

## India's progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

### Why in news?

The Prime Minister expressed concern that progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) seems to be slowing down.

### What are Sustainable Development Goals?

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 with a vision to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.
- The SDGs, officially known as 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' is a set of 17 Global Goals with 169 targets between them.
- India is one of the signatory countries that has committed to achieving these goals by 2030.
- The UN member states use the SDGs to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years.
- The SDGs framework sets targets for 231 unique indicators related to economic development, social welfare and environmental sustainability.

### Where does India currently stand in the progress on SDG indicators?

- India is roughly halfway to the deadline to achieve SDGs.
- A recent study assesses India's progress on 33 welfare indicators, covering 9 SDGs and the results are mixed.
- **Positive trends** - India is 'On-Target' to meeting 14 of the 33 SDGs, including indicators for neonatal and under-five mortality, full vaccination, improved sanitation, and electricity access.
- But, the national 'On-Target' designation does not apply equally across all districts.
- **Concerning trends** - For 19 of the 33 SDG indicators, the current pace of improvement is not enough to meet SDG targets.
- Despite a national policy push for clean fuel for cooking, more than two-thirds (479) of districts remain 'Off-Target'.
- **Heightened concern** - No district in India has yet succeeded in eliminating the practice of girl child marriage before the legal age of 18 years.
- Despite the overall expansion of mobile phone access in India (93% of households), only 56% women report owning a mobile phone.

### Why India's SDG progress is important?

- India is expected to surpass China as the world's most populous country in 2023, as per UN projections.
- India will become the third largest economy in the world over the next decade.
- Regardless of the global progress that has been made to date, realising Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) at a global scale is intrinsically tied to the success of India for the above 2 reasons.

### **What could be adapted from India's recent mobilisation for COVID-19?**

- India adopted an 'optimisation' approach to the COVID-19 pandemic giving the focus and resources necessary to succeed.
- The following lessons from COVID-19 could be adopted in realising SDGs.

*'Optimisation problem' is the designing and implementing a policy response to a pressing issue relying on political will, responsive administration, adequate resources, and sound data.*

- **Political-administrative synergy** - Strong and sustained political leadership supported by a responsive administrative structure at all levels, from national to the district level.
- This synergy which was willing to learn and undertake course corrections in real-time was critical to the success of vaccination programme and rollout of a comprehensive relief package.
- **Public data platform** - The existing digital infrastructure, as well as new, indigenous initiatives such as the Co-WIN data platform made India's success with COVID-19 possible.
- India must put in place a coordinated, public data platform for population health management, by
- India must consolidate its many platforms into an integrated digital resource for district administrators, as well as State and national policy makers.
- **Proactive Programmes** - A targeted SDG strategy delivered at scale must be executed with the same timeliness of India's COVID-19 relief package.
- For example, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (March 2020) later augmented Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (2023) covering 800 million people.
- The relief programme was a mix of spending to provide direct in-kind and economic support, as well as measures aimed at revitalising the economy, small businesses, and agriculture.
- This was critical in blunting the adverse effects of COVID-19, especially for vulnerable and the socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
- It also measurably demonstrated the value of a proactive, government-supported programme specifically aimed at improving people's well-being.

### **What does India need to do?**

- There is no historical precedence on how to deliver development to a billion-plus people in a healthy and sustainable manner.
- India needs to innovate a new policy path in order to meet the aspirations of its people in the decade ahead.
- India has proved that it is possible to deliver at scale in such an ambitious and comprehensive manner, in successfully delivering a real-time response to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

- To succeed in meeting its SDG targets, a similar concerted, pioneering, nation-wide effort would be the need of the hour.

## References

1. [The Hindu - India, its SDG pledge goal, and the strategy to apply](#)

