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Q6

Despite Consistent experience of High growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development. Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS II · 10 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Note the gap between high growth and weak human-development indicators
- Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive

Revision summary

Post-1991 growth raised averages more than health, learning and equality.

HDI lags because public health and education spends stayed thin.

Informal jobs, gender gaps, caste and regional skew stop inclusion.

NHM, RTE, NFSA and MGNREGA are the conversion tools that were under-used as growth policy.

District outcome scorecards can make balanced development a measured target, not a slogan.

Introduction

India's national income rose fast after 1991, yet United Nations **Human Development Index** ranks stayed low because income is only one of three HDI limbs. Health, schooling, nutrition, and equality did not rise at the same speed. Balanced and inclusive development remains elusive where growth is job-poor, regionally skewed, and weakly converted into public services.

Body**The growth and HDI gap**

- High GDP growth can sit beside stunting, anaemia, learning poverty, and a large informal workforce, which is why HDI, National Family Health Survey, and Annual Status of Education Report numbers lag headline growth.
- Public spending on health and education stayed far below the needs set by the National Health Policy and later the National Education Policy target of 6 per cent of GDP.
- Female labour-force participation stayed weak, so half the population did not share growth through wages.

Issues that block balance and inclusion

- **Jobless or informal growth:** manufacturing and organised services did not absorb the workforce leaving farms, so Gini and consumption gaps widened even when averages rose.

- **Health and nutrition:** the **National Health Mission** improved rural facilities, yet specialist gaps, out-of-pocket costs, and poor sanitation kept life-expectancy and child-nutrition gains slow.
- **Schooling without learning:** the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009**, raised enrolment; grade-level reading and maths did not follow in many States.
- **Social identity:** caste, tribe, disability, and minority location still shape access to land, credit, and public jobs, so growth at the top does not trickle as inclusion.
- **Regional and rural-urban skew:** coastal and metro districts captured investment; rain-fed and forest districts stayed on MGNREGA and distress migration.
- **Environmental and agrarian stress:** farm incomes lagged, which is why NFSA grain and MGNREGA wages remain the real safety net rather than a shared growth story.

What would make development less elusive

- Fund the **National Health Mission** and primary care so growth is not eaten by medical bills.
- Deliver foundational literacy under **Samagra Shiksha and the RTE Act**, not only school buildings.
- Use MGNREGA, NFSA, and a tighter PM-KISAN-credit net as floors, while industrial policy and skilling create the next rung of work.
- Publish district HDI-type scorecards and tie **Finance Commission** and **NITI Aayog** incentives to nutrition, learning, and female work, not only to GSDP growth.

Short way forward

- **Treat human development as the test of growth:** jobs, NHM, NFSA nutrition, and RTE learning must move with GDP, or inclusion will stay elusive.

Flow diagram

High GDP growth -> Weak conversion
 Weak conversion -> Thin NHM and nutrition
 Weak conversion -> Enrolment not learning
 Weak conversion -> Informal jobless pattern
 Thin NHM and nutrition -> Low HDI inclusion
 Enrolment not learning -> Low HDI inclusion
 Informal jobless pattern -> Low HDI inclusion

Conclusion

High growth did not automatically raise human-development indicators because jobs, health, learning, gender, and regions did not share that growth. Balanced development becomes possible only when NHM, RTE schooling, NFSA, and MGNREGA, plus decent work, are funded as core economic policy, not as leftover welfare.

Facts & figures

Human Development Index

UNDP composite of health, education and income; India's rank stayed modest relative to GDP growth stories in the 2010s.

National Health Mission

Umbrella rural and urban health mission for facilities, ASHA workers and reproductive-child health; still uneven in specialists and quality.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

Statutory elementary education for ages 6-14; enrolment gains outran learning outcomes in many surveys.

National Food Security Act, 2013

Legal foodgrain entitlement meant to convert growth into nutrition security for priority households.

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, 2005

Demand-based rural wage employment that cushions districts left out of high-growth corridors.

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