

# India improves ranking in Human Development Index to 126

Our Bureau  
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INDIA has inched a rank higher up the Human Development Index (HDI) to 126 among the 177 countries surveyed this year. But, this is still a far cry from Norway, which tops the index or China, ranked at 81.

HDI, developed by the United Nations Development Programme, is often regarded as a more comprehensive measure of economic welfare achieved by a nation than the conventional GDP. The '06 index released on Thursday shows the top five positions have been claimed after Norway by Iceland, Australia, Ireland and Sweden.

On the other end of the scale are Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sierra Leone and Niger. China has moved up by nine ranks compared with last year.

The index shows why India still figures at the low end of the scale. For instance, nearly 35% of India lives below \$1 a day, while 80% lives on just \$2 a day. The per capita health expenditure in India was \$82 in '03 as against \$278 for China.

On the score for technology diffusion and creation, India has 44 cellular subscribers per 1,000 people, as against China's 248. The number of researchers per million people in India is 119, even as the spend on R&D as a percentage of GDP was 0.8%. China spends 1.3% of its GDP on R&D, it has 663 researchers per million people.

Also, while India has logged a 4% average annual GDP growth rate in the 15-year period of 1990-2004, despite the late spurt towards 8%, China has shot up at an average annual growth rate of 8.9%.

But this picture is changing. The UNDP report notes that India is moving closer on achieving the Millennium Development Goal on Water. Citing experiences from various Indian states, the report says that equitable distribution of water and sanitation services is greatly enhanced when access and management rights are transferred to communities themselves. But, the report also argues that while there is enough water in the world, the poor are getting systematically excluded from access to water by their poverty, limited legal rights and public policies that often limit access to the infrastructure for water. In some parts of India, groundwater tables are falling by more than 1 metre a year, jeopardising future agricultural production.

Measured on conventional indicators, water stress is increasing. The report says that about 700m people in 43 countries live below the water stress threshold of 1,700 cubic metres per person. By '25, that figure will reach 3bn, as water stress intensifies in China, India and other countries. Though India has a greater role in the globalisation story, it is way behind Bangladesh when it comes to sanitation. Despite an average income that is 60% higher than its neighbour, India has a lower rate of sanitation coverage.