

Major Challenges to Sustainable Development in India

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Abstract

Sustainable development is quite comprehensive term and includes the prospects of preserving and enhancing the overall quality of human lives with environmental-inclusive development. That is why the international organizations and governments across the globe have developed a number of policies for promoting sustainable development. The Government of India also made certain efforts such as National Environment Laws and other constitutional provisions for the harmonious development of economic and environmental aspects of the country. This paper will try to explore the challenges related to sustainable development in the Indian context. In order to study these challenges, the documents of various international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization etc. and documents prepared by Government of India have been analyzed. The major challenges to sustainable development in India are poverty, hunger and malnutrition, poor quality elementary education, unemployment of youth, lack of water management, unavailability of modern energy for rural India, lack of sustainable infrastructure etc. This paper will be helpful to analyze the real situation of sustainable development in India and challenges before it. It will also create social awareness regarding the major challenges which need immediate action. Social awareness and public discussion on such matters can be beneficial to create public interest in seeking way and means to solve these challenges.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable development, challenges to sustainable development, International and National efforts for sustainable development.

Introduction

Sustainable Development is most echoed phrase now-a-days. The development which is in harmonious relationship with the environment is known as sustainable development. The term is quite comprehensive and includes social, economic and environmental aspects in it. The concept of sustainable development became famous when World Conference on Environment and Development published its report 'Our Common Future' or commonly known as 'Brundtland Report'. The report defined the term as, 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

Since the publication of 'Brundtland Report', the concept of sustainable development has developed beyond the initial intergenerational framework to focus more on the comprehensive goal of development which is socially inclusive and sustainable economic growth in mutual relation with the environment. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the 'Earth Summit' in 1992 published the Earth Charter, which emphasized the building of a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. The action plan of this conference namely 'Agenda 21' for sustainable

development identified information, integration, awareness and participation as key building blocks to help all developed and developing countries to achieve development that recognizes these all as interdependent pillars. This agenda also focus on that broad public participation in decision making as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainability of the environment. Sustainable development is linked with Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Goal No. 7 was to ensure environmental sustainability. After this in 2002, 'World Summit on Sustainable Development' (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. In this global challenge of sustainability is understood as a complex and interdependent upon environment, social and economic development. The Plan of this conference recommends that the UN General Assembly to consider a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development starting in 2005(United Nations, 2002). The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also named as 'Earth Summit 2012' was the third international conference on sustainable development. The conference aimed at reframing the economic and environmental goals of the global community. It was hosted by Brazil Rio de Janeiro from 13 to 22 June 2012. The conference was a 20-year follow-up of the 1992 Earth Summit held in the same city and also the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The primary outcome of the conference was in the form of a document named as "The Future We Want". The heads of state of the 192 governments participated and renewed their political commitment to sustainable development and sustainable future. The time period for the Millennium Development Goals ended in 2015 and these are now converted to Sustainable development goals, officially known as 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' are an intergovernmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets. World leaders gathered on 25 September 2015, at the United Nations in New York to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals were generated as a parallel concept to the MDGs at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012. A timeline of 2015-2030 was set for 17 SDGs, ratified by 193 nations.

India has accepted all above mentioned principles and ideas given by intergovernmental agencies in recent times. The Constitution provisions of India contain specific provisions for environmental protection. Article 21 relates to right to life encompasses right to clean environment, right to livelihood and other such rights. In 1976 with 42 Amendment a global consciousness for protection of environment has been added in the form of Article 48A to the directive principles of State Policy. In Fundamental Duties, Article 51A (g) states that every citizen should have compassion for the environment. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974, Forest (Conservation) Act 1981, Environment Act of 1986 and various court decisions regarding the protection of the environment and sustainable development are some of the efforts made by Indian Government. The National Environment Policy states that only such development is sustainable, which respects ecological constraints and imperatives of social justice.

Challenges to Sustainable Development in Indian Context

Despite the above mentioned efforts at international and national level, there are many challenges before our nation to achieve the goal of sustainable development. The natural resources of India are depleting at an alarming rate, economic disparity is increasing and children are malnourished. Some of these challenges are listed below:

1. Natural Capital Gap between the amount of use and amount of possession

There is a huge gap between the amount of natural resources that India uses and that it possess. The demand of natural capital has been doubled since 1961 as reported by the Global Footprint Network. At present, India needs resources of two 'Indias' to meet its consumption demand. The ongoing industrial development needs these resources and due to rapid consumption of these, a lot of damage to environment has occurred. If this trend continues, these resources will not be available for the future generations. The increasing gap between the natural resources utilization and natural resources availability is a major challenge to the sustainable development in India.

2. Increasing Population

In India, 17 percent of population of the world resides and this increasing population of India is a major problem at present. By looking at the data of last few decades, it is often predicted that India will become largest populated country within few decades. The increasing size of Indian population has been as subject of much concern now-a-days and it is source of much anxiety for the environment. Due to increasing population, natural resources are depleting at an alarming rate. The increasing population and present consumption pattern are contributing to the climate change and challenging sustainable development. This growth of population is also responsible for complicating the universal access to basic health, education, safe drinking water, sanitation, food and energy. The growing population also leads to pollution and pose a major threat to the environment and sustainability.

3. Poverty

The first Sustainable Development Goal is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. More than one billion people are living in extreme poverty. Poverty is the major global challenge and its eradication is an indispensable requirement for the sustainable development. The United Nations is giving highest priority to poverty eradication in all its development agendas. The prevailing poverty in the developing countries is responsible to endanger the social fabric, threaten political stability, undermine the economic growth and pose a major challenge for environmental sustainability. Poverty is a complex problem and multidimensional problem at the global level which can cause a major challenge before the sustainable development of India.

4. Hunger and Malnutrition

Hunger and malnutrition in India and even at global level are major threat to human development. To achieve sustainable development, a lot of stress is placed on these aspects and to end hunger and malnutrition is second Sustainable Development Goal. Majority of children in India suffers from malnutrition. In all the developing countries including India, malnutrition and hunger among children are responsible for their deaths in early age. Hunger and malnutrition cause serious damage to individuals and society that is why both these problems pose a major challenge for environmental sustainability and sustainable food systems.

The hunger and malnutrition cause serious defects in the children and even death. India is ranked as one of the highest ranking countries in terms of number of children who are malnourished. This number is a major threat to the productivity, economic growth and environment.

5. Low Quality Elementary Education

Elementary education is quite important for the harmonious development of the individual and society as a whole. Education is a basic human right and required for the realization of other rights also. The sustainable development of the environment depends upon the right kind of knowledge, skills and attitude of the people towards the protection of the environment. In India, several efforts for free and compulsory education are made by government from time to time but the quality of education provided in most of the schools is of low quality. The major stress is placed on increasing the enrollment and reporting the numbers. No one bothers about what is taught to students and what they learn. The low quality of elementary education is one of the most important challenges before the human development and sustainable development. Low quality education is building insensitive attitude among children towards the environment.

6. Gender Inequality

Gender parity is major developmental goal of the United Nations. The importance of gender equality and women empowerment for the process of sustainable development is well recognized by different policies and practices at international level and national level. The importance of gender equality has also been articulated in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, adopted in 2012, which included recognition of the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment across the three pillars of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental, and resolve to promote gender equality and women’s full participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels. Gender inequality in education in India is a multifaceted issue and critical threat for social, economic, human and sustainable development.

7. Unemployment of Youth

Unemployment of youth is the most disturbing problem of India and it is becoming serious day by day. Full time employment for all is not possible but sustainable development goals and governments are making efforts for the reduction in unemployment with minimum damage to society, environment and economic aspects of the development. Unemployment directly or indirectly increases social disturbances, economic and environmental damage. Unemployment of India is creating a large number of inequalities among society. Income inequality in India is posing a major threat to economic development of all sections of the society. Inequalities are also undermines the overall inclusive growth, equal access to social justice and broader sustainable development.

8. Lack of Water Management

Water is a renewable resource but at the same time it is finite. It is essential for life, but even then clean water is not available for majority of population in India. Increasing population of our country and lack of proper water management put a lot of pressure on the availability of water for all. The quality of land water is degrading day by day. The agriculture overuse of ground water, lack of proper sanitation facilities, water pollution of natural sources, industrial waste drainage into rivers and other such harmful efforts are responsible for creating a huge gap between the water availability and water use. This gap can be minimized if there is proper management of water and water usage. But at present, in India no serious efforts in this direction has been started and lack of water management is posing a serious threat to lives of people and also to the health of environment. So lack of water management in India is a major hindrance in the process of sustainable development.

9. Unavailability of modern Energy in rural areas

Majority of Indian live in rural areas, due to the lack of access to modern, reliable and clean energy to these people is a critical challenge before the government of India. There are 364 million people in India who do not have the access to electricity. According to National Sample Survey 2007, only 55 percent of rural household have access to electricity and rest of the population depends upon kerosene lamps for lightening. The major challenge before Indian Government is to bridge this gap between the supply of electricity and its need in rural India. No doubt, serious efforts in this direction has been made but these efforts fail in providing access to modern cooking fuels to rural population however in expanding electricity to these people the efforts are quite successful.

10. Lack of sustainable infrastructure

Sustainable, good and modern infrastructure is crucial for rapid economic development, poverty reduction and overall human development. Sustainable infrastructure includes both physical and social components. The social component includes education and health. The physical infrastructure is important for economic development by enhancing productivity and it also helps in promoting the potential capability of human capital. The sustainable infrastructure is quite important in poverty reduction. Parallel to it, social infrastructure including education and health of the people contribute a lot towards the development of human capital. Both these component are necessary for the development of the country. But as per Global Competition Report 2011-12 India ranks 89th in basic infrastructure. It indicates poor development in this direction as compared to other countries.

Conclusion

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