

The state of the States

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"The SDG India Index overlooks the aspect of inter-dependence of Sustainable Development Goals."

India was one among the 193 United Nations member states to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. It has been making sincere efforts to achieve these goals. The SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018, released to the public in December 2018 by NITI Aayog, is a useful comparative account of how well different States and Union Territories have performed so far in their efforts to achieve these goals.

In this effort, it has not been possible to establish suitable indicators for three of the 17 goals, including climate action (SDG-13). This is on account of either lack of identification of appropriate indicators or of the inability to compare different States. On the whole, 62 indicators representing 14 goals have been identified based on their measurability across States over time. A progress performance assessment has been made towards targets set by the Government of India, or the UN SDGs target for 2030, or the average of the three best-performing States. For reasons of comparability, all these indicators are normalised.

Four categories

Based on a scale of 0 to 100, the States are categorised into four groups: achievers, front runners, performers, and aspirants. Achievers are those States which have already accomplished the set target. Front runners are those States that are very close to realising them. A majority of the States are categorised as performers and some lag behind as aspirants. Although classification sounds like an appropriate thing to do, there is arbitrariness in the exercise in the sense that in a unitary range, those States with scores till the midpoint are categorised as aspirants and a cluster of States in a close range of progress are termed as performers. A few States are designated as front runners. The three front runner States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh — assume values of 66, 69 and 69, respectively, as against a range of States with values between 50 and 64. With the national score being 57, almost 17 States qualify as above or equal to the national score. Plotted on a graph, there is a negatively skewed distribution of scores with a reasonable tail to the left, a fat presence in the middle, and a tapering to the right. This needs to be recognised in classification; otherwise the arbitrariness with which the classification is made somewhat hints at a purposive designation of a few States in two extremes and a major share of them in between.

The problem of averaging

Further, when one reads into the performance on various SDGs, it is found that many States fall into the aspirant category, especially for SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-9 (industry innovation and infrastructure) and SDG-11 (sustainable cities and communities). These kinds of differences could well be emerging owing to a different number of indicators considered under different SDGs as well as their corresponding variability across the States. This is evident in the variation of scores across different goals. For instance, in case of goals 1 and 2, the range for the majority of the States is between 35 and 80. For goals 3 and 6, the range is between 25 and 100. Again, for goal 5, it ranges between 24 and 50. Given these variations across different goals, merely averaging them not only compromises on robustness but also masks the disaggregated story to a large extent. Not only does the feature of the progress performance pattern need to be recognised in such classification but also the pathway of progress in development indicators, which has a character removed from linearity. Given that this is a measure of progress towards a target, the States near the target get a value closer to one compared to those which are away from the target assuming a lower value. These values are determined in relative terms in the sense that they represent the unitary position of the States within the available scale of gap between the minimum achieved and the target. Such positioning conveys a linear distance, which does not differentiate a given distance between two States which have performed well compared with another pair of States which are far from achieving the target.

The difference in progress between the three front runner States is three points. This is perhaps not similar to the distance between the performing States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which too have a three-point difference. Such comprehension of achievement is limited as regards to comparing States, let alone designating them into four categories.

What can be done?

Finally, the process of aggregation adopted to present the summary index of compliance with the targets being a simple average assumes that each of the goals as well as the corresponding set of indicators are equally important and can substitute for each other. This also overlooks the aspect of inter-dependence of various goals, although it is upfront stated in the exercise. To ensure minimum robustness of this measure, a geometric average would have served towards avoiding perfect substitutability of one goal with the other. It means achievement of progress in one goal cannot compensate for compromise in another. While this exercise serves as a report card of performance of States as regards compliance with the SDGs, its scientific adequacy is compromised with

arbitrariness that presents a stereotypical pattern of performance rather than bringing out surprises.

The choice of indicators representing specific goals need not necessarily be guided by availability but also their explicit independence from one another. This may help in making a uniform set of indicators for each of the goals with proper representation without duplication. On the whole, this performance assessment may not be misleading, but it does not help us understand the relative significance of compliance in some goals that helps in compliance of the other. Thus, performance assessment of SDGs while overlooking the strict interdependence of them may not be rewarding.



Sustainable development goal

introduction

- As we know that Millennium Development Goals were finished in 2015, therefore the decision to achieve sustainable Development Goals was taken at the United Nations summit instead of these development goals.
- In this regard the meeting of the General Assembly was held in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015.
- In the same meeting, 17 targets were set for the next 15 years, which was decided to achieve in the period from 2016 to 2030. 193 countries participated in this meeting.
- The theme of this UN Summit was "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

main point

- The Sustainable Development Goal is a group of programs based on 17 major goals and 169 supportive goals.
- These goals and supporting goals have been accepted by the member countries in the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference.
- The aim of all these member countries is to be achieved by the year 2030.
- The aim of these goals is to ensure sustainable development. The format of these are more broader than the previous millennium development goals.

These 17 goals are as follows: -

Goal-1

Objective - Complete eradication of Poverty
Details - To eliminate the extreme poverty of all the people in every country of the world. Right now those people are considered to be extremely poor who spend life in less than \$ 1.90 a day.

Goal -2

Objective - End of starvation
Details - Promotion of end of starvation, food security and better nutrition and sustainable agriculture.

Goal-3

Objectives - Good health and well-Being.
Details - To give healthy life to all and improve the

- quality of life of everyone.
- **Goal-4**
- **Objective** - Quality education
- **Details** - Ensuring inclusive and just, quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- **Goal-5**
- **Objectives** - Gender Equality
- **Details** - Attaining gender equality and efforts for empowering all women and girls.
- **Goal-6**
- **Objective** - clean water and sanitation.
- **Details** - To ensure the availability of clean water and sanitation for all and its sustainable management.
- **Goal-7**
- **Objective** - Affordable and clean energy.
- **Details** - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- **Goal-8**
- **Objectives** - Decent work and economic growth.
- **Details** - Promote continuous, inclusive and sustainable economic development, along with productive employment and decent work for everyone.
- **Goal-9**
- **Objectives** - Development of industry, innovation and infrastructure.
- **Details** - Building strong infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and promoting innovation.
- **Goal-10**
- **Objective** - Reduce inequality.
- **Details** - Reducing inequality within the countries and among the countries.
- **Goal-11**
- **Objective** - Sustainable cities and community development.
- **Details** - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, flexible and sustainable.
- **Goal-12**
- **Objectives** - Responsible consumption and production.
- **Details** - Making production and consumption pattern sustainable.



Goal-13**Objective** - Climate change**Details** - To ensure immediate action to tackle climate change and its effects.**Goal-14****Objective**- life below water**Details** - To ensure the conservation and utilization of oceans, seas and sea resources for sustainable development.**Goal-15****Objective** - Life on the land.**Details** - Attempts to prevent the growing loss of

terrestrial ecosystems, safe forests, land degradation and biodiversity that promote sustainable use.

Goal-16**Objectives** - Peace, Justice and strong institutions.**Details** - To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and to ensure the access to justice for all.**Goal-17****Objectives** - Partnerships for the goals.**Details** - Reviving the global partnership for sustainable development and strengthening the means of implementation.**Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)****1. Consider the following statements-**

1. Only Tamil Nadu was announced as front runner in the Baseline Report of Sustainable Development Goals India Index.
2. Sustainable Development Goals is based on 17 major goals and 169 supportive goals.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. The growth in the direction of sustainable development of states in the Baseline Report of Sustainable Development Goals India Index released by NITI Ayog recently. Do you agree that this report manifests the real situation of states? Present your argument in favour and against.

(250 Words)**Note:** Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 11 Feb. is 1(d)