

## Understanding Sustainable Development Goals and the Challenges of Northeast India: A Review Essay

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### Abstract

With its rich cultural diversity, Northeast India presents a unique and complex challenge for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the region has made notable progress in areas such as poverty alleviation, education, and health, the concept of diversity—intended to foster unity—has instead become a source of division. Ethnic groups in Northeast India often define their identity in opposition to perceived rivals, fuelling identity politics and deepening social divisions. This construction of “the other” has historical roots in colonial exploitation, and the legacy of ethnic violence has intensified these tensions in recent years. As ethnic identity becomes a powerful political tool, cultural symbols once tied to community pride are now weaponised for elitist power-mongering (Dutta, 2015).

This essay largely reviews the book *Sustainable Development Goals in Northeast India: Challenges and Achievements*, which was co-edited by Subhash Anand, MadhushreeDas, Rituparna Bhattacharyya, and RB Singh and published by **Springer Nature** in 2023, which can be accessed at the link <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6478-7>. Additional articles and books on issues linked to Northeast India's development, belonging, identity, difficulties, and responses have been undertaken to strengthen and support the central arguments critically.

The several papers included in the current review address the region's diversity, where challenges seem to surface for implementing inclusive strategies. Evidently, more profound socio-economic inequalities and governance challenges exist. While progress has been made, key SDG indicators—such as infrastructure development, gender equality, and economic equity—remain far below the national average, limiting the region's ability to achieve sustainable development (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023). The current review essay addresses how the manipulation of ethnic identity in Northeast India has shaped both the region's development trajectory and its social fabric.

The critical research questions are: How has the politicisation of ethnic identity influenced the implementation of SDGs in the region? What role does governance play in overcoming the socio-economic and political divides? Can SDGs be realistically implemented in the context of “troubled diversity” (Dutta, 2015)? This review also highlights the recommendations for more inclusive, community-driven strategies to achieve sustainable development by 2030—that is not too far off.

**Keywords:** Northeast of India; North Eastern Region (NER); Land of Seven Sisters (excluding Sikkim); Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Challenges in NER

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Advances in Geographical and Environmental Sciences

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# Sustainable Development Goals in Northeast India

Challenges and Achievements



## Introduction

Historically, the colonial legacy played a crucial role in shaping the identity of the tribes in Northeast India. During British rule, anthropologists and evangelists explored the region, but the colonisers never fully comprehended the complex diversity within the region. Legacy has it that the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was reluctant to engage deeply with the region's indigenous cultures and territories, leaving them largely unexplored and disconnected. This detachment has contributed to the ongoing challenges in understanding and addressing the region's complexities. Dutta's "troubled diversity" thesis (2015) examines how these colonial legacies and the continuing struggle for recognition and development have shaped identity in Northeast India.

While diversity is a fundamental social reality, but when cultural or racial differences are perceived as threats to group identity, it can fuel inequality and conflict. In regions like Northeast India, ethnic groups often define themselves by constructing a rival or oppressor they perceive as a threat to their existence allowing them to see 'the other' with mistrust. Much of this drives the region's identity politics, where historical fears of domination and exploitation exacerbate.

The northeastern states are home to over 200 distinct ethnic groups speaking more than 200 dialects/languages (Hazarika, 2019). This ethnic and linguistic diversity, while a source of rich cultural heritage, often creates significant challenges in governance, economic development, and social cohesion. Tensions between indigenous groups and migrant communities in almost all these states have led to ethnic conflicts that disrupt social stability and delay policy implementation (Brahmachari, 2019; Bhaumik, 2009; Debbarma, 2023). The notion of "troubled diversity" aptly describes these challenges stemming from the region's complex social systems and the historical legacies of conflict (Saitluanga et al., 2022).

In the northeastern region, political movements calling for greater autonomy or independence—such as those in Nagaland and Assam—have

added further complexity to governance, with insurgencies and armed conflicts often destabilising the area (Bhaumik, 2009; Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2020a, b; Bhattacharyya et al., 2023a; Bharadwaj, 2016). These movements, while rooted in historical and ethnic grievances, contribute to delays in development and policy progress.

Furthermore, the region's marginalisation from national political and economic discourse intensifies its development challenges. The northeastern states are geographically isolated from the rest of India, which has limited their integration into the national system and hindered their access to resources and opportunities for growth (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023; Sharma, 2020). Thus, the policies formulated at the national level often fail to address the region's unique needs and priorities, leading to a sense of exclusion among its people (Gupta, 2021).

### Is Diversity a Dilemma?

Cultural clashes and social fragmentation have further fuelled tensions. Land rights issues, migration disputes, and ethnic identity conflicts have exacerbated social divisions (Gogoi, 2017). This has contributed to the perception that people from the northeastern region are "othered" (Pulla et al., 2020) within India's broader national identity, which is largely shaped by the majority Hindi-speaking population (Basumatary & Panda, 2020).

While the diversity of the northeastern states poses developmental challenges, it also offers an opportunity for growth. To address the region's unique challenges, a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to governance, economic development, and policymaking is necessary. By embracing diversity through better political representation, social inclusion, and targeted development strategies, the region can overcome its barriers and achieve sustainable development (Pulla et al., 2020).

The perceived discrimination faced by northeastern communities is partly a result of their ethnic diversity, limited interaction with the rest of India, and historical neglect. These

factors have fostered a sense of alienation and marginalisation, shaping the region's social and political landscape. Pulla et al. (2020) explored these dynamics, addressing issues of belonging, identity, and social exclusion, particularly in relation to ethnicity, caste, and regional identity. This research sheds light on how social structures perpetuate exclusion and how marginalised communities navigate these challenges.

Many ethnic groups, such as the Naga, Khasi, Mizo, and Bodo, possess distinct traditions, practices, and worldviews that differ from those of the predominant Hindi-speaking North Indian population (Hazarika, 2019). This divergence has led to cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes, contributing to discrimination and a sense of "otherness" for people from the northeastern region. The struggle for land rights and identity in all states results in violent conflicts and calls for greater self-determination (Bhaumik, 2009; Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2020a, b; Bhattacharyya et al., 2023a; Debbarma, 2023).

Geographical isolation, coupled with limited infrastructure, has further deepened the disconnect between the northeastern region and the rest of India, perpetuating feelings of exclusion (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023; Sharma, 2020; Sultana et al., 2023). This isolation has also meant that regional concerns have often been neglected by the national media and political discourse, as seen in the inadequate representation of the Assam Movement and the insurgency in Nagaland (Chakravarty, 2020).

National political participation is limited, and central policies fall short of embracing local issues and regional aspirations (Bhaumik, 2009; Bhattacharyya et al., 2023; Sultana et al., 2023). Lack of political engagement and targeted development plans has fuelled perceptions of discrimination and underdevelopment, which continue to hinder northeastern states' advancement.

Thus, India's northeastern region's multiethnic composition poses significant development challenges; it also offers an opportunity for growth through inclusive, culturally sensitive policies. A concerted effort to address

governance, economic inclusion, and social cohesion issues will be critical for achieving sustainable development and improving the region's integration into the broader national fabric.

This review article is extensively based on the most recent book entitled *Sustainable Development Goals in Northeast India: Challenges and Achievements* (Anand et al., 2023).

The introduction (Part 1) includes a review of the region's SDG difficulties and achievements, as well as significant knowledge points, establishing the tone for the remainder of the book.

Poverty reduction, food security, health, gender equality, land degradation, and technology adoption are all SDG-specific challenges that provide theoretical insights, as well as empirical evidence, in Part 2.

Part 3 presents case studies highlighting the practical implementations and practices of the SDGs in the Northeast Region. The case studies focus on social initiatives, conservation activities, and local difficulties.

### Primary Challenges

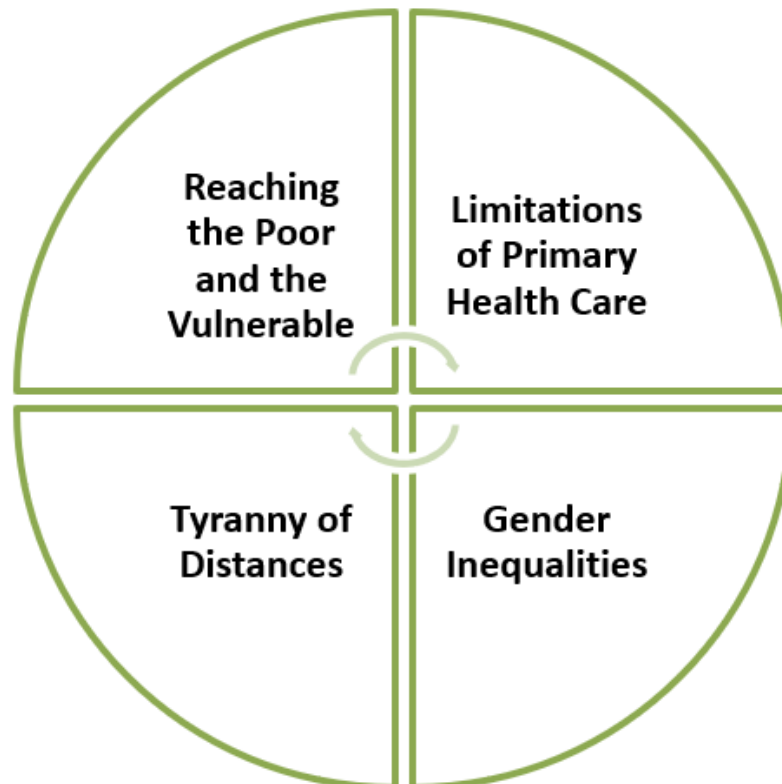
The primary challenges (please refer to Figure 1), in addition to the diversity of its people are its physical, socio-economic, and cultural landscapes. The eight northeastern states of India, connected to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor, seem to be in a state of neglect. Since independence, the region's economy has struggled due to a lack of access to the nation's mainstream. Understandably, it has plenty of natural resources that have not been unearthed. With 7.98% of India's total geographical area, the Northeast is home to just 3.77% of nation's population and has not seen much development (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023, Sultana et al., 2023). Standard development indicators, such as road length, access to healthcare, power consumption, and other vital measures, remain significantly below the national average.

According to NITI AYOGE's SDG India Index, Assam and Tripura are among the top ten fastest-

moving states in the Northeast region. Mizoram and Manipur both scored 72, followed by Tripura (71), Arunachal Pradesh (65), Meghalaya (63), and Nagaland (63) (see Das, 2024).

The authors Bhattacharyya et al. (2023), in the Introduction Chapter titled *Sustainable Development Goals in Northeast India—Challenges and Achievements*, provide a broad view of how the region has performed in relation to the national and global goals, noting both areas of achievement and those in need of

further improvement. The collection of essays begins with a tribute to Professor Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, a well-known geographer whose efforts helped define the understanding of human geography in Northeast India. It details his academic background, personal life, and career accomplishments (Chapter 2). Professor Bhattacharyya's dedication to human geography education and research has influenced numerous generations of researchers (Kar, 2023).



**Figure 1: Diagrammatic Description of the Primary Challenges of Northeast India**  
 Source: Prepared by the Authors

**The SDGs and Northeast India Approach to Antyodaya?**

The purpose of SDGs is to reduce poverty and income inequality, promote economic development and improve quality of life. An economic analysis of the results of the SDGs in Northeast India by Kumar et al. (2023) focuses on reducing poverty, income inequality and economic development. The authors argue that despite the region's wealth and growth potential, it lags some SDG indicators, especially those related to poverty (SDG 1) and economic growth (SDG 8). It examines how structural

weaknesses, limited market access, and social exclusion have exacerbated economic inequalities in the region. It also examines the role of public planning and interventions in solving these problems. However, the authors point out that more needs to be done to ensure that the economic benefits of development are shared among the different communities in the region (Chapter 4).

The concept of a 'Just transition' is the essence of Antyodaya (Misra, 2023), which was explained as integral humanism by Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). It is about

the welfare and upliftment of society's poorest and most marginalised people. The term *Antyodaya* means the "rise of the last person," referring to the idea that the accurate measure of a society's progress and success should be based on the well-being and development of its most disadvantaged members, particularly those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. According to the above principles, those who are poor, uneducated, and socially marginalised should be at the centre of economic policies and development efforts. In Chapter 3, the authors' Sultana et al. (2023) explain the history and relevance of 'Just Transition' in the global context, particularly focusing on the industrial sectors transitioning from fossil fuels and high-carbon production to more sustainable practices. They delve into the implications of such transitions on local communities, particularly Indigenous populations, and highlight the challenges of balancing environmental sustainability with economic growth. The narrative considers the region's complex sociopolitical fabric, history of insurgency, and ethnic diversity. The authors advocate participatory planning, where local communities are involved in decision-making processes to ensure inclusive and equitable transition to sustainable practices.

Gogoi & Saikia (2023), in Chapter 18, explore the challenges in achieving SDG 1: No Poverty in Assam, identifying the significant gaps that exist in the region's poverty alleviation efforts. The authors analyse factors such as income inequality, access to social services, and employment opportunities. The fundamental limitation is the lack of comprehensive regional poverty data. The authors point out that much of the available data is outdated or incomplete, making it difficult to assess the true extent of poverty and effective interventions. Furthermore, the fragmentation of social programs and overlapping programs can lead to confusion and ineffectiveness, making it more difficult for the poor to benefit from government programmes.

## **Food Security and Land Degradation**

Food insecurity and land degradation in Northeast India are deeply intertwined issues that significantly challenge the region's sustainable development (Mandal et al., 2023). The region's vulnerability to extreme weather events—such as floods, droughts, and landslides—disrupts agricultural production and affects the food supply chain, aggravating food insecurity (Chapter 5). These climate-related disasters, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change, have a particularly severe impact on smallholder farmers and rural communities, who are highly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. Mandal et al. (2023) further argue that addressing these challenges requires prioritising climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, focusing on disaster preparedness and resilient agricultural policies to ensure food security.

At the same time, Hazarika et al. (2023) emphasise that land degradation is crucial in undermining the region's food security (Chapter 6). Unsustainable agricultural practices, such as deforestation, overgrazing, and inadequate land management, contribute to soil erosion, reduced fertility, and decreased agricultural productivity. This, coupled with a lack of modern farming techniques and insufficient access to markets and financial resources, limits the region's ability to achieve food security. Similarly, Dutta & Dutta (2023) argue that achieving food security in the region requires more than just increasing agricultural productivity; it necessitates addressing the underlying social and economic determinants of food insecurity, such as poverty and gender inequality (Chapter 7).

Yet in another chapter, Singh & Chaudhary (2023) focus on land degradation, which directly threatens food security in the region. They explore how deforestation, overgrazing, and unsustainable agricultural practices contribute to soil erosion and reduced agricultural productivity, further compounding the issue of food insecurity (Chapter 8). The authors stress that climate change accelerates land degradation with its altered rainfall patterns and

rising temperatures, making the region increasingly vulnerable to droughts and soil erosion. To combat this, they advocate for solutions like reforestation, soil conservation techniques, and promoting sustainable farming practices, alongside policy interventions that encourage community involvement in land management and the adoption of climate-resilient agriculture.

Similarly, Meitei and Sharma (2023) explore the relationship between food security, population growth, and land use in Manipur, focusing on agricultural sustainability. The lack of land holdings in the country will increase population growth. The authors also note that traditional agricultural practices are being abandoned in favour of more intensive but less sustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, there is insufficient support for smallholder farmers in terms of financial aid and access to modern agricultural technologies (Chapter 28).

In a similar vein, studies relating to land use changes in Northeast India's Seven Sister States (excluding Sikkim) over the past two decades using the Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) to track alterations in vegetation cover has been studied by Puri (2023). She addresses rapid urbanisation, revealing a significant decline in forest cover, both factored with negative implications for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Puri underscores the need for sustainable land management practices and the implementation of conservation policies that protect the region's natural resources while balancing the demands of economic development (Chapter 9).

Together, these studies underscore the intricate link between land degradation and food insecurity in Northeast India and the urgent need for integrated, sustainable solutions to address both.

### **Habitat, Health and Environment**

In their chapter, Chamar & Dhanak (2023) examine the quality of living space among rural households in Northeast India, focusing on housing conditions, access to basic services, and infrastructure development. The authors use a

mix of quantitative data and qualitative case studies to illustrate the disparities in living standards across different states in the region and find that many rural households still lack access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and adequate housing, which impacts their overall well-being and the achievement of SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The authors argue that improving housing and infrastructure is essential for enhancing the quality of life and achieving broader development goals in Northeast India. They recommend a combination of government interventions and community-driven initiatives to improve living conditions in rural areas, focusing on the construction of affordable housing, better sanitation, and renewable energy solutions (Chapter 10).

Saikia & Saleh (2023) explore how data science and advanced technology can be harnessed to improve resource management and economic development in Northeast India. The authors discuss the role of big data, remote sensing, geospatial technologies, and artificial intelligence in addressing issues such as resource scarcity, natural disaster management, and urban planning and focus on how these technologies can help achieve the SDGs by providing better insights into environmental conditions, enhancing disaster preparedness, and improving agricultural productivity. The authors provide examples of successful technological interventions in the region, such as the use of GIS for land use planning and drones for agricultural monitoring. The chapter concludes by urging governments, private organisations, and academia to collaborate in promoting technological innovations that can drive sustainable development in Northeast India (Chapter 11).

In another chapter, Sarma (2023) focuses on the health sector in Northeast India and its alignment with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. The author analyses the region's health infrastructure, examining factors such as access to healthcare, quality of healthcare services, and public health outcomes. It identifies several challenges in the healthcare system, including a

shortage of healthcare professionals, inadequate infrastructure, and high rates of maternal and child mortality. It touches on the impact of traditional healthcare practices in remote areas, where modern healthcare facilities are scarce. The author argues for a more integrated approach to healthcare that combines modern medicine with traditional practices and increases government investment in healthcare infrastructure. The chapter concludes by calling for urgent reforms to improve the region's health outcomes in line with SDG 3 (Chapter 12).

It is evident from Chapter 27 that health-related disparities exist between Manipur's hill and valley regions. An analysis of the region's progress toward achieving SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being points to significant disparities in access to health services between the hill and valley regions, with rural and hill communities suffering from a lack of services, health, and professionals. In addition, political instability and social unrest intensify the challenges of providing adequate health care across the state (Ngaihte & Anushruti, 2023). These gaps must be addressed to achieve SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being.

Bhattacharjee (2023) provides a detailed examination of the progress made by Northeast India in achieving health-related SDGs. The author presents data on key health indicators, such as life expectancy, child mortality, and access to healthcare, to measure the performance of different states in the region and highlights both progress and challenges in achieving SDG 3. While some states have made significant strides in improving immunisation rates and reducing child mortality, others continue to struggle with high levels of malnutrition, poor maternal health services, and a lack of healthcare access in rural areas. The author calls for increased government focus on public health campaigns, more significant investment in rural healthcare infrastructure, and better implementation of health policies tailored to the region's specific needs (Chapter 13).

## Gender Equality

Gender equality is complicated by cultural norms that perpetuate traditional gender roles. The collection by Anand et al. (2023) has a couple of dedicated chapters on the issues relating to the status of gender equality in North-East India in the context of SDG 5. The authors (Gupta et al., 2023) in Chapter 14 analyse the region's performance regarding gender-related indicators, such as literacy, labour force participation and women's political participation, showing positive trends and evil. On the other hand, Northeast India has the highest female literacy and employment rates compared to other parts of the country. However, of course, gender-based violence and unequal pay and employment opportunities persist. The authors call for more robust legal frameworks to protect women's rights, educational measures to promote equality and outstanding policies that guarantee equal opportunities for women in all sectors of society.

An in-depth look at the role of women farm workers in the local economy is examined in the context of the status of women's work in agriculture and other sectors over time. It discusses rural women's challenges regarding access to employment opportunities, education and health services, arguing that their jobs are often underpaid despite women's significant contribution to the local economy (Chapter 15). The authors call for more investment in skills development and economic inclusion programmes for rural women's employment (Rani & Chamar, 2023).

In a similar context, Chapter 17 identifies that one of the major significant limitations is the lack of coordination between government bodies and local communities. The chapter notes that while various development programmes exist, the inefficiency in implementation and lack of data-driven planning slow down progress. Additionally, the authors highlight the limited financial resources as a significant constraint, affecting the state's ability to scale up initiatives to achieve the SDGs. Therefore, Saha et al. (2023) outline a roadmap for Assam in its efforts to achieve the SDGs. It focuses on key sectors



such as agriculture, education, health and infrastructure, analysing the progress made so far and the challenges that remain (Saha et al., 2023).

### **Gender and Disasters**

One of the most severe issues raised is the absence of gender-specific standards in disaster management. Although women play an essential part in the adverse reaction, present frameworks fail to recognise their demands and contributions. Another constraint is the ineffective incorporation of local knowledge into disaster planning, which can promote community well-being.

In Chapter 19, Bhattacharyya et al. (2023b) examine the challenges of providing safe drinking water during emergencies in Assam, especially during floods and other natural disasters. It shows the need for better emergency water treatment solutions. In so doing, the chapter highlights the inadequate infrastructure for emergency water treatment in Assam. Despite the frequency of natural disasters, the region lacks a strong and powerful disaster management system, and the supply of clean water during times of crisis can be delayed. In addition, the authors cite limited financial resources and technical expertise as major barriers to improving water treatment facilities.

Similarly, Chetry (2023), in Chapter 20, focuses on community-based disaster management in the Majuli flood zone in Assam, focusing on gender dynamics. It analyses how floods affect women and why their role in disaster management is overlooked.

Sarma et al. (2023), in a slightly different context in Chapter 21, report a successful community conservation initiative in Assam's Manas region, where communities helped to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods. However, this initiative appears to rely on external money, and its long-term viability is dubious due to a lack of financial support. Community factors include intercommunity conflicts as well as long delays in implementing conservation activities.

In Chapter 22, Ahmed (2023) concentrates on the Char Islands along the River Brahmaputra, which are especially vulnerable to floods. The author discusses the challenges that communities living in these environments face, as well as measures for reducing flood risk. The absence of long-term planning for these Char islands appears to be a significant restriction. The chapter observes that most flood mitigation solutions are temporary and do not address the root reasons of risk, such as erosion and poor infrastructure. Furthermore, the Char islands' distant location makes it difficult to provide timely emergency help and respond to calamities.

### **Labour Economy and Underpayments**

In the state of Assam, for instance, in most urban areas, unpaid labour cuts women's income and contributes to gender inequity. Without economic recognition of unpaid domestic work, closing the gender pay gap and ensuring equal opportunity for women becomes harder. An examination of unpaid labour in Assam's urban settlements focuses on the implications of gender inequality and the implementation of SDG 5. The emphasised constraint appears to lack emphasis on pro bono work within economic and political systems. The authors in Chapter 23 argue that without an accurate estimate of unpaid domestic work, it will be difficult to close the gender pay gap and provide equal opportunities for women. Furthermore, cultural norms that maintain gender roles significantly impede change (Goswami & Bhattacharyya, 2023).

### **Tourism, Wildlife, and Conservation**

Sustainable growth requires addressing infrastructural, marketing, and seasonal tourist demand issues. Sustainable tourism is essential in environmentally vulnerable places. Several restrictions in the tourism industry, such as poor infrastructure, insufficient marketing, and seasonal fluctuations in tourist demand, appear to be reinforced (Chapter 25). Furthermore, the tourist industry confronts issues ensuring its expansion is sustainable and environmentally benign, especially in vulnerable locations (Yadav et al., 2023).

While researching the possibilities for ethnic tourism in Arunachal Pradesh, a report highlights the lack of infrastructure and accessibility in the state's remote districts, which limits tourism expansion (Chapter 26). Furthermore, the authors emphasise the absence of training and capacity-building programmes for local people to participate in tourism-related activities, limiting their participation and potential advantages from the business (Borgohain & Patowary, 2023).

A chapter that presents the conflict between human activities and wildlife conservation as a central obligation investigates the dynamics of wildlife conservation in the Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary, focusing on the difficulties of balancing wildlife conservation with local community development needs (Sarma et al., 2023). Local people frequently rely on natural resources from the refuge for survival, resulting in a tension between land conservation and human growth. Furthermore, limited funding and lax enforcement of environmental rules impede the region's long-term growth (Chapter 24).

### **GIS, Cyber Security and Other Issues**

The topic of cybersecurity in Northeast India is widely debated. The region's digital transition presents both opportunities and difficulties, which is a significant focus point. As more people in the region gain internet access, robust cybersecurity frameworks become increasingly crucial for protecting against cyber threats and ensuring data privacy. Chapter 16 examines the current state of digital infrastructure and highlights gaps in cybersecurity policies and implementation. The author also emphasises the necessity of cyber literacy and capacity building in providing individuals and organisations with the tools to protect themselves against cyber threats. To secure Northeast India's digital landscape, comprehensive cybersecurity plans focusing on digital inclusion, cyber education, and more robust regulatory frameworks are required (Bhattacharjee, 2023).

One of the most significant drawbacks appears to be a lack of technical experience in using GIS and remote sensing tools among local

authorities, which hinders their effective deployment. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the expensive cost of purchasing and maintaining the required technology as a critical impediment to broader adoption (Rongmei et al., 2023). Remote sensing and GIS techniques are being used to map landslide-prone areas in Manipur's Tamenglong district, providing insights into how these technologies might help lessen the impact of natural disasters (Chapter 29).

The lack of environmental impact assessments prior to the start of the project appears to have resulted in long-term biological damage to Loktak Lake. Furthermore, the project has severe effects on local communities, particularly in terms of migration and loss of livelihoods, which were not adequately considered during planning (Tiwari & Tiwari, 2023). The trade-offs between growth and environmental sustainability in the Loktak Multipurpose Project (LMP) in Manipur have been examined focusing on the socioeconomic and ecological aspects (Chapter 30).

### **Claims and Counterclaims**

Anand et al. (2023) seem to see the troubled diversity of Northeast India as a primary disadvantaging factor in achieving a well-reckoned achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With its diverse cultures, ecosystems, and socioeconomic conditions, this region offers a distinct challenge for the SDG implementation scenario. Stakeholders claim poverty, education, and health improvements, but counterclaims underscore ongoing barriers to sustainable development.

Additionally, targeted poverty reduction programmes have been successful. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has helped rural areas reduce poverty by providing jobs and enhancing lifestyles (Bhaumik & Dutta, 2021). Evidence that poverty rates have fallen in some regional states during the past decade reinforces this notion.

Counterclaims show significant barriers to SDGs in Northeast India. The continuance of socio-economic inequities, particularly gender and ethnic imbalances, is a crucial contention. Regional cultural norms that limit women's public involvement hinder their education and employment, contradicting SDG 5's gender equality development.

Infrastructure shortages impede access to healthcare and education, another major challenge. Roads, schools, and hospitals are scarce in rural areas, making service delivery difficult (Choudhury, 2020). The lack of a comprehensive infrastructure network makes SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) challenging because many people cannot access healthcare.

Ethnic tensions and insurgencies undermine governance and development (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023; Bhowmik et al., 2018). This instability wastes resources and generates uncertainty, discouraging social sector investment.

Good governance is essential for SDG implementation, but many Northeast Indian states lack it. Poor data-driven planning and government agency coordination have hampered development efforts. This disconnected approach makes target population identification and resource allocation difficult, resulting in overlapping programmes that fail to meet community requirements.

Key counterclaims show persisting hurdles to Northeast India's socioeconomic development progress. Education and poverty reduction have improved, but deep-rooted disparities, poor infrastructure, and governance concerns limit sustainable growth. Community engagement, good governance, and infrastructure development are needed to solve these challenges. By addressing these issues holistically, Northeast India can have a more egalitarian and sustainable future.

## Discussion

The challenges faced by Northeast India are multifaceted and require a comprehensive understanding of historical, social, and political contexts. By aligning efforts with the SDGs and addressing systemic inequalities, there is a

possibility for creating a more inclusive society. Through collective action and advocacy, it is imperative to dismantle the structures of discrimination and racism that have long plagued the region. The journey towards equity and justice for Northeast Indians is not only a moral imperative but a critical component of India's overarching narrative of unity in diversity.

The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, provide a global framework for achieving peace, prosperity, and sustainability by 2030. This initiative is particularly vital for Northeast India, a region characterised by diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and complex socio-economic challenges. Despite its potential, Northeast India faces significant hurdles in realising these goals, including poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality, and environmental degradation.

This comprehensive overview has explored the SDG challenges and achievements in Northeast India, emphasising the social perceptions, theoretical insights, and case studies relevant to this region. By analysing various SDG-specific issues, the review brings to the forefront the current situation and the challenges entailed in implementing SDGs in Northeast India.

Indeed, the region has unique SDG challenges and potential. Different socio-economic and cultural contexts necessitate specialised approaches to meet regional needs. Stakeholder collaboration to promote sustainable development by understanding the complex SDG relationships is crucial.

The reviewers are from the social work and community development fields and find it important to recommend true engagement strategies with local people and use technology as the region approaches 2030. Only then, antyodaya will be possible.

## A Final Word

The book *Sustainable Development Goals in North-Eastern India: Challenges and Achievements*, indeed provides an informative look at the complexities of implementing and accomplishing the SDGs in Northeast India. This comprehensive resource emphasises the

region's distinct social, environmental, and economic landscape while underlining its numerous issues.

Using a multidisciplinary perspective, this collection highlights the relevance of local knowledge, community participation, and effective governance in the quest for sustainable development. The case studies highlight successful projects while emphasising ongoing limitations such as insufficient infrastructure, financial limits, and sociopolitical obstacles.

Overall, this is an excellent resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in promoting sustainable development in complex and diverse ecosystems. It emphasises Northeast India's ability to serve as an example for attaining the SDGs by harnessing local resources, adopting creative solutions, and advocating inclusive policies. Assam and the rest of the region can work towards a more sustainable future by addressing the highlighted concerns head-on. Overall, the editors Anand et al. (2023) make an essential contribution to the SDG literature by providing a complete, multidisciplinary approach that combines practical case studies with a thorough examination of Northeast India's particular issues. The editors and writers emphasise that while Northeast India faces serious challenges, it also has enormous potential for sustainable development. By harnessing local expertise, enhancing governance, and encouraging innovation, the region can serve as a model for long-term development in similarly diverse and complex regions.

Whether you are an academic, a policy specialist, or someone genuinely concerned about the future of Northeast India, this book is a motivating and fascinating read that will leave you with respect for the region's challenges and optimism about its ability to accomplish the SDGs by 2030 and beyond.

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### Conflict of Interest

Neither of the authors has contributed to the current volume of articles under review. There has been no pecuniary interest in undertaking the review.

### Author Contribution Statement

The senior author, Dr Pulla, benefited from an extensive reading of the volume and familiarity with regional scholarship on matters relating to the Northeast region of India. Subash Sharma prepared detailed summaries of each chapter under review for discussion with the senior author. While Dr Pulla rendered the article in its present form, Subash Sharma appropriately checked the references.

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