

1. Introduction

Sustainable development has become a buzzword in the world today amongst environmentalists, politicians, in media and among elite masses. The term “sustainable development” first appeared in the WCED’s report “Our Common Future” (also known as the Brundtland Report) in 1987 as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. To be sustainable, development must possess both economical and ecological sustainability. It indicates the way in which developmental planning should be approached.³

As the human population is exploding, resources are shrinking. Concerns loom everywhere, from declining pollinators affecting food security, to air and water pollution affecting the quality of life, and land shortage and degradation affecting both agriculture and biodiversity. These are just some examples of the results of unsustainability. This is an important moment to find solutions for sustainable living, in harmony with Mother Earth.

India is home to one-sixth of the world's people and it has the densest population. It also has the second-largest population after China, which it will surpass in less than a decade if current trends continue. India is a country full of diversity and contradictions. While per-capita emissions are amongst the lowest in the world, it is also the third biggest generator of emissions. Despite being the third largest economy in the world, India also has the largest number of people living below the international poverty line. Because of this sheer size and rapid growth, sustainability is a challenge. In spite of these challenges, India is a conscious aspirant. It has shown leadership in combating climate change and meeting the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs), as is reflected in many of its developmental schemes. As the fastest growing economy, India is undergoing the dilemma of sustainable development too. India’s immediate priority is to provide

livelihoods and employment to its population besides creating sustainable economic opportunities at both- micro & macro – levels to keep its promises to take the GDP growth of the country to an ambitious double-digit target of 10 percent.⁴ India has to provide houses to millions, ensure food & nutritional security, and make health services accessible & affordable. For the sustainable inclusive growth, jobs have to be created. In order to tackle its developmental challenges, and to push the economic growth further, India, apart from conventional development programs, plans to set up smart cities, construction of roads, railways, and other large infrastructure projects.

2. Principles of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development has come to stay and is growing both in the national and international field according to the economic and developmental needs. As the problem of environment is not confined to any particular area or nation and in view of its global character, the remedial measures are to be taken in the global perspective. The following are the sustainable development principles for the maintenance of the symbiotic balance between the right to environment and development:

1) The Precautionary Principle

The Precautionary Principle is a tool for making better health and environmental decisions. It aims to prevent harm from the outset rather than manage it after the fact. In *Research Foundation for Science v. Union of India*,⁵ the Supreme Court has explained that “Precautionary Principle” generally describes an approach to the protection of the environment or human health based on precaution even where there is no clear evidence of harm or risk of harm from an activity or substance. It is a part of the principle of sustainable development. It provides for taking protection against specific environmental hazards by avoiding or reducing environmental risks before specific harms are experienced.

2) The Polluter Pays Principle

The Polluter Pays Principle, as interpreted by the Supreme Court of India, means that the absolute liability for harm to the environment extends not only to compensate the victims of pollution but also the cost of restoring the environmental degradation. Thus, it includes environmental costs as well as direct cost to people and property. Remediation of the damaged environment is part of the process of sustainable development and as such,

preservation and protection of historical/archaeological monumental wealth for future generations. Right to development includes the whole spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social process for the improvement of people's well being and realization of their full potential."

4) Environment Protection

Environmental protection is a practice of protecting the natural environment on individual, organization controlled on governmental levels, for the benefit of both the environment and humans. This has been recognized, and governments have begun placing restraints on activities that cause environmental degradation. Due to the pressures of over-consumption, population and technology, the biophysical environment is being degraded, sometimes permanently. The protection of the environment is an essential part of sustainable development. Without adequate environment protection, development is undermined; without development, resources will be inadequate for needed investments and environmental protection will fail. The strong environment policies complement and reinforce sustainable development. It is often the poorest who suffer the most from the consequences of pollution and environmental degradation. In *Intellectuals Forum v. State of Andhra Pradesh*,¹¹ it was observed that, "the debate between the development and economic needs and that of the environment is an enduring one, since if the environment is destroyed for any purpose without a compelling development cause, it will most probably run foul of the executive and judicial safeguards. In response to this difficulty, policy makers and judicial bodies across the world have produced the concept of sustainable development. Accordingly, the court has to follow the principle of sustainable development and find a balance between the developmental needs and environmental degradation." In *Citizen, Consumer and Civic Action Group v. Union of India*,¹² the Court observed that while the courts have social accountability in the matter of protection of environment, there should be a proper balance between the same and development activities which are essential for progress. There can be no dispute that the society has to prosper, but it shall not be at the expense of the environment. In the like vein, the environment shall have to be protected, but not at the cost of development of the society. Both development and environment shall co-exist and go hand-in-hand. Therefore, a balance has to be struck and administrative actions ought to proceed in accordance therewith, and not de-hors the same.

5) Obligation to Assist and Co-operate

The environmental problem is not an individual problem or that of one country. It is a global problem and it can be tackled only with the

assistance and co-operation of all. Principle 9 of the Rio Declaration provides that the States should co-operate to strengthen indigenous capacity- building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration further provides that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. Similarly, Principle 12 of the Rio Declaration provides that the States should co-operate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation. And finally Principle 27 of the Rio Declaration expects the people and the States to co-operate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development.

6) Use and Conservation of Natural Resources

In order to meet the needs on sustainable basis, it is absolutely necessary to use the earth's natural resources carefully and the natural resource base must be conserved and enhanced. It is part of our moral obligation to other living beings and future generations. The resources must be conserved and enhanced to meet the needs of growing populations.

7) Eradication of Poverty

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.¹³ As recalled by the foreword of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report, at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, 189 countries unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration, pledging to “*spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty*”.¹⁴ This commitment was translated into an inspiring framework of eight goals and, then, into wide-ranging practical steps that have enabled people across the world to improve their lives and their future prospects. The MDGs helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, to enable more girls to attend school than ever before and to protect our planet. Poverty eradication is addressed in Chapter II of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002), which stressed that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today

and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries.

3. Sustainable Development in India: Perspectives and Strategies

India, since the early seventies, has taken an active part in global efforts to tackle environmental problems. Smt. Indira Gandhi (late Prime Minister of India) was the only visiting head of the State to participate on the U.N. Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm (Sweden) in 1972. It was also emphasized at this conference by Mrs. Gandhi that the removal of poverty is an integral part of the goal of an environmental strategy for the world. The concept of interrelatedness, of a shared planet, of global citizenship and of “spaceship earth” cannot be restricted to environmental issues alone, but applied to the shared and interlinked responsibilities of environment and development.¹⁵ With this spirit, India realized the need for international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral programmes and regional initiatives in dealing with the issues of environment and development. At the government level, the Ministry of Environment and Forests acts as a nodal agency for relations with international agencies like UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), SACEP (South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme), IUCN (International union for Conservation of Nature), World Bank, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) and EEC (European Economic Community). Independently, NGOs in India have also taken several initiatives towards global cooperation and exchange of ideas. Following are the examples of our concerns of such issues at international level where India:¹⁶

- Acceded to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of Ozone Layer, March, 1985. Under this Framework Convention, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was adopted in 1987. The Protocol came into force in 1989 for phasing out CFCs. India has signed it after London amendments.
- Signed the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the Bonn Convention) in 1979. It came into force in 1983. This Convention was ratified between India and the former USSR and came into force in 1986.
- Signed the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil, 1954 (London); the International Convention on

Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage (as amended), 1969 (Brussels); the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage (as amended), 1971 (Brussels); the Protocol of 1978 on International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (Montego Bay); and the Basal Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

- Signed the Convention of the Antarctica; and considered the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctica under the Antarctica Treaty.
- Made efforts to evolve a South Common Strategy of developing countries to deal with global environmental issues.

To further its efforts towards cooperation and to evolve a common strategy amongst the developing countries to deal with global environmental issues, an International Conference of 21 developing countries was hosted by India in New Delhi in April, 1990. As a follow-up to this, a ministerial level Conference of Developing Countries was organized by the People's Republic of China in Beijing in June, 1991, the first of its kind of developing world. At this Conference 41 participating countries adopted a declaration which articulates the concerns of these countries. India participated actively in putting forward the concerns of the Group of 77 countries. G77's initiatives at the Preparatory Committee Meeting held in Geneva in 1991 have emphasized the centrality of certain developmental considerations in the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), 1992.¹⁷ Earlier, to UNCED India's viewpoint was also presented by Shri. Kamal Nath, Minister of State, Environment and Forests at the Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council at Nairobi in February, 1992.¹⁸ He summed up as, "It is not a question of assistance or aid, but of global partnership in working towards making our planet healthier, safer and more productive."¹⁹ It was with this background that India approached the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in June, 1992.

As indicated earlier, sustainability has been an integral part of the Indian culture. The need for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources has been expressed in Indian scriptures more than three thousand

6. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has provided the following 17 Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals covering a broad range of social and economic development issues:

- GOAL 1: No Poverty
- GOAL 2: Zero Hunger
- GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being
- GOAL 4: Quality Education
- GOAL 5: Gender Equality
- GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
- GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- GOAL 13: Climate Action
- GOAL 14: Life below Water
- GOAL 15: Life on Land
- GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal

7. Conclusion

Sustainable Development is, therefore, a historic opportunity for the world communities to deliver inclusive growth, eliminate poverty and reduce the risk of climate change by changing perspectives and approaches to economic development. It entails everyone to participate in making efforts to achieve sustainable development. India and the world have a long and challenging way to go in dealing with environmental problems, and learning to live together in sustainable communities. We need to realize that economic and sustainable development is a collective responsibility. We, as individuals, also have to grow into responsible consumers by committing to a changed lifestyle. If we do not act now, we will be delayed to reverse the impact.

Sustainable development does not focus only on the environment but however, it is also for meeting the diverse needs of all the people in existing and future communities, promoting their personal well-being and equity in their relationships with each other, in a context where nature-society imbalances can threaten economic and social stability. Economic development achieved so far has adopted various techniques which have proved harmful to the environment in which we reside in. The growing population and our rate of consumption of natural resources have placed a big stress on the environment. There is a need for development which is sustainable in its nature and which does not have a negative impact on the environment. The way we approach development affects everyone. The impacts of our decisions as a society have very real consequences on other people's lives. For example, by incorporating health plans, for instance, we can ensure that residents have easy access to healthcare facilities which in turn will provide them with a healthy standard of living. Also, poverty and degraded environment are closely inter-related, especially where people depend for their livelihoods primarily on the natural resources based on their immediate environment. Therefore, restoring natural systems and improving natural resource management practice at the grassroots level are central to a strategy to eliminate poverty.

There is still hope for us. We can, to a certain degree, reverse the process of degradation of our surroundings, for Mother Earth is forgiving and able to heal her wounds if we do not inflict more grievous ones on her. The good earth is our mother and that if we destroy her, we destroy ourselves. So we should act today for a better tomorrow for our children. It is time that each one of us adopt an 'energy-efficient and green' mind-set and use the natural resources available equitably, judiciously and save them for our future generations, as, *"the best way to predict the future is to create it"*.