Social Progress Index

What is the issue?

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- From being a symbol of hunger and poverty in 1947, India has now transformed itself into one of the fastest growing major economies.
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- These achievements are extensive, considering the challenges of democratic governance & accommodating cultural diversity.
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- While growth remains strong despite some slackening, the societal reach of development is still largely un-quantified.
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What are significant indices for tracking development?

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- There have been efforts to track individual social outcomes such as health, education and safety.
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- 'National University of Educational Planning & Administration' and the Union HRD ministry computes an Educational Development Index.
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- NITI Aayog has rolled out the health, education and water index.
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- Apart from these individual indices, there have also been efforts to look at progress through the lens of a human development index.
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- But even these do not isolate the impact of economic growth.
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- A common measure to quantify social progress of Indian States is needed – Which is were 'Social Progress Index' fits in.
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What is ‘Social Progress Index’?

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- It is a marker that ranks States using social and environmental indicators.
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- Their capability to provide for basic needs such as shelter, water, sanitation, education, health, and communication facilities is evalvuated.
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- While the extent of crime & corruption is taken into account, analysing the prevailing prejudices and its impact on personal decision making is also done.
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- The study (2005-2016) helps analyse whether policies are heading in the right direction and enables considerations for adjustments.
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What are its findings?

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- **Overall social progress** - score for the country now stands at 57.03/100, which is approximately 8 points higher than in 2005.
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- The country performs better in the provision of basic human needs rather than opportunities for its citizens.
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- Therefore, despite small improvements, the creation of a society with equal opportunities for all still remains an elusive dream.
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- **Statewise Progress -** All States have recorded progress. The
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- Notably, states that had the worst performance in 2005 (Tripura, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Bihar) imporved the largest.
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- Alternately, in states that had achieved a threshold level of social progress, driving improvements becomes more difficult.
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- Hence, states with a relatively low level of social progress can potentially improve rapidly.

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- **Economic Resonance –** A major finding is that the greatest improvements have been in areas where social progress most often accompanies economic prosperity.
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- But interestingly, areas that had a poor social progress were not strongly correlated with poor economic growth.
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- Access to ‘Information & Communication Technologies’ increased with per capita GDP, but ‘Health & Wellness’ had the little correlation to GDP.
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- This suggests that focusing on economic parametes will result in an unbalanced social development.
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What is the way forward?

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- While the economy is on the right track, the urgency to identify and focus on social parameters is lacking.
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- The idea that economic development will automatically transform social conditions is flawed and needs to be tweaked.
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- Social progress needs to be stimulated by focussing on policies directly targeting social issues.
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Source: The Hindu

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