



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Towards Sustainable Development in India

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“The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

The relationship between environment and humankind is indeed deep and has been recognized from the Vedic period. Furthermore, non-violence towards both animate and inanimate components of the biosphere has been deep-rooted as a guiding principle in the Indian psyche. Decades ago, when the environment was not a buzzword, the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi said: “The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.” This is a statement of profound social, economic and ethical ramifications. His prominent belief of “enoughness” in his saying is perhaps more relevant at the present time than when it was said.

However, as our wants are not restricted we kept on inventing novel things to get a better life without considering the environmental depletion. At present, we have been bitten by the bug of “consumerism” and because of greed which made the society unbalanced and unequal. The present technological advancements have brought with it immediate benefits and equally serious long-term costs.

The idea and origin of Sustainable development:

The idea of sustainable development has developed through various environmental struggles for a better healthier place than the present. Sustainable development is a process that requires us to view our lives as elements of a larger entity. It requires a holistic way of looking at the world and human life. The term Sustainability is chosen to bridge the gulf between development and the environment. It explores the relationship among economic development, environmental quality, and social equity. In brief, it is a pursuit of harmony between humans and their environment by protecting and preserving the natural environment for future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable development is the achievement of continued economic and social development without detriment to the environment and natural resources. The major discussion about sustainable development is found in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), a body created by the UN General Assembly in 1983 which was headed by Gro Brundtland, the then prime minister of Norway. The Commission's report, defined “sustainable development” as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This definition emphasizes the importance to use the natural resources not only for our survival but also for future generations to meet their future needs.

A Brief History of Sustainable Development:

The idea of sustainability had emerged from a series of meetings and reports during the 1960s and 1970s. It witnessed a growing concern that economic growth, development and lifestyle demands in industrial nations were undermining the ecological balance, economic stability and security of the planet. World famous pressure groups were formed, like "Friends of the Earth" and "Greenpeace". A number of ecologically minded writers came to prominence, including Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Charles A. Reich's *The Greening of America* (1970), Theodore Roszak's *Making of a Counter Culture* (1969) and *Where the Wasteland Ends* (1972), and E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973).

In 1966 Kenneth E. Boulding wrote 'The economics of the coming Spaceship Earth', in which there were no unlimited reservoirs of anything, with humanity having to find its place in a cyclical ecological system capable of continuous reproduction while continually needing inputs of energy.

In 1970 the first environmental event to have any real social and cultural impact was held in the US, following an earlier discussion in the United Nations that there should be a global holiday, an Earth Day, to draw attention to environmental degradation. In 1972 the editors of *The Ecologist* issued a call to action, writing, in *A Blueprint for Survival* and 1972 also saw the publication of *Limits to Growth* by a global think-tank known as the Club of Rome and the first serious international discussion of global environmental issues at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm.

In 1983 work started on a major study by the World Commission on Environment and Development that would firmly establish sustainable development as the most significant concept and practice of our time. In 1987 the results were published as *Our Common Future* (the Brundtland Report).

Major Environmental threats to sustainable development:

Though we are facing various environmental threats, some of the most important environmental threats are as follows:

1. **Growing Population:** Population growth coupled with unplanned and ruthless exploitation of natural resources in the name of development is the root cause of our present state of the environment. It puts considerable pressure on its natural resources and reduces the gains of development.
2. **Loss of Genetic Diversity:** At present most wild genetic stocks have been disappearing from nature. Wilding including the Asiatic Lion are facing problem of loss of genetic diversity. The protected areas network like sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserves are also isolating their population. So, they are decreasing changes of one group breeding with another.
3. **Urbanization:** Urbanization and industrialization have given birth to a great number of environmental problems that need urgent attention. Among the environmental problems, air pollution, municipal waste and noise pollution are major threats that our country is facing.
4. **Air and Water Pollution:** Majority of our industrial plants are using out-dated and population technologies and makeshift facilities devoid of any provision of treating their wastes. A great number of cities and industrial areas that have been identified as the worst in terms of air and water pollution.

Human beings are both the contributing agents and victims of the changes that our environment is going through. All countries need to recognize the profound transformation required to address the emerging threats of sustainable development.

Steps towards Sustainable Development:

Every individual has a responsibility in protecting the environment, if serious about leaving a safe world for the next generation. Every one must work towards the development of a sustainable society that manages its economy without doing irreparable environmental harm. Some of important steps in this direction are enumerated below.

1. **Change over in energy segment:** There will be abundant resources if we convert our economies to renewable energy sources, sustainable agricultural practices, and reasonable control of excess consumption. A change over is necessary from non-renewable and polluting energy systems to those that are renewable and non polluting.
2. **Conservation of resources for the future:** In the name of development, the damage and destruction of the environment are as clearly visible now as never before. Human greed must be controlled, human needs must be regulated and natural resources must be used prudently. If greed continues to dominate, the engine of economic growth will drain our natural resources.
3. **Population stabilization:** Population planning is another significant factor in sustainable development. It is significant that, while the overall world population is rapidly increasing, it is actually decreasing in many of the developed countries. In 1950, 40% of the world's population lived in developed countries and 60% in developing countries. By 2025, 80% will be living in developing countries and only 20% in developed countries. By 2050, India will surpass the China to become the most populous country in the world and will continue to remain so for a long time, if not forever. In terms of population planning, managing the population increase is the biggest challenge. Therefore, the birth rates must fall perceptibly at the earliest and human race must willingly practice population control and its stabilization at the level of carrying capacity.
4. **Development and Forests:** Forests serve catchments for the rivers. Forests in India have been shrinking for several centuries owing to pressures of agriculture and other uses. Vast areas that were once green, stand today as wastelands. These areas are to be brought back under vegetative cover. The tribal communities inhabiting forests respects the trees and birds and animal that gives them nourishment. We must recognize the role of these people in restoring and conserving forests. The strategies for the joint management of forests should be evolved in a well planned way.
5. **Develop a sustainable society:** we must also work towards the development of a sustainable society which maintains harmony with the environment and meets the current needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs.
6. **Environmental education:** awareness and education is one of the important inputs for a correct appraisal of environmental problems. Without environmental education, stable climate, national security, and economic prosperity are impossible. The spread of environmental education at all levels for environmental awareness, environmental conservation and knowledge about the implementation of sustainable development that needs major emphasis. Further, the acts are enforced in the country, but their implement is not so easy. The reason is their implementation needs great resources, technical expertise, political and social will. Again the people are to be made aware of these rules. Their support is indispensable to implement these rules.

7. **Agricultural Land Management:** India's mass poverty is directly related to the land degradation. The green revolution has created its own environmental problems of land degradation through colonization and topsoil loss. Further, outside the green revolution belt, the agriculture still largely depends on rain. In fact, soil loss and water degradation lead to declining agricultural productivity, unsustainable land use rural poverty, diseases and hunger. Today, agriculture land is being diverted to building airports, industrial complexes, special economic zones, etc. This would have grave repercussions on agriculture. Hence, the people must be acquainted with the methods to sustain and increase agricultural growth without damaging the environment.

8. **Control of Pollution of Water, Air and Land:** most of the water bodies are being polluted by wastes of biological and chemical wastes. Land and sea interface is equally polluted. The Air in our metropolitan cities is dirty because of a large number of vehicles outdated and industrial establishments uses older technologies.

Recently, our capital city Delhi has suffered from air pollution caused by transportation, road dust, industries and pollutant emissions. The rapid urbanization of Delhi along with the level of growth in economic activities in the city and its surrounding areas stressed the natural environment significantly. Though several steps have been taken in the recent past to improve the environmental condition still many challenges remain to contain the environmental pollution.

9. **Collective Approach:** this approach has become necessary because of the inherent global character of environmental problems. Hence, environmental problems must be approached at all three levels: Immediate local problems like water pollution and waste management can be taken up at a community level. Regional problems like acid rain, floods, air pollution and deforestation can be dealt with at the national or regional level Global issues like climate change, depletion of the ozone layer and for the associated problems should involve global bodies and global leaders.

10. **Poverty:** India has often been described as a rich land with poor people. The poverty and environmental degradation have a nexus between them. The vast majority of our people are directly dependent on the natural resources of the country for their basic needs. By the sheer necessity of survival, the poor pollute the environment and erode the land, both of which, in turn, further entrench poverty and in perpetual poverty causes resource depletion. Hence, to achieve sustainable development, Poverty must be reduced by meeting basic health needs, education, shelter, productive employment, and population management.

Since resources of the earth are limited, the human race must willingly set a limit to its requirements for sustenance, need and comfort and not use resources with an element of greed and luxury. Hence, we must learn to respect nature and use the resources in a judicious and responsible manner, failing which we will deprive our future generations thereby endangering their life on this earth. The main conclusion of the paper is that development should not be at the cost of environmental degradation and should be based on ecological principles and practices.