

A PERSISTING VARIANCE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SUSTAINABLE GOALS INDEX

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Planning & Economic Reforms

The [NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index for 2019](#), released on Monday, does not reveal any surprising information. The South's Kerala, [Tamil Nadu](#), Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka are joined by Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Goa as the best performers while the northern/north-central and north-eastern States have been laggardly in achieving the U.N.-mandated goals by 2030. Poor performers such as Uttar Pradesh have shown discernible advances in the indices — measured between 2018-19 — especially in adopting cleaner energy and improving sanitation. But the regional divide is stark in basic livelihood goals such as “eradication of poverty”, and “good health and well being” or even in measures such as “industry, innovation and infrastructure”. This points to variances in both State governance and in administrative structures and implementation of welfare policies. The South, led by Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has done much more in orienting administrative institutions to deliver on basic welfare, leading to actions on health care, education, poverty eradication and hunger, with a governance structure tuned to competitively monitoring actions on these fronts. The converse is true of northern States — Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — where outcomes have remained relatively poor despite there not being much of a difference in the governance structure. The obvious answer to the puzzle could be the presence of historical socio-political movements that have resulted in greater circulation of elites in power and which have addressed issues related to welfare more thoroughly in the South — Kerala and T.N in particular. Yet even these States need to go further in reaching the UN's SDGs and achieving the living standards of both the first world and other developing nations.

The western States, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra, are also better off in economic growth and industry, indicating a diversified economy, higher employment ratios, skilled labour and better entrepreneurial culture. A major fault-line in India is in achieving gender equality, where barring middling performers such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, the rest of the country falls short. Low sex ratio (896 females per 1,000 males), poor labour force participation and presence in managerial positions (only 17.5% and 30%, according to the report), high level of informality of labour, a major gender pay gap (females earn 78% of wages earned by males in regular salaried employment), lack of adequate representation in governance (14.4% in Parliament, but 44.4% in local government) besides high crime rates against women and girls are among the major national level indicators that have contributed to this. States need to climb a mountain to achieve gender equality, but immediate steps such as enhancing women's participation in governance through parliamentary reservations would go a long way in addressing several of the issues faced by them.

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