

GOOD PRACTICES INTEGRATING THE SDGS INTO DEVELOPMENT PLANNING



ASSAM, INDIA

In this brief:

- Context
- Sustainable Development and the SDGs in Assam
- Institutional changes for achieving the SDGs
- SDG-based classification of budgets
- The Integrated Village Development Programme
- IT-based SDG monitoring system

This brief is part of a series produced by UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub, based on case studies commissioned in six Asian countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal and the Philippines at the national level and India at the subnational level in Assam state. The briefs illustrate emerging good practices in integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs into development planning in these countries. They also highlight innovative practices in development planning that can serve as good examples for other countries and regions for their work in planning for the 2030 Agenda. The content of these briefs will be updated to reflect the evolving experiences of the countries involved. We welcome your comments and updates at: uyanga.gankhuyag@undp.org.

Context

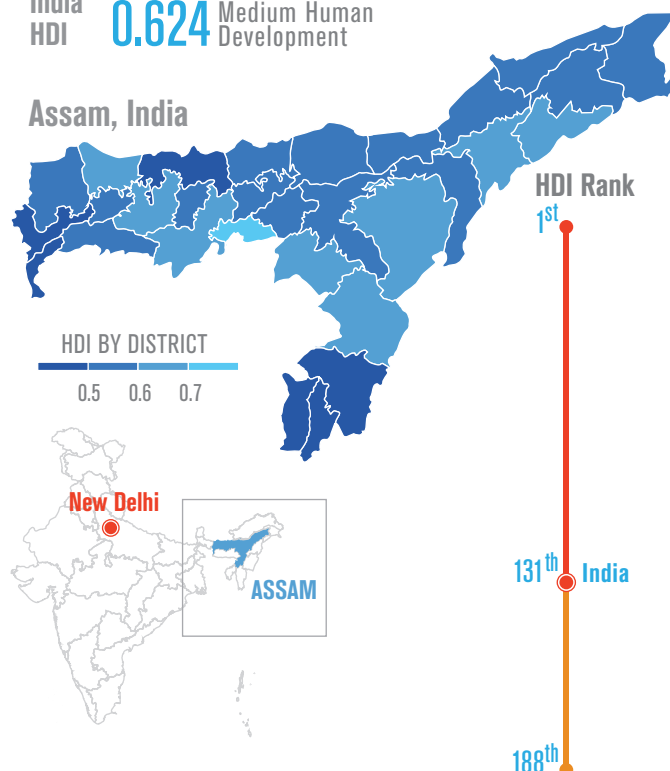
India is a union comprised of 29 states and 7 territories. The state of Assam in north-eastern India is predominantly agrarian, with about two-thirds of the working population engaged in subsistence agriculture and similar activities. The land and labour productivity in agriculture in Assam is lower than the national average. Until 2010, Assam's economic growth was less than 5 percent in most years, much slower than the average growth in India. However, growth is expected to rise to over 8 percent in 2017/18 and beyond.¹ In 2012, out of 23 large states in India, Assam was ranked 16th by its Human Development Index (HDI). The proportion of people subsisting below the poverty line is estimated at 32 percent compared to 22 percent for all of India.² The literacy rate in Assam is 73 percent (79 percent male and 67 percent female),³ the infant mortality rate was 48 out of 1,000 live births and the under-five mortality rate was 56 out of 1,000 (2014/15), all of which compare unfavourably with national averages.⁴ Assam is thus one of the less-developed states in India.

POPULATION **31,205,576**

Assam
HDI **0.557** Medium Human Development

India
HDI **0.624** Medium Human Development

Assam, India



ECONOMY

Assam State
GDP per capita **US\$ 966**

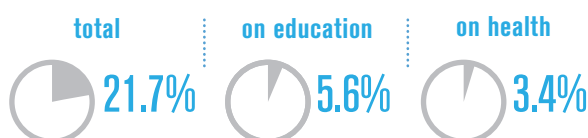
India
GDP per capita **US\$ 1,709**

POVERTY



GOVERNMENT SYSTEM: Federal (India)

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES (% of State GDP)



Assam is home to different ethnic and religious groups. To provide greater autonomy to some of the ethnic groups, Assam has established three autonomous councils: the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council and Bodoland Territorial Council. These councils have quasi-legislative and judicial powers guaranteed by the Act of the State Assembly.

After decades of development planning, the central government in India gave up the centralized planning process in 2014 and replaced the former Planning Commission with a new think tank, NITI Aayog (National Institute for Transforming India), which advises the central government on development issues. Similar to other states, the state of Assam followed suit, giving up the directed development planning process and establishing its own think tank, the State Innovation and Transformation Aayog (SITA) with an operational arm named the Transformation and Development Department (TDD).

Fiscal decentralization in India has also had implications on state-level development planning. The move toward greater fiscal decentralization was initiated based on 2015 recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission, a constitutionally established authority that meets every five years to allocate revenues from the central government to states. About 42 percent of the central government tax revenues are shared with the states, increased from about 32 percent earlier.⁵ Additionally, substantial unconditional funds were allocated to local authorities at the grassroots level.

The government of the state of Assam committed to meeting the SDGs by adopting its long-term vision document, *Assam 2030: Our Dream, Our Commitment*,⁶ based on the SDGs. The long-term vision sets the overarching objectives of a poverty-free Assam, improving security, promoting economic development, developing human resources, ensuring sustainable development, and providing corruption-free, future-ready governance. It was prepared in a highly participatory manner, through consultations with many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.⁷

Sustainable Development and the SDGs in Assam

The Government of Assam has acted proactively to embrace the SDGs. The administrative head of the state, the Chief Secretary, announced a decision to launch the SDGs as a statewide Single Synergized Initiative (SSI)⁸ even before the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the UN General Assembly. The SSI will be implemented by engaging people, forming new partnerships and undertaking innovative projects to usher in future-ready governance. In addition, it will be implemented through the "whole of government" approach – ensuring that all government agencies work in an interconnected way toward the SDGs, thus reflecting the key principle of the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda.

This long-term vision based on the SDGs fills the gap created by the discontinuation of the previous planning framework, which used to be carried out by the Planning Commission at the national level and the State Planning Board at the state level.

Figure 1. The timeline of events to adopt the SDGs in Assam



Box 1. Strategic architecture for taking action towards the long-term vision and the SDGs in Assam

The long-term vision document of Assam, Assam 2030: Our Dream, Our Commitment, was newly adopted in July 2017 after the new state government came to power in Assam. It outlines a long-term vision anchored on the SDGs, as well as strategic architecture to be used in implementing the vision. The strategic architecture entails using the following approaches and principles in implementation:

- **Implementing the SDGs as a Single Synergized Initiative:** All sectoral initiatives of the government will be revisited, given that the SDGs are interconnected. In this process, duplications will be removed and synergies realized. The sectoral initiatives and programmes will be monitored through an IT-based platform that enables the realization of these synergies. Government institutions of Assam state will be revamped to put an effective future-ready governance system in place. The “People, Partnerships, Projects” approach will be the cornerstone of this strategy – projects to be formulated and implemented in partnership with different stakeholder partners, for the larger interests of the people.
- **Technology, innovation, knowledge management and management of change:** Emerging technologies and disruptive innovation will be explored and applied in implementing the vision. An effective knowledge management system will be put in place and a carefully crafted strategy for management of change adopted.
- **Mobilization and utilization of resources:** The strategic architecture recognizes seven types of resources that are needed for achieving the SDGs. While conventional paradigms are centred on financial resources – and financial constraints – the strategic architecture in Assam calls for a paradigm shift which recognizes six other types of resources: land, human resources, capital/infrastructure, biological resources, IT resources and institutional resources. A strategy called “7-for-17” (7 types of resources for 17 goals) envisages reforms where each government department will participate actively, such as by mapping available resources, identifying sources of new resources, improving efficiency and adopting the “value for money” principle, reorienting budgeting toward the SDGs, and mobilizing resources from communities, state-owned enterprises and the central government.

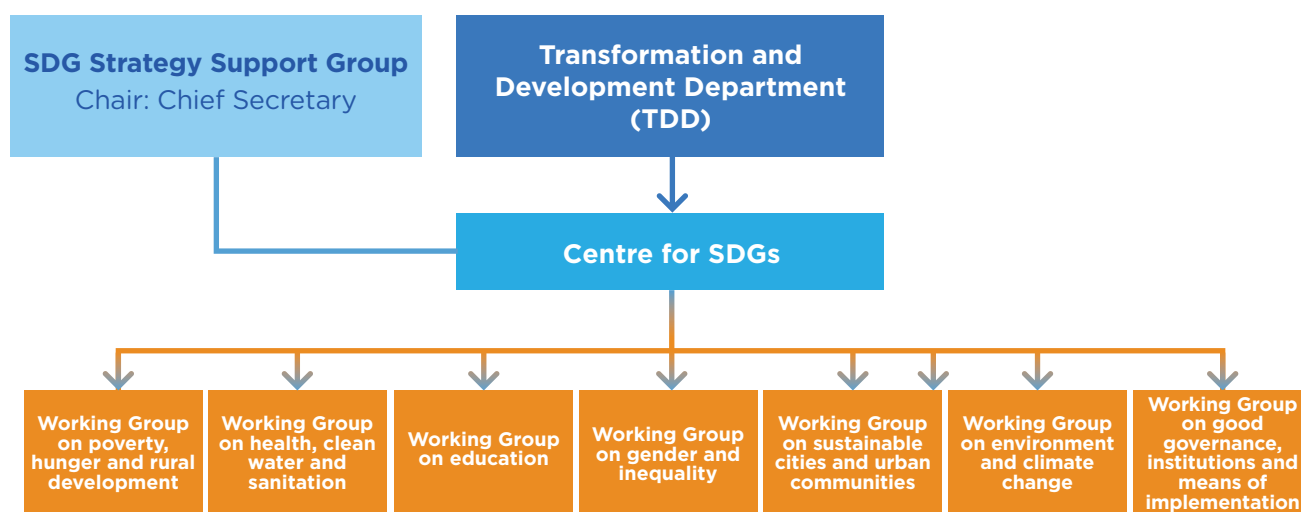
Institutional changes for achieving the SDGs

The Transformation and Development Department (TDD) was established in 2016, replacing the previous Department of Planning. TDD is the nodal department for coordinating activities within other departments for achieving the SDGs.

An SDG Strategy Support Group (SSSG) was set up to support strategic thinking and integrated implementation, and oversee SDG-related activities such as data collection and analysis. SSSG is chaired by the Chief Secretary of the State and is comprised of key state government officials.

Two new centres were established in the Assam Administrative Staff College – the Centre for SDGs (CSDG) and the Centre for Innovation and Future Studies (CIFS). These centres were instrumental for conceiving governance reforms needed to realize the Assam 2030 vision.

The government of Assam also set up eight interdepartmental working groups to prepare Strategy Paper and Action Plans (SPAPs) to achieve the SDGs. The Centre for SDGs organizes meetings of these working groups. The Working Groups were set up to break departmental silos and enable collaboration across departments. Support was also provided by the UN system in India, with staff working alongside state government officials in crafting the thematic SPAPs. The SPAPs will provide thematic roadmaps on how to proceed further: setting targets, identifying implementing and supporting agencies, and identifying actions and solutions in a holistic manner. The roadmaps are expected to lead to thematic work plans.

Figure 2. Institutional arrangements for SDG coordination in Assam

In addition to these structures dedicated to the SDGs, the state government took important steps to mainstream the SDGs into the work of all government departments. For this purpose, the government mapped government departments against SDG targets. Such mapping enables the assignment of responsibilities for SDG targets to specific agencies of the government.

SDG-based classification of budgets

The government of Assam is also taking action to ensure that fiscal resources are allocated to the SDGs, and underpin this with high-level commitment. In February 2016, a committee of ministers of Assam (equivalent to a cabinet) decided to redesign the budgetary process around the SDGs and discussed new approaches to mobilizing resources for the SDGs.

In July 2016, the government released an SDG-oriented outcome budget for the fiscal year 2016/17, the first in India. They also did this in the following year for the 2017/18 budget. In addition, the government started additional classification of its budget by regrouping financial resources by activities and by SDG.

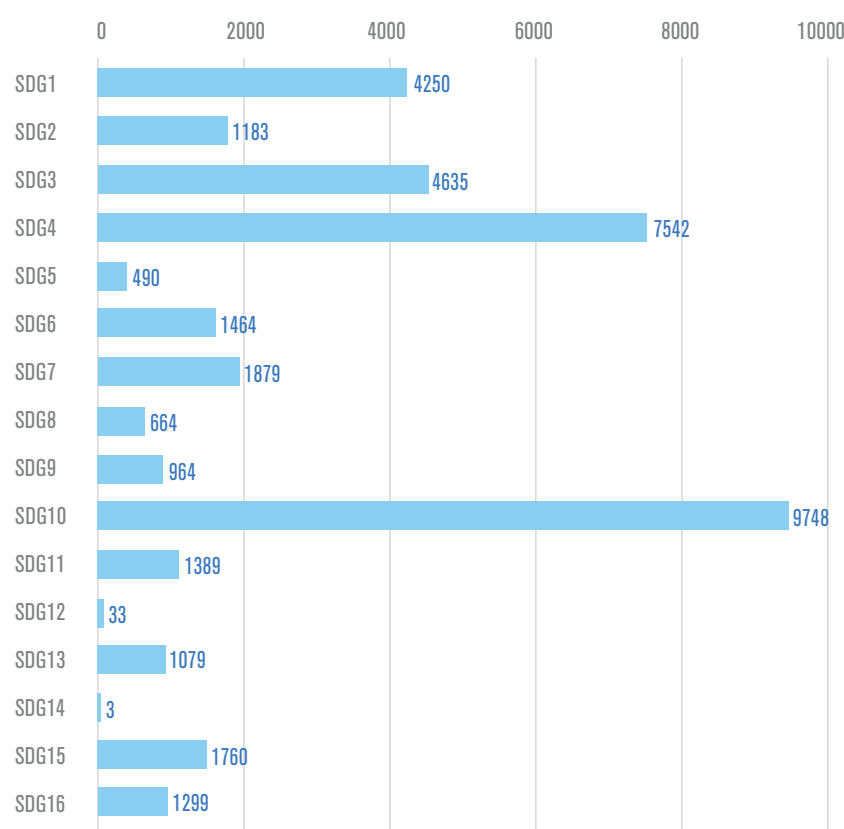
Classification of expenditures by the SDGs shows that the biggest allocations are made for SDGs 10, 4, 3 and 1 (inequality, education, health and poverty). Together, 55 percent of the 2017/18 budget was tagged for the SDGs (See Figure 3).



*Our Government fully appreciates and commits itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which recognise that economic growth, industrialization, infrastructure and access to energy provide the foundations of development. Of course, elimination of poverty in all forms in the State is at the top of our agenda. This is reflected in our motto, "**Sab Ka Saath; Sab Ka Vikas**" [Collective Effort, Inclusive Development]*

"Today, much of India's development agenda is mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals". This is an open endorsement for these Goals given by our visionary leader, Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, while addressing the United Nations on 25th September 2015 at the UN Sustainable Development Summit. We need to tune our planning and budgeting process to these SDGs."

From the Budget Speech of the Assam Finance Minister to the State Assembly, 26 July 2016

Figure 3. Allocation of resources by the SDGs in the state budget, 2017/18 (in INR 10 million)

Source: Government of Assam (2017). Highlights of Budget 2017/18

Mapping of government departments against the SDGs (noted earlier) was an important tool to assist in SDG classification of budgets. In addition to government departments, existing programmes and interventions are also mapped against SDG targets. The completed mapping then becomes a reference document for government agencies in classifying newly proposed programmes and fiscal expenditures.

The process of SDG classification of the budget proceeds as follows:

1. The Finance Department requests the line departments to prepare their departmental budgets. In addition, the line departments are asked to tag their expenditures to the SDGs and their targets – in other words, to identify to what extent their proposed development expenditures would contribute to the SDGs. The contribution to the SDGs is now an important reason for the line departments to get priority funding.
2. Line departments prepare their budget proposals. In doing that, allocation to sectors that directly contribute to promoting the SDGs are fully counted as expenditures towards the SDGs. For example, expenditure on public health is counted as fully contributing to the SDG 3. In the case of sectors that indirectly contribute to the SDGs, a fraction of the allocation to these sectors is counted toward the SDGs. The exact determination of this fraction is an estimate made by the concerned department based on tacit knowledge, rather than using a scientific method.
3. The Finance Department reviews the budgets submitted by the line departments and prepares a formal budget for presentation to the State Assembly.
4. Upon approval by the State Assembly, funds are transferred to the line departments.

Some difficulties were encountered in the process of classifying budgets by the SDGs. These include:

- Lack of clarity in how to classify expenditures made on items that serve several SDGs and targets, such as roads. In such cases, assumptions were made by respective government departments.
- Lack of clarity in how to classify funds allocated to local governments as block grants, or unassigned grants. While the broad purpose of expenditure made from these funds is known, the actual discretion to use the funds rests with the local governments, and there are no systems for tracking what these funds are used for.

The Integrated Village Development Programme

The Government of Assam launched a new programme in 2016/17 called the Chief Minister's Samagra Gramya Unnayan Yojana (CMSGUY, or the Integrated Village Development Programme), an initiative aimed for the holistic development of villages. The programme is expected to help the state of Assam achieve several of the Sustainable Development Goals: reducing poverty and hunger, increasing employment, reducing inequality, promoting sustainable use of water and terrestrial ecosystems, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, and building partnerships.

The key focus of the programme is to double farm income in the nearly 25,000 villages of Assam within five years, by focusing and building on the comparative advantage of each village. The state government plans to spend US\$4.8 billion on the programme, which translates to US\$192,000 per village. As of July 2017, the government had approved US\$240 million for the programme from the 2016/17 budget.

The integrated programme will be implemented through projects identified by villagers and funded by the state government through a system of grants. The demand-led principle in allocating funding to villages is informed by lessons from various poverty alleviation and rural development programmes implemented by the national and state government since the 1970s.

The state government is setting up the governance system of the programme in a way that differs from typical government programmes. CMSGUY will be implemented in "mega mission mode", which in practice means that such projects are given high priority and are well-resourced. At the state level, the programme will be headed by a Mega-Mission Society (MMS), or an apex team, led by a Chief Executive Officer and supported by managers with specific expertise, for example expertise in finance, administration or technical subject matters. The MMS will oversee state-level teams and block-level teams. The village block-level teams will be critical for the implementation of projects funded by the CMSGUY. These teams will be staffed by professionals mostly to be hired from outside the government and remunerated at market rates. Such a set up will help ensure that the thinking is "out of the box" and that the MMS cuts through existing administrative layers, inefficiencies and delays.

IT-based SDG monitoring system

The government of Assam is developing a new IT-based system for monitoring the SDGs. When finalized, the system will consist of:

- SDG indicators localized for Assam
- A web portal with dashboards, and databases that bring together data from existing national and state sources, as well as regularly entered administrative data
- An integrated Management Information System (MIS) of existing flagship programmes
- Institutional architecture
- Government focal points to update data on a regular basis
- Training programmes for the focal points.

The government of Assam has identified 59 SDG-related indicators, published in the Economic Survey of Assam 2016/17, and identified targets to be achieved by 2030.

The Centre for SDGs, in collaboration with the Directorate of Economics and Statistics of Assam, the Institute of Social Change and Development, UNICEF and the Indian Institute of Technology, is developing ASSAMINFO, an online monitoring system that organizes data from multiple sources and enables users to track progress on SDG indicators for the state.

At the front end of the system is a web portal with dashboards that will present data on SDG indicators in tables, graphs and maps, and also enables downloads in spreadsheets. The portal will enable rapid and timely access to data and information, allowing the monitoring of indicators and comparison between districts, states and the national average. At the back end, ASSAMINFO will compile and organize primary and secondary data from

multiple sources – survey and administrative data.

Another important data source will be from major national and state programmes. All national and state flagship programmes have in-built monitoring systems (Management Information Systems, or MIS) to periodically track the progress and outcomes for reporting to the Government of India and the Government of Assam. The Government of Assam will bring together these existing MIS scattered over different platforms, to enable monitoring of SDG indicators. The Centre for SDGs is currently mapping the flagship programmes against SDG indicators, where programmes have definite impact on Sustainable Development Goals and targets; it has also developed a template to gather information from the Management Information Systems of existing flagship programmes.

Notes:

Data specifications and sources:

- Data on population is from the 2011 Census of India. Available from: <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/districtlist/assam.html>
- Data on human development, including HDI by districts shown in the map, is from the Government of Assam, National Institute for Transforming India and UNDP (2014). Assam Human Development Report 2014. Available from: http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/human-development/Assam_HDR_30Sep2016.pdf
- Data on State GDP (Gross State Domestic Product, GSDP) per capita is calculated in current US\$. The following figures were used: the projected GSDP for 2014/15 from Assam Statistical Handbook 2016, Directorate of Economics and Statistics (<http://ecostatassam.nic.in/reports/SHB2016.pdf>, p.55); the population from the 2011 Census of India; and the exchange rate, average for 2014, from the Reserve Bank of India.
- Data on government expenditures for Assam is for 2014/15 fiscal year, from the Assam Statistical Handbook 2016, Directorate of Economics and Statistics. Available from: <http://ecostatassam.nic.in/reports/SHB2016.pdf>, p. 66, 67
- Data on poverty is for 2014/15 fiscal year, from the National Institute for Transforming India. Available from: <http://niti.gov.in/state-statistics> (Poverty by states, Tendulkar poverty estimates).

Disclaimer: Boundaries shown on the map do not imply official endorsement by the United Nations

¹ Government of Assam (2017). Economic Survey: Assam 2016–2017. p. 290

² Estimates for 2011/12, using the national poverty line. Open Government Data Platform India. Number and Percentage of Population below Poverty Line by states – 2011/12 based on Tendulkar Methodology. Available from <https://data.gov.in/catalog/below-poverty-line-india>

³ Government of India (2014). Analysis of budgeted expenditure on education. New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resources

⁴ Srivastav N & Basumatari J (2016). The major trends in public health care spending in India and its relationship with health care outcomes among North Eastern States, Management in Health, XXX/3/2016.

⁵ Ministry of Finance, India (2015). 14th Finance Commission (FFC) Report Tabled in Parliament. Press release 24 February 2015. Available from <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115810>

⁶ Government of Assam (2017). Assam 2030: Our Dream, Our Commitment.

⁷ The long-term vision document was initially adopted in February 2016. However, after the May 2016 elections, the new government, led by the former opposition party, came to power in Assam. The new government then released a new version of the vision document, which was more specific and focused, and included strategic architecture. The new vision document retained the focus on the SDGs.

⁸ SSI is a modality for special, high-priority programmes to be conceptualized and implemented in an integrated manner.

This case study is based on Acharya, Sarthi, and Anurag Goel (2017). Assam: Case study of SDG integration in planning. Unpublished paper commissioned by UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub.

It also uses material from Goel, Anurag (2017). Strategic architecture for implementing CMSGUY. Working Paper 1, Centre for SDGs; and a draft proposal for an IT-based SDG monitoring system prepared by the Centre for SDGs.

This document also benefited from communication with government officials of the state of Assam – V.K. Pipersenia, Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam; K.V. Eapen, Additional Chief Secretary, Transformation and Development Department; Rudramani Dubey, Director of the Centre for SDGs and others; Neeraj Srivastava, Director of NITI Aayog; representatives from UNDP – Ritu Mathur, Programme Analyst, UNDP India; and others.