disparities. We also believe in the importance of promoting fair and ethical economic practices by supporting businesses that prioritise social responsibility and sustainability.

- **Participating in policymaking processes and global solidarity initiatives:** We believe that youth voices should be mainstreamed into policymaking processes. Platforms should be created for us to be able to engage systematically with policymakers and decision-makers at local, national, and international levels. By providing inputs and proposing solutions, we could help shape policies that address inequalities in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare. Additionally, as inequalities transcend borders, the youth could engage in global solidarity campaigns, supporting initiatives in other countries, and building awareness about SDG 10 best practices from India.



SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

We could advance efforts to achieve SDG 11 by participating in sustainable urban development initiatives, advocating for policies that prioritise liveability, and contributing our ideas and energy to build cities and settlements that are environment-friendly, inclusive, and resilient.

- **Community engagement and civic participation:** We have a key role to play in engaging with local communities, and identifying their needs and concerns related to urban development. By participating in community meetings and community planning processes, volunteering for neighbourhood improvement projects, and collaborating with local authorities, we can contribute to creating more liveable and sustainable cities.
- **Promoting 'active' transportation:** Encouraging walking, cycling, and the use of public transportation would help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion. The youth can lead by example and advocate for the expansion of pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly infrastructure.
- **Participating in urban renewal projects:** Our engagement with urban renewal projects and heritage preservation efforts could contribute to rejuvenating historical sites, and maintaining the cultural fabric of cities. These endeavours would find resonance with the Indian National Education Policy (2020), which speaks of extending academic credits to youth who dedicate themselves to the preservation and maintenance of local heritage sites.

- **Proposing urban sustainability solutions:** We would like to bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to urban challenges, and can contribute to policies and practices that promote sustainable urban development. Particular areas in which we are keen to contribute ideas include affordable housing, rider-friendly transportation (including the mapping of safer routes for women, particularly at night), creating green spaces, developing plastic collection banks, and smart waste management.



SDG 13 Climate action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

As the generation that will be most affected by the impacts of climate change, we have a particular interest in advancing climate action and addressing environmental challenges.

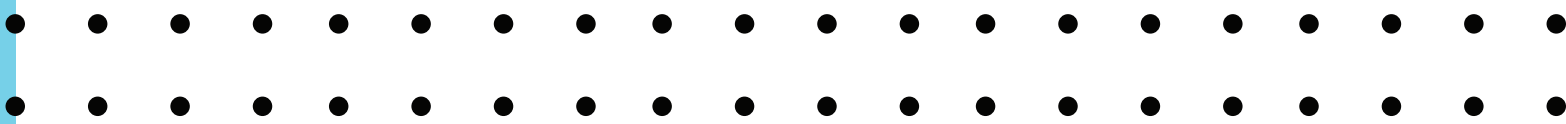
- **Supporting environmentally conscious consumer choices and green technologies:** Young people can make environmentally conscious consumer choices by supporting eco-friendly products, and companies that prioritise sustainability. Our choices could influence market trends and encourage businesses to adopt greener practices. We are also committed to advocate for the adoption and development of green technologies, such as electric vehicles and energy-efficient appliances.
- **Promoting low-carbon lifestyles:** By adopting low-carbon lifestyles ourselves, we can lead by example and demonstrate the feasibility of responsible consumption and sustainable living. We are also keen to help build awareness about the Indian government's roadmap for carbon credits, and selling the latter to prominent industries and international partners, as this could contribute towards the momentous global target of mobilising US\$ 100 billion per year for financing climate action in developed countries.
- **Building climate-focused careers:** There are among us those who aspire to build careers in fields related to climate science, renewable energy, and environmental policy as this would allow us to contribute directly to climate action through our professional work.
- **Forming youth-led climate groups:** We are committed to joining or forming youth-led climate groups or organisations that provide a platform for collective action. These groups could work towards engaging stakeholders, convening workshops and events, and driving awareness campaigns to promote climate action.

CONCLUSION

We are the architects of tomorrow and together, we stand at the threshold of change. As we set out to engineer the transformations we believe our country needs, we know that the road ahead will not be easy. Yet, we know too, that our unflinching stubbornness will see us through. Unlike most travellers into the unknown, we already have a guide. Our *Millennial Manifesto* is not a wish-list of aspirations, but a blueprint of how we will build a strong and prosperous India.

Authored by: *Students of Amity University, Calcutta University, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Kolkata, Jadavpur University, Presidency University, Sister Nivedita University, St Xavier's College, and St Xavier's University.*

Edited by: *Ambar Kumar Ghosh, Junior Fellow, ORF; Pratinashree Basu, Associate Fellow, ORF; and Anirban Sarma, Senior Fellow, ORF.*



Endnotes

- 1 Priyanka Deo, “Is India’s rapidly growing youth population a demographic dividend or a disaster?”, *Times of India*, February 02, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/is-indias-rapidly-growing-youth-population-a-dividend-or-disaster/articleshow/97545222.cms?from=mdr>
- 2 Ernst & Young, *India@100: Realizing the Potential of a US\$26 Trillion Economy*, 2023, https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_in/topics/india-at-100/2023/01/ey-india-at-100-full-version.pdf?download
- 3 United Nations, “Youth and the SDGs”, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/>



Ideas . Forums . Leadership . Impact

20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area,
New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-35332000. Fax : +91-11-35332005
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org