

The performance of India in the achievement of sustainable development Goals: A way forward

¹Hari Prapan Sharma * (Corresponding Author) , ²Ashish Chaturvedi

¹Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura India,

²Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura India

Abstract

This research paper attempts to analyze the progress of India with regards to the sustainable development goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015. Since 2018, National institution for Transforming India (NITI Ayog) has been publishing SDG Index. This paper, taking in consideration the SDG2018 and SDG2019 Index respectively, throws the light on the issues that have facilitated performance and non-performance of India on various SDGs. This paper will also highlight the areas which will help the policy makers to improve the SDGs performance. The implication of this paper will further add to the scant sustainable development literature in Indian context.

Key Words: Sustainable Development Goals; Poverty; Inclusive Development, Social Development.

1.Introduction

The definition of the term, "economically developed" had witnessed rapid transformation during the last couple of decades, a globally active civil society along with increased awareness of the citizens across the globe has resulted in a political as well as economic restructuring of the term "development". As a result, the concept of sustainable development has rapidly emerged and has become a significant component of the discourse about world economic development (Kumar et al, 2016; Keesstra et al, 2016). The term sustainable development has not been clearly defined but there has been a global consensus regarding the triple bottom line approach of the term i.e. a combination of economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Falebita and Koul, 2018; Elliott, 2012). The global strategy for remedial measures to ensure sustainability; lead by the United Nations, has also changed drastically from the concept of MDG (Millennium development goals) to SDG (Sustainable development goals). India, being one of the rapidly developing countries of the era, had also been focusing on ensuring the achievement of the goals. To ensure it, the National institution for transforming India (will be referred to as NITI Ayog), has started publishing SDG index since 2018 (NITI Report, 2018). The paper will examine the progress and problems of sustainable development in India by taking the help of SDG index 2018 and 2019.

2.1 Background:

Evolution of Sustainable development goals- In 2000, with the advent of the new millennium, the United Nations set eight goals to all erstwhile member countries (191). The objective was to combat poverty, hunger and discrimination by 2015. These goals are:-

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. To achieve universal primary education.

3. To promote gender equality and empower women.
4. To reduce child mortality.
5. To improve maternal health.
6. To combat HIV/AIDS/Malaria and other diseases.
7. To ensure environmental sustainability.
8. To develop a global partnership for development.

The millennium development goals achieved several successes. The goals were easy to comprehend and the ease of understanding resulted in improved public awareness and continuity of the actions. Also, since they were not legally binding, the cost and time delay of diplomatic discussions and apprehensions was not a factor (Carley, & Christie, 2017). However, there was an excessive onus on the poor and developing country with advanced economies being a patron of financial aids and investment. One major shortcoming was that the process of achieving millennium development goals did not have any intermediate milestone which would have resulted in improved communication between policymakers and implementing channels (Sach, 2012). Several experts and development economists have also established that for the achievement of any developmental agenda the data availability and accuracy is a major requirement. However, the data management during the MDG era was very poor and the data provided by LDC (least developed countries) or poor countries was often outdated (Kaygusuz, 2012). The general perception was that the responsibility of rich countries was to provide financial support to the poor countries in order to achieve developmental goals (UNDP, 2015).

A major shortcoming of the millennium development goal was that it ignored the “Governance” factor while considering the developmental objective. It is evident that corruption and poor governance is one of the major roadblocks in the path of development as it reduces institutional accessibility & credibility and increases vulnerability.

Keeping these factors into consideration, the United Nations general assembly in 2015 adopted “*Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development*”. The assembly finalized a set of 17 universal goals which caters to different domains such as poverty eradication, human health & sanitation etc. Unlike the Millennium development goals, the sustainable development goals were finalized after several rounds of discussions with both developed and developing countries (UN report, 2016). The concern about accountability has also been taken care of with the establishment of a global High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The 17 goals are as follows -:

1. No poverty.
2. Zero hunger.
3. Good health & well-being.
4. Quality education.
5. Gender equality.
6. Clean water and sanitation.
7. Affordable & clean energy.
8. Decent work and economic growth.
9. Industry, innovation & infrastructure.
10. Reduced inequality.
11. Sustainable cities and communities.

12. Sustainable consumption and production.
13. Climate action.
14. Life below water.
15. Life on land.
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions.
17. Partnerships for the goals.

Therefore, by comparing the millennium development goals with sustainable development goals, we may establish that the latter is a broader and more inclusive set of goals. The other striking feature of SDGs is that they are interconnected and cannot be seen in isolation.

2.2 India and Sustainable development-

After a long gestation in economic progress due to imperialism, India gained independence from colonial powers in 1947. Several historians have established that the British empire drained Indian economic wealth and do more *undevelopment* than *development*. After gaining independence, the country had a major task of the rejuvenating economy. However, in initial years the focus was on social expenditures with institution-building and poverty eradication methods being the dominant areas of government expenditures. The Gandhian approach of sustainable development was ignored in order to build a "pragmatic" economic structure. Although officially the Indian economy was a mixed economy, it was evident that the trajectory adopted was having biasedness towards the socialistic pattern. In 1954, the government expressed the desire for the creation of a socialistic pattern of society lead by public sector enterprises. Later in 1976, India added the word "Socialist" in the preamble of its constitution. Since India was at a lower stratum of development, the focus was more on results than on process. As a result, the concern regarding environmentalism and bio-diversity was ignored in favor of speedy development (Ghosh et al, 2019). It has been argued that even in the erstwhile "green revolution" the concern of environmentalist regarding excessive use of pesticides and insecticides were ignored (Samal, 2019). This phenomenon of ignoring environmental risk in favour of financial and economic gains climaxed after the economic reforms of 1991. The crisis of foreign exchange reserves and the decisional process of opening up of Indian economy is well known and hence not required to be explained in detail. Post-1991, Indian economy saw rapid transformation with service sector emerging as the driving factor of economic growth of the late 1990s and beyond. However, the concept of sustainable and inclusive growth was still elusive and India witnessed a long period of "*Jobless growth*".

Till 2014, the developmental strategy of India was predominantly created by the planning commission of India which was a *quasi-constitutional* body led by the prime minister of India who was assisted by several experts in various fields. The plan of development was replicated and formulated with the help of five-year plans which was the roadmap of development.

In 2014, the government of India scrapped planning commission and in the same year National Institution for Transforming India (Niti-Ayog) was established. The Ayog is a deviation from the erstwhile planning commission as it supports the bottom-down approach and thereby boosts cooperative federalism. In 2015, the United Nations introduced sustainable development goals and since then the Indian government in co-ordination with the Niti-ayog is striving to contribute to the

achievement of the SDGs. Various schemes of Indian government such as Swachh-Bharat, Mission Indradhanush, PM-JAY can be mapped to the various goals which have been determined by the UNO. Since lack of data was one of the major hindrances in the achievement of Millennium development goals, Niti ayog has started publishing SDG index since from 2018 with an objective to track the progress and problems of all states and union territories. Till now it has published two reports, SDG index 2018 and SDG index 2019. While 2018 index ignored SDG 12, 13, 14 and 17; 2019 index has covered SDG goals 1 to 16. The Ayog has stated no availability of data as the reason for excluding SDG 17 from the report.

3.1 Research Gap

Incorporation and implementation of SDGs is imperative for India to achieve Sustainable Development. There are 26 state and 7 Union territories in India, they are different in the terms of physical resources availability and size of domestic production. State-wise mapping of SDG is essential because many of the Indian states are larger than European nation in term of population and area occupied, such as Uttar Pradesh is 6th largest administrative unit in the world in term of population (Khan and Ansari, 2017). SDGs are novel to India and there is dearth of academic literature related to SDGs in India. Literature specifically related to current state of sustainable development in India and issue promoting SD could not be found and this is the research gap. This research Paper attempt to depict the current scenario of SD performance of each state of India and identify the issues which contribute to the better achievement of SDGs.

3.2 Research Objective

In the context of above discussed research gap this research paper attempt to answer the following objective:

- To evaluate the current state of SDGs achievement of the various states in India.
- To identify issues promoting SDGs
- To identify the shortcoming in adoption and implementation of SDGs in India

4. Discussion:

This following section is centered around the discussion with regards to achievement of SDGs in India.

SDG 1 (No Poverty) - To achieve SDG1, several government schemes such as MGNREGA, National Rural and Urban livelihood missions, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana, PM-JAY etc. has been playing a vital role. This is evident from the rapidly declining rates of people living below the poverty line. While the people living below the poverty line were 21.9% in 2011-12, the goal is to minimize the segment to 10.95% by 2030. As per SDG-Index 2019, six states and six union territories have already achieved this target. However, the composite index of the country has decreased. In 2018 the composite index was 54 whereas in 2019 it has reduced to 50.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) – Several governmental schemes such as provision of Mid-day meal in schools, poshan Abhiyan, a restructured and improved public distribution system, improved agricultural infrastructure and extension services by innovative interventions such as “Pradhan-mantra Fasal bima yojana” and “pradhan mantra Krishi sinchayee yojana” have been facilitated in achieving this goal. However, while in 2018, the composite index was 48, it has deteriorated to 35. The reduction in poverty

index along with the hunger index is a serious problem. It has to be mentioned here that out of 117 countries the rank of India was 102 in the recently published global hunger Index.

SDG 3 (Good health & well-being) - Goal 3 is one of the goals where India has improved its performance from 2018 to 2019. The composite index was 52 in 2018 which has improved to 61 in 2019. A reduced infant and maternal mortality rate coupled with the provision of Affordable health insurance scheme under PM-Jay has resulted in the improved. However, the large gap between performing and non-performing states in this parameter is a big concern.

SDG 4 (Quality education) - on this parameter the performance of India has been constant as for both 2018 and 2019, the composite index has been 58. Some of the major challenges in achievement of this goal have been poor teacher-student ratio, absenteeism, enrollment being a focal point rather than learning, high dropout rates and gender-discrimination. However, the government is making an attempt to improve the quality of education by the help of programmes such as “*Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*” which has merged the three programmes namely; *Sarv-Shiksha Abhiyan*, *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* and Teacher’s education. The flagship scheme of *Beti-Bachao, Beti-padhao* is creating an environment to promote gender parity in the field of education.

SDG 5 (Gender equality) - Gender disparity has been a major area of concern for the country. Traditionally, Indian society is considered to be patriarchal with less involvement of women in day to the day decision-making process. Majority of the females are home-makers which is considered a non-economic activity. Incidents such as dowry, rape, sexual harassment and female foeticides are still prevalent. These factors are evident from the abysmal labour workforce participation rate of 32%, with most of this 32% coming from regressive sectors such as tea plantation and agricultural labour. The problem is visible in SDG index of both 2018 and 2019 with only two states (Kerala and Sikkim in 2018 & Kerala and Himachal Pradesh in 2019) having an index of 50. The composite index is also worrisome with an index of 36 in 2018 and 42 in 2019. However, the improvement in the index is a relief with the government investing heavily in programmes such as *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana*, *Beti-Bachao Beti-Padhao*, *Sukanya Samriddhi* etc.

SDG 6 (Clean water & sanitation) – Since 2014, the government of India under the leadership of Prime minister Mr.Narendra Modi has created a significant mass movement of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation with the help of the ambitious *Swatch Bharat Abhiyan*. The movement has led to mobilization and awareness of cleanliness and its benefits to the ordinary citizens as well as civil societies. As a result, India has been doing exceptionally well in proceeding towards the achievement of this goal. The provision of safe drinking water, the abolition of open defecation has resulted in the magnificent composite index for both 2018 and 2019. In 2018 the composite index was 63 which shot up to 88 by 2019. The growth in the index is evident from the data that 100% rural household and 97.2% urban household have toilets.

SDG 7 (Affordable & clean energy) – This goal has also witnessed significant growth over the last two years. The composite index in this parameter has seen a massive jump from 51 in 2018 to 70 in 2019. Under the flagship programme of the government of India, “*Pradhan Mantri Sahaj bijli har ghar yojana- Saubhagya*”, a focus has been given by the government to ensure universal electrification with a special emphasises on rural electrification. The next step is to improve distribution as the

existing electricity supply channel is erratic and interrupted. Schemes such as Deendayal-gram Jyoti yojana, integrated power development scheme etc. have been made functional to achieve the same. The government has also been working extensively in the field of energy conservation and environmental protection with the help of providing LED bulb at a subsidized rate to common people. The pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which provides LPG gas to the poor household, has also contributed to a significant reduction in CO₂ emission.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and economic growth) - The growth in this parameter over the last two years has been stagnant. In 2018, the composite index was 65 whereas, in 2019, it has been 64. The decline in GDP rate along with a reduction in manufacturing activities can be attributed to this stagnation.

SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) - The composite index of this goal has jumped from 44 in 2018 to 65 in 2019. This growth is also visible in the Global Innovation Index in which India has increased its rank from 57 to 52. To achieve this objective, the government of India has been striving hard for institutional and structural reforms. Provision of Goods and Services Tax, Liberalization in foreign direct and foreign institutional investment policy, and the attempts to increase the ease of doing business in India are some examples of the attempt of the Indian government to boost industrial motivation. In the field of research and development, new efforts have been made to boost innovation by enhancing the role and importance of the office of comptroller-general of Patents, design & trademarks.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) - The composite index of this goal represents a decline over the last two years. While in 2018 the composite index was 71, it has been reduced to 64 in 2019. It represents the wide-ranging inequalities in India between rich and poor, male and female, etc. Although 46.4% of seats of the Panchayati raj institutions belong to women, the functioning of these institutions is still patriarchal and it is a male relative of the female legislature who usually dominates the proceedings. Government of India has tried to bridge the income gap by making provision in 2019 to allow 10% reservation to economically weaker sections of the society irrespective of their caste, creed and religion. To strengthen the progress of SC and ST citizens of India the parliament of India has passed the 126th amendment of the constitution and has extended the period of the reservation to 10 years.

SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) – India, like several other developing countries, has been witnessing a period of massive urbanization. As larger areas have been urbanized, a need is there for planned development and provision of several amenities such as transportation, water and sanitation, facilitation of educational institutions, healthcare facilities etc. Unfortunately, India has been performing very poorly in this regard. India scored only 39 in SDG 2018 Index and even in 2019, India has been able to score only 53 with several states and union territories still scoring below 50. Provision of affordable houses is very important in this regard, the unavailability of affordable houses in Metropolitan cities have resulted in the creation of large slums which are often devoid of even the basic infrastructural needs. In this regard, the government of India is accelerating the scheme of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, as of 2019, around 31% of the household under this scheme has been completed.

SDG 15 (Life on land) - The performance of India to achieve this goal has deteriorated in the last two years. While in 2018, the composite index was 90, in 2019 it has been decreased drastically to 66.

There are several challenges to pursue this goal, In a developing country such as India, the focus is on Industrialization, The liberal policies of the government has resulted in industrialization of Tier III and Tier IV cities also. The large population of India also pressurizes the agriculture production which has resulted in excessive use of chemical fertilizers. Also, 57 of the fauna species in India are on the verge of extinction. All these factors are contributing to the abysmal performance of India in this regard.

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and strong institutions) - As per the SDG Index report for 2018 as well as 2019, India has been doing reasonably well in this regard. It has achieved scores of 71 and 72 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. A reduction in crime rate by 16% after 2015, accessibility of judicial procedures and provision of legal identity in the form of Aadhar card have been attributed for achieving this goal.

Table 1- SDG Index composite score 2018 and 2019 with a maximum index score being 100

SDG Goal	Composite Index 2018	Composite Index 2019
SDG 1	54	50
SDG 2	48	35
SDG 3	52	61
SDG 4	58	58
SDG 5	36	42
SDG 6	63	88
SDG 7	51	70
SDG 8	65	64
SDG 9	44	65
SDG 10	71	64
SDG 11	39	53
SDG 12	90	66
SDG 13	Not calculated	60
SDG 14	Not calculated	Not calculated
SDG 15	Not calculated	66
SDG 16	71	72
SDG 17	Not calculated	Not calculated
Overall Score- India	57	60

Source: NITI Ayog,

It has to be noticed that the SDG-Index of 2018 did not give much emphasise on SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14 and SDG 17, therefore, we do not have any data of 2018 to compare with 2019. In 2019, the composite index for SDG 12 was 55 whereas sufficient data was not available for SDG 13, 14 and 17.

4.1 State-wise analysis - One of the major concerns about the progress of achievement of sustainable development goals is the wide gap between performing and non- performing states. As per the report of 2019, Kerala which is the top-performing state has a composite score of 70 whereas Bihar which is at the bottom is having a score of 50. One thing which is clear from analyzing both top-performing and worst-performing states (Table 2 and Table 3) is that states of southern India is certainly performing better and the situation is bleak in eastern parts of India.

Table 2: Top 5 performing states of SDG 2019

States	SDG Index
Kerala	70
Himachal Pradesh	69
Andhra Pradesh	67
Tamil Nadu	67
Telangana	67

Source: NITI Ayog,

Table 3: Top 5 worst performing states of SDG 2019

States	SDG Index
Bihar	50
Jharkhand	53
Arunachal Pradesh	53
Meghalaya	54
UP/Assam	55

Source: NITI Ayog,

Among the 16 SDGs, marine ecosystems are for coastal states only, and scores on this one were not counted in the composite total. In the other SDGs, the best performers were Tamil Nadu for ‘no poverty’; Goa for ‘zero hunger’; Kerala for ‘good health’; Himachal Pradesh for ‘quality education’; Himachal again for ‘gender equality ‘; Andhra Pradesh for ‘clean water and sanitation’; Sikkim for ‘affordable and clean energy’; Telangana for ‘decent work & economic growth’; Gujarat for ‘industry, innovation and infrastructure’; Telangana for ‘reduced inequalities’; Goa for ‘sustainable cities and communities’; Nagaland for ‘sustainable consumption and production’; Karnataka for ‘climate action’; Manipur for ‘life and land’; and Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat for ‘peace, justice, strong institutions’(Refer Table 4).

Table 4: SDG wise performance list in all parameters

SDG	Top Performing State	Worst Performing State
SDG1	Tamil Nadu	Jharkhand
SDG2	Goa	Jharkhand
SDG3	Kerala	Nagaland
SDG4	Himachal Pradesh	Bihar
SDG5	Himachal Pradesh	Telangana
SDG6	Andhra Pradesh	Tripura
SDG7	Sikkim	Odisha
SDG8	Telangana	Manipur
SDG9	Gujarat	Mizoram
SDG10	Telangana	Goa
SDG11	Goa	Meghalaya
SDG12	Nagaland	Rajasthan
SDG13	Karnataka	Jharkhand

SDG14	-	-
SDG15	Manipur	Haryana
SDG16	Andhra Pradesh	Assam

Source: NITI Ayog,

5. Conclusion

From the analysis, we may conclude that although India is showing significant progress, it still needs to develop innovative strategies and policy formulation in certain aspect. One of the major targets should be bridging the north-south gap in development. The poor performance of the northeastern state is a major paradox as they are rich in both resources and human capital. The fact that still there are several citizens who are not able to afford two meals in a day is a major factor to accelerate the anti-poverty programmes to ensure the right to food to the citizens. On the other hand, the growing industrialization shall be supplemented with efforts to minimize pollution. Therefore, India still needs to travel a long way to ensure the achievement of sustainable development goals.

6. References

- 1) Assembly, G. (2015). sustainable Development goals. *SDGs), Transforming our world: the, 2030*.
- 2) Assembly, G. (2015). sustainable Development goals. *SDGs), Transforming our world: the, 2030*.
- 3) Carley, M., & Christie, I. (2017). *Managing sustainable development*. Routledge.
- 4) Elliott, J. (2012). *An introduction to sustainable development*. Routledge.
- 5) Falebita, O., & Koul, S. (2018). From developing to sustainable economy: A comparative assessment of India and Nigeria. *Environmental development, 25*, 130-137.
- 6) Ghosh, N., Saha, R., & Bhowmick, S. (2019). SDG Index and Ease of Doing Business in India: A Sub-National Study. *Occasional Papers*.
- 7) Kaygusuz, K. (2012). Energy for sustainable development: A case of developing countries. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 16*(2), 1116-1126.
- 8) Keesstra, S. D., Bouma, J., Wallinga, J., Tittonell, P., Smith, P., Cerdà, A., ... & Bardgett, R. D. (2016). The significance of soils and soil science towards realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *Soil*.
- 9) Kumar, S., Kumar, N., & Vivekadhish, S. (2016). Millennium development goals (MDGS) to sustainable development goals (SDGS): Addressing unfinished agenda and strengthening sustainable development and partnership. *Indian journal of community medicine: official publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine, 41*(1), 1.
- 10) Kumar, S., Kumar, N., & Vivekadhish, S. (2016). Millennium development goals (MDGS) to sustainable development goals (SDGS): Addressing unfinished agenda and strengthening sustainable development and partnership. *Indian journal of community medicine: official publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine, 41*(1), 1.
- 11) Lele, S. M. (1991). Sustainable development: a critical review. *World development, 19*(6), 607-621.
- 12) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, (2015). Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in India: A Study of Financial Requirements

and Gaps Retrieved from

https://www.devalt.org/images/L3_ProjectPdfs/AchievingSDGsinIndia_DA_21Sept.pdf

- 13) Sachs, J. D. (2012). From millennium development goals to sustainable development goals. *The Lancet*, 379(9832), 2206-2211.
- 14) Samal, M. (2019). The Role of Legal and Social Policies in Attaining Sustainable Urban Development in India. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 8(4), 140-140.
- 15) Sudhir, V., Srinivasan, G., & Muraleedharan, V. R. (1997). Planning for sustainable solid waste management in urban India. *System Dynamics Review: The Journal of the System Dynamics Society*, 13(3), 223-246.
- 16) UN, (2017). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017. Retrieved from <https://sdgactioncampaign.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/07/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2017.pdf>
- 17) UN, (2018). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf>
- 18) UN, (2019). The Future Is Now Science for Achieving Sustainable Development, Global Sustainable Development Report, (2019). Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf
- 19) UN, (2019). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>
- 20) UNDP, (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/brochure/SDGs_Booklet_Web_En.pdf