

Assessing India's Sustainable Development Goals Progress: An Analysis of Performance, Measurement, and Alignment with Viksit Bharat 2047

Dr. Rajeev Kumar

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Economics, Mahila College Dalmianagar, Dehri-On-Sone, Rohtas (Bihar)

Email: [rajeev11gaya\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:rajeev11gaya[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *India's engagement with the 2030 Agenda has produced one of the most elaborate subnational monitoring architectures in the developing world. Yet, the analytical relationship between measured SDG performance and the country's long-horizon development aspiration, Viksit Bharat 2047, remains under-theorised. This paper undertakes a three-part assessment. First, it interrogates the measurement apparatus itself, identifying six structural limitations - indicator substitution across editions, data vintage lags, ceiling effects and index saturation, equal-weight aggregation, the "averaging out" of distributional deficits, and the divergence between domestic and international scoring -that together inflate apparent convergence toward the Goals. Third, it constructs an alignment assessment between SDG outcomes and the 2047 vision, arguing that the binding constraints on Viksit Bharat lie precisely in the goals where India's measured performance is weakest: SDG 2 on course to approach the saturation ceiling well before 2047, rendering it unfit as a metric for the 2047 horizon. It concludes with proposals for a successor measurement framework - disaggregated, distribution-sensitive, stock-and-flow differentiated, and anchored in a "Viksit Bharat Indicator Framework" that extends beyond 2030 targets to high-income-economy benchmarks.*

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; SDG India Index; composite indicators; Viksit Bharat 2047.

1. Introduction

It was simultaneously the country with the largest absolute number of people living in deprivation on most SDG indicators, and the country whose domestic development programming was most densely aligned, at least rhetorically, with the seventeen Goals. A decade later, that duality persists - but a third element has been introduced. India now operates two development horizons at once: a multilateral one expiring in 2030, and a national one extending to 2047.

This creates an analytical problem that the existing literature has not adequately addressed. The SDG framework was designed as a deprivation-elimination agenda - its targets are largely expressed as thresholds (zero poverty, universal access, full coverage). The Viksit Bharat indicators that measure progress on the first become progressively less informative as the economy approaches the second. A country can achieve near-complete household electrification (SDG 7) and still be nowhere near the energy-productivity frontier of a high-income economy. A country can eliminate open defecation and still have inadequate wastewater treatment.

This paper asks three connected questions:

- **Performance:** What does the available evidence establish about the pace, composition and spatial distribution of India's SDG progress between 2018 and 2026?
- **Measurement:** To what extent are the observed gains an artefact of index construction rather than a reflection of outcome change, and what are the implications for the credibility of the monitoring architecture?

- **Alignment:** Where do they diverge, and what measurement framework is required for the 2030–2047 Period?

The paper's contribution is threefold. Methodologically, it applies a required-pace decomposition and a sigma-convergence test to the SDG India Index series, demonstrating that the headline composite is approaching functional saturation. Substantively, it identifies a "scissors gap" between India's domestic and international SDG assessments and traces it to specific methodological divergences rather than to data manipulation. Normatively, it proposes a successor indicator framework.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap

2.1 Composite indicators and their discontents.

The methodological critique of composite development indicators is well established. Nardo et al. and the OECD–JRC handbook set out the sequence of discretionary choices - indicator selection, normalisation, weighting, aggregation - each of which embeds a normative judgment. Ravallion demonstrated for the Human Development Index that aggregation choices impose implicit trade-off rates between dimensions that are rarely acknowledged and often implausible. Permanyer showed that country rankings in multidimensional indices are frequently not robust to weighting perturbations. Applied to the SDGs, Diaz-Sarachaga et al. argued that the global SDG Index systematically disadvantages low-income countries by including indicators with sparse data. At the same time, Miola and Schiltz catalogued the indicator-availability problem across the 231-indicator global framework.

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2.2 SDG measurement in India

The Indian literature divides into three strands. The first is descriptive-institutional: accounts of the localisation process, the role of NITI Aayog's twin mandate, and the construction of state-level indicator frameworks. The second is critical-statistical: analyses of gaps in the National Indicator Framework (NIF), the absence of recent large-sample consumption data for much of the period, and the consequent reliance on administrative rather than survey data. Scholars in this tradition - notably in *Economic & Political Weekly* - have questioned whether improvements in administratively reported coverage constitute improvements in outcomes. The third strand is spatial: studies of inter-state and inter-district divergence, often using the SDG India Index itself as the dependent variable.

2.3 The research gap.

Three gaps are evident. First, published analyses of the SDG India Index largely predate the fourth edition (2023–24) and subsequent global reports; no systematic analysis of the longest available domestic time series has addressed comparability breaks. Second, the divergence between India's domestic composite score and its global SDR score, the former at 71 and the latter at 68.3 with a mid-nineties rank, has been noted journalistically but not analytically decomposed. Third, and most importantly, no scholarly work has yet assessed the measurement adequacy of the SDG framework for the Viksit Bharat 2047 horizon. This paper addresses all three.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Deprivation-elimination versus frontier-attainment.

Let a development indicator x be bounded by a deprivation floor x_0 and an aspirational frontier x^* . SDG targets typically set the normative reference at a threshold x_T where $x_0 < x_T < x^*$ - universal access, zero hunger, full enrolment. Composite indices normalise performance as $x_i \rightarrow x_T$.

The index saturates: further real improvement toward x^* generates no measured gain. Formally, the index's marginal in formativeness $\partial_i / \partial x_i$, falls to zero once the threshold is attained, even though the development distance $x^* - x_T$ may be large. This is not a technical quibble. It is the central reason why the SDG India Index, however well-constructed for the 2030 Agenda, cannot serve as the metric for 2047. India's score on SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) is in the mid-nineties, but this reflects attainment of household electrification and clean-cooking-access thresholds, not convergence with high-income-economy energy productivity, grid reliability, or per capita clean-energy consumption.

3.2 The alignment matrix

We define alignment between an SDG goal g and the Viksit Bharat objective along two dimensions:

- **Instrumental centrality** - the extent to which attainment of g is a causal precondition for high-income transition; and
- **Measurement adequacy** - the extent to which the current indicator set captures the relevant frontier distance. This yields a four-quadrant classification (Table 6, Section 6) distinguishing goals that are well-measured and central, central but poorly measured, well-measured but peripheral to income convergence, and doubly deficient.

3.3 Hypotheses

- **H1 (deceleration):** The pace of composite-score improvement is decelerating in the goals closest to saturation, so that aggregate gains increasingly reflect progress in a shrinking set of goals.
- **H2 (sigma convergence):** Inter-state dispersion in composite scores has declined, driven by catch-up among initially low-scoring states.
- **H3 (measurement divergence):** The gap between domestic and international assessments of India's SDG performance is attributable to indicator-set composition and reference-value selection rather than to differences in underlying data.
- **H4 (misalignment):** The goals with the weakest measured performance are disproportionately those with the highest instrumental centrality for Viksit Bharat 2047.

4. Data and Methodology

4.1 Data sources

The analysis draws on four bodies of data.

- SDG India Index, editions 1–4.** The baseline report (2018) covered 13 goals and 62 indicators; the second edition (2019–20) expanded to 16 goals and 100 indicators; the third (2020–21) used 115 indicators; and the fourth (2023–24) uses 113 indicators aligned to the MOSPI National Indicator Framework, computing goal-wise scores on 16 SDGs for all states and union territories, with composite scores on a 0–100 scale. SDG 17 is treated qualitatively and excluded from the composite; SDG 14 is scored only for coastal states.
- Sustainable Development Report (SDSN), 2016–2026.** The SDR provides India's global SDG Index score, rank, spillover score and goal-level dashboard/trend classifications,
- National statistical sources.** MOSPI's SDG National Indicator Framework Progress Report series and the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey; NFHS-5; Periodic Labour Force Survey; Central Electricity Authority and MNRE capacity data; Ministry of Education UDISE+ and the national achievement surveys.
- Policy documents - Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy.**

4.2 Methods

Method 1 - Trajectory and required-pace analysis. For the national composite, the observed annual pace is

computed as $pobs = St1 - St0t1 - t0$ pobs = $t1 - t0St1 - St0$ and the required pace to attain a target score ST by year T as $preq = (ST - St1) / (T - t1)$ $preq = (ST - St1) / (T - t1)$. The pace ratio $\pi = pobs/preq$ indicates whether the current trajectory is sufficient. Projected attainment year under linear extrapolation is $T_{proj} = t1 + (ST - St1)/pobs$ $T_{proj} = t1 + (ST - St1)/pobs$.

Method 2 - Goal-level gap decomposition. For each goal, the residual gap $Gg = 100 - sg$ is decomposed by its share of the total residual gap, $\omega g = Gg / \sum gGg$, identifying where the aggregate deficit is concentrated.

Method 3 - Sigma convergence. Dispersion is measured by the range $R_t = \max iSit - \min iSit$ and, where the full cross-section is available, the coefficient of variation $CV_t = \sigma_t / \mu_t$ $CV_t = \sigma_t / \mu_t$. Declining R_t R_t and CV_t indicate sigma convergence.

Method 4 -Beta convergence. The specification $\Delta Si = \alpha + \beta Si$, $2018 + \epsilon_i \Delta Si = \alpha + \beta Si$, $2018 + \epsilon_i$ is estimated across states and UTs, with $\beta < 0$ $\beta < 0$ indicating catch-up. Because initial scores are bounded above, β β is biased toward negativity by construction; the test is therefore interpreted jointly with the sigma results and with a specification excluding saturated observations.

Method 5 -Comparative index decomposition. The domestic and SDR scores are compared along four axes, indicator count and composition, reference-value selection, normalisation bounds, and vintage of underlying data, to attribute the divergence.

Method 6 -Alignment mapping. Each goal is scored on instrumental centrality (derived from the growth-accounting and human-capital literature on middle-income transitions) and measurement adequacy (derived from the threshold-versus-frontier distinction in Section 3.1).

4.3 Limitations. Three limitations must be stated.

First, successive editions of the SDG India Index are not strictly comparable: indicator sets, reference values, and, in some cases, goal coverage change between editions, so inter-temporal comparisons of composite scores are indicative rather than exact. NITI Aayog itself notes methodological refinement across editions.

Second, several indicators rely on administrative reporting of scheme coverage rather than independently surveyed outcomes, introducing a potential upward bias.

Third, the analysis is conducted at state / UT level; substantial intra-state heterogeneity, documented in district-level indices, is not captured.

5. Results

5.1 The national trajectory

India's composite SDG India Index score rose from 57 in 2018 to 66 in 2020–21 and to 71 in 2023–24.

Table 1 sets out the implied pace.

Table 1: National composite score trajectory and implied pace, 2018–2023–24

Interval	Score change	Approx. years	Pace (points/year)
2018 → 2020–21	57 → 66 (+9)	~2.5	3.6
2020–21 → 2023–24	66 → 71 (+5)	~3.0	1.7
2018 → 2023–24 (full)	57 → 71 (+14)	~5.5	2.5

Source: Author's computation.

Two findings follow. First, the pace has decelerated - from roughly 3.6 points per year in the first interval to 1.7 in the second. This is consistent with H1: the early gains were concentrated in goals with large, easily closed access gaps (sanitation, electrification, cooking fuel), while the later period requires quality improvement- and outcome-based indicators that move more slowly.

Second, the **required pace to 2030 is far above the observed pace**. Against an observed full-period pace of 2.5, the pace ratio is $\pi \approx 0.52$ $\pi \approx 0.52$. Under linear extrapolation, India would reach approximately 86 by 2030 and would cross 100 only around 2035 – 36.

The second result has a counterintuitive corollary central to this paper's argument: on any plausible trajectory, the composite index reaches its ceiling well before 2047. The index therefore cannot discriminate among development states in the final two decades of the Viksit Bharat horizon. Measured on this instrument, India would appear to have "completed" its development agenda approximately a decade before the 2047 milestone - an obvious reduction and direct evidence of the saturation problem formalised in Section 3.1.

5.2 Goal-level performance and gap concentration

Table 2: Goal-wise scores, change, and share of residual gap (SDG India Index)

Goal	2020–21	2023–24	Change	Residual gap (100 – score)	Share of total gap (%)
1 No Poverty	60	72	12	28	7.6
2 Zero Hunger	47	52	5	48	13
3 Health & Well-being	66	77	11	23	6.2
4 Quality Education	57	61	4	39	10.6
5 Gender Equality	48	49	1	51	13.8
6 Water & Sanitation	83	89	6	11	3
7 Affordable Clean Energy	92	96	4	4	1.1
8 Decent Work & Growth	61	68	7	32	8.7
9 Industry & Innovation	55	61	6	39	10.6
10 Reduced Inequalities	67	65	–2	35	9.5

11 Sustainable Cities	79	83	4	17	4.6
12 Responsible Consumption	74	81	7	19	5.2
13 Climate Action	54	67	13	33	8.9
15 Life on Land	66	75	9	25	6.8
16 Peace & Institutions	74	68	-6	32	8.7
Composite	66	71	5	29	—

Source: Compiled and computed from. SDG 14 excluded (coastal states only); SDG 17 not scored. Shares computed over the 15 goals listed and sum to 100 with rounding.

Three results stand out.

Progress is highly uneven across goals: The largest gains are recorded on SDG 13 (Climate Action, +13) and SDG 1 (No Poverty, +12), which NITI Aayog itself identifies as the strongest performers. SDG 3 also advances substantially (+11). At the other extreme, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) moves by a single point, and two goals -SDG 10

The residual gap is concentrated in five goals: SDG 5, SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 9 and SDG 10 together account for approximately 57 per cent of the total residual gap, despite being five of fifteen goals. Conversely, SDG 7 and SDG 6, the two best-performing goals, contribute barely 4 per cent of the remaining deficit, meaning further effort on these goals cannot materially move the composite. This is the arithmetic of saturation: the headline score is now hostage to precisely the goals on which progress has been slowest.

The improvement on SDG 13 requires careful interpretation: The thirteen-point gain on Climate Action is the single largest contributor to the recent composite improvement. However, climate-action indicators in the domestic framework capture renewable capacity installation, disaster-management preparedness, and per capita emissions relative to a reference, variables on which India performs well partly because of its low per-capita emissions base. As per capita income rises toward Viksit Bharat levels, the emissions-per-capita indicator will mechanically deteriorate unless decoupling occurs at an unprecedented rate. **The SDG 13 score is therefore structurally pro-cyclical in the wrong direction:** it is highest when the economy is poorest. This is perhaps the clearest single instance of misalignment between the SDG measurement framework and the 2047 objective.

5.3 Subnational performance and convergence

Table 3: Dispersion of state / UT composite scores

Edition	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Front-runner states /UTs (score 65–99)
2018 (baseline)	42	69	27	—
2023–24	57	79	22	32 (10 new entrants)

Source: author's computation of range.

Sigma convergence is confirmed

The range of state scores narrowed from 27 points in 2018 to 22 points in 2023–24, a 19 per cent reduction in dispersion, while the floor rose by 15 points and the ceiling by 10. Critically, the minimum score in 2023 – 24 (57) equals the national average of 2018: the worst-performing state today is where the average state was six years ago. All states and UTs improved their scores, and 32 are now classified as

front-runners, including 10 new entrants: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

Table 4: Fastest-improving states/UTs, 2018 to 2023–24

Rank	State/UT	Score increase (points)
1	Uttar Pradesh	25
2	Jammu & Kashmir	21
3	Uttarakhand	19
4	Sikkim	18
5	Haryana	17
6	Assam, Tripura, Punjab	16 each
9	Madhya Pradesh, Odisha	15 each

Source: Beta convergence is evident but asymmetric

Uttar Pradesh, which recorded the lowest baseline score in 2018 (42), registered the largest improvement (+25), reaching approximately 67. Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Assam - all low-baseline states - appear among the fastest movers. This pattern is consistent with $\beta < 0$: initially poorer performers improved faster, as H2 predicts. The mechanism is intuitive. Low-baseline states had the largest unexploited access gaps, and the nationally financed, centrally designed delivery programmes of the period - housing, sanitation, clean cooking fuel, financial inclusion, electrification, insurance coverage - are precisely the interventions that close access gaps rapidly and are measured by the indicators most heavily represented in the index.

Two qualifications are essential, however.

First, convergence in the index is not convergence in the economy. Over the same period in which SDG composite scores converged, per capita net state domestic product between the richest and poorest major states continued to diverge. The reconciliation is straightforward: the index measures largely threshold-based access, which is amenable to national programme delivery, whereas income divergence is driven by productivity, industrial composition and agglomeration - none of which are well captured in the composite. Convergence on the index and income divergence are therefore not contradictory findings but complementary evidence of what the index does and does not measure.

Second, the catch-up is concentrated in the storable goals. States that improved fastest did so principally on SDG 6, 7, 1 and 11 - the goals now nearest their ceilings. The next phase of convergence would require catching up on SDG 4 (learning outcomes), SDG 5, SDG 9, and SDG 2, goals that depend on state-level institutional capacity, teacher quality, and local governance and nutrition systems rather than

centrally transferable physical assets. There is no strong reason to expect the convergence rate observed in 2018 – 2024 to persist in 2024 – 2030.

5.4 The domestic–international divergence

Table 5: India in the global Sustainable Development Report

Edition	SDG Index score	Rank	Universe	Notes
SDR 2025 (10th ed.)	~67	99	167 countries	First entry into the top 100
SDR 2026 (11th ed.)	68.3	94	169 countries	Spillover score 95.7; highest-ever rank

Source: SDR 2026 also records that, among major powers, China and India have registered.

The largest gains in SDG Index ranking since 2015, rising 14 and 18 places respectively, while the United States declined five positions.

Here is the paper's central measurement finding. In 2023 – 24, the domestic composite index places India at 71 on a 0–100 scale; the global index places India at 68.3 on a nominally identical scale, with a rank in the mid-nineties of 169 countries. The scores are numerically close, but their interpretive content differs entirely. A domestic score of 71 is reported as "front-runner" status; a global score of 68.3 corresponds to a rank in the bottom half of the world distribution, with major challenges remaining on a substantial share of goals.

Decomposing the divergence (Method 5) yields four sources:

- **Indicator composition.** The domestic index uses 113 indicators drawn from the NIF, selected for state-level availability and national policy salience. The global index uses a different, partly non-overlapping set, including indicators on which India performs poorly and that have no domestic counterpart, notably certain nutrition, air-quality, biodiversity-protection, press-freedom, and labour-rights measures.
- **Reference values.** The domestic index normalises against national targets, several of which are less demanding than the global SDG target values the SDR uses. Where the domestic target is the national programme target rather than the global SDG threshold, scores rise mechanically.
- **Normalisation bounds.** The choice of lower bound (worst performer versus an absolute floor) materially affects scores; the two indices make different choices, and the domestic index's state-relative framing compresses scores upward.
- **Vintage and provenance.** Domestic indicators rely more on administrative scheme-coverage data, which update rapidly; global indicators rely more on survey and modelled estimates, which lag and respond less quickly to programme rollout.

H3 is therefore supported: the divergence is methodological, not evidentiary. But the implication is not that one index is "right". Instead, the two indices answer different questions: "how far has India moved toward its own targets?" versus

"where does India stand in the world distribution?" Conflating them systematically produces over-optimistic policy narratives. The SDR's spillover score of 95.7 reinforces this reading: India imposes very low negative externalities on other countries' SDG attainment, largely because of low per capita consumption, and this will also deteriorate as incomes rise.

5.5 Six structural limitations of the measurement architecture

Synthesising the foregoing, we identify the following limitations.

(L1) Inter-edition non-comparability. Indicator sets changed across all four editions (62 indicators and 13 goals in 2018; 100 and 16 in 2019–20; 115 in 2020–21; 113 in 2023–24). The reported improvement from 57 to 71 is therefore a comparison across different measuring instruments. Some portion of the 14-point gain is attributable to instrument change rather than outcome change. Published material cannot determine the magnitude of this component, which is itself a finding: no back-casting of earlier editions onto the current indicator set has been published.

(L2) Administrative-data dependence and outcome substitution. Indicators capturing coverage (households provided, accounts opened, toilets constructed, connections released) are substituted for indicators capturing outcome (usage, functionality, service quality). The EPW-centred critical literature has repeatedly made this point. The substitution is defensible on availability grounds but systematically favours flows over stocks and installation over function.

(L3) Saturation and ceiling effects. As Sections 3.1 and 5.2 show, goals scoring above 85 contribute almost nothing to further composite movement while remaining far from the high-income frontier. The index's informativeness is declining precisely as India's development challenge shifts to quality.

(L4) Equal weighting. The composite assigns equal weight to each goal, implying that a one-point gain on SDG 7 is equivalent to a one-point gain on SDG 4. No development theory supports this equivalence, and the ranking depends on this assumption. A weighting scheme reflecting instrumental centrality to long-run growth and welfare would reduce India's composite substantially, since the heavily deficient goals (2, 4, 5, 9) are among the most growth-critical.

(L5) Distributional insensitivity. Goal scores are computed on state means. A state can improve its score while intra-state inequality widens, across districts, between urban and rural areas, and across caste, tribe, gender, and religious groups. The "leave no one behind" principle, formally central to the 2030 Agenda, is operationally absent from the composite. The decline in the SDG 10 score is the only point at which inequality enters the headline number, and it does so weakly.

(L6) Structural perversity in environmental indicators. As argued in Section 5.2, per capita emissions-type indicators reward poverty. Any serious alignment of SDG measurement with Viksit Bharat requires replacing level-based environmental indicators with intensity- and decoupling-based ones (emissions per unit GVA, material footprint per unit output, water productivity), on which India performs considerably worse.

6. Alignment with Viksit Bharat 2047

6.1 The arithmetic of the 2047 objective

Viksit Bharat 2047 implies, at minimum, transition to high-income status by the Independence centenary. The arithmetic is demanding. Attaining high-income thresholds within approximately two decades requires sustained real per capita growth in the region of 6–7 per cent annually, maintained without interruption for twenty-plus years - a performance achieved historically by a small number of East Asian economies, each of which did so based on exceptional human-capital accumulation, high investment rates, manufacturing-led structural transformation and rapid total-factor-productivity growth.

Each of these four preconditions maps onto an SDG where India's measured performance is weak:

- **Human capital** → SDG 4 (score 61) and SDG 2 (score 52). Learning outcomes and early-childhood nutrition are the binding constraints; stunting prevalence recorded in NFHS-5 and foundational-literacy deficits documented in national and independent assessments directly constrain future labour productivity.
- **Labour-force utilisation** → SDG 5 (score 49) and SDG 8 (score 68). Female labour- force participation, though recently rising in PLFS estimates, remains far below comparator economies; the growth cost of under-utilised female labour is the single largest identified drag on India's potential output in the comparative literature.
- **Innovation and structural transformation** → SDG 9 (score 61). Gross expenditure on R&D as a share of GDP remains below 0.7 per cent, compared with 2–4 per cent in economies that completed the high-income transition. Manufacturing's share of GVA has not risen materially.
- **Inclusive distribution** → SDG 10 (score 65, declining). Sustained high growth with widening dispersion risks the political-economy instability that has terminated growth episodes elsewhere.

6.2 The alignment matrix

Table 6: Alignment of SDGs with Viksit Bharat 2047 - centrality and measurement adequacy

Quadrant	Characterisation	Goals	Implication
I. High centrality, adequate measurement	Growth-critical and reasonably well captured	SDG 8, SDG 10	Retain and strengthen indicators; address substantive deficit
II. High centrality, inadequate measurement	Growth-critical but indicators measure access/inputs, not quality/outcomes	SDG 4, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 9	Priority zone. Requires new outcome indicators (learning levels, micronutrient status, time-use, R&D productivity)
III. Lower income-centrality, adequate measurement, near saturation	Welfare-critical, largely achieved on threshold terms	SDG 1, SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 11	Shift to frontier benchmarks (service reliability, treatment capacity, energy productivity)
IV. High centrality, structurally perverse measurement	Indicators move against the 2047 trajectory	SDG 13, SDG 12, SDG 15	Replace level-based with intensity/decoupling indicators

Source: Author's construction, applying the framework of Section 3.2 to the scores in Table 2.

H4 is confirmed. Quadrant II - the goals most central to high-income transition and most poorly measured - contains SDG 2, 4, 5 and 9, which are four of the five largest contributors to India's residual SDG gap. The goals on which India's measured performance is strongest (Quadrant III) are those whose further improvement contributes least to the 2047 objective. The measurement architecture, in other words, is most reassuring precisely where reassurance matters least, and least informative precisely where the stakes are highest.

6.3 The 2030–2047 interregnums

A further alignment problem is temporal. The SDG framework expires in 2030; Viksit Bharat extends to 2047. No indicator framework currently governs the seventeen-year interregnum. The SDR 2026 notes that UN member states are actively considering the post-2030 agenda, with an SDG Summit scheduled for September 2027, and that respondents to SDSN's global surveys emphasise stronger implementation mechanisms, adequate financing and better use of science and data over wholesale redesign of the goals. India has an evident strategic interest in shaping that agenda: a post-2030 framework built around frontier rather than

threshold benchmarks would align the multilateral monitoring system with India's own 2047 trajectory, whereas a framework that extends existing threshold indicators would leave India measuring, for two decades, variables on which it had already saturated.

6.4 Where the frameworks genuinely converge

The analysis should not be read as establishing wholesale divergence. Three areas of strong convergence deserve emphasis-first, energy transition. India's non-fossil capacity expansion and its commitments under the updated NDC and the long-term low-emission strategy simultaneously serve SDG 7 and SDG 13 objectives and Viksit Bharat industrial-policy objectives, since energy cost and security are manufacturing competitiveness. Here the SDG and 2047 agendas are mutually reinforcing, provided measurement shifts from installed capacity to generation share, storage adequacy and grid reliability; second, digital public infrastructure. India's digital identity, payments, and data-exchange layers serve SDG 1, 8, 9, 10, and 16 targets while constituting precisely the kind of general-purpose institutional capability associated with sustained productivity growth.

Third, the federal learning mechanism. The SDG India Index's most durable contribution may be institutional rather than statistical. By inducing what NITI Aayog terms "collaborative competition" among states, generating state- and district-level indicator frameworks, and embedding SDG targets in state budgets and planning departments, the exercise has built subnational statistical and planning capacity that serves as an asset for any long-horizon development agenda. Weigh this institutional output independently of the composite score's analytical limitations.

7. Policy Recommendations

7.1 Construct a Viksit Bharat Indicator Framework (VBIF) with frontier benchmarks

Retain the SDG India Index to 2030 for continuity, but develop in parallel a VBIF that normalises each indicator against high-income-economy medians rather than SDG thresholds. On such a framework, India's score would be substantially lower and - critically - would retain discriminatory power through 2047. The VBIF should be released alongside, not in place of, the SDG Index, with explicit crosswalks.

7.2 Replace coverage indicators with functionality indicators

For every access indicator approaching saturation, introduce a paired quality indicator: hours of supply and voltage reliability alongside electrification; water quality at point of use and hours of supply alongside tap connections; wastewater treated and reused alongside sanitation coverage; learning levels alongside enrolment. This directly addresses L2 and L3.

7.3 Publish a back-cast comparable series

NITI Aayog should recompute earlier editions on the current indicator set, or publish a consistent sub-panel of indicators common to all four editions, so that analysts can separate instrument change from outcome change. Without this, the 57-to-71 trajectory cannot be used for rigorous inference - a serious handicap for a flagship national statistical product.

7.4 Introduce distribution-sensitive aggregation

Report, alongside each state's mean score, an inequality-adjusted score computed across districts and across social groups, following the methodology of inequality-adjusted human development indices. This operationalises "leave no one behind" and addresses L5.

7.5 Reform environmental indicators toward intensity and decoupling

Replace per capita emissions with emissions per unit of GVA, add material and water productivity, and include air-quality exposure (population-weighted PM_{2.5}), on which India's deficit is severe and growing. This addresses L6 and aligns measurement with the actual 2047 challenge of growing while decoupling.

7.6 Prioritise Quadrant II with dedicated national missions and independent measurement

(i) time-bound national targets to 2035 rather than 2030, (ii) independently measured outcome data not generated by the implementing ministry, and (iii) explicit budget-tagging, extending existing SDG budget-tagging practice in several states.

7.7 Restore and institutionalise survey frequency

Credible SDG and VBIF measurement requires a quinquennial consumption survey, a continuing health and demographic survey, a regular national learning assessment with comparable scales across rounds, and disaggregated time-use data. The analytical cost of survey gaps during 2015-2022 remains evident throughout this paper's evidence base.

7.8 Engage the post-2030 process strategically

India should enter the 2027 SDG Summit deliberations with a developed proposal for a post-2030 framework that incorporates frontier benchmarks, intensity-based environmental indicators, and financing mechanisms, both to shape the global agenda and align it with the Viksit Bharat horizon.

8. Conclusion

India's measured progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals over 2018–2026 is real, substantial and spatially convergent. The national composite score of the SDG India Index rose from 57 to 71; every state and union territory improved; 32 are now classified as front-runners; inter-state dispersion narrowed from 27 to 22 points; and the worst-performing state today stands where the national average stood six years ago. Internationally, India achieved its highest recorded SDG Index position, 94 of 169 countries, with a score of 68.3, gaining 18 rank positions since 2015, the largest improvement among major powers alongside China. Yet this paper's analysis establishes four results that qualify the headline narrative in ways consequential for policy. First, the pace of improvement has **decelerated**, from about 3.6 to 1.7 points per year, and at the observed full-period pace of 2.5 points per year, India will reach a composite score of about 86 by 2030 rather than full attainment, a pace ratio of roughly 0.52. Second, the residual gap is **concentrated**: goals registered outright declines. Third, the apparent proximity of the domestic score (71) and the global score (68.3) conceals a **profound interpretative divergence** traceable to indicator composition, reference values, normalisation and data provenance - the former signals front-runner status, the latter a position in the bottom half of the world distribution. Fourth, and most fundamentally, the goals most central to the Viksit Bharat 2047 objective are precisely those most poorly measured and most deficient in performance, while the goals on which India scores highest are approaching saturation and will cease to be informative long before 2047. The policy implication is not that India should abandon the SDG framework; its institutional yield, state and district indicator systems, SDG budget-tagging, and a functioning mechanism

of collaborative competition among states are genuine national assets. **The implication is that the measurement architecture must be rebuilt for the horizon it is now expected to serve.** An index calibrated to deprivation thresholds cannot measure the journey to the development frontier. If India intends 2047 as a serious analytical target rather than a rhetorical one, it requires an indicator framework whose reference values are the performance of high-income economies, whose environmental metrics are intensity-based rather than level-based, whose service indicators measure function rather than installation, and whose aggregation is sensitive to who is being left behind. Building that framework in the 2026–2030 window - in parallel with the final SDG push and in dialogue with the post-2030 global agenda - is the most consequential measurement reform available to Indian development policy.

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