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Research Article

Assessing Inclusive Development in Rajasthan Through Sustainable Development Goal Indicators: A Secondary Data Analysis (2010–2025)

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Abstract

Inclusive development remains a strategic priority for Rajasthan's socio-economic transformation, yet disparities across social groups and regions challenge the achievement of equitable outcomes. This paper examines Rajasthan's progress on key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — especially SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and SDG 16 (Peace & Strong Institutions) — using secondary state-level data (2010–2025) from official SDG dashboards, government reports, and academic sources. The analysis reveals substantial strides in access to primary education and social welfare coverage, coupled with persistent structural inequalities affecting women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and rural households. Despite net enrolment gains, Rajasthan lags in higher education completion and quality learning outcomes. Gender equity indicators remain modest, while income inequality persists in rural and urban contexts. Institutional reforms and social protection have been initiated, but implementation gaps, employment generation deceleration (e.g., MGNREGS job days decline) and incomplete targets reflect uneven inclusive growth trajectories. Empirical evidence underscores the need for policy recalibration to enhance equity-focused interventions. The study contributes to inclusive development literature by systematically integrating state SDG indicators, thereby offering an evidence base for policymakers to target priority areas and strengthen program effectiveness.

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KEYWORDS: Inclusive Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Secondary Data, Rajasthan, Social Inequality, Gender Equity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive development embodies economic growth coupled with equitable access to opportunities, services and outcomes across diverse social groups, ensuring that no one is left behind. In Rajasthan — India's largest state by area — socio-economic challenges such as poverty, gender disparity, tribal marginalization, educational inequalities, and rural employment gaps have historically shaped public policy agendas. To align with global norms, Rajasthan adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, integrating all 17 global goals into its state development agenda. The Government of Rajasthan established institutional mechanisms to monitor SDG progress and compiled state-level composite indicators covering education, poverty, inequality, gender, health, and governance domains. However, despite institutional efforts, performance on several key indicators remains uneven, highlighting persistent barriers to inclusive development. This study uses secondary data exclusively — from official SDG dashboards, government statistical reports, and peer-reviewed studies — to critically assess Rajasthan's inclusive development performance and identify areas requiring policy action.

To align with global norms, the Government of Rajasthan (GoR) adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework in 2015. Since then, the state has institutionalized the monitoring of these goals through the Rajasthan SDG Index. However, while the transition from "Millennium Development Goals" to "Sustainable Development Goals" marked a shift toward holistic inclusion, the question remains: *Is the growth truly inclusive, or is it merely expansive?* This study utilizes a longitudinal analysis of secondary data (2010–2025) to evaluate whether the "leave no one behind" promise is being realized in the desert state.

Conceptual Framework

Inclusive development in this research is operationalized through three multidimensional pillars:

1. **Equity of Opportunity:** This refers to the removal of systemic barriers to essential services. In the context of Rajasthan, it involves assessing SDG 4 (Education) and SDG 1 (Poverty) to see if the "starting line" is equal for a child in Jaipur versus a child in the remote hamlets of Jaisalmer.
2. **Equity of Outcome:** Beyond participation, this pillar looks at the results. Are the income gaps (SDG 10) closing? Is the Gender Parity Index leading to actual workforce participation (SDG 5)?
3. **Social Justice & Participation:** This involves the empowerment of marginalized groups (SC/ST) and their representation in decision-making bodies (SDG 16).

The SDG framework operationalizes these pillars with measurable indicators. For instance, SDG 4 monitors access to inclusive quality education; SDG 5 examines gender equality

outcomes; SDG 10 and SDG 16-gauge inequality reduction and institutional inclusion.

Key Research Problem

While Rajasthan has adopted SDG-aligned planning and reporting mechanisms, evidence of inclusive growth at the outcome level across multiple dimensions is fragmented. Most existing analyses focus on isolated sectors (e.g., education or poverty), without integrating cross-sectoral SDG indicators to assess broader inclusion trends over a decade. This gap constrains stakeholders' ability to identify persistent disparities and formulate targeted policy responses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Development Frameworks

The literature suggests inclusive development requires measurable, multi-sector indicators that capture economic, social, and institutional dimensions. Klasen (2010) emphasized that inclusive growth combines economic performance with equity outcomes, while UNDP's Human Development Reports integrate education, health, and income inequality as core metrics. Such frameworks support the use of SDG indices as holistic state-level inclusion measures.

SDG Monitoring in Rajasthan

Recent studies by Meena (2025) highlight that while Rajasthan has made "quantum leaps" in school infrastructure, the "quality of learning" remains a bottleneck. Furthermore, reports from the *Rajasthan SDG Portal* indicate a significant spatial divide. The "Aspirational Districts" program has targeted the most backward regions, but academic critique suggests that these interventions often focus on "low-hanging fruit" (such as primary enrolment) rather than structural shifts (such as high-tech skill development).

Education and Equity

School education research in Rajasthan highlights expansions in access and gender parity gains at primary levels, but persistent equity challenges remain, particularly affecting SC/ST girls in rural areas and in secondary schooling outcomes. Quality and retention beyond primary schooling continue to lag, reinforcing structural barriers to inclusion.

Poverty, Inequality & Gender

Secondary data shows continued efforts to target poverty through social security schemes and employment programs, yet inequalities persist based on caste, gender, and geography. Gender equality indicators reveal improvements in women's participation rates and financial inclusion, but labor force participation disparities remain evident. SDG 10 data show slow progress in reducing income inequality and underrepresentation of women in legislative bodies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data.

- Data Sources: Rajasthan SDG Index Reports (1.0 to 4.0), NITI Aayog State Reports, Census of India (Projections), and the Economic Review of Rajasthan (2010–2025).
- Data Analysis: Comparative indicator analysis and district-wise performance mapping.

- Scope: The study focuses primarily on the intersection of SDG 4 (Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) as the primary drivers of long-term inclusive development.

SDG 4 and SDG 10 in Rajasthan: Comparative and District-wise Analysis (Based on Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025)

1. Comparative Indicator Analysis: SDG 4 (Quality Education)

Table 1: Key SDG 4 Indicators – Status and Interpretation (Rajasthan)

Dimension	Indicator (SDG 4)	Status as per SDG Index 2025	Interpretation
Access	Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio (Primary)	High (Above 95%)	Indicates near-universal access at primary level
Participation	Net Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)	Moderate	Transition bottleneck after elementary education
Gender Equity	Gender Parity Index (School Education)	Near parity	Aggregate parity achieved; intersectional gaps persist
Social Inclusion	Enrolment of SC/ST Students	Moderate	Lower retention beyond upper primary
Quality	Pupil-Teacher Ratio	Uneven across districts	Quality constraints in remote regions
Outcomes	Learning Achievement (Proxy)	Moderate to Low	Enrolment gains not matched by learning outcomes

Source: Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025

2. District-wise Illustration: SDG 4 Performance

Table 2: District-wise SDG 4 Performance Categories

Category	Districts (Illustrative)	Observations
High Performers	Jhunjhunu, Kota, Jaipur	Better infrastructure, teacher availability
Medium Performers	Ajmer, Alwar, Bikaner	Access achieved, quality gaps persist
Low Performers	Jaisalmer, Barmer, Dungarpur	Tribal concentration, dropout after primary

Source: Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025

Insight:

Educational inequality in Rajasthan is spatially embedded,

with western and tribal districts lagging behind educationally advanced regions.

3. Comparative Indicator Analysis: SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

Table 3: Key SDG 10 Indicators – Status and Interpretation

Dimension	Indicator (SDG 10)	Status (SDG Index 2025)	Interpretation
Economic	Income/Consumption Inequality	Moderate to High	Growth benefits unevenly distributed
Social	SC/ST Inclusion Indicators	Moderate	Structural barriers persist
Gender	Women's Representation (Economic & Political)	Low to Moderate	Participation gap remains significant
Regional	Inter-district SDG Variation	High	Spatial inequality pronounced
Institutional	Inclusive Policy Coverage	High	Coverage strong, outcomes uneven

Source: Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025

4. District-wise Illustration: SDG 10 Performance

Table 4: District-wise Inequality Patterns (SDG 10)

Region Type	District Examples	Nature of Inequality
Urban-Dominant	Jaipur, Kota, Udaipur	Lower poverty, higher opportunity
Agrarian Semi-Urban	Alwar, Bharatpur	Income volatility, employment insecurity
Tribal-Dominant	Banswara, Dungarpur	Multi-dimensional deprivation
Desert/Remote	Barmer, Jaisalmer	Limited access, service delivery gaps

Source: Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025

Insight:

Districts with **educational deficits (SDG 4)** are also those

exhibiting higher inequality (SDG 10), confirming SDG interlinkages.

5. Integrated Comparative Matrix: SDG 4 vs SDG 10

Table 5: SDG 4–SDG 10 Synchronised Outcome Matrix

Dimension	SDG 4 (Education)	SDG 10 (Inequality)	Combined Implication
Access	High (Primary)	Moderate	Access ≠ Equity
Retention	Low (Secondary)	High Inequality	Dropouts reinforce inequality
Quality	Uneven	Structural	Poor learning limits mobility
Gender	Near parity	Participation gap	Education gains not converting
District Variation	High	High	Place-based disadvantage

Source: Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025

Major Government Achievements

1. Institutional Setup for SDGs

Rajasthan has operationalized a state-level SDG implementation cell, district committees, and indicator monitoring frameworks that align departmental schemes with SDG targets, improving coordination, data collection, and periodic reporting.

2. Education Access & Gender Parity

Net primary enrolment reached **81.48%**, with adjusted net access above 95% at primary levels while gender parity indices show near parity at primary levels. State efforts plus civil society interventions (e.g., Educate Girls) have contributed to increased girls' enrollment and retention.

3. Social Protection and Poverty Mitigation

Social security pension schemes and food security programs expanded coverage substantially, supporting consumption and welfare for poor households across rural and urban areas.

4. Gender Empowerment Programs

Programs like Indira Mahila Shakti Udyog and financial inclusion initiatives have helped to increase women beneficiaries and support community-based institutions such as SHGs.

Drawbacks and Continuing Challenges

1. Uneven Progress & Implementation Gaps

Despite comprehensive SDG frameworks, progress is uneven. District scores vary widely, and some targets (e.g., higher education equity and livelihood inclusion) lag behind goals.

2. Poor Labor Generation Trends

Reports show a significant decline in rural employment under MGNREGS, undermining livelihood security and inclusive rural development.

4. Persistent Inequalities

Persistent inequalities exist in income distribution, representation in political institutions, and access to advanced educational opportunities for marginalized groups.

4. Quality of Outcomes

Even where access is achieved, quality and retention (especially in secondary & higher levels) remain weak, affecting long-term human capital outcomes.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Primary Access Improved: Secondary data uncovers substantial advances in access to primary education and broad coverage of social protection schemes.
2. Rajasthan has successfully moved children into classrooms (SDG 4). However, the secondary data shows that this has not translated into "decent work" (SDG 8) or "reduced inequality" (SDG 10). The inclusion is currently quantity-driven rather than transformation-driven.
3. Gender Parity Gains Partial: Gains in gender parity are noticeable in schooling and financial inclusion but not equitably reflected in workforce participation and political representation.
4. Inequality Remains: SDG 10 indicators show income and structural inequalities persist, particularly in rural versus urban contexts.
5. Implementation & Monitoring: Institutional mechanisms improved SDG monitoring, but execution gaps hinder the translation of policy into outcomes.
6. Education Access Achieved, Retention Weak: SDG 4 indicators show enrolment success but dropout escalation beyond elementary stages.
7. Inequality is Structural, Not Residual: SDG 10 outcomes indicate entrenched disparities linked to caste, gender, and geography.
8. District Disparities are Core Challenge: Lagging districts consistently underperform on both SDGs.
9. Policy Coverage vs Outcome Gap: Welfare and education schemes are widespread, but outcome equity remains elusive.
10. Rajasthan demonstrates a quantity-driven inclusion model, prioritizing access over outcome transformation.
11. Without improving secondary education quality and completion, SDG 10 targets will remain unattainable.

12. Integrated SDG planning (SDG 4 ↔ SDG 10) is essential for inter-generational mobility.
13. The GoR's institutional setup (SDG implementation cells) is a model for other states. However, the decline in MGNREGS man-days (as reported in 2024-25) indicates a tightening of the safety net, which directly impacts the most vulnerable SC/ST households.

5. SUGGESTIONS

1. **Focus on Quality Education:** Strengthen secondary and higher education, improve learning outcomes, and reduce dropout rates among rural and marginalized students.
2. **Targeted Livelihood Programs:** Revitalize employment guarantee schemes and link skills training with emerging local economic opportunities.
3. **Gender-Focused Interventions:** Expand women's participation in decision-making and workforce sectors beyond basic financial inclusion.
4. **Sub-State Equity Strategies:** Deploy district-level inclusion plans, especially in lagging areas like Jaisalmer and Bharatpur.
5. **Data & Monitoring Enhancements:** Regularly update SDG data, promote third-party evaluations, and integrate citizen feedback mechanisms for policy accountability.
6. **Transition Management:** Shift focus from *Universal Primary Education* to *Universal Secondary and Vocational Education* to check dropouts.
7. **District-Specific Equity Budgets:** Implement "Differential Funding" where lagging districts (like Jaisalmer) receive higher per-capita grants for social infrastructure.
8. **Digital Inclusion:** Aggressively expand rural broadband to ensure the "Digital Rajasthan" initiative reaches tribal hamlets.
9. **Strengthening MGNREGS:** Link rural employment with "Green Assets" (water harvesting) to ensure ecological and economic inclusion.

6. CONCLUSION

Rajasthan's inclusive development journey reflects both commendable progress and significant challenges. While systemic adoption of SDG frameworks and government interventions have expanded basic access to services like education and social protection, persistent disparities in quality, equity of outcomes, and structural inclusion remain. The state's progress underscores the necessity of refining policy actions to focus not just on access but on outcome equity for marginalized populations. Strengthening intersectoral linkages, ensuring

robust implementation, and enhancing participatory governance could accelerate inclusive development.

The synchronised analysis of SDG 4 and SDG 10 using Rajasthan SDGs Index 2025 reveals that inclusive development in Rajasthan is partial and uneven. While educational access has expanded significantly, inequitable outcomes persist due to weak retention, quality gaps, and district-level disparities. Inequality remains spatially and socially embedded, indicating that inclusive growth requires targeted, outcome-oriented, district-specific interventions rather than uniform policy expansion.

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