

INDIA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; We borrow it from our children”

Lakota.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

India makes up 2.4 percent of the world's land, while supporting 16 percent of the world's population. The compounding result is a severely unsustainable use of natural resources for several generations. Currently, India is experiencing rapid and widespread environmental degradation at alarming rates. Tremendous pressure is placed upon the country's land and natural resources to support the massive overpopulation.

In this paper we focus on strategies for sustainable development which are necessary for survival of our present generation as well as coming generation.

Introduction

During the last few decades, it has become evident that we can no longer think of socio-economic development in isolation from the environment. The nature of issues confronting us along with an increasing interdependence among nations necessitates that countries come together to chart a sustainable course of development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, was a milestone event, effectively focusing the world's attention on environmental and development problems we face as a global community. The Summit brought together governments from around the globe, representatives from international agencies and non-governmental organizations with the objective of preparing the world for attaining the long-term goals of sustainable development.

Agenda 21 adopted at the conference, represents a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on socio-economic development and environmental cooperation . The foremost responsibility for leading this change was placed on national governments. Each government was expected to design national strategies, plans, and policies for sustainable development in consonance with the country's particular situation, capacity and priorities. This was to be done in partnership with international organizations, business, regional, state and local governments, non-government organizations and citizens groups. The Agenda also recognized the need for new assistance for developing countries to support the incremental cost of actions to deal with global environmental problems, and to accelerate sustainable development.

Since UNCED, extensive efforts have been made by governments and international organizations to integrate environmental, economic and social objectives into decision-making through new policies and strategies for sustainable development or by adapting existing policies and plans. As a nation deeply committed to enhancing the quality of life of its people, and actively involved with the international coalition towards sustainable development, the Summit provided India an opportunity to recommit itself to the developmental principles that have long guided the nation. These principles are embedded in the planning process of the country and therefore the need for a distinct national strategy for sustainable development was not felt.

There are many different origins and definitions of the term sustainable development but in 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development's report called the Brundtland Report is by far the best and is now one of the most widely recognized definitions

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The main challenges to sustainable development which are global in character include poverty and exclusion, unemployment, climate change, conflict and humanitarian aid, building peaceful and inclusive societies, building strong institutions of governance, and supporting the rule of law.

Sustainable development: Indian context

The Constitution of India

- Article 21 conferring the Right to Life encompasses right to clean environment, right to livelihood, right to live with dignity and a number of other associated rights
- The Directive Principles of State Policy often referred to as the ‘conscience’ of the Constitution are intended to ensure ‘distributive justice’ and that political democracy in India is accompanied side by side with social and economic democracy

The National Environment Policy

- “Only such development is sustainable, which respects ecological constraints and the imperatives of social justice”

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990)

- “If the gains in productivity are to be sustained, resources must also continue to be available over time. This requires that, while providing for current needs, the resources base be managed so as to enable sustainable development.” (Volume 2, Chapter 18)

Environmental considerations have been an integral part of the Indian culture and have increasingly integrated in the planning process. This is reflected in our constitutional, legislative and policy framework as also international commitments.

The government recognizes that these laudable objectives are clouded by concerns. The Government of India is cognizant of these challenges. While seeking to achieve a high and sustained economic growth, it realizes that economic growth standing on an unsteady social and environmental foundation cannot be sustained. National vision assigns primacy to enhancement of human well-being which includes not only adequate level of food consumption and other consumer goods but also access to basic social services especially education, health, drinking water and basic sanitation. It also assigns primacy to the expansion of economic and social opportunities for all individuals and groups and wider participation in decision-making. Conservation and management of natural resources is an important focus of development strategy.

Challenges of sustainable development

The challenges of sustainable development and its consequences are clearly visible. It is only invisible if we not want to see.

Population is a major challenge for the sustainable development. In the beginning of the 21st century the population of the Earth reached 6 billion, and is expected to level out between 10 and 11 billion over the next 50 years. The basic challenges will be shortages of drinking water and arable land for food production.

Poverty is another major challenge because almost 25% of the world's population lives on less than USD 1 per day.

Inequality continues to be a serious obstacle to sustainable development with the number of people suffering from undernourishment. The fall of food prices over the past 30 years may have contributed to increases in consumption, but in many regions of the world arable terrains are limited, and the creation of new ones has a destructive effect on the remaining ecosystems. In the future, the growth of food production should not come at the expense of nature. By 2010 the current step of biodiversity loss should be significantly slowed.

The shortage of drinking water in many regions of the world is a major barrier to sustainable development. It is expected that, at the current rate of development, every second person will suffer from water shortage by the year 2025.

Human health is also an obstacle in sustainable development. In many cases, deaths in developing countries are avoidable. Humanity should direct more attention and money in the coming years to the struggle against diseases. The imminent task is to reduce the death rate among children under five years of age by two-thirds, and the death rate of young mothers by 75% by 2015.

Consumption of energy is a major challenge for the sustainable development. Consumption of all forms of energy is continually rising. The improvement of access to reliable, sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources and services, as well as the creation of national programmes for energy effectiveness, is a particularly important task for the next 10-15 years.

Deforestation is particularly a great challenge before the sustainable development. The world's forests diminish mainly due to expansion of agriculture. In the coming years, improving the recovery and management of the forests will be of utmost importance.

Petrol consumption is constantly rising. The Summit emphasized the need to realize the decisions of the Kyoto Protocol for reaching an agreement on emissions norms for greenhouse gases in developed countries.

Strategies for Sustainable Development

The conceptual meaning of sustainable development is not to create an obstacle in the development process but this concept belongs to how we utilize our resources so that an inter-relationship can be established among present and future generation. To attain sustainable development many probable strategies can be useful.

(i) Technology

Using appropriate technology is one which is locally adaptable, eco-friendly, resource efficient and culturally suitable. It mostly involves local resources and local labor. Indigenous technologies are more useful, cost-effective and sustainable. Nature is often taken as a model, using the natural conditions of that region as its components. This concept is known as “design with nature”. The technology should use less of resources and should produce minimum waste.

(ii) Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle Approach

The 3-R approach advocating minimization of resource use, using them again and again instead of passing it on to the waste stream and recycling the materials goes a long way in achieving the goals of sustainability. It reduces pressure on our resources as well as reduces waste generation and pollution.

(iii) Promoting Environmental Education and Awareness

Making environmental education the center of all learning process will greatly help in changing the thinking pattern and attitude of people towards our earth and the environment. Introducing subject right from the school stage will inculcate a feeling of belongingness to earth in small

children. 'Earth thinking' will gradually get incorporated in our thinking and action which will greatly help in transforming our lifestyles to sustainable ones.

(iv) Resource Utilization as Per Carrying Capacity

Any system can sustain a limited number of organisms on a long-term basis which is known as its carrying capacity. In case of human beings, the carrying capacity concept becomes all the more complex. It is because unlike other animals, human beings, not only need food to live, but need so many other things to maintain the quality of life. Sustainability of a system depends largely upon the carrying capacity of the system. If the carrying capacity of a system is crossed (say, by over exploitation of a resource), environmental degradation starts and continues till it reaches a point of no return. Carrying capacity has two basic components:

- i. Supporting capacity i.e. the capacity to regenerate
- ii. Assimilative capacity i.e. the capacity to tolerate different stresses.

In order to attain sustainability it is very important to utilize the resources based upon the above two properties of the system. Consumption should not exceed regeneration and changes should not be allowed to occur beyond the tolerance capacity of the system.

(v) Improving Quality of Life Including Social, Cultural and Economic Dimensions

Development should not focus just on one-section of already affluent people. Rather it should include sharing of benefits between the rich and the poor. The tribal, ethnic people and their cultural heritage should also be conserved. Strong community participation should be there in policy and practice. Population growth should be stabilized.

Steps taken by government

India released its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) on 30th June, 2008, to outline its strategy to meet the Climate Change challenge. The National Action Plan advocates a strategy that promotes, firstly, the adaptation to Climate Change and secondly, further

enhancement of the ecological sustainability of India's development path. India's National Action Plan stresses that maintaining a high growth rate is essential for increasing the living standards of the vast majority of people of India and reducing their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Accordingly, the Action Plan identifies measures that promote the objectives of sustainable development of India while also yielding to benefits for addressing climate change. There are **eight National Missions** which form the core of the National Action Plan, representing the multi-pronged long-term strategy. These missions have been formed by combining several ongoing programs with the ones newly formulated.

National Solar Mission has a twin objective - to contribute to India's long term energy security as well as its ecological security. We are living in a world of rapidly depleting fossil fuel resources and access to conventional energy resources such as oil, gas and coal is becoming increasingly constrained. The rapid development and deployment of renewable energy is imperative in this context and in view of high solar radiation over the country solar energy provides a long term sustainable solution.

The purpose of the **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system** is to get a complete understanding of whether and to what extent the Himalayan glaciers are in recession and how the problem can be addressed. The other major objective is to establish an observational and monitoring network for the Himalayan environment to assess freshwater resources and health of ecosystem.

The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture aims to make Indian agriculture more resilient to climate change by identifying new varieties of crops, especially thermal resistant ones and alternative cropping patterns. This is to be supported by integration of traditional knowledge and practical systems, information technology and biotechnology, as well as new credit and insurance mechanisms.

National Mission on Enhanced Energy Efficiency under the Ministry of Power, will target improvements in energy efficiency in buildings, management of solid waste and accelerating modal shift to mass transport.

The **National Water Mission's** main objective is “conservation of water, minimizing wastage and ensuring its more equitable distribution both across and within states through integrated water resources development and management”.

The draft of the **National Mission for a Green India** aims to address climate change by enhancing carbon sinks in sustainably managed forests and by adaptation of vulnerable ecosystems and forest-dependent local communities to changing climate. It builds on the Prime Minister's Green India campaign for afforestation and the national target of increasing land area under forest cover. It is to be implemented on degraded forest land through Joint Forest Management Committees set up under State Departments of Forests. These Committees will promote direct action by communities.

National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change strives to work with the global community in research and technology development and collaboration through a variety of mechanisms and, in addition, will also have its own research agenda supported by a network of dedicated climate change related institutions and universities and a Climate Research Fund. The Mission will also encourage private sector initiatives for developing innovative technologies for adaptation and mitigation

While these National Missions will serve as umbrella organizations in their respective fields, some existing schemes and programs towards sustainable development that are being undertaken by the government are:

Carrying Capacity Based Regional Development Planning, Grand in Aid Scheme for Development and Promotion of Clean Technology, Grant in Aid Scheme for Voluntary Agencies, Green Architecture by School of Planning and Architecture, Sustainable Development Framework for mining ,Convergence for Sustainable Development

Conclusion

Sustainable development is a vision and a way of thinking and acting so that we can secure the resources and environment for our future generation. It will not be brought about by policies only — it must be taken up by society at large as a principle guiding the many choices each citizen makes every day, as well as the big political and economic decisions that affect many. It is clear that environmental degradation tends to impose the largest costs on those generations that are yet to be born. Future generations are disadvantaged with regard to present generations because they can inherit an impoverished quality of life, share a condition of structural weakness in having no voice and representation among the present generation and so their interests are often neglected in present decisions and planning while it is very much needful that we think about our generation. We can only improve sustainable development when it will put an emphasis on involving citizens and stakeholders. Ultimately, the vision will become reality only if everybody contributes to a world where economic freedom, social justice and environmental protection go hand in hand, making our own and future generations better off than now.

Sustainable development will not be easy. Yet, it is an unavoidable responsibility that is achievable with better planning, stronger policies, and effective execution. Governments can no longer look at the issue from a narrow, short-term perspective. To avoid destabilization of the planet, the inclusion of the sustainable development agenda in public and private policy spheres is not only unavoidable, but inescapable.

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