

Evaluating the Integration of SDG 11 in India's Smart Cities Mission: Evidence from Indore Using the Output–Outcome Monitoring Framework

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Abstract:

How global sustainability frameworks are translated into practice at the city level remains an important question in urban geography. This paper examines the convergence of India's Smart Cities Mission (SCM) and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities) with special reference to Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Indore is widely regarded as a frontrunner in India's urban transformation experiment. The study explores how Indore's Smart City Proposal has translated into localised sustainable outcomes across four critical SDG 11 target dimensions: sustainable transit systems (Target 11.2), cultural heritage safeguarding (Target 11.4), climate-disaster resilience (Target 11.5), and municipal solid waste management (Target 11.6). This study is based on secondary data from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework (OOMF), UN-Habitat evaluation reports and the NITI Aayog SDG India Index. The analysis reveals a consistent structural tension. While Indore has achieved remarkable milestones in data-driven waste management, green infrastructure and digital mobility, the benefits of these initiatives remain disproportionately concentrated within the small Area-Based Development (ABD) zone. This ABD zone covers only 742 acres of the city region and serves about five percent of the city's population, leaving the broader pan-city population of 2.5 million residents relatively underserved. The paper contributes to the study of smart urbanism in an Indian intermediate city context and introduces a two-dimensional aggregate versus spatial assessment framework.

Keywords: *Urban Geography, SDG Localisation, Indore Smart City, Spatial Justice, Smart Urbanism, Climate Resilience.*

1. Introduction

Urbanisation in the global south is no longer a slow and sequential process; rather, it has been taking place rapidly and disorderly. This fast-paced urbanisation has a direct impact on how hundreds of millions of people live, work, and move. India offers one of the starkest examples of this transformation. Urban centres across the country are projected to account for more than

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seventy per cent of national GDP by 2030, placing high pressure on governments to rethink how cities are planned, financed, and governed (MoHUA, 2015). In response, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) in 2015. It was a competitive, performance-linked programme that invited cities to submit proposals for technology-led urban renewal. The SCM is built on three interdependent pillars: Liveability, Economic Vitality and Sustainability. In its philosophy, this mission aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), particularly SDG 11, which calls on nations to make human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (Laituri et al., 2021). The gap between a policy framework and lived urban experience can be vast. Scholars working at the intersection of urban geography and development studies have observed that translating top-down sustainability indicators into genuinely equitable city-level transformation is not a technical problem alone; it is a political and spatial one (Bhan, 2019). In aggregate statistics, the rapid infrastructure deployment is impressive but frequently lacks the question of who in the city actually benefits (Praharaj, 2025). The implementation of Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs) and digital monitoring platforms has introduced better efficiencies in municipal management, but also risks of data inequality, where certain zones become legible to the state's digital eye while others remain invisible (Datta, 2019; Kitchin, 2014). To address these issues, the MoHUA developed the Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework (OOMF), a robust accountability mechanism tracking transformation across one hundred smart cities through 213 indicators mapped across fifteen SDG targets. Within this framework, Indore presents itself as an instructive case study. It is selected in the first competitive round of the SCM. Indore has pursued an ambitious combination of concentrated Area-Based Development (ABD) in its historic urban core and broader Pan-City technological investments, receiving national recognition for waste management achievements and consistently topping the Swachh Survekshan survey for seven consecutive years.

This paper explores that to what extent have Indore's smart city interventions actually achieved localised SDG 11 targets, and where do spatial inequalities persist despite high aggregate performance scores? It proceeds by first situating the study within established theoretical debates around smart urbanism and spatial justice, before presenting the methodological approach, empirical findings across four SDG 11 target areas, a discussion of spatial inequality, and a set of evidence based policy suggestions.

2. Literature Review

The academic discussion on Smart Cities has been developing since the concept became popular in urban policy discourse in the early 2010s. Initially driven by corporate technology narratives championed by IBM, Siemens, and Cisco and this gave a way to a more critical scholarly literature that asks for whom smart cities are built for, and at what cost to those excluded from their digital benefits (Hollands, 2008; Kitchin, 2014). Hollands (2008) argues that the smart city as a policy concept is as much a branding strategy for technology firms as it is an urban governance framework, and that its dominant metrics systematically privilege efficiency and capital formation over social equity. Kitchin (2014) deepens this critique, demonstrating through real-time data governance analysis that smart city platforms reproduce

the legibility problem identified by Scott (1998): they make visible what the state wishes to manage and render invisible what it does not.

On the question of SDG localisation, a number of studies have been done examining how global sustainability goals are integrated through national frameworks to city-level implementation. Laituri et al. (2021) provide one of the most systematic treatments of SDG Indicator 11.3.1 in secondary cities, demonstrating that standard UN metrics were designed with large metropolitan data environments in mind and often fail to capture the dynamics of intermediate cities precisely the scale at which India's SCM operates. Parnell and Pieterse (2010) show through their analysis of African secondary cities that the spatial justice dimensions of sustainability goals are routinely subordinated to aggregate output metrics in national reporting frameworks, a pattern equally operative in the Indian context where OOMF composite scores can mask distributional inequalities.

Within the Indian urban governance literature, Praharaj (2025) offers the most thorough independent appraisal of the SCM, finding that its dual-track structure concentrating investment in small ABD zones while allocating far smaller budgets to pan-city solutions create what he calls 'uneven geographies of smartness.' Bhan (2019) deepens this critique, arguing that the entire grammar of Indian smart urbanism is inflected by a middle-class imaginary that equates urbanism with property value, aesthetics and digital legibility, systematically marginalising informal settlers, street vendors, and migrant workers who constitute the majority of India's urban population. Datta (2019) adds a postcolonial dimension, tracing how the smart city imaginary in India reproduces colonial-era spatial hierarchies between legible formal city space and illegible informal city space.

The concept of spatial justice, developed most influentially by Harvey (1973) and later elaborated by Soja (2010) in the context of urban geography, provides a powerful critical lens for reading these uneven geographies. Spatial justice is not simply about distributing infrastructure evenly; it concerns the deeper question of whether the spatial organisation of urban development reinforces or challenges pre-existing socio-economic inequalities (Harvey, 1973; Mullick and Patnaik, 2022).

Urban Political Ecology, developed through Swyngedouw's (2004) metabolic urbanism framework, insists that cities be understood as metabolic systems embedded in broader ecological processes. Research on heritage-led urban regeneration in comparable South Asian cities has consistently documented the green gentrification dynamic. On urban climate resilience, Revi et al. (2014), writing for the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, establish that informal settlements in riverine and low-lying zones face disproportionately high climate risk in rapidly growing South Asian intermediate cities. Anguelovski et al. (2016) extend this analysis, documenting 'climate gentrification' the process by which green infrastructure and resilience investments in urban core areas drive land value appreciation that ultimately displaces low-income residents most exposed to climate risk.

Finally, the BRT and transit corridor literature provides the evidential base for Section 8's policy recommendations. Cervero and Golub (2007) systematically document how high-frequency, corridor-based transit investment catalyses mixed-use densification along routes,

using Curitiba's and Bogotá's integrated BRT-land use frameworks as benchmark cases. This paper builds on and extends this literature by offering a spatially sensitive analysis of one of India's highest-performing smart cities and demonstrating that headline performance scores can mask significant distributional inequalities.

4. Data Sources and Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative and comparative secondary data analysis approach triangulating evidence from three official and internationally recognised data sources. The deliberate reliance on secondary data ensures methodological reproducibility however it is important to acknowledge that secondary and administrative data carry their own limitations. OOMF indicators are self-reported by Smart City Development Limited entities, introducing potential bias toward project completion over outcome quality. UN-Habitat evaluations are qualitative in character and cannot always be cross-validated with local administrative records. The NITI Aayog SDG Index is not disaggregated at ward or settlement level. These constraints mean the study's findings are most reliable for characterising city-level patterns and structural tendencies rather than making precise quantitative claims about specific localities.

MoHUA OOMF Dashboard and Urban Outcomes Framework. Physical progress indicators, achievement ratios, and thematic use cases were extracted for Indore Smart City Development Limited (ISC DL). The OOMF tracks 213 indicators across fifteen SDGs, providing a basis for mapping SCM interventions onto specific SDG 11 sub-targets.

UN-Habitat India Case Files (2025). Qualitative and quantitative project outcome data were reviewed to cross-reference SCM indicator achievements with independently evaluated SDG 11 targets, particularly in heritage conservation and socioeconomic displacement.

NITI Aayog SDG India Index and City Progress Scorecards. These provided baseline performance vectors for waste management, public transport, and water access. Mahato's (2025) analysis of Indian states' SDG 11 progress was used as the comparative national context.

5. Project Distribution Profile under SCM Indore

The total project cost approved for the Indore Smart City Proposal is approximately ₹5,099 crore which is funded under the competitive SCM allocation framework (ISC DL, 2019).

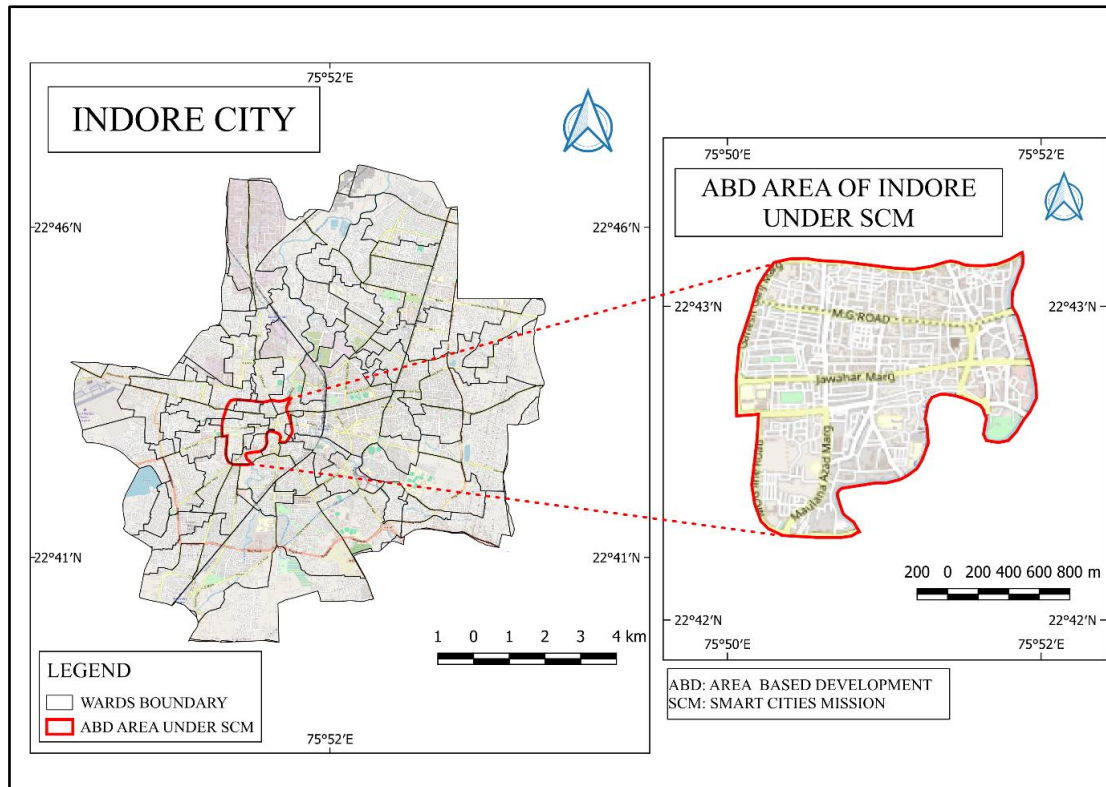


Figure 1: Indore Municipal Corporation ward boundaries and Smart Cities Mission ABD area.

Source: Map created by author using QGIS software; basemap data from OpenStreetMap.

Table 1: Financial Allocation and Spatial Distribution in SCM Indore

Development Track	Geographic Coverage	Target Population	Allocated Budget
Area-Based Development (ABD)	742 Acres (~3 sq. km.) — 1.1% of municipal area	~125,000 citizens (~5%)	₹1,400 crore (retrofitting) + ₹2,900 crore (PPP) = ₹4,300 crore (84% of total)
Pan-City Initiatives	276 sq. km. (entire municipal area)	~2,500,000 citizens (~95%)	₹700 crore (ICT only) (14% of total)

Source: ISCDL (2019); budget percentages calculated by author.

An examination of how this budget is geographically distributed reveals a spatial concentration. The ABD core, covering barely 1.1 percent of Indore's total geographic municipal area, was awarded with eighty-four percent of the total SCM budget. The 54-acre MOG Lines residential housing project which is a single PPP redevelopment scheme within the ABD, alone represents an outlay roughly equivalent to one-fifth of the entire Pan-City ICT allocation (ISCDL, 2019). The Pan-City projects which are proposed for serving 2.5 million residents across 276 square kilometres, receives only ₹700 crore and these projects exclusively for ICT solutions. This

forms the empirical base for the spatial analysis presented in Section 6 and directly represents the aggregate-versus-spatial gaps visible in Table 2.

6. Empirical Analysis: SDG 11 Targets in Indore

The four target areas examined below are each assessed for aggregate OOMF achievement and then for spatial distribution. Table 2 summarises this two-dimensional assessment; the sub-sections provide the empirical detail behind each evaluation.

Table 2: Two-Dimensional Assessment — Aggregate Achievement vs. Spatial Distribution by SDG 11 Target

SDG Target	11 Intervention Type	OOMF Aggregate Achievement	ABD Spatial Reach	Pan-City Spatial Reach
11.2 Sustainable Transit	ITMS, 150+ EV buses, NMT corridors	High — fleet digitised, emissions reduced	Strong — NMT, pedestrian streets in ABD	Weak — first-last mile gaps in 79 peripheral wards
11.4 Cultural Heritage	Rajwada facade, underground utilities, pedestrianisation	Moderate — physical fabric preserved	Strong physically; weak socially (displacement, rent rises)	Not applicable — heritage assets confined to ABD core
11.5 Disaster Resilience	SCADA, weather stations, ICCC early warning	Moderate — core zones monitored	Strong — dense sensor coverage	Critically weak — Khan/Saraswati riverbank settlements uncovered
11.6 Waste Management	Bio-CNG plant, 6-stream segregation, GPS/RFID fleet	Exceptional — 100% household segregation achieved	Strong	Strong — only target with genuine city-wide reach

Source: Compiled by author from OOMF Dashboard (ISCDL, 2019; 2025), UN-Habitat (2025), and field evaluation documentation.

6.1 Sustainable Mobility and Transit Systems (Target 11.2)

Target 11.2 of SDG 11 calls for safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems

for all, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations. Indore's approach rests on two pillars: digitalisation of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and city bus fleet through an Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS) integrated with the central ICCC, and the electrification of the public transport fleet through the Atal Indore City Transport Services Limited (AICTSL). The ITMS has delivered real-time route optimisation, automated signal coordination, and passenger information displays across key corridors, measurably reducing average journey times. The deployment of over 150 electric buses has contributed to fleet emission reductions and shorter waiting intervals at major stops, a tangible contribution to the environmental dimension of Target 11.2. However, Non-Motorised Transport infrastructure dedicated cycling lanes, smart pedestrian streets, shaded walkways have been developed almost exclusively within the 742-acre ABD core. The seventy-nine wards lying outside the ABD boundary experience a qualitatively different street environment. First-last mile connectivity remains poorly addressed in the outer wards. These are the service gaps that aggregate OOMF scores do not capture but that determine whether Target 11.2 is being achieved for Indore's residents as a whole.

6.2 Cultural Heritage Conservation and Socioeconomic Displacement (Target 11.4)

Target 11.4 asks cities to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage. Indore's historic core, centred on the Rajwada palace complex and the Gopal Mandir, was identified as a flagship ABD intervention. The conservation approach was genuinely innovative: strict facade preservation guidelines, underground utility duct systems eliminating the visual and structural damage of overhead wiring, and progressive pedestrianisation reducing vibration damage from vehicle traffic. These achievements represent a real departure from demolition-oriented heritage management common in Indian city centres. Yet the OOMF's heritage indicators, focused on the physical state of cultural assets, do not capture the socioeconomic consequences of formalising a previously informal urban heritage economy. According to UN-Habitat's (2025) independent evaluation, the formalisation of the Rajwada marketplace was accompanied by sharp increases in property values and commercial rental rates, rendering the heritage zone unaffordable for the traditional craftsmen, artisans, and small traders whose presence had been, in itself, a form of living cultural heritage. Strict smart-zone licensing frameworks displaced non-registered informal street vendors to secondary peripheral markets. More broadly, this dynamic illustrates a structural tension running directly through the SDG framework: SDG 11.4 (protect cultural heritage) and SDG 11.1 (adequate housing and anti-displacement) work at cross-purposes when heritage interventions are not accompanied by explicit anti-displacement policies such as rent stabilisation, preferential trader licensing, and community land trust instruments.

6.3 Urban Metabolism, Circular Economy, and Waste Management (Target 11.6)

In Indore's smart city programme the dimension that stands as a genuine national model is its approach to solid waste management under Target 11.6, which calls for reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities through sustainable waste management.

Indore has built a closed-loop circular economy for municipal solid waste. One hundred percent household segregation across six distinct waste streams has been achieved through an intensive

community engagement programme backed by ward-level monitoring. Collection effectiveness is tracked in real time through a GPS and RFID-enabled fleet, with live feeds to the ICCC enabling rapid response to collection gaps. The centrepiece of the system is the Gobardhan Bio-CNG Plant, processing 550 metric tons of organic waste per day (ISCDL, 2025). The plant converts municipal organic waste into pure biomethane fed back into the city's gas grid and used to fuel the public bus fleet closing the loop between waste generation and energy consumption in a way that is both environmentally and financially sustainable. As Table 2 demonstrates, the Gobardhan model is also the only SDG 11 target area in this study to achieve genuine pan-city reach, making it the most important benchmark for what equitable smart urbanism in Indore could look like across all target areas.

6.4 Disaster Resilience and Climate Adaptation (Target 11.5)

Target 11.5 focuses on significantly reducing deaths, affected persons, and economic losses caused by disasters, with particular attention to protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations. Indore's digital resilience infrastructure, managed through the ICCC, includes automated weather tracking stations, spatial telemetry nodes, and a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system monitoring critical urban infrastructure. In aggregate, this represents a sophisticated early warning capability that many Indian cities of comparable size do not possess. The spatial justice problem is starkly exposed when the distribution of monitoring infrastructure is mapped against the city's actual geography of flood risk. The low-income informal settlements lining the outer banks of the Khan and Saraswati rivers facing the most severe seasonal inundation and the least structurally resilient housing stock lie largely outside the ICCC's dense sensor coverage zone. Revi et al. (2014), writing for the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, specifically identify this configuration formal early warning infrastructure built for commercial zones while informal riverside settlements remain unconnected as the modal pattern of climate risk amplification in intermediate South Asian cities. The result is a technically sophisticated resilience system that amplifies the socio-spatial vulnerability it was ostensibly designed to reduce.

7. Discussion:

Across three of the four SDG 11 target areas studied, OOMF indicators show high or moderate aggregate achievement while spatial analysis reveals sharp differentials between the ABD core and the nearby wards. Only Target 11.6 (waste management) achieves genuine pan-city reach, because the Gobardhan Bio-CNG Plant's operational logic which is processing all municipal waste regardless of origin is inherently city-wide. The other three targets operate through infrastructure linked to space, whose spatial coverage directly reflects where the SCM budget was allocated. This pattern is not unique to Indore. Praharaj (2025) documents equivalent ABD-Pan-City disparities in Pune, Bhopal and Surat, suggesting a structural tendency at the programme level rather than a city-specific failure. Bhan (2019) situates this within India's wider urban governance tradition: the SCM is the latest iteration of a lineage in which formal, legible, visible city space is continuously upgraded while informal and invisible space is left to manage its own conditions. In this regard the smart city is less a transformation of the Indian city and a high-technology rearticulation of its pre-existing spatial hierarchies. The advance of SDG 11.4 (heritage protection) through Rajwada formalisation actively undermines SDG 11.1

(anti-displacement) by raising rents and displacing informal traders. The advance of SDG 11.5 (disaster resilience) through SCADA deployment in the commercial core deepens the climate vulnerability of riverbank communities through the climate gentrification dynamic (Anguelovski et al., 2016). These inter-SDG conflicts are invisible to monitoring frameworks that assess each target in isolation.

8. Policy Suggestions.

The findings of this study suggest three specific policy suggestions for Indore and comparable intermediate cities pursuing SDG 11 localisation through the smart city framework. First, inclusion of Transit Corridor-Based Development along major mobility axes would equitably distribute smart infrastructure and non-motorized transport networks which will ensure growth across peripheral wards rather than limiting it to a central core. Second, the creation of an Urban Resilience Fund which can be financed by circular economy surpluses like the Bio-CNG plant. This would supply essential flood infrastructure and early warning systems to vulnerable, informal riverside settlements and bring marginalized populations under the city's climate protection network. Finally, establishing a Community-Centred Information Architecture by democratizing municipal data will ensure participatory governance and safeguard resident communities from the socioeconomic fallout of heritage and green regeneration projects.

9. Conclusion

Indore's Smart Cities Mission achievements in circular waste economy design, digital transit management, and cultural heritage preservation are real and provide a practical roadmap for other rapidly growing intermediate cities. The Gobardhan Bio-CNG model is the most important achievement because of its circular design and pan-city reach. Table 2 makes the essential structural finding concrete. It reveals a sharp spatial divide between the 742-acre ABD core and Indore's remaining wards. Transit equity, heritage justice, and climate resilience are unevenly distributed in ways that directly correspond to the SCM's financial geography, in which eighty-four percent of the budget serves five percent of the population. This is not a failing of Indore's implementation specifically; it is a structural tendency of the SCM design, documented comparably in Pune, Bhopal, and Surat (Praharaj, 2025). A second major finding concerns the inter-SDG tensions revealed by cross-target spatial analysis. SDG 11.4 and SDG 11.1 are in active conflict in the Rajwada zone. The three policy recommendations offered transit corridor development grounded in the Curitiba-Bogotá-ITDP evidence base, a resilience fund drawing on the Gobardhan surplus, and a community-centred open data and anti-displacement architecture are practically achievable within the existing institutional architecture of the SCM. SDG 11's ambition is that no one should be left outside the perimeter of a sustainable city. Closing the gap between that ambition and Indore's spatial reality is the unfinished yet achievable work of sustainable urban governance.

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