

INDIA TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT

This research study makes an attempt to evaluate India's progress toward achieving the "Sustainable development goals" established by the "United Nations" in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals Index has been published annually by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Ayog) since 2018. This study examines the factors that have influenced India's performance on key SDGs, both positively and negatively, taking into account the SDG 2018 and SDG 2019 Indexes, respectively. This paper will also emphasise the areas that will assist policy makers and government officials in improving the achievement of the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs). The implication of this research will further add to the very small body of literature on sustainable development in the Indian setting.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Development Goals, Social Development, Millennium Development Goals.

Introduction

The meaning of the concept "economically developed" has undergone significant change over the past two decades. A globally engaged civil society and improved global awareness have led to an economic and political reorganization of the phrase "development." Consequently, the concept of "sustainable development" quickly gained popularity and also started to play a key role in discussions concerning the state of the global economy (Keesstra(2016); Kumar (2016)). Although the word "sustainable development" lacks a clear definition, it is commonly understood as referring to a combination of economic development, inclusivity, and ecological sustainability (Elliott, 2018; Falebita and Koul, 2012).

The worldwide approach for ensuring sustainability, given by "United Nations", had dramatically moved away from "MDG (Millennium Development Goals)" to "SDG (Sustainable Development Goals)". India is among the quickly rising nations, had been concentrating on assuring the accomplishment of objectives. Hence, the "National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Ayog)" began issuing the SDG index in 2018 (NITI Report, 2018). Using data from the SDG indexes for 2018 and 2021, the article will assess the state of sustainable development in India and its issues.

Background

Inception of "Sustainable development goals"- When the new century began in 2000, the "United Nations" set 8 objectives for all former member nations (191). By 2015, the goals were to end "poverty", "hunger", & "discrimination". These objectives are shown in the figure below:

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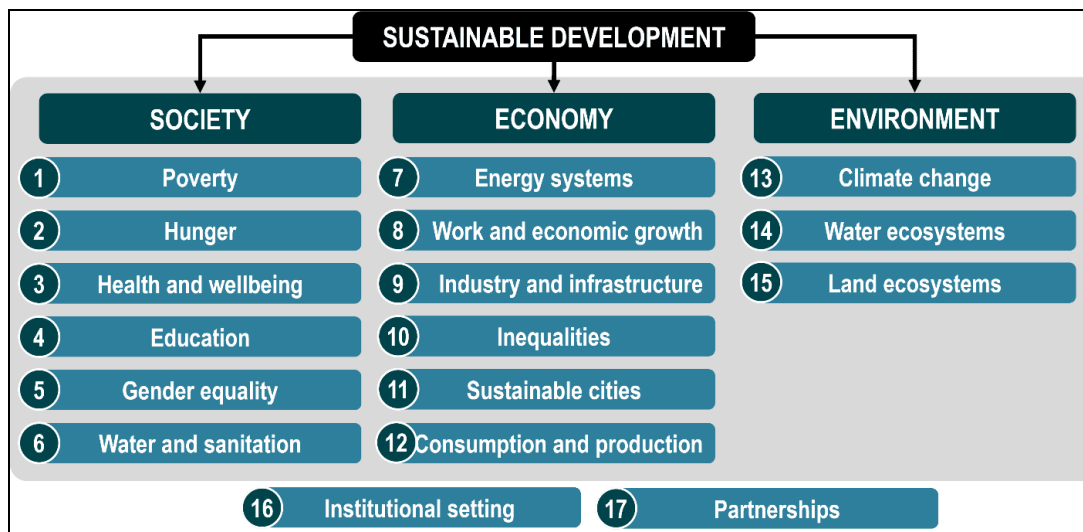
Several of the "Millennium Development Goals" were successful as the objectives were simple to understand, & because of this, public awareness and the consistency of the actions both improved. Additionally, because these goals were not legally enforceable, the expense associated with political negotiations was irrelevant (Carley et al, 2017). A disproportionate amount of responsibility was placed on the poor and emerging nations with advanced economies to be the beneficiaries of financial help and investment. One significant flaw in the process of reaching the Millennium Development Goals was the absence of any intermediate milestones that would have increased communication between decision-makers and implementation channels (Sach, 2012).

Various academicians and economists had also stated that data availability and accuracy are critical requirements for achieving any developmental objective. However, data analysis management during the "Millennium Development Goals" era was extremely subpar, & LDC (least developed nations) or poor countries frequently gave obsolete data (Kaygusuz, 2012). The common belief was that wealthy nations owed it to poor nations to financially assist them in achieving their development objectives (UNDP, 2015).

The "Millennium Development Goal" had a major flaw as it failed to consider the "Governance" element while analyzing the development goal. It's obvious as misconduct and poor governance significantly impede progress because they reduce credibility and access to institutions.

One key weakness of the "Millennium Development Goal" was that it overlooked the "Governance" component while analysing the development target. It is obvious that corruption and bad governance are big impediments to progress because they make institutions less approachable and credible.

The "United Nations General Assembly" adopted "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development" in 2015 after taking these factors into account. A set of 17 universal goals, including eradicating poverty and improving sanitation and human health, were adopted by the assembly. The "Sustainable development goals", in contrast to the "Millennium Development Goals", were decided upon following numerous consultations with both industrialised and poor nations (UN report, 2016). The creation of a "Global High-Level Political Forum" has addressed the issue of accountability (HLPF). These are the 17 "SDG" objectives:



Consequently, we can say that the “Sustainable Development Goals” are a broader and more inclusive set of objectives by comparing them with the millennium development goals. Another notable aspect of the SDGs is that they are interrelated and cannot be viewed in isolation.

Sustainable development and India

In 1947, India won its independence from the colonial powers after a protracted period of economic development caused by imperialism. According to several historians, the British empire sapped the economic resources of India and caused more undevelopment than development. The nation's economy needed to be revived as soon as it attained independence. However, in the early years, the emphasis was on social spending, with measures for eradicating poverty and establishing institutions dominating government spending. To create a “pragmatic” economic system, the Gandhian philosophy of sustainable development was disregarded. Even though the economy of India was technically a mixed economy, it was clear that the trajectory taken was tilted toward the socialistic model.

The central government stated its goal to establish a socialistic model of society in 1954, with public sector businesses serving as its leaders. Later in 1976, India amended its constitution's preamble by including the word “Socialist.” India was at a lower stage of development, hence results were prioritised over processes. Therefore, environmental and biological diversity concerns were disregarded in favour of rapid expansion (Ghosh et al, 2019). It has been stated that environmentalists' concerns about the extensive utilisation of pesticides and insecticides were disregarded even during the former “green revolution” (Samal, 2019). After the economic reforms of 1991, this pattern of disregarding environmental danger in favour of financial and economic rewards reached its peak. It is unnecessary to go into detail about the foreign exchange reserve crisis and the decision-making process for the opening up of the Indian economy because these topics are well-known. The Indian economy underwent a dramatic shift after 1991, with the development of the service sector as the main engine of economic development and growth in the 1990s and thereafter. Later, India saw a protracted era of “Jobless growth” and the idea of sustainable and inclusive growth remained elusive.

Up until 2014, the planning commission of India, which is a quasi-constitutional body headed by the prime minister of nation and numerous specialists in several sectors, was primarily responsible for developing India's development strategy. Five-year plans, which served as the development's road map, helped replicate and shape the development strategy. The planning commission was abolished by the Indian government in 2014, and the “National Institution for Transforming India (Niti-Aayog)” was founded in the same year. The Aayog differs from the former Planning Commission in that it encourages the bottom-up approach, which strengthens cooperative federalism. “Sustainable development goals” (SDGs) were proposed by the “United Nations” in year 2015, and from that time, Indian government has been working with “Niti-ayog” to help accomplish the SDGs. Several Indian government projects, such as “Swachh-Bharat”, “Mission Indhradhanush”, and “Pradhan Mantri-Jan Dhan Yojana”, can be linked to the numerous UNO goals.

“Niti-Ayog” launched the SDG index in 2018 with the goal of monitoring the progress and problems of all states and union territories, recognising that a lack of data was one of the most significant barriers for attaining the “Millennium Development Goals”. It has so far published the SDG Index 2018 and SDG Index 2019. In contrast to the 2018 index, which excluded SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 17, the 2019 index includes SDGs 1 to 16. The Ayog cites a lack of data availability as the reason for keeping SDG 17 out of the report.

Research gap

India must incorporate and put into practise the SDGs in order to achieve sustainable development. In India, there are 28 states and 8 union territories, and they vary in terms of the amount of domestic production and the accessibility of physical resources.

State by state mapping of Sustainable development goals is very crucial as the population of most of the Indian states are larger than many European nations such as Uttar Pradesh, which is the sixth-largest administrative unit in the world in terms of population(Khan et al, 2017). The SDGs goals are difficult to achieve, and the country lacks academic literature on them. There is a gap in the literature regarding the state of sustainable development in nation India today. This study aims to present the current situation on how each Indian state is performing in terms of the “Sustainable Development Goals” and to pinpoint the problems that are hindering the SDGs from being more effectively achieved.

Objectives of the Study

This research article attempts to address the following goal in the light of the aforementioned research gap:

- To assess the various Indian states' present levels of SDG performance.
- To pinpoint initiatives promoting SDGs
- To pinpoint India's shortcomings in SDG adoption and execution.

SDG achievement in India

This section focuses on the subject of SDG achievement in India.

- **SDG-1 “No Poverty”**: A number of government initiatives, including “MGNREGA”, the “National Rural and Urban Livelihood Missions” are being implemented to help accomplish SDG 1. A crucial role has been played by the “Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana”, “Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana” etc. The steadily decreasing rates of people who live in poverty make this clear. While the percentage of persons living in poverty was 21.9% in 2011–12, the target is to reduce it to 10.95% by 2030. According to SDG-Index 2019, this goal has already been attained by six states and six union territories. The nation's composite index has dropped, though. The composite index dropped to 50 in 2019 from 54 in 2018.
- **SDG-2 “Zero Hunger”**: Various government initiatives, including the “Mid-day Meal” Program running invariousrural schools, “Poshan Abhiyan”, “a Restructured and Improved Public Distribution System”, Better Agricultural services and Capacity Building by Innovative Interventions such as “Pradhan-mantree Fasal Bima Yojana” and “Pradhan mantra Krishi Sinchayee Yojana,” have aided in the achievement of this goal in a fair manner. The aggregate index has declined from 48 to 35 in 2018. A severe issue is the increase in the hunger and poverty indices. In the most current publication of the global hunger index, India was ranked 102 out of 117 countries.
- **SDG-3 “Good health and well-being”**: India's performance in this goal has increased from 2018 to 2019. The composite index rose from 52 in 2018 to 61 in 2019. Improvements have been made as a result of decreased baby and maternal mortality rates and the availability of an affordable health insurance programme under PM-Jay. The significant difference in this parameter's performing and non-performing states, however, is cause for serious concern.
- **SDG-4 “High-quality education”**: As the composite index was 58 in both 2018 and 2019, India's performance on this metric remained stable. Poor teacher-student ratios, absenteeism, enrolment being prioritised over learning, high dropout rates, and gender discrimination have been some of the key obstacles to achieving this goal. The government is attempting to raise educational standards, however, with the aid of initiatives like “Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan,” initiated after combining 3 programmes “Sarv-Shiksha Abhiyan”, “Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan”, and “Teacher's Education”. The centrepiece programme of “Beti-Bachao, Beti-Padhao”, is fostering an atmosphere to advance gender equity in the educational sector.

- **SDG-5 “Gender Equality”:** For the nation, gender inequality has been a main source of concern. Indian society has always been seen as patriarchal, with fewer women participating in daily decision-making. The majority of women stay at home, which is regarded as a noneconomic activity. There are still many instances of “dowry, rape, sexual harassment, and female foeticides” prevalent in our nation. These reasons are demonstrated by the appalling 32% labour force participation rate, the majority of which comes from regressive industries like tea plantations and agricultural labour. The issue is evident in the SDG index of both 2018 and 2019 as in both the years only 2 states were able to reach a score of 50 (Kerala & Sikkim in 2018; Kerala & Himachal Pradesh in 2019).
- **SDG-6 “Clean Water and Sanitation”:** With the support of the programmes such as "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan", Indian government, headed by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, since 2014 has developed a substantial popular wave of cleanliness, and sanitation. The movement has mobilised people and raised awareness of cleanliness and its advantages for both civil society and individual citizens. India has therefore been progressing toward the accomplishment of this goal incredibly well. The provision of safe drinking water and the elimination of open defecation have both contributed to the astonishing composite index for 2018 and 2019. In 2018, the index was 63, and it increased to 88 in 2019.
- **SDG-7 “Clean, Affordable Energy”:** Over the past two years, this aim has also seen tremendous progress. From 51 in 2018 to 70 in 2019, the composite index for this metric experienced a significant increase. In order to promote “universal electrification”, with a focus on electrification of rural and sub urban areas, Indian government has prioritised its key programme, "Pradhan Mantri Sahaj BijliHar Ghar Yojana- Saubhagya". As the current electrical supply channel is inconsistent and interrupted, the next stage is to improve distribution. To accomplish this, programmes like the "Deendayal-gram Jyoti Yojana" and the "integrated power development scheme", among others, have been made operational. By offering LED bulbs to the general public at a reduced price, the government has been actively pursuing environmental protection and energy conservation. Providing LPG gas to low-income households under the "Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana" has significantly reduced CO2 emissions.
- **SDG-8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”:** Over the past two years, the growth of this goal has remained constant. The composite index was 65 in 2018 while it was 64 in 2019. This standstill can be explained by a fall in manufacturing activity as well as a decline in GDP rate.
- **SDG-9 “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure”:** The overall score for this objective increased from 44 to 65 in just one year. This development may also be seen in India’s rise from 57 to 52 in the Global Innovation Index. The Indian government has been working hard on institutional and structural reforms to meet this goal. SDG 9 has established itself as a need for optimizing the process and effectiveness of the other SDGs. Goal 1 "No Poverty", which strives to eliminate poverty in all places, can be achieved by increasing industries that improve livelihood prospects, give financial security, and broaden people's skill sets, making them less susceptible to exploitation. The introduction of the “Goods and Services Tax” in 2017, liberalisation of foreign policies & institutional investment policies are a few instances of the Indian government's measures to promote industrial productivity. Between 2018 and 2019, it averaged a 7.2% increase in gross domestic output. India has also maintained the goal of not only boosting industry, innovation, and infrastructure, but also of remaining sustainable and environmentally benign. It has achieved one of the least per capita carbon emissions.
- **SDG-10 “Reduced Inequalities”:** The aggregate index for this objective has decreased in the previous 2 years. The score, which was 71 in 2018, has dropped to 64 in 2019. It symbolises the numerous disparities between affluent and poor, male and female, and other groups that exist in India. Even though women hold 46.4% of the seats in Panchayati raj institutions, these organisations' operation is still patriarchal. In an effort to bridge the income gap, the Indian government introduced a provision in 2019 to offer 10% reservation to economically disadvantaged sectors of society. The 126th amendment of the Indian Constitution was ratified by the Indian parliament, extending the 10-year reservation term in order to improve the advancement of SC and ST persons.

- **SDG-11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”:** India, like many other developing nations, has been experiencing a period of rapid urbanisation. As more area is urbanised, there's a greater demand for development planning and the supply of a variety of utilities, such as transportation, hygiene and sewage, and the facilitation of higher education institutions and healthcare facilities. Unfortunately, India has not performed very well in this regard. In the SDG 2018 Index, India only received a score of 39, and even now, in 2019, it has only managed to receive a score of 53. The initiatives of economical accommodation are crucial as lack of affordable housing in Metropolitan areas has led to development of sizable slums that frequently lack even the most basic infrastructure requirements. In this regard, the Indian government is speeding up the “Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana programme”. Till financial year 2019 approximately 31% households have been erected under this programme. The government has now set a target of providing everyone with access to secure, convenient, and environmentally friendly transportation networks by the year 2030, particularly through the expansion of public transportation. A special focus will be placed on the requirements of people in vulnerable situations.
- **SDG-12 (Responsible Consumption and Production):** India's development toward SDG 12 is adequate but not satisfactory. India's development toward SDG 12 is adequate but not satisfactory. SDG 12 strives to establish ethical patterns of production and consumption on a global scale. In order to ensure that the needs of future generations are not jeopardised, sustainable use of resources and production means "use of services and related products that respond to basic needs and improve quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product." The composite index dropped by significant level from 90 to 66 from 2018 to 2019. In India, each person wastes around 50 kg of food annually, according to the UNEP 2021 report. With only nine years left, it appears quite hard to fulfil the aim of halving food waste without substantially boosting investment. According to the NITI Aayog's SDG dashboard 2020-21, Jammu & Kashmir and Nagaland are now doing well among all of India's states and union territories in terms of SDG 12.
- **SDG-13 “Climate Change”:** India stated its voluntary objective in 2009 to lower the “GDP's” emissions intensity upto 20–25% by the calendar year 2020 compared to the emission level recorded in 2005, despite the fact that it is not subject to any legal obligations under the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)". And India was successful in achieving this goal as from 2005 to 2016, India brought down emission intensity by 24%.
- **SDG-14 “Life below Water”:** SDG 14 requires countries to work together to conserve our seas and the lives that rely on them, which is genuinely a global responsibility. Countries commit to achieve sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems by 2020, and to substantially reducing marine pollution of all types during the next five years. This will necessitate worldwide scientific collaboration, harvesting and fishing regulations, and more study and information on matters vital to the sustenance of life below water. According to "India's Fifth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity," the nation has a 7,517-kilometer coastline that provides food and a means of subsistence for more than 250 million people. India is the world's second-largest producer of fish. The Indian government has launched the "Sagarmala Project," often known as the "Blue Revolution," to improve the condition of India's docks and shores. To safeguard marine habitats, the government has established a "National Plan for the Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems". India prioritises marine and coastal biodiversity protection.
- **SDG-15 “Life on land”:** Over past two years, performance of India in achieving this goal has declined. In contrast to 2018 when it was 90, the composite index has significantly declined to 66 in 2019. Pursuing this objective presents a number of difficulties: In a developing nation like India, industrialisation is the main priority. The government's liberal policies have led to the industrialization of “Tier III cities and Tier IV cities.” Indian agriculture is under pressure from the country's massive population, which has led to an overuse of chemical fertilisers. Additionally, 57 species of wildlife in India are under danger of going extinct. All of these issues contribute to India's dismal record.

- **SDG-16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institution”**: India has been performing pretty well in this area. In 2018 and 2019, it received scores of 71 and 72, respectively. The achievement of this target has been linked to: 16% drop-in crime rates after financial year 2015, easiness in legal processes, and the provision of having Aadhar card.

State-wise Analysis

The large disparity between states that are performing and those that are not performing is one of the main issues with the progress of achieving the “sustainable development goals”. Tamil Nadu, stood as the best-performing state according to the 2021 report with a score of 86. While Bihar, which came last, has a score of 32. One conclusion that can be drawn from looking at the best- and worst-performing states in India (Tables 1 and 2) is that southern Indian states are undoubtedly doing better than their eastern counterparts.

Marine habitats are one of the 16 SDGs that solely apply to coastal states, hence scores regarding the goal were not included in the composite total. The best performing states in terms of the other SDGs were Tamil Nadu for "no poverty," Goa for "zero hunger," Kerala for "excellent health," Himachal Pradesh for "quality education," Himachal again for "gender equality," Andhra Pradesh for "clean water and sanitation," Sikkim for "cheap and clean energy," Telangana for "decent job & economic growth," Gujarat for "business, innovation, and infrastructure," Telangana for "reduced inequalities.

Table 1: Top 5 Best States as per SDG Index 2021 as per Niti Aayog

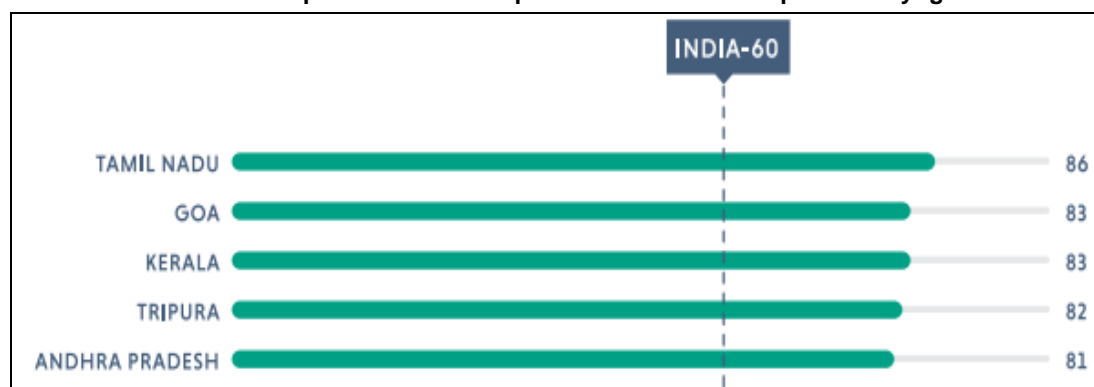


Table 2: Top 5 Worst States as per SDG Index 2021 as per Niti Aayog



Conclusion

We may infer from the data that, despite India's great development, it still needs to create new policies and plans in a few areas. Closing the development gap between the north and the south should be one of the main goals. Despite having abundant resources and human capital, the north-eastern states' poor performance is a significant conundrum. One of the main reasons to speed up “Anti-poverty programmes” to guarantee the “Right to food” to all the residents of nation is the reality that still many residents are unable to afford two meals every day. On the other hand, initiatives to reduce pollution must be added to the expanding industrialization. In order to assure the achievement of “sustainable development goals”, India still has a long way to go.

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