Call for action: presenting constituency-level data on population, health and socioeconomic wellbeing related to 2030 Sustainable Development Goals for India

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India is committed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets.[1] Accomplishing the SDGs will require strong and sustained political support and accountability, not just at the national level but at the level of the 543 parliamentary constituencies with elected representatives, referred to as the Members of Parliament (MPs).[2,3] However, readily available data related to SDG indicators is lacking for constituencies. This occurs because the populations served by a district (a unit at which data is typically made available) and a constituency are not the same; a constituency can have parts of a district or multiple districts intersecting it or vice versa.[4] Building on prior research,[5,6] we present a data resource of 33 SDG indicators related to population, health and socioeconomic well-being for the 543 parliamentary constituencies that the MPs can utilize to assess the progress their respective constituencies have made so far and what needs to be done to accomplish the targets by 2030 (Fig. 1; also see https://geographicinsights.iq.harvard.edu/PC-SDG-Progress).

For indicators such as adolescent pregnancy, multidimensional poverty, access to electricity and women having bank accounts, a vast majority of the constituencies are on course to achieving the targets or have already achieved the targets in 2021. On the other hand, for indicators such as health insurance, access to basic services, and an array of women's well-being and gender inequality indicators (e.g., girl child marriage, intimate partner violence, contraceptive use) more than two-thirds to three-fourths of the constituencies are not on track to achieving the targets by 2030. Despite national success in indicators such as improved sanitation or neonatal mortality, 119 and 218 constituencies, respectively, are not on-course to achieving these targets. Similarly, targets related to access to basic services, including clean fuel for cooking, hand-washing facilities, or improved water quality, also remain out of reach in a large majority of the constituencies.

In a recent Q&A session in the parliament on the request for constituency-level data for evaluating a particular program on registered agricultural laborers, the Minister for Labour and Employment acknowledged no data was being maintained at the constituency-level.[7] Furthermore, several Lok Sabha members have asked the Government of India on the status of SDG Indicators at sub-national levels in the Parliament.[8,9] This fundamental data gap needs to be addressed for MPs in order for them to function effectively in serving the needs of their constituents.

Having constituency-level data is a critical pre-requisite for the success of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees (DISHA). The DISHA was established to provide a quarterly review of all development activity and, importantly, to ensure better coordination among the elected and administrative representatives for efficient functioning. However, in the absence of constituency-level data, the MP who chairs these meetings cannot get an accurate assessment of the progress of the various programs for his or her constituents as only district data is made available by the district administrator. Since the MPs are directly responsible and accountable to their constituents, the availability of development data at the constituency-level at the DISHA meetings can substantially empower the MPs to function effectively in a targeted manner. Outside of formal governmental engagement, timely and accessible constituency-level data can also bring a data-oriented approach to MPs engagement with civil society and other stakeholders to prioritize issues most important to their constituents.

While attempts have been made to create a reliable constituency-level data resource,[10,11] a more durable solution is needed such that all micro datasets be consistently geo-tagged for parliamentary and assembly constituencies. The discordance in the populations that are served by

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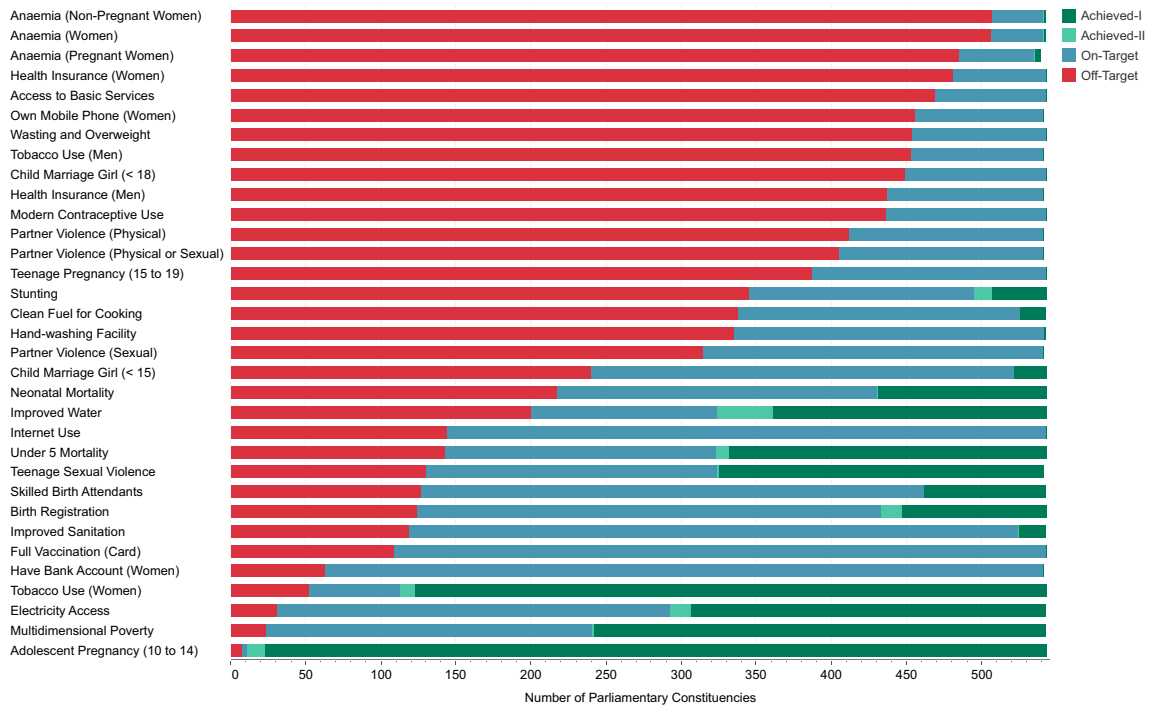
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Fig. 1: Distribution of parliamentary constituencies (count) for 33 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators by constituency status. Notes: For the selection of indicators, we used a published study that provided an assessment across these indicators for the districts of India,[6] and to derive the constituency estimates, we utilize a previously published methodology.[5]

districts and constituencies and the inefficiencies they bring to development governance make a compelling case for establishing a national commission to systematically explore and develop a strategy for harmonizing these two critical policy units. For instance, recently Andhra Pradesh, which was due for reconstituting its 13 districts since its separation from Telangana in 2014, decided to largely use the number and geometry of 25 of its 26 parliamentary constituencies to create the new districts.[12] There is a de-limitation scheduled for reconstituting the number and geometry of parliamentary and assembly constituencies in 2026,[13] and it would be timely to consider possibilities for harmonizing the populations served by the districts and parliamentary constituencies.

Recent years have seen India's elected officials engage publicly and more consistently in articulating and shaping policy agendas. Creating a robust constit-uency-level data surveillance and monitoring system on the health and well-being of their population can bring the necessary political synergy and accountability needed to accomplish the SDGs.

Contributors
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Data sharing statement
Parliamentary Constituency estimates for SDG indicators are geo-visualized in an interactive dashboard: https://geographicinsights.iq.

harvard.edu/PC-SDG-Progress. The data source underlying this work is publicly available and can be accessed from https://dhsprogram.com/data/available-datasets.cfm.

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