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INDIA is falling short in nine of 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), trailing global averages and ranking 109th out of 167 countries, according to the Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) State of States: Are We on Track to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals 2030, released this week at the Anil Agarwal Dialogue 2025. The report, drawing from the Sustainable Development Report 2024 by Dublin University, NITI Aayog's SDG India Index 2023-24, and the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections 2011-2036 by the National Commission on Population, paints a mixed picture for the nation of over 1.4 billion. Tamil Nadu shines at third place with a score of 78 but lags in 19 of 108 indicators — 18% — across 12 SDGs, reflecting India's broader battle to meet the 2030 deadline.

INDIA'S SDG STRUGGLE: UNEVEN AND SLOW PROGRESS CASTS SHADOW ON 2030 DEADLINE

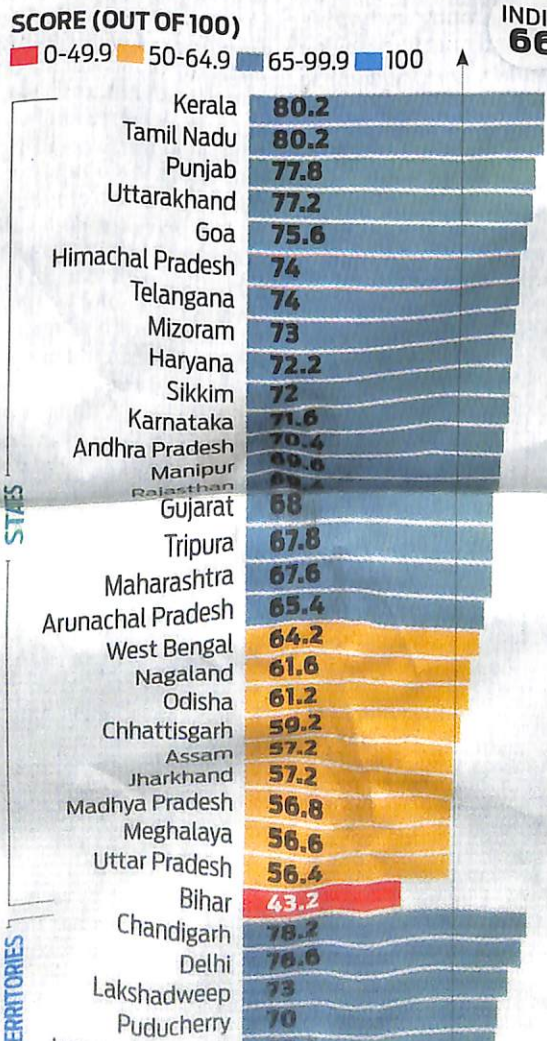
Nationally, India's SDG score rose from 66 in 2020-21 to 71 in 2023-24, showing some progress. Yet, the CSE report flags stagnation since 2020 in SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). SDG 1 (No Poverty) is the lone bright spot, with multidimensional poverty — covering health, education, and living standards — down to 14.96%. Still, Bihar (34) and Arunachal Pradesh (below 50) lagged, eight states like UP scored 50-64, and a key measure — extreme poverty below \$1.25 daily — was dropped in 2023-24, leaving gaps in the data. The report warns that, globally, no SDG will be met by 2030 at this pace, with India's 2019-2022 decline only slightly offset in 2023.

Tamil Nadu, projected to exceed 76 million people by 2036, ranks third behind Kerala and Uttarakhand. Its score of 78 beats the national 71, earning 'front runner' status (65-99) in 13 of 17 SDGs. The state leads SDG 1 with a 2.2% poverty rate — far below India's 14.96% — thanks to robust welfare schemes. It scores 100 in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), ensuring every home has electricity, and lifts SDG 13 (Climate Action) to 67 with 25% forest cover to curb climate change.

However, Tamil Nadu stumbles in 19 of 108 indicators (18%), spread across 12 SDGs, notably SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). In SDG 5, it scores 50-64, with a sex ratio of 929 females per 1,000 males matching the national figure. SDG 14 (Life Below Water) also hits 50-64, with 43% of its coastline eroding, while SDG 11 and SDG 15 fall below the national average due to urban strain and weak afforestation data. State scores range from 34 in Bihar to 100 in Goa and Uttarakhand.

Towards dignified life

Five Sustainable Development Goals are critical to ensuring a dignified life for citizens—No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). Overall, 10 states and one Union Territory (UT)—home to 51 per cent of India's population—have achieved less than 65 per cent of the targets in these key SDGs



INDIA 66 **TARGET 100**

SDG 1 No poverty
7 states and 3 UTs, accounting for nearly 38 per cent of the population, have a score of less than 65 in the Goal

SDG 2 Zero hunger
17 states and 2 UTs, accounting for nearly 79 per cent of the population, have a score of less than 65 in the Goal

SDG 3 Good health and well-being
5 states, accounting for nearly 28 per cent of the population, have a score of less than 65 in the Goal

SDG 4 Quality education
17 states and 3 UTs, accounting for nearly 75 per cent of the population, have a score of less than 65 in the Goal

SDG 12 Decent work and economic growth
8 states and 2 UTs, accounting for nearly 47

and SDG 2 (40). Tamil Nadu's 78 outpaces Uttar Pradesh (64) and Gujarat (67), where 30-43% of indicators lag below 50. India performs well in four SDGs — SDG 3, SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7, and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) — with all 36 states and UTs hitting at least half their targets. SDG 7's strong showing, with most states above 65 except Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Daman and Diu, stems from tracking just electricity and clean cooking fuel access, skipping global metrics like CO2 emissions. SDG 5, however, is a national low point, with 14 states below 50 and 17 at 50-64. India's sex ratio is 929, 29.2% of married women face spousal violence, and only 13.96% of landholdings are female-owned, underscoring gender inequality.

Data gaps hinder progress. Tamil Nadu lacks water quality stats for SDG 6 and air quality data for SDG 11, while afforestation figures for SDG 15 are missing — mirroring 13 other states. Nationally, SDG 1 omits extreme poverty, SDG 7 skips emissions, and SDG 14 lacks coastal UT data like Andaman and Nicobar. SDG 13 misses weather-related death tolls for 11 regions, and SDG 12 ignores e-waste. Of 108 indicators (106 for non-coastal states), 16 states lag in 30-43%, and Tamil Nadu struggles with one in six.

Kiran Pandey, Programme Director of the Environment Resources Unit at CSE told TNE: "there are some limitations in the report due to data gaps. For instance, the country has removed a key indicator — eradication of extreme poverty (measured as people living on less than US \$1.25 per day) — from its latest assessment in 2023-24, which hides the ground reality. India's performance in SDG 5—Gender Equality—is the weakest, with the country falling significantly behind on all eight key parameters. The sex ratio at birth remains skewed 29.2% of married women face spousal violence, and only 13.96% of landholdings are owned by women, highlighting deep-rooted societal challenges, which worsen when it comes to Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Wage disparity, poor workplace representation, and limited autonomy — only 54% of women have personal mobile phones and 74% of married women participate in family planning decisions — further indicate gender inequality, dragging 14 states and UTs below 50 and 17 into the 50-64 range. While India's performance in SDG 7 — Affordable and Clean Energy — appears promising, this stems largely from limited parameters: access to electricity and clean cooking fuel (LPG and PNG). Globally, CO2 emissions and renew-

