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Sustainable Development Goals in Maharashtra: Progress and Challenges (2023-24)

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global development framework that integrates economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. In the context of India's federal structure, the role of state governments will be crucial in achieving the goals of 'Development Goals 2030'. In this context, the research paper presented here assesses Maharashtra's performance in terms of SDGs based on the Sustainable Development Goals India Index 2023-24 published by NITI Aayog. A descriptive and analytical research methodology has been adopted for this study, and a detailed analysis of the SDGs score, regional differences and social inequalities have been conducted. The study has revealed that Maharashtra's performance in the areas of clean and affordable energy, sustainable cities, water and sanitation, and institutional governance is remarkable. However, significant limitations are clearly evident in the achievement of the goals of zero hunger, gender equality, industry and innovation. The study findings suggest that the SDGs progress in Maharashtra is largely based on infrastructure-oriented development and has not achieved the desired momentum in social and human development indicators. Consequently, the need for policy interventions that focus on nutrition security, gender-inclusive growth, and decentralized innovation systems is highlighted. The present research paper highlights the importance of state-level SDGs assessment from both academic and policy perspectives.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Maharashtra, SDG India Index, Regional Development, Inclusive Growth, India.

Introduction:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, are a comprehensive global development framework that goes beyond traditional economic development concepts to integrate social justice, environmental protection and institutional good governance. These goals are based on the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and focus on achieving equitable distribution of the benefits of development. Under this initiative, through 17 goals and 169 targets, concrete and measurable progress has been set by 2030 on multifaceted issues such as poverty eradication, quality education, health care, gender equality, climate action, sustainable consumption and production patterns and strong institutions. Therefore, the SDGs are not just a declarative framework for development, but a results-oriented and indicator-based planning system.

In a country like India, which is federal, socio-economic and demographically diverse, the effective implementation of the SDGs largely depends on the policy capacity of state governments. The role of states becomes more important as most of the subjects in the areas of education, health, agriculture, water supply, local infrastructure and social protection are included in the state list. In this context, the Sustainable Development Goals India Index developed by the NITI Aayog is an important policy tool for comparative and quantitative assessment of the progress of states. The index provides scores to states on the basis of various social, economic and environmental indicators and categorizes them into categories such as progressive, progressive, leading and goal-oriented. As a result, both the principles of competitive and cooperative federalism are promoted and evidence-based policymaking is guided.

Maharashtra is the leading economic state in India and contributes a large share to the country's gross domestic product. Maharashtra has played a significant role in the national economy due to industrialization, urbanization, expansion of the service sector, Mumbai's position as a financial hub and competent infrastructure. The state has made remarkable progress in infrastructure development through renewable energy initiatives, transport arrangements, industrial development belts and smart city projects.

However, along with this economic progress, structural problems such as rural poverty, instability in the agricultural sector, malnutrition, gender inequality, development gaps in tribal and backward areas and regional imbalances are still strongly felt. Social and human development indices are found to be relatively low in Vidarbha, Marathwada and some tribal-dominated districts. This makes it clear that the benefits of development have not reached all levels equally. Against this backdrop, it becomes necessary to examine the extent to which the economic growth of the state is actually inclusive and sustainable, and how compatible it is with social justice and environmental balance. In this context, the present research paper attempts to highlight the strengths, limitations and future policy directions in the development process by conducting an in-depth analysis of Maharashtra's performance in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Review of Literature:

According to Bhanumurthy and Rao (2020), the literature on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shows that in a large and diverse country like India, it is essential to assess the SDGs not only at the national level but also at the state level. Given the state-wise disparities and socio-economic differences, a state-level analysis is more effective.

According to a study by Kumar and Singh (2022), states with strong infrastructure and administrative capacity perform relatively better on economic and environmental goals. However, several studies have shown that their progress on social goals such as hunger eradication, gender equality and social protection remains relatively limited.

Reports by the Government of Maharashtra (2023) highlight the state's industrial development, increasing adoption of renewable energy and progress in urban infrastructure. At the same time, according to a report by the Ministry of Rural Development (2022), challenges such as agrarian distress, malnutrition among children and women and low female labour force participation rates are consistently reported.

A review of the available literature reveals that there is relatively limited availability of

Table 1: Goal-wise SDG Scores of Maharashtra (2023–24)

SDG No.	Goal Title	Score
SDG 1	No Poverty	68
SDG 2	Zero Hunger	45
SDG 3	Good Health & Well-being	84
SDG 4	Quality Education	67
SDG 5	Gender Equality	54
SDG 6	Clean Water & Sanitation	93
SDG 7	Affordable & Clean Energy	100
SDG 8	Decent Work & Economic Growth	73
SDG 9	Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	54
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities	86
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities & Communities	98
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption & Production	77
SDG 13	Climate Action	73
SDG 14	Life Below Water	58
SDG 15	Life on Land	68
SDG 16	Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	76
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals	--

Source: NITI Aayog (2024)

comprehensive and objective-wise analysis of Maharashtra's performance in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. The present research paper attempts to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the present research are as follows.

1. To analyse the performance of Maharashtra in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on the SDGs-India Index 2023–24.
2. To identify the strengths and limitations in Maharashtra's sustainable development performance.
3. To examine the major social and economic challenges that hinder inclusive development.
4. To suggest policy recommendations for achieving balanced and inclusive SDGs.

Methodology:

The study is based on secondary sources such as SDGs India Index and Dashboard 2023–24 NITI Aayog, official reports of the Government of Maharashtra, UN SDGs documents and various research papers and government policy reports. Descriptive and analytical research methods have been adopted for the study. This research paper has done a comparative analysis of SDGs scores by objective, analysis of regional and social disparities and policy-oriented clinical presentation. SDGs scores are calculated on a scale of 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating better performance.

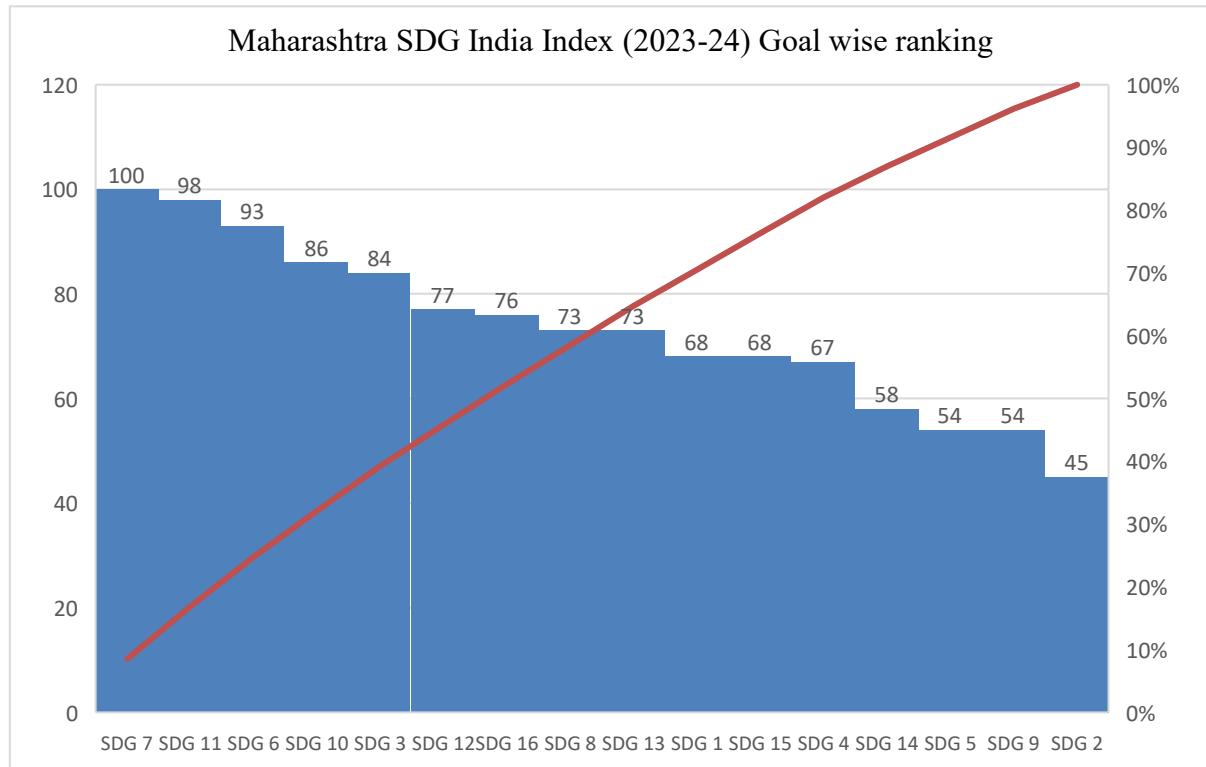
Maharashtra's SDG Performance:

According to the SDGs India Index 2023–24, Maharashtra has a cumulative score of approximately 73 on the SDGs, placing it among the top-performing states. However, Maharashtra's performance across various goals is uneven. While the state has made significant progress on some goals, it is clearly limited on some social goals.

Information on partnerships for SDG 17 goals is often not included in the SDG India Index at the individual state-level or is not published separately, as indicators related to this goal are primarily in the nature of national and international partnerships.

Chart 1: Goal-wise SDG Scores of Maharashtra (2023–24)
Findings:

investment is needed in carbon emission control



• **High-performing targets:**

Under SDG 7 on clean and affordable energy, Maharashtra has successfully achieved universal electrification, rural and remote areas electrification and increased solar and wind power capacity by scoring 100 points. Under SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, urban infrastructure has been made more efficient through the implementation of urban transport systems, metro projects, waste management, smart city initiatives and affordable housing (PMAY). Under SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, the Jal Jeevan Mission, construction of household toilets, solid waste and wastewater management and expansion of water supply networks have significantly improved the healthy living standards of citizens.

• **Medium-performing targets:**

Under SDG 3 on good health and well-being, positive progress has been made in reducing maternal and child mortality, expanding infant immunization and strengthening public health systems; however, rural-urban health gaps, malnutrition and quality of health services remain issues. SDG 8 Decent jobs and economic growth While the growth in the industrial and services sectors is positive in the area of decent work and economic growth, the large share of the informal sector, skills and employment mismatches and youth unemployment are key challenges. SDG 13 Climate Action Although climate action plans, disaster management systems and green energy initiatives are being implemented, more

and climate adaptation. SDG 16 Good Governance sees improvements in e-governance, transparency in service delivery and law and order; however, more efforts are needed to increase the speed of justice, control of corruption and administrative efficiency.

• **Goals with performance challenges:**

The low score in the SDG 2 Zero Hunger or Zero Hunger target indicates malnutrition, anaemia, stunting in children and nutritional deficiencies in the state. The main reasons behind this situation are instability in agricultural income, limited productive capacity of small and marginal farmers and lack of nutrition-sensitive policies. SDG 5 Gender Equality is facing significant challenges due to low participation of women in the labour market, wage inequality, limited representation in decision-making and socio-cultural barriers. SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure development is facing challenges due to district-wise industrial imbalances, insufficient investment in research and development, technical limitations in the micro, small and medium enterprises sector and lack of communication infrastructure.

This analysis shows that although Maharashtra has made significant progress in infrastructure and energy, there is a need for strategic and focused intervention by the state government in the areas of human development, gender equality and innovation-led

industrialisation. These disparities indicate that economic growth has not translated evenly into social development outcomes.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Strengthening Nutrition Security:**

The concept of nutrition security is not limited to food supply alone but is related to ensuring the continuous availability of quality, safe and nutritious food. This requires effective implementation of the Poshan Abhiyan, integrated coordination between Anganwadi and health systems, and targeted government interventions against malnutrition. Increasing the production of pulses, coarse grains, fruits and vegetables through nutrition-sensitive agriculture is important. It is also necessary to ensure the fulfilment of essential nutrients in the diet by including various food components in the public distribution system.

- **Gender-inclusive development:**

The economic, social and political empowerment of women is essential to achieve inclusive growth. Skill development, digital and financial literacy, and entrepreneurship are necessary for women. It is important to ensure equal pay and social security by providing safe and equal employment opportunities. In addition, it is necessary to increase the participation of women in self-help groups, women's commissions and local self-government bodies and empower them at the institutional level.

- **Innovation and Industrial Development:**

Innovation-based industrialization is very important to enhance long-term economic competitiveness. Startups, research and technology transfer can be promoted by establishing district-level innovation centres. Modernization of the micro, small and medium enterprises sector, adoption of digital technology and adoption of green production methods are necessary. Local resource-based industries can be encouraged by strengthening the research and development sector through public-private partnerships.

- **Balanced Regional Development:**

It is necessary to implement policies that achieve urban-rural coordination to reduce regional disparities. Strengthening infrastructure, education and health services in rural areas, as well as connecting local industries to markets are important. Implementing needs-based planning at the district and taluka levels through decentralization, as well as effectively implementing targeted development programs for backward and tribal areas are key elements of inclusive and balanced development.

Conclusion:

Maharashtra's performance on the Sustainable Development Goals reflects a development paradigm based on strong infrastructure, clean energy transition and urban governance. However, limitations in the areas of hunger

eradication, gender equality and innovation highlight the structural limitations of infrastructure-centric development. Prioritizing social investment, gender-sensitive policies and decentralized innovation systems is essential to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

This analysis shows that although Maharashtra has made significant progress in infrastructure and energy, there is a need for strategic and focused intervention by the state government in the areas of human development, gender equality and innovation-led industrialisation. These disparities indicate that economic growth has not translated evenly into social development outcomes.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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