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EMERGING TRENDS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION



EDITOR

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EMERGING CHALLENGES OF INDIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Mahatma Gandhi's principle of "enoughness" in his saying "the earth provides enough to satisfy every person need but not for every person's greed" is perhaps more relevant at present time than when it was said. Currently, we have been bitten by the bug "consumerism" and desperately want to possess all the goods and services without considering the environmental depletion. We made a very impressive economic progress, especially during the past two centuries, in creating material and luxuries of lifestyle, but this progress has been achieved at a tremendous cost to the environment. The various human activities meant to improve the quality of life are usually accompanied by environmental degradation. The consequences of natural resources exploitation are clearly seen in the loss of biodiversity, pollution of land, air and water bodies and generating pressure on public infrastructure, health care, sanitation and on education access besides problem in managing solid waste and e-waste. As such identifying and addressing the existing and emerging challenges that are likely to affect most significantly India's prospects for sustainable development is important to increase resilience at the national level. This paper discusses some of these contours and major challenges.

Definition of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development is the achievement of continued economic and social development without detriment to the environment and natural resources. It has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the Brundtland Report which defined that the "Sustainable development is the 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. Sustainable use is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present but also for generations to come. Thus it naturally urges the maintenance of ecological integrity and eco-friendly development by satisfying basic human needs with a long-term view.

A Brief History and origin of Sustainable Development:

The idea of sustainability had emerged from a series of meetings and reports during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1972, the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment marked the first great international meeting on how human activities harming the environment and putting humans at risk. Further, the 1980 World Conservation Strategy, prepared by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature along with the UN Environment Program and the World Wildlife Fund, promoted the idea of environmental protection in the self-interest of the human species.

In 1987, the UN-sponsored Brundtland Commission released a report named "Our Common Future" which captured widespread concerns about the environment and poverty in many parts of the world and its report has popularized the term sustainable development. The report has brought many major unintended changes which are occurring in the atmosphere, in soils, in waters, among plants and animals.

Further, world attention on sustainability peaked at the 1992 UN conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro. It brought together the heads or senior officials of 179 governments, and included the Earth Summit, the largest-ever meeting of world leaders and adopted Rio Declaration for achieving Sustainable Development.

International Agreements and India:

As the global economy has grown and developed, issues related to sustainable development are receiving increased importance. The agreements regime has also expanded in scope since environmental issues are no longer considered in isolation. However, one of the ways in which

India has shown its increased commitment towards sustainable development is through its growing participation in various international agreements.

Additionally India has remained at the forefront of globally sustainable development policy formulation, active in all international forums relating to environmental protection and has signed all the multilateral agreements relating to the environment such as; Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES); The Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network; Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species; Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking; Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF); International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN); Basel Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movement of Hazardous and their Disposal; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol are among few.

India has also signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and acceded to the Kyoto Protocol under which the developing countries, such as India do not have binding Green House Gas (GHG) mitigation commitments but its voluntary mitigation actions to reduce the emissions intensity of GDP by 20-25 percent by 2020 in comparison to the 2005 level excluding the agriculture sector is much admired. And, the National Action Plan provides for eight missions that will enable the country to adapt to climate change and enhance the ecological sustainability of India's development path.

Though India has made significant progress in terms of its achievements across the pillars of sustainable development, many problems continue to persist and new threats are also posing new challenges to the country.

India's major Challenges:

More than half the world's population lives in urban clusters and India too is rapidly urbanising with 31.16% (2011 census) of its population now living in cities, an increase from 27.81% of its population in 2001. The magnitude of migration from rural to urban migration is an important component of urban population growth.

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 environment. Our country has witnessed rapid urbanization in the last few years which is accompanied by depletion of natural resources hence; urbanisation will be an emerging challenge in sustainable development. Urban planning becomes a key concern. Cities were, in the past, the natural place for social cohesion and progress. But today, the phenomenal rapid growth of urbanization presents a challenge to maintain that very precious characteristic of cities as an engine for social mobility and inclusiveness. Further, policies to address the problems of urban poor also remain a glaring vacuum in an environment where schemes and programmes are often designed with an assumption that poverty lies in villages. Human Activities such as Land clearing, Agriculture, overfishing, Grazing, Mineral extraction, Fuel consumption, Industrialization, Urbanization and deforestation affecting sustainability and causing environmental degradation and social stress because of negative changes in the ecosystem.

Thus the main cause of unsustainability is ever increasing human population which naturally leads to over-exploitation of resources. Presently, all accessible fresh water and underground water resources are in a state of depletion in many areas. The aquatic environment and its productivity are also on the decline. Even pure and primitive remote forest areas have been changed by humans' interference. Another set of challenges is lack of social inclusion, widespread regional disparities, urban-rural gaps and gender inequality. A key challenge is to adopt a meaningful standard of basic needs, i.e., access to safe water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, primary health services, and basic infrastructure including electricity, roads and connectivity. The global economic downturn, violent conflicts in some countries, biodiversity loss, and degradation of water, dry lands, forests, and climate change are the challenges to the peace and prosperity as they threaten to reverse the achievements to date and undermine any future gain.

Pursuing the path which India has chartered for sustainable development will create many challenges, if not properly solved, may result in further environmental degradation. The emerging challenges will be successfully faced with people's involvement in environmental management, the spread of education particularly at lower levels and effective implementation of

governmental laws. Needed political will and people support will bring environmental sustainability as India move on the chartered path of development.

Need To Conserve And Manage Resources For Future:

In the name of development, the damage and destruction of the environment is as clearly visible now as never before. Human greed must be controlled, human needs must be regulated and natural resources must be used prudently. Further, 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.

The least we can do each one of us can play our role, as a responsible member of the society to conserve the resources and protect or save the environment. And 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 national or regional level Global issues like climate change, depletion of ozone layer and for the associated problems should involve global bodies and global leaders. 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 challenges of sustainable development. These include well-managed policies that foster healthy and inclusive growth, economic shifts to sustainable patterns of production, effective governance and renewed global partnership and means of implementation.

There is an opportunity to achieve the sustainable development collectively by the renewed commitment, conviction, and courage assisted by improved science and technology. 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.

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