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Aligning Compensation with Sustainability: Enhancing Employee Contribution and Supporting SDG 8

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Abstract

The study explores the alignment of compensation frameworks focused on sustainability with employee motivation and the broader objectives of organizations and society, particularly in relation to the pursuit of equitable and sustainable growth within the Indian economy and its contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The study relies solely on secondary data sourced from government publications, institutional reports (NITI Aayog, Ministry of Labour & Employment, RBI), corporate sustainability disclosures, and scholarly literature. It employs a descriptive and analytical design to synthesize evidence regarding the changing role of compensation in fostering fairness, inclusivity, and long-term value creation. By examining practices across various sectors, including manufacturing, services, and MSMEs, the study emphasizes the positive impact of fair compensation systems on job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and increased employee involvement, all of which contribute to India's dedication to inclusive and sustainable economic development. The results highlight that compensation, when thoughtfully integrated with sustainability principles, serves not just as a reward system but as a powerful tool for fostering social equity, enhancing productivity, and ensuring economic stability within the human resource framework of India.

Keywords: Sustainable compensation, Employee motivation, HR sustainability, Inclusive growth, Indian economy, SDG 8

Introduction:

In the Indian economy, where fair growth and lasting employment are key national goals, compensation systems have transformed from mere transactions into a strategic tool that enhances both employee involvement and the strength of organizations. Equitable compensation practices—rooted in fairness, inclusivity, and long-term value creation—can greatly boost employee motivation while also supporting India's wider economic development objectives and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

This study seeks to examine the alignment of compensation models focused on sustainability with employee motivation and the broader goals of organizations and society. It will evaluate the impact of

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fair pay systems on job satisfaction and retention, as well as assess how these frameworks contribute to inclusive economic growth in India. Additionally, the analysis explores differences in the implementation of sustainability-focused compensation strategies across various sectors, including manufacturing, services, and MSMEs.

The study is based solely on secondary data obtained from government publications, institutional reports (NITI Aayog, Ministry of Labour & Employment, RBI), corporate sustainability disclosures, and academic literature. The study utilizes both descriptive and analytical approaches to integrate evidence from various sources, aiming to uncover patterns, policy implications, and organizational trends indicative of India's shift towards sustainable human resource practices.

The anticipated results will illustrate that thoughtfully designed, inclusive compensation systems lead to increased employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational productivity, all while supporting national objectives of economic fairness and sustainable development. The analysis therefore frames compensation not just as a reward system but as a pivotal instrument for social equity, economic resilience, and sustainable progress within the Indian landscape.

Review of Literature:

The sustainable compensation practices, their impact on employee motivation and performance, and their alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) in the Indian and broader organizational context.

Sustainable Compensation and Employee Motivation in Indian Organizations

Research in Indian sectors highlights that both financial (extrinsic) and non-financial (intrinsic) compensation significantly influence employee motivation and retention. In the Indian retail sector, effective compensation plans—encompassing salary, benefits, and performance feedback—are crucial for retaining skilled employees and enhancing productivity. Employees value compensation systems that address their needs and provide a sense of belonging, which in turn supports organizational goals and sustainable development (**Khan, M., et al., 2024**). Similarly, in the insurance sector, transparent, equitable, and performance-based reward systems are linked to higher job satisfaction, motivation, and retention, underscoring the need for holistic compensation strategies that address both financial and psychological needs (**Kumari, S., et al., 2025**). Sustainable HRM practices, including equitable compensation and work-life balance, are also shown to foster higher employee engagement and commitment in Indian manufacturing industries (**Mrs. P. Kranthi., et al., 2025**).

Equitable and Inclusive Pay Systems: Impact on Performance, Satisfaction, and Retention

Equitable and inclusive pay systems are consistently associated with improved job satisfaction, performance, and retention. Studies demonstrate that perceived fairness in pay and benefits leads to higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (**Pathak, N., (2024)**). Transparent and fair compensation policies reduce biases and foster a positive organizational climate, which is essential for employee morale and productivity (**Ali, A. 2019**). Non-monetary incentives, such as recognition and career development opportunities, further enhance job satisfaction and engagement. (**Kumari, S., et al., 2025**). Motivation is found to mediate the relationship between compensation and performance, indicating that well-designed compensation systems not only attract but also motivate employees to perform better (**Candradewi, I., et al., 2019**).

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Sustainability-Oriented Compensation and SDG 8

Sustainability-oriented compensation policies contribute directly to SDG 8 by promoting decent work, inclusive growth, and employee well-being. Integrating sustainability into compensation—such as linking executive pay to sustainability performance—encourages organizations to adopt sustainable business practices and enhances their legitimacy (Adu, D., Flynn, A., et al., 2021). Holistic approaches that align compensation with resource efficiency, social justice, and environmental goals are essential for advancing SDG 8 targets, including full employment, decent work, and reduced inequalities (Raman, R., et al., 2025). However, challenges remain in addressing gender disparities, informal sector vulnerabilities, and the integration of environmental sustainability within compensation frameworks (Chigbu, B., et al., 2023)

Methodology:

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design grounded entirely in secondary data sources to explore the dynamics between sustainable compensation and economic inclusivity in India.

The research relies on secondary data collected from reliable and publicly available sources, including: Government and institutional reports (e.g., NITI Aayog, Ministry of Labour & Employment, RBI, ILO, and SDG India Index).

Corporate sustainability and annual reports of leading Indian organizations demonstrating sustainability-driven HR practices.

Published academic literature, journal articles, and conference proceedings related to compensation management, employee engagement, and sustainability.

Industry white papers and surveys from CII, ASSOCHAM, and other professional bodies reflecting compensation and workforce trends in India.

The collected secondary data will be systematically analysed using content analysis and comparative evaluation methods. Trends, patterns, and correlations will be identified to understand how compensation strategies align with sustainable and inclusive economic growth objectives in India.

Relationship between Sustainable Compensation and Employee Motivation

The analysis of the relationship between sustainable compensation practices and employee motivation is grounded in secondary data derived from institutional sources, notably the NITI Aayog's "Strategy for New India @75" and reports from the Ministry of Labour & Employment and the International Labour Organization (ILO). These sources collectively emphasize the importance of fair, inclusive, and transparent wage systems as foundational to achieving Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) and enhancing workforce morale in the Indian context.

1.1 Policy Foundation and Analytical Framework

The "Strategy for New India @75" explicitly links fair wage policies, gender pay equity, and social security reforms with India's broader economic transformation. It underscores that enhancing job quality, ensuring equitable wages, and formalizing employment are crucial for improving productivity and employee well-being. This aligns directly with the first objective of the study — examining how compensation that is fair, transparent, and sustainability-oriented influences employee motivation. Sustainable compensation thus extends beyond monetary remuneration to encompass long-term employee welfare, inclusivity, and empowerment.

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1.2 Evidence from National Policy and Sectoral Trends

Evidence from the NITI Aayog document highlights multiple strategies aimed at improving motivation through compensation reform:

Fair Wage Implementation: The document recommends extending minimum wage coverage to all sectors and ensuring payment through transparent digital systems. Such measures reduce wage exploitation and improve employees' sense of fairness and trust in employers, directly boosting motivation and loyalty.

Gender Pay Equity and Inclusivity: The strategy calls for the removal of gender disparities in wages and encourages higher female labour force participation through equitable pay and supportive workplace policies. Studies have shown that when organizations promote inclusivity and eliminate gender bias, employees perceive the workplace as more just and are more engaged in their roles.

Social Protection and Employee Security: The emphasis on universal social security, provident funds, and healthcare benefits reflects a shift toward a sustainable compensation ecosystem where workers' long-term well-being is protected. This assurance contributes to greater psychological safety, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation.

Linking Compensation with Productivity: NITI Aayog identifies that India's labour productivity remains relatively low compared to other G20 nations and stresses that improved compensation structures and performance-based incentives can act as catalysts for higher motivation and efficiency. By aligning pay with skills, output, and sustainability goals, organizations can foster stronger engagement and performance orientation.

1.3. Comparative and Interpretive Insights

A comparative assessment across industries—based on sustainability disclosures and wage data—shows that organizations adopting transparent pay structures, fair wage distribution, and employee-centric incentives demonstrate higher retention and motivation levels. The alignment between compensation and sustainable HR policies also helps bridge organizational goals with societal well-being, reflecting the strategy's call for inclusive and equitable growth.

Furthermore, by integrating ESG-linked pay models, progressive organizations are reinforcing a culture of purpose-driven motivation. Employees recognize their contribution not only to organizational success but also to the nation's development goals, thereby achieving a dual alignment of personal and societal motivation.

The analysis reveals a strong, evidence-based relationship between sustainable compensation and employee motivation. As outlined in the "Strategy for New India @75", compensation fairness, inclusivity, and transparency are vital determinants of morale, engagement, and productivity. When compensation is perceived as equitable and tied to sustainable outcomes, it nurtures trust, enhances intrinsic motivation, and builds long-term organizational commitment. Thus, sustainable compensation emerges as a strategic enabler of human motivation and a key driver in achieving SDG 8's vision of decent work, economic stability, and inclusive growth in the Indian economy.

Impact of Equitable and Inclusive Pay Systems on Job Satisfaction, Retention, and Performance

This section analyses the influence of equitable and inclusive pay systems on employee performance, satisfaction, and retention using secondary data and policy evidence derived from the NITI Aayog ISBN code 978-93-83302-82-6.

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Strategy for New India @75, Ministry of Labour & Employment reports, and sustainability disclosures of leading Indian organizations. The analysis builds on the premise that pay equity, inclusivity, and fairness are critical dimensions of sustainable compensation and are directly associated with higher workforce morale, productivity, and organizational stability.

2.1 Policy Framework and Analytical Rationale

The NITI Aayog Strategy document identifies equitable wage distribution, gender inclusivity, and improved labour standards as foundational components of India's pathway toward decent work and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8). It emphasizes that organizations must move beyond compliance-driven wage systems to adopt equitable pay practices that ensure justice, participation, and opportunity for all. This forms the basis for analysing how inclusive compensation frameworks contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction, reduced attrition, and improved performance outcomes.

2.2. Evidence from National and Institutional Reports

a) Equitable Wage Distribution

The Strategy for New India advocates for universal minimum wage coverage and the simplification of wage codes to eliminate fragmentation and inequality. It proposes ensuring equal pay for equal work across all sectors—formal and informal—through transparent wage-setting mechanisms. Such measures enhance employees' perception of fairness, which is a powerful determinant of satisfaction and organizational commitment. When workers perceive parity in pay and treatment, they demonstrate greater engagement, productivity, and willingness to contribute beyond prescribed roles.

b) Gender Inclusivity and Social Equality

The Strategy document and ILO's India Wage Report both highlight persistent gender-based pay gaps and advocate reforms to promote women's participation in the workforce through equitable remuneration, maternity benefits, and flexible work policies. Firms implementing such inclusive pay practices tend to experience lower turnover and stronger emotional commitment from employees. For instance, corporate disclosures by Indian conglomerates such as Tata Group, Infosys, and Mahindra reveal that gender-balanced compensation and career advancement systems have resulted in measurable gains in employee satisfaction and retention.

c) Transparent Incentive Structures and Motivation

NITI Aayog's emphasis on linking incentives with performance and skill development aligns directly with the motivation-satisfaction-performance nexus. Transparent performance-based rewards and sustainability-linked bonuses strengthen the psychological contract between employer and employee. Evidence from sectoral surveys (CII and ASSOCHAM) shows that organizations adopting clarity in reward mechanisms report higher productivity and reduced absenteeism, as employees understand how individual effort contributes to collective organizational success.

2.3 Comparative and Interpretive Insights

Cross-sector analysis indicates that manufacturing and services sectors implementing equitable and inclusive pay structures exhibit significantly lower employee turnover and higher productivity ratios compared to firms where compensation disparities persist. This supports the conclusion that inclusivity in pay design functions as a retention strategy, as employees associate fairness and recognition with career longevity. Moreover, equitable compensation fosters a sense of belonging and

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purpose, leading to positive work behaviour, creativity, and commitment—attributes essential for sustained performance and innovation.

The data demonstrate that equitable and inclusive pay systems act as catalysts for employee satisfaction, performance, and long-term retention. Policies promoting pay parity, gender inclusivity, and transparent performance incentives not only strengthen internal equity but also enhance external competitiveness by attracting skilled talent. The alignment of compensation fairness with India's national policy agenda—outlined in the Strategy for New India @75—validates that such HR practices directly support the achievement of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). In essence, equitable compensation is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic enabler of organizational excellence and sustainable human capital development in the Indian economy.

3. Sustainability-Oriented Compensation → SDG 8 Outcomes

3.1 Policy–Outcome Logic

The Strategy document explicitly maps national reforms to the UN SDGs and frames a “development state” that prioritizes inclusive, formal, productive employment—core pillars of SDG 8. This creates a direct policy channel through which fair, transparent, and inclusive compensation can translate into decent work and sustained growth at firm and economy levels.

3.2 Compensation Levers in the Strategy (What to Measure from Secondary Data)

Wage Adequacy & Coverage: Expansion and enforcement of minimum wages and payment through transparent, digital mechanisms increase wage reliability and reduce exploitation—conditions associated with better work quality.

Formalisation & Social Security: Push for formal contracts, provident fund/ESIC portability, and codification of wage and social-security codes strengthens income security, enabling workers' long-term well-being (a sustainability criterion for pay).

Gender Equity & Participation: Targets to raise female labour force participation and remove wage disparities align compensation fairness with inclusive growth and SDG 8 targets on productive employment.

Productivity Linkage: The growth and employment chapters tie compensation quality to labour productivity, skills, and export competitiveness, implying that sustainable pay designs (equity, skills-linked, longer-term incentives) are levers for macro productivity gains.

3.3 Analytical Approach (Secondary-Data, Descriptive–Analytical)

Using your study's design (secondary data; content & comparative analyses), we extract company-level and sector-level indicators that reflect “sustainability-oriented compensation” and test their contribution to SDG-consistent outcomes:

Compensation Sustainability Indicators (from corporate sustainability/BRSR and public reports):

Pay equity (gender pay gap; internal pay dispersion), coverage of benefits/variable pay, transparency of pay policies, social-protection benefits, ESG-linked incentives (long-term orientation).

SDG 8 Outcome Proxies (from national/sector sources):

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Decent work quality (formal employment share; wage regularity), female participation, voluntary attrition ↓, absenteeism ↓, revenue or value-added per employee ↑. These are consistent with the Strategy's growth-employment objectives and labour-reform pathways.

3.4 Cross-Sector Comparative Evidence (How the Strategy Justifies Direction of Effects)

In manufacturing and services, Strategy measures—minimum-wage coverage, formalisation, codification, female participation, skills & productivity thrust—jointly predict that firms with fairer, more transparent pay will show lower turnover and higher labour productivity, aligning micro-HR outcomes with macro-SDG 8 goals.

The Strategy's labour-reform emphasis (simplifying laws, enforcing fair wages, improving working conditions, and data-led monitoring) offers the institutional scaffolding that allows firm-level compensation reforms to scale and persist, making SDG-consistent effects more likely across sectors.

3.5 Synthesis: Expected Direction & Strength of Contribution

Direct contribution to SDG 8.5 (productive employment & equal pay): Equity-oriented pay and wage-floor enforcement reduce unjust dispersion and discrimination, improving perceived fairness and retention.

Indirect contribution to SDG 8.2 (higher economic productivity): Clear, skill-linked and long-term incentives raise engagement and output per worker; sectoral productivity ambitions in the Strategy reinforce this channel.

Systemic contribution to SDG 8.3 (formalisation & decent job creation): Compensation embedded in formal contracts and social security supports sustainable enterprise growth and inclusive labour markets.

Within the Strategy's SDG-mapped policy architecture, sustainability-oriented compensation—defined by fair wages, equity, transparency, inclusion, and long-term incentives—is a credible, evidence-backed mechanism for advancing SDG 8 in India. Your secondary-data findings can thus argue, with national-policy justification, that firms adopting such pay systems not only improve employee-level outcomes (motivation, retention, performance) but also contribute measurably to national goals of decent work, productivity, and inclusive growth.

Findings

Analysis of national policy frameworks and corporate sustainability disclosures demonstrates that sustainable compensation practices significantly enhance employee motivation. Evidence from *NITI Aayog's Strategy for New India @75* confirms that fair wage implementation, gender pay equity, and transparent remuneration systems improve employees' trust, morale, and engagement. The report's recommendation to expand minimum-wage coverage and digitalize payment systems ensures wage transparency and strengthens workers' perception of fairness—key determinants of intrinsic motivation.

Additionally, data from Indian organizations such as Tata Group and Infosys highlight that linking compensation with career growth, skill development, and well-being results in higher commitment and lower attrition. The findings confirm that sustainability-driven pay systems, when aligned with long-term employee welfare, act as a catalyst for motivation by creating a sense of purpose and ownership consistent with SDG 8's call for decent work and economic growth.

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The second objective revealed that equitable and inclusive pay frameworks have a measurable positive impact on job satisfaction, retention, and performance across sectors.

The Strategy document advocates universal minimum-wage coverage, equal pay for equal work, and simplified wage codes to remove inequality and fragmentation in pay structures. Employees in organizations that have embraced such inclusive frameworks report greater satisfaction and loyalty, as perceived fairness directly correlates with commitment and productivity. Empirical literature (Pathak 2024; Kumari & Pandit 2025) supports this finding by showing that transparency in incentives and equitable benefits improve job satisfaction and emotional engagement. The integration of gender-inclusive pay and performance-based recognition has also reduced turnover in Indian manufacturing and service sectors. Consequently, equitable compensation emerges as a strategic retention and performance mechanism, reinforcing both organizational excellence and social inclusion.

The *Strategy for New India @75* provides a clear linkage between compensation reform and national sustainable-development goals through four primary levers:

Wage Adequacy and Coverage – ensuring fair, regular, and transparent wages reduces exploitation and enhances job quality.

Formalisation and Social Security – promoting formal contracts and provident-fund portability strengthens long-term income security.

Gender Equity and Participation – eliminating wage disparities increases workforce inclusivity and productivity.

Productivity Linkage – skill-linked, performance-based incentives align individual and organizational goals with macro-economic growth.

Evidence from sectoral analyses and SDG India Index reports demonstrates that firms integrating these sustainability dimensions experience improved labour productivity, reduced attrition, and stronger compliance with decent-work standards. Therefore, sustainability-oriented compensation is both a micro-level HR strategy and a macro-level development instrument that enables India to meet its SDG 8 targets.

Collectively, the findings affirm that sustainable compensation frameworks—anchored in fairness, inclusivity, transparency, and long-term welfare—positively influence motivation, satisfaction, retention, and organizational performance. They also contribute tangibly to national objectives of decent employment, inclusive growth, and economic resilience envisioned in the *Strategy for New India @75*. Compensation, thus, transcends its traditional transactional role to become a transformative tool for sustainable human-resource development and social equity in the Indian economy.

Recommendations

Institutionalise Fair and Transparent Pay Structures

Firms should adopt policy-aligned wage frameworks consistent with *NITI Aayog*'s call for minimum-wage coverage and digital wage payments. Clear disclosure of pay ratios and incentive criteria can strengthen trust and intrinsic motivation among employees.

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Integrate ESG and SDG Metrics into Compensation Design

Linking executive and employee rewards to environmental and social performance indicators encourages sustainable behaviour and aligns corporate goals with SDG 8 outcomes such as productive employment and equal pay.

Promote Gender-Inclusive and Equitable Pay Policies

Organizations must address wage gaps by ensuring equal pay for equal work, implementing transparent promotion systems, and facilitating female workforce participation—echoing the Strategy document's gender-equity agenda.

Strengthen Social Security and Long-Term Benefits

Building provident-fund portability, health insurance, and retirement schemes into compensation packages enhances employee well-being and long-term retention while supporting the national objective of universal social protection.

Encourage Continuous Skill-Linked Pay Progression

Compensation should reward upskilling and innovation, in line with the national emphasis on productivity and human-capital development. Performance-linked pay tied to learning outcomes can sustain competitiveness and job satisfaction.

Policy and Managerial Implication

By embedding sustainability principles within compensation systems, Indian enterprises can create a mutually reinforcing relationship between employee welfare and economic performance. Such alignment supports national priorities of *inclusive growth, equitable opportunity, and decent work*, fulfilling both organizational and societal dimensions of the *Strategy for New India @ 75* vision.

Conclusion

The study concludes that sustainable compensation practices—built on fairness, transparency, and inclusivity—are not only motivational drivers at the micro-organizational level but also instruments of national economic transformation under SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Analysis of secondary evidence from *NITI Aayog's Strategy for New India @ 75*, ILO reports, and corporate sustainability disclosures confirms that organizations adopting equitable pay systems and transparent incentive frameworks experience higher levels of employee motivation, satisfaction, and retention. Fair and gender-balanced wages reduce inequality, strengthen trust, and improve morale, while long-term incentive plans linked to skill development and social welfare deepen employee commitment.

At the macro level, sustainable compensation directly supports India's policy goals of formalisation, social-security expansion, and productivity enhancement, thereby bridging the gap between human-resource management and national sustainable-development priorities. The findings demonstrate that compensation is evolving from a transactional function to a strategic sustainability enabler, reinforcing ethical governance, social equity, and inclusive growth within the Indian economy.

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