

IS INDIA DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT ITS ENVIRONMENT?

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The current issue has flagged the gradual decline in the performance of the country and certain states in meeting the targets set by the SDGs. | Photo Credit: K.V.S. Giri/The Hindu

India has been slipping in the global rank in meeting the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for the past five years, with the country dropping another place since 2021, according to a report published by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The wide-ranging [goals](#) are interlinked, connecting environmental, socio-economic development, while focusing on sustainability. The goals include zero poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being among others.

The [report](#), entitled 'State of India's Environment 2023', looks at 17 goals adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 that act as "shared a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future."

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Published annually, the report examines several metrics such as the state of development, effects of climate change, health, decarbonisation, agriculture, biodiversity, and the energy sector.

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India's rank worldwide has slipped nine places from 116 to 121 since 2017. It now ranks behind most of its neighbours: Bhutan (70), Sri Lanka (76), Nepal (98), and Bangladesh (104). Pakistan is the only other country in the subcontinent that has ranked behind India, at 125.

The rollback has been attributed to declining performance on 11 goals, such as zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5) and sustainable communities (SDG 11), the report said.

There has also been stagnation in goals pertaining to life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Goals on responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13) are on track, it added.

Individual states in India have also performed below average. States that usually fare well in these indices have also slipped in their performance. Kerala, which ranked first, has fallen behind on four goals; Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, which share the second rank, have slipped on four and six goals respectively.

Meanwhile, the performance of most states has declined on goals regarding life on land and decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, and good-quality education. Life on land has seen the most decline.

The report also highlighted two main trends in 2022-2023: a turn back to fossil fuels and reversing the gains made towards transitioning to clean energy due to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and the impact of climate change with extreme weather events worldwide.

Some of the other findings include:

“There is news to cheer. The environment is now mainstream – we are all outraged at how pollution is affecting our health or climate change is devastating our future. But the bad news is that we are not acting at the scale of the devastation that we see around us. We need to take more deliberate steps to reverse the damage,” said Sunita Narain, director general of CSE, in a [release](#) during the launch of the annual report.

Apart from the grimmer findings, the report also highlights progress in some sectors, including policy changes in waste management sector and recycling.

“In industry, we have now identified pathways to decarbonise industrial sectors that are usually difficult to decarbonise. In agriculture, strong evidence is emerging of the efficacy of traditional and regenerative farming methods. On the issue of forests and biodiversity, losses of forests are a dark truth, but at the same time more and more communities are demanding rights over forests – what is more, these rights are being granted,” Ms Narain added.

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