

Research Question: What can India do to achieve its chief SDG Targets before 2030?

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015, aimed at resolving the world's most pressing challenges by the year 2030. As the second most populated country in the world, India faces various socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, environment degradation, hunger, and inadequate access to education and healthcare. Considering these pertinent issues, the country's chief SDGs are:-

- I. Goal 1 (No Poverty)
- II. Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being)
- III. Goal 4 (Quality Education)
- IV. Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
- V. Goal 13 (Climate Action)

In this report, I will be evaluating India's existing policies in achieving these goals, while also recommending additional policies and measures that would accelerate India's timeline in achieving these targets by 2030.

2. How India Implements & Assesses Policies Fulfilling the SDGs

India is committed to implementing the SDGs based on the nationally defined indicators responding to national priorities and needs. In this effort, towards integrating SDGs into the country's on-going national and sub-national policies and programs, at national level, NITI Aayog has mapped the SDGs with centrally sponsored programs of concerned Central Ministries/Departments. The National Institute for Transforming India – The NITI Aayog – serves as the apex public policy think tank of the Government of India. It is also the nodal agency tasked with catalyzing economic development and fostering cooperative federalism and moving away from bargaining federalism through the involvement of Indian State Governments in the economic policy-making process. The NITI Aayog has been entrusted with the mandate to design strategic and long-term policy, program frameworks, and initiatives to fulfil the SDGs and monitor progress with the active involvement of states, civil society, and other think tanks.

Further, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) developed a National Indicator Framework (NIF) consisting originally of 306 national indicators along with identified data sources and periodicity following due consultation process with concerned Ministries/Departments, UN Agencies, and other stakeholders.

Table 1: Goal-wise Distribution of NIF

Goal	Number of indicators in NIF (original)	Number of indicators in NIF (version 2.1)
Goal 1: No Poverty	19	21
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	19	19
Goal 3: Good Health and Well Being	41	42
Goal 4: Quality Education	20	19
Goal 5: Gender Equality	29	29
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	19	16
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	5	5
Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	40	32
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	18	16
Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities	7	9
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	16	15
Goal 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production	17	15
Goal 13: Climate Action	4	5
Goal 14: Life Below Water	13	11
Goal 15: Life on Land	21	16
Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	18	19
Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals	0	13
Total Number of Indicators	306	302

Source: MOSPI – Sustainable Development Goals NIF Progress Report (2020)

Presently, at national level, data flows from Official Statistical System, and various data source ministries are involved in the process of providing data on SDGs. MoSPI coordinates with these line ministries for institutionalizing the data flow for SDG indicators. NIF is the backbone of monitoring SDGs at the national level and provides appropriate direction to policy makers and implementing agencies of various schemes and programs. Keeping in view the localization of SDGs, states/UTs are also carrying out similar exercises at state and district levels.

3. Progress with Chief SDGs in the SDG India Index's 4th Edition

India has taken significant strides in accelerating progress on the SDGs between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 editions of the Index. The composite score for India improved from 57 in 2018 to 66 in 2020-21 to further to 71 in 2023-24. Noteworthy advancements have been observed in Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 13 (Climate Action). Among these, Goal 13 (Climate Action) has shown the most significant improvement, with its score increasing from 54 to 67. Goal 1 (No Poverty) follows closely, with its score rising significantly from 60 to 72. The progress underscores the effects of the focused programmatic interventions and schemes of the Union and State Governments in improving the lives of citizens. Significant progress has also been made in Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The Government's focus on food and nutrition security, health, education, electrification, housing for all, sanitation, and energy has significantly contributed to the improvements.

Key interventions facilitating SDG achievements include:

1. Over 4 crore houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).
2. 11 crore Toilets & 2.23 lakh Community Sanitary Complexes in rural areas.
3. 10 crore LPG connections under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

4. Tap water connections in over 14.9 crore households under Jal Jeevan Mission.
5. Over 30 crore beneficiaries under Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
6. Coverage of over 80 crore people under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
7. Access to 150,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandir which offer primary medical care and provide affordable generic medicines.
8. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of ₹34 lakh crore made through PM-Jan Dhan accounts.
9. The Skill India Mission has led to over 1.4 crore youth being trained and upskilled and has reskilled 54 lakh youth.
10. PM Mudra Yojana sanctioned 43 crore loans aggregating to ₹22.5 lakh crore for entrepreneurial aspirations of the youth besides Funds of Funds.
11. Start Up India and Start Up Guarantee schemes assisting the youth.
12. The Saubhagya scheme for access to electricity.
13. Emphasis on renewable energy resulted in an increase in solar power capacity from 2.82 GW to 73.32 GW in the past decade.
14. Between 2017 and 2023, India has added around 100 GW of installed electric capacity, of which around 80% is attributed to non-fossil fuel-based resource.
15. Improvement in digital infrastructure with reduced internet data costs by 97% which has in turn positively affected and fostered financial inclusion.

4. Effects of Policies on each Key Goal

a. Goal 1 – No Poverty

Goal 1 (No Poverty) improved by 12 points from 2020-21 (Index 3) to 2023-24 (Index 4), advancing from Performer to Front Runner category. Multidimensional poverty nearly halved from 24.8% to 14.96% between 2015-16 and 2019-21. Multidimensional poverty for 2022-23 further likely dropped to 11.28%, with 24.8 crore people moving out of multidimensional poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23. 99.7% were offered employment of the persons demanding employment under MGNREGA in 2023–2024. 95.4% households live in pucca/semi-pucca houses as per NFHS-5 (2019-21). 41% of households have at least one member covered under health insurance or health scheme as per NFHS-5 (2019-21), an improvement from 28.7% in NFHS-4 (2015-16).

b. Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-being

Goal 3 improved substantially from 52 in 2018 to 77 in 2023-24. Maternal Mortality Rate per 1,00,000 live births stand at 97. There has been reduced under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) from 36 in 2016-18 to 32 in 2018-20. 93.23% children aged 9-11 months are fully immunized. 87.13% tuberculosis cases are notified against target. 97.18% of total deliveries are reported in health institutions.

c. Goal 4 – Quality Education

The adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) for elementary education is 96.5% for 2021-22, up from 87.26% in 2018-19, with 14 States and UTs achieving 100%. The Pupil Teacher Ratio is 18 for 2021-22, thus achieving the target of 30. 88.65% of schools have access to both electricity and drinking water. 100% parity between females and males in Higher Education (18-23 years).

d. Goal 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

There has been significant improvement in score from 63 in 2018 to 89 in 2023-24. All individual household toilets have been constructed against target and all districts have verified to be ODF under SBM(G). 99.29% of rural households have improved their source of drinking water. 94.7% of schools have functional toilets for girls. Overexploitation in blocks/mandals/taluks has reduced from 17.24% in 2017 to 11.23% in 2022.

e. Goal 13 – Climate Action

There was a drastic improvement of 13 points in overall composite score of Goal 13 from 54 (Performer category) in SDG India Index 3 (2020-21) to 67 (Front Runner category) in the SDG India Index 4 (2023-24). The disaster preparedness score as per Disaster Resilience Index stands at 19.20. There was significant improvement in electricity generation from renewable energy from 36.37% in 2020 to 43.28% in 2024. 94.86% of industries now comply with environmental standards.

5. Limitations of the Policies & Recommendations to Overcome them

a. Goal 1 – No Poverty

Despite significant economic growth, poverty remains a pervasive issue, with a substantial portion of the population living below the poverty line. *Inequality in wealth distribution hampers efforts to eradicate poverty.* The informal sector dominates employment, *leading to job insecurity and inadequate social safety nets for vulnerable populations*, which impedes poverty alleviation efforts.

To overcome these limitations, policymakers must resort to more equitable measures to enhance social welfare. For instance, to alleviate uneven wealth distribution, the government must resort to more *progressive taxation systems*, wherein those from lower-income groups are not burdened disproportionately. The government can also do this by *reducing indirect (regressive) taxes* on general goods and services, to reduce the tax burden on lower-income groups.

To mitigate the problem of job insecurity, the government should *subsidize infant industries and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and encourage entrepreneurship* among marginalized communities to create sustainable employment opportunities. This will, in turn, reduce people's reliance on informal sector jobs. Additionally, the government should also *subsidize education* further, especially for people from rural backgrounds as this will enable them to seek employment in formal sectors such as the tertiary sector in the long run, reducing employment in the informal sector and increasing job security and overall income.

b. Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-being

Access to quality healthcare is uneven, particularly in rural areas. The healthcare system is often underfunded, leading to inadequate infrastructure and services. India also faces significant public health challenges, including *high rates of communicable diseases and increasing non-communicable diseases*, which strain the healthcare system and resources.

To rectify this, the government should *increase healthcare funding* and allocate more resources to healthcare, particularly in rural areas, to improve infrastructure, access to services, and the quality of healthcare. Policymakers should also encourage preventive health by developing and implementing comprehensive *public health campaigns targeting communicable and non-communicable diseases*, emphasizing preventive care and health education.

c. Goal 4 – Quality Education

While enrolment rates have improved, the *quality of education remains low*, with significant disparities in educational outcomes based on *socio-economic status* and geography. Additionally, there are *high dropout rates*, particularly among marginalized communities, hindering progress toward universal education. Factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers contribute to this issue.

The government must enhance educational quality by *investing in training and curriculum development* to improve the quality of education. Standardized assessments should also be implemented to monitor educational outcomes and address disparities. To reduce dropout rates, the government should *create targeted interventions for at-risk students*, including financial incentives for families and support programs that address barriers to education, such as transportation and childcare.

d. Goal 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

India faces severe *water scarcity* due to over-extraction, pollution, and climate change impacts, affecting access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Although initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission have improved sanitation, many rural and urban areas still *lack adequate sanitation infrastructure*, leading to health risks.

The government should *increase investments in water supply and sanitation infrastructure*, particularly in rural and underserved urban areas, to ensure access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities. They should also *promote water conservation* by implementing policies that encourage water conservation practices in agriculture and urban areas, such as rainwater harvesting and wastewater recycling. Additionally, manufacturing factories should be *incentivized to adopt sustainable practices through tradable permits* to reduce the industrial waste and debris that is disposed in water bodies.

e. Goal 13 – Climate Action

India is *highly vulnerable to climate change impacts*, including extreme weather events and rising sea levels, which threaten livelihoods and exacerbate poverty. There is a *gap between policy formulation and implementation*, with insufficient funding and coordination among various government levels hindering effective climate action.

The government should implement policies such as *carbon taxes and tradable permits* to incentivize businesses to adopt more sustainable practices. There should also be an increase in investments in renewable energy sources to reduce toxic emissions. Additionally, the government must *foster better coordination*

among various levels of government and stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of SDG-related policies. This includes integrating SDGs into local planning and budgeting processes.

6. Conclusion

Through these findings, it is evident that all 17 SDGs are closely intertwined. While the 5 aforementioned SDGs are the key targets of India, they also have an indirect effect on other SDGs. For example, in achieving 100% parity between females and males in Higher Education (18-23 years), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) were simultaneously fulfilled along with a direct effect on SDG 4 (Quality Education). Additionally, in the long run, this will increase labor force participation, leading to the fulfilment of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

While India has made significant headway in achieving its SDG targets, implementing these recommendations may resolve the limitations warranted by current policies and facilitate progress toward achieving the SDGs by 2030.

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