

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ROLES OF SOCIETIES
GOVERNMENTS AND NGOS**

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Introduction

Sustainable development means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs. It means equity in development and sectoral actions across space and time. It requires an integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development. In *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India* and in *M.C Mehta v. Union of India*, it was observed that the balance between environmental protection and developmental activities could only be maintained by strictly following the principle of 'sustainable development. This is a development strategy that caters the needs of the present without negotiating the ability of upcoming generations to satisfy their needs. The strict observance of sustainable development will put us on a path that ensures development while protecting the environment, a path that works for all peoples and for all generations. It is a guarantee to the present and a bequeath to the future. All environmental related developmental activities should benefit more people while maintaining the environmental balance. This could be ensured only by the strict adherence of sustainable development without which life of coming generations will be in jeopardy.

UN General Assembly convened a conference on the "human environment" at Stockholm in June 1972, which came out with guiding principles on "human environment". It emphasized that man has the fundamental right to environment of quality and also that he has a responsibility towards protecting the environment for present and future generations. It also maintained that natural resources of the earth must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations. About a decade later, to address the issues concerning continuing depletion of natural resources and unsustainable development, the World Commission on Environment and Development was created in 1983. Popularly known as Brundtland Commission (1983), it described sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

After twenty years of Stockholm Declaration, the UN Conference on 'Environment and Development' (also known as 'Earth Summit') was held at Rio-de Janeiro in 1992 that adopted an action plan, popularly known as 'Agenda 21'. The agenda 21 promised to reduce poverty, provide clean water and health care, and protect the natural resources and so on. Also to be noted that some of the Millennium Development Goals have urged for ensuring environmental sustainability and reduction of the percentage of the population under extreme poverty. Similarly, explaining implications of climate change for sustainable development the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes (IPCC) the importance of social and environmental equity in development. Thus all the major world conferences and initiatives taken so far on environment and development have stressed on economically viable development, socially equitable development and protection of the environment for attaining sustainable development.

Need for sustainable development

Rivers, Forests, Minerals and such other resources constitute a nation's natural wealth. These resources are not to be frittered away and exhausted by any one generation. Every general owes a duty to all succeeding generations to develop and conserve the natural resources of the nation in the best possible way. It is in the interest of mankind. It is in the interest of the nation. Today society's interaction with nature is so extensive that the environmental question has assumed proportions affecting all humanity. Industrialisation, urbanisation, explosion of population, over-exploitation of resources, depletion of traditional sources of energy and raw materials and the search for new sources

of energy and raw materials, the disruption of natural ecological balances, the destruction of a multitude of animal and plant species for economic reasons and sometimes for no good reason at all are factors which have contributed to environmental deterioration. While the scientific and technological progress of man has invested him with immense power over nature, it has also resulted in the unthinking use of the power, encroaching endlessly on nature. If man is able to transform deserts into oases, he is also leaving behind deserts in the place of oases. In the last century, a great German materialist philosopher warned mankind: "Let us not, however, flatter ourselves over much on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places, it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first".

Role Governments and NGOs in achieving Sustainable development

Sustainable development is achieved through optimizing gains from several variables, rather than maximizing those from a single one. This requires government departments, by convention sectorally organized, to work together, or in some cases as a single multi-disciplinary authority. For this joint planning, transparency and coordination in implementation are required. The richness of skills available in society must be harnessed through partnerships involving institutions in civil society, such as NGOs, CBOs, corporate (including private) bodies, academic and research institutions, trade unions, etc., which must be made an integral part of planning and implementation for sustainable development.

NGOs and other civil society groups are not only stakeholders in governance, but also a driving force behind greater international cooperation through the active mobilization of public support for international agreements. The participation of civil society in global governance is increasing in significance, but is not unprecedented. NGO involvement is usually considered a late-twentieth-century phenomenon, but in fact it has occurred for over two centuries. The recent rate of proliferation of non-governmental organizations, however, is notable. The contributions from civil society participation need to be enhanced through a strengthened, more formalized structure for engagement. UN programs seek legitimacy for their policies through the involvement of civil society. An improved governance structure would acknowledge the role of NGOs and other members of civil society and devise formal channels for participation.

There is on the one hand a surfeit of laws, many of them outmoded and irrelevant. On the other hand, effective enforcement is lacking in respect of laws relevant to contemporary concerns and conducive to governance. This calls for a thorough review of laws, elimination of those which are outmoded, and simplification of the procedures for implementing those which are relevant. Internal reviews as well as learnings from international experience should be the basis of identifying and filling gaps in existing laws. It must, however, be recognized that laws in themselves do not provide solutions, unless there are mechanisms to effectively enforce them. There are many traditional systems and practices whose value and validity needs to be recognized and brought into the mainstream of governmental development thinking and policy. Appropriate mechanisms for integrating them need to be created. Many policies were framed either before sustainable development became a major concern or in a sectoral perspective. These need to be reviewed from the point of view of sustainable development. All future policies must be guided by considerations of sustainable development.

Conclusion

This is a critical moment in earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. Our planet earth is perhaps the only human habitat in the vast universe and we owe it to posterity to preserve the divine heritage of our biosphere without pollution, degradation and destruction. The long term perspective for sustainable development requires the broad-based participation of various stakeholders in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation at all levels.

There is both a need and a scope for regional and global cooperation in sustainable development. Some of the areas of common concern are marine and riparian issues, transboundary environmental impacts, management of bioresources, technology sharing and sharing of sustainable development experiences. Efforts must be made, especially by developing countries, to work towards synergizing experiences and raising shared regional concerns as a

strong united front in international forums. Mechanisms must be put in place to facilitate such international exchange of domestic and global experiences in sustainable development.

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