

Rural and Urban Challenges in Sustainable Development

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Abstract: *For the last decade and a half, sustainable development has been the catchword in most of the policies and programmes of nation states all around the world. The Rio Earth Summit has been hailed as a landmark meeting aimed at augmenting efforts towards achieving sustainable development and environmental protection. We often hear or read about global warming, environmental degradation, depletion of resources and scarcity of water, pollution of air, water and land, melting glaciers, or mass migration of people from rural to urban areas in search of livelihood means. Why have these issues become so prominent?*

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I. INTRODUCTION

For the last decade and a half, sustainable development has been the catchword in most of the policies and programmes of nation states all around the world. The Rio Earth Summit has been hailed as a landmark meeting aimed at augmenting efforts towards achieving sustainable development and environmental protection. We often hear or read about global warming, environmental degradation, depletion of resources and scarcity of water, pollution of air, water and land, melting glaciers, or mass migration of people from rural to urban areas in search of livelihood means. Why have these issues become so prominent? Why has it become so important for the nations to incorporate the sustainable development dimension in their policies and governance? India, for its part, has also been playing an active role towards this end through various multilateral agreements apart from making it one of the core themes in its governance matters. The management of resources is easier said than done. It needs massive efforts not only at the Central but also at the State level to meticulously work out the modalities of integrating the goal of sustainable development with governance and decentralised governance, in particular. From a positive angle, decentralised governance can help a great deal in accomplishing these constructive goals in tandem with the national policy. It is an on-going process in India. It would definitely take a considerable length of time to measure its impact on the nation. With this background, this Unit deals, in depth, as to what sustainable development is and how it can be realised through decentralised governance.

WHAT IS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Commission Report Our Common Future (1987), is defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This is one of the most widely used definitions relating to sustainable development. Similar definitions have been coined since then that emphasised on 'improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems' or 'the development that comprises of economic and social development that protect and enhance the natural environment and social equity'. The World Conservation Strategy Report defined it as 'the integration of conservation and development to ensure that modifications to the planet do indeed secure the survival and well being of all people'. Whatever the definition is, it carries the tenor of development that can be achieved without an undue exploitation of the natural resources. For long, it was taken for granted by the mankind that nature is bountiful and can be used unscrupulously. Accordingly, the resource exploitation continued unmindful of the consequences till it was realised that the resources are actually being overexploited. The international community called for a meet that aimed at bringing a halt to this menace and chalk out a programme to restore nature's capacity.

The first call to these environmental threats was given as early as 1960s. A new environmental movement emerged around this time that was sparked off by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*; the book drew the attention of the world to the destruction of wildlife by the use of pesticide DDT. She warned that these chemicals contained the Sustainable Development and Challenges to Decentralised Governance

Emerging Issues and Trends prospect of a dying world in which springtime would no longer bring forth lease to new life but only silence. Carson revealed that our actions could lead to seriously damaging environmental consequences when we interfered with the natural systems we fully did not understand. There were meetings from time to time addressing these issues including the Stockholm Conference of 1972; the United Nations General Assembly, in 1983, set up the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) with the Norwegian Prime Minister Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland as the chairperson. The Report *Our Common Future* was brought out by this commission. The core theme of the Report emphasised the importance of taking into consideration environmental resource limitation before deciding the economic policies of the State. Thus a need was felt to integrate environment and economics in a co-ordinated manner without having detrimental effects on both.

In this period of market driven economies and globalisation, there is an immense competition between various nations to reap maximum benefits. This undue competition led to overuse of natural resources in the name of development. The developing countries especially are compelled to use their resources in an un-economical manner; while the poverty levels remained as they are, development eluded many a country. Keeping this in view, the Brundtland Commission argued that in a world marked by extreme poverty, people are compelled to use resources in an erratic manner for meeting their immediate needs; these means of survival result in an unhealthy environment. Therefore, the key to development is welfare of the people with a simultaneous nurturing of natural resources. There exist two dimensions of human needs: (1) the fulfilment of basic needs like food, clothing, shelter and a clean environment; and (2) the option of pursuing a chosen lifestyle, in terms of materialistic possessions. The developed countries were successful, through early industrialisation, in providing these comforts to their population. The developing countries have not been able to secure the advanced technologies that would ensure a better life style to their citizens. To this day, they are in need of technical knowledge that would not only give them a good life but also an economically viable one. These countries have abundant natural resources but they lack the know-how to convert them into environmentally sustainable technologies and tools. In this context, the second option, that is, the option of choosing one's own life style becomes a subjective option. A good governance strategy promises a better standard of living and how this can be realised depends on the integrated approach adopted by the government. Thus an intermittent linkage has been established between both the aspects.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

Some of the fundamental principles that characterise sustainable development are:

What is sustainability in life?



Sustainable Lifestyles are considered as ways of living, social behaviors and choices, that minimize environmental degradation (use of natural resources, CO₂ emissions, waste and pollution) while supporting equitable socio-economic development and better quality of life for all.

- Conservation of natural resources and biological diversity
- Deterrence of harmful effects on environment
- Integration of environment and economy
- Training and awareness programmes on environmental protection

• Cooperative and participatory approach Thus, there is a predestined link between governance and sustainable development; there is a need to integrate the dynamics of society, ecology and economy through the use of environmentally compatible technologies. Above all, there is a need to sustain development in urban and rural areas by providing basic amenities and good standard of living. Despite an effort towards good decentralised governance via Panchayati Raj institutions, there exists a denial of basic needs of food, water and shelter to substantial proportion of the population. Many an effort has remained ineffective due to delay in governmental support and lack of initiatives. The provision of basic amenities, good standard of living and income generation is a crucial aspect of good governance. Even in States where the development is said to be on an increasing level, there are instances of poor governance that have widened the gaps in terms of human development.

The rise of sustainable homes

Written by Architecture news & editorial desk

Despite the continued resistance from climate sceptics, the urgency of the climate crisis becomes clearer by the day. And so does the realisation that, by necessity, sustainable housing will have to be an important part of its solution.

The 2016 Paris Agreement commits signatories to the goal of limiting “global warming to below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels by 2050.” It states that to achieve this goal, the global community will need to reduce net carbon emissions to zero by at least 2050, and preferably earlier.



As the Low Carbon Living CRC points out, Australian homes generate around 13 percent of our carbon emissions. It is clear, therefore, that if we are to meet our Paris commitments, we need to reduce the carbon we use in our homes. We must embrace the concept of sustainable homes.

Challenges of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is something that can help the entire world's population and it helps supply security for future generations, but it is not without its challenges. There are a large number of challenges that need to be met if we are to achieve a better future.

Some of these key challenges include the following issues:

War and Instability

When there is turmoil, instability and war between nations it stands to reasons that sustainable development cannot occur. For instance the war in Ukraine has had an impact on sustainable development. In fact, one of the biggest issues that has affected countries outside of Ukraine are issues surrounding food sustainability since Ukraine and Russia are big producers of wheat and barley.

In fact, Russia and Ukraine account for around 30% of all exports around the world, which is a big figure and ultimately has a significant impact on food production and availability. This is one of the effects of globalization is that nations have become dependent on each other to support their own standards of living.

It is difficult to maintain a civil society and the well-being of people when there is war or the threat of conflict over a country. In these cases, sustainable development goals cannot be easily met.

Suitability and Availability

Another issue is the ability of a nation to implement sustainable development programmes in their country. It is common for developed nations to suggest to developing nations that the process they use in their own countries should be future proofed and sustainable, but this raises the question whether this is firstly possible and secondarily pragmatic. This is why developing countries need subsidies and support from the developed world to help them reduce their liabilities towards non-sustainable enterprises.

Governmental Issues

Other issues relate to what initiatives Governments may want to sign-up to, and how keen they are on sustainable development. Most governments sign up to issues surrounding global warming and other climate issues, but not always. In some cases, there is a political initiative to reject environmental issues and sustainable development goals to instead address the immediate needs of their country or populous. For example – promoting and supporting legacy fossil fuel industries because they play a big part in supporting deprived local communities and areas. Closing certain industries without replacing them can lead to certain communities suffering job losses and poverty. In these locations many governments are resistant to change related to sustainable development programmes.

Poverty & Unemployment

One of the goals of sustainable development is to end poverty but this is no easy task and cannot be done without addressing a number of other issues that contribute to poverty.

Some of the issues relate to inequalities and economic opportunities that people face. This can be inequalities between different countries. It's well known that people in developed nations tends to be (as a whole group) better off financially than those individuals who live in developing nations.

However, inequalities can occur within a country itself. For example, the difference in wealth that may be found in urban areas when compared to some rural locations where employment can be difficult to obtain or is less well paid. Or, rural opportunities are only available in certain industries, such as the agricultural sector. Take for instance the difference to access to employment between someone living in New York compared to an individual located in the American Rust Belt.

Inequalities also occur between men and women. In many countries women lack access to well-paid employment or any employment at all. Often, sustainable development programmes in term of employment initiatives have goals related to equality of opportunity.

Without addressing the issues surrounding the causes of poverty within any given community, then it can be difficult to reduce poverty, and in turn also difficult to address some of the wider goals and challenges of sustainable development.

The social sciences look at how individuals interact with each other. The case studies and socio scientific research that academics carry out can help us understand what the challenges are in a particular community and help us address those issues.

A lot of work has been done to reduce poverty but there still is a massive amount to do. Take for example that it is estimated that 650 million people still go hungry and do not have enough food. Food security is a problem and may get worse due to population growth.

One of the key inputs for sustainable development which is linked to increased poverty and a lack of progress in terms of development is the access that citizens have to electricity. Energy poverty is a major issue that affects the poverty of an individual. This has been one of the key goals of sustainable development and significant improvements have been made in this area. As recently as 2020 it is estimated by the World Bank that just over 90% of the world population now has access to electricity. However, there are big gaps in some of the poorest nations where a large percentage of their populations do not have access to electricity.

Unfortunately, addressing poverty and global development has become more difficult after 2020 with additional global challenges such as the global downturn, recession and a slow recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a massive impact on global economic and caused an increase in poverty around the world. Take for example just one statistic – where the pandemic pushed just under 5 million people into poverty in South East Asia alone.

Population Growth

Another potential challenge for sustainable development is population growth. As the United Nations say themselves in their reports – population growth in developing countries can be seen as both a success and a challenge for the future. The larger the world's population the more resources are needed to ensure that people remain out of poverty and have utilities such as fresh water and electricity.

II. CONCLUSION

Sustainable Development is the process of improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. It carries the premise of development that can be achieved without an undue exploitation of the natural resources. The management of resources is easier said than done. It needs massive efforts not only at the Central but also at the State and District levels to meticulously work out the modalities of achieving the goal of sustainable development in tandem with the national policy. It is an on-going process in India. The governance for sustainable development should include an integrated approach of economic and environmental concerns in the development strategy, keeping in view not only the quality of life that has to be offered to its citizens but also an equal distribution of it with 'social equity' as its goal. Governance should also safeguard a citizen's right to develop simultaneously holding the environmental concerns at a high pedestal. There are numerous challenges to sustainable development in India such as loss of biodiversity, depleting natural resources, pollution of land, water and air as also poor health, poor literacy rate and environmental sustainability. The decentralised governance helps in promoting human and environmental concerns alike. For this the pace of integration of the functions, functionaries and finance machineries needs to be accelerated so as to ensure sustainable human development

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