

Sustainable Development Efforts in India – A Study

B. Jayarama Bhat,
Dept. of Studies in Economics,
Kuvempu University, India.
E-mail: bj_bhat1959@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Development, to be meaningful, should always be sustainable in nature, for it is a process of long term character; it doesn't halt anywhere, any time. Sustained efforts must always be on to reap the fruits of sustainable development. Sustainable development is one that of commitment towards social progress accelerated economic growth and increased environmental conservation. The ninth five year plan (1997-2002) has explicitly recognized the need for linking environment, health and development and showed concern towards ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilization and participation of people (in development process) at all levels. However, the Indian experience has been growth becoming unsustainable because of poor state of infrastructures, increased social and regional imbalances, the looming environmental threats including water and energy shortages. The per capita Gross National Income in India grew from \$ 730 in 2005 to \$1410 in 2011, amounting to a growth rate of 11.9%. In the 2001-2011 decade the average annual GDP growth was 7.4%. It is heartening to note that India, among the six South-East Asian countries, has achieved a respectable positive economic growth rate of 8.2%, despite the world economic crisis in 2009. With a predicted 4.9% growth, the Indian economy showed the lowest growth since 2002; a recovery was expected by 2013 with GDP growth amounting to 6%; the previous government at the Centre expected a growth rate of 9 to 10%. The current growth status, it is argued, is not sustainable as we (as a Nation) are, measured on International standards, poor in road network, ports, distribution networks etc. With the above backdrop, based on secondary data, the intended paper shall be a study on the efforts made in India aimed at sustainable development, the problems therein as well the paper will concentrate on suggesting remedies to overcome the problems identified in the study.

1. Introduction

Development should always be meaningful in nature. It is a process of long term character; it does not halt anywhere, any time. Sustained efforts must always be on to reap the fruits of sustainable development. As early as in 1987 in a Report entitled 'Our Common Future', the Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as "development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Extensive efforts by the governments, international organisations, local authorities, business, citizen groups and individuals are being made, across the globe, to operationalize the task of sustainable development. A World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg in 2002 which resulted in Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and was committed for achieving internationally agreed development goals including United Nations Millennium Declaration, United Nations, Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biodiversity, Convention to Combat Desertification and non-binding targets of the Forestry Principles.

The Constitution of India ensures to all the Indian citizens, Justice-social, economic and Political Equality-of states and opportunity-and the Dignity of the individual. The Right to Life is conferred in Article 21 encompassing right to clean environment, right to livelihood, right to live with dignity. As well, the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) ensure distributive justice including social and economic justice; it is a duty upon the state to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife.

The spirit of sustainable development has been articulated in the National Environmental Policy (NEP) of 2006 which states that such a development which respects ecological constraints and the imperatives of social justice can only be considered sustainable development; otherwise not. Provided,

- i. Human beings enjoy a decent quality of life,
- ii. Human beings should become capable of recognising the finiteness of the biosphere and
- iii. That neither the aspiration of a good life nor the recognition of the limits of the biophysical world should preclude the greater justice in the world, the fundamental aspirations of sustainable development are considered achieved.

2. Paper Scheme

This paper is an attempt at an analysis of sustainable development efforts made in India, based on the published sources, and showcasing the current Indian economic scenario. This is a descriptive paper. Part-I is on the Policies and Programmes of sustainable development in India. The issues of Achievements and Challenges of sustainable development are dealt with

in Part-II. A brief sketch of Future Outlook is presented in Part-III of the Paper prior to the conclusion in Part-IV.

2.1 Sustainable Development - the Policies and Programmes

With an aim to fulfil:

- a) Commitment towards social progress,
- b) Accelerated economic growth and
- c) Increased environmental conservation, the policies and programmes of the sustainable development, in India, have been designed and implemented, since the 1990s¹. Ensuring the environmental sustainability of the development process was felt the need of the hour through social mobilization and peoples' participation at all levels of development. Promotion of human development and conservation of natural resources continued to become the part of the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). And, in this direction efforts were continued to achieve the United Nations MDGs pertaining to poverty eradication which was already included in the country's monitorable development goals.

It is well conceived that *Social, Economic and the Environment (SEE) are the three pillars of sustainable development*. In the economic front, the thrust of Economic Reforms, in all the sectors, has been to open India's market to international competition, remove controls over private sector and eliminate trade barriers. Liberalised access to foreign capital and encouragement to foreign investments have also been catered to through economic reforms in the country. The banking and financial regulatory bodies were being strengthened aimed at expansion of the domestic capital markets.

2.2 Agriculture

As agriculture is the main stay in India, it is obvious this sector needs to be encouraged on top priority². India's National Agricultural Policy (NAP) states that, the policy will seeks to promote technically sound, economically viable, environmentally non-degrading, and socially acceptable use of country's natural resources- land, water and genetic endowment to promote sustainable development of agriculture ³.

The programmes initiated in the agricultural sector aimed at promoting sustainable development of the sector are:

1. National Food Security Mission (NFSM)
2. Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)
3. Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)
4. National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Area (NWDPA)
5. Command Area Development and Water Management Programme (CADWM)
6. National Project for Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies
7. Kissan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme

8. National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS)
9. Macro Management of Agriculture (MMA)
10. Integrated Scheme of Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize (ISOPOM), and
11. Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS)

2.3 Industry

In the Industrial Front, the 1991 Industrial Policy Statement attempted at establishing policy framework aimed at the following:

- a) Encouraging entrepreneurship,
- b) Developing indigenous technology
- c) Bringing in new technology,
- d) Dismantling the licence permit system,
- e) Developing the capital market and
- f) Increasing competitiveness for the benefit of the common man- all aimed at promoting development which is sustainable in nature⁴.

Particularly in the Indian context, promotion of support to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) has been catered to through National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) aimed at enhancing capabilities, competitiveness and marketability of the products of MSEs in the country⁵. The ICT sector is also being promoted in a great way mainly aimed at software development for export. The development of telecom sector led to increased national coverage and resulted in maximisation of consumer benefits in terms of declining tariffs.

2.4 Investment, Trade and Technology Up gradation

The post-liberalization period paved easier ways for FDI and technology transfers and others – all aimed at promoting growth in the country. Manufacturing activities have been promoted through Special Economic Zones (SEZs). In the trade front, significant policy initiatives have been taken through scaling down of tariff barriers, partial dismantling of the system of import and export licenses and simplification of other procedures being followed prior to 1991 in the trade sector⁶. Efforts at technology up gradation were initiated by promoting imports of capital goods for certain sectors under Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme at zero per cent duty; the areas covered being engineering and electronic products, basic chemicals and pharmaceuticals, apparels and textiles, plastics, handicrafts, chemicals and allied products and leather and leather products- of course a wide range of coverage.

2.5 Infrastructure-Banking and Social Initiatives

Growth of the electricity sector was being promoted by policy initiatives in the form of the Electricity Act 2003, the National Electricity Policy 2005 and Tariff Policy 2006 – all creating a conducive environment for investments in the power sector in the country; use of renewable sources of energy was encouraged significantly contributing to the growth of

infrastructure in India⁷. Added to this, the financial sector reforms, initiated in the 1990s, sought to create an efficient, productive and profitable financial sector in the country aimed at overall financial stability. Also, the Indian capital market was opened up for Foreign Institutional Investors⁸.

It is being argued that economic liberalization and globalization have social impacts in the Indian context. In this regard, changes in social policies have been initiated aimed at addressing the existing social inequality and concerns. Here, the aspects of poverty, employment, education, housing, health, agriculture, afforestation and environment protection, drinking water, energy to rural areas, and welfare of weaker sections of the society- are all included under the broad umbrella termed the Twenty Point Programme initiated in the year 2006.

2.6 The Government of India Twenty Point Programme

1. Gaibi Hatao (Poverty Eradication)
2. Jan Shakti (Power to People)
3. Kisan Mitra (Support to Farmers-Farmers' Friendly)
4. Shramik Kalyana (Labour Welfare)
5. Khadya Surksha (Food Security)
6. Sabke Liye Awas (Housing for All)
7. Shubh Peya Jal (Clean Drinking Water)
8. Jan Jan Ka Swastya (Health for All)
9. Sabke Liye Shiksha (Education for All)
10. Anuschi Jaati, Jan Jaati, Alp-sankhyak Evam Anya Pichhra Varg Kalyan (Welfare of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Minorities and Other Backward Class (OBCs))
11. Mahila Kalyana (Women Welfare)
12. Bal Kalyan (Child Welfare)
13. Yuva Vikas (Youth Development)
14. Basti Sudhar (Improvement of Slums)
15. Paryavaran Samrakshan evam Van Varadi (Environmental Protection and Afforestation)
16. Samajik Suraksha (Social Security)
17. Grameen Sadak (Rural Roads)
18. Grameen Oorja (Energization of Rural Areas)
19. Pichhra Kshetra Vikas (Development of Backward Areas), and
20. E-Shasan (IT-Enabled e-Governance)

Apart from, and along with, the above the following Policy Initiatives taken also aim at promotion of sustainable development in India:

- National Housing and Habitat Policy (NHHP), 1998
- Jawaharlal Neharu National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM), 2005
- The National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP), 2006
- The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), 2005
- National Population Policy (NNP), 2000
- Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme (RGNFS), 2006 (SCs & STs Students to pursue M.Phil and Ph.D.,)
- The National Food Security Mission (NFSM), 2007
- The Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), 2007
- The National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy (NRRP), 2007
- The National Environment Policy (NEP), 2006,
- The National Forest Policy (NFP), 1998.

Thus from the above it is clear that the Government of India have initiated, evolved several policy measures promoting sustainable development in the country.

2.7 Legal, Institutional and Financial Support

In India, a plethora of laws has been enacted and implemented pertaining to the three pillars (SEE) of sustainable development. To begin with, the Indian legal initiatives have focused more on the environment, but of late, many initiatives that address social and economic issues, aimed at bringing about integration between and among, have been taken.

The key Acts with regard to sustainable development (SEE) are:

1. The (Welfare Protection Act), 1972 and its Amendments in 1991, 2002,
2. Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996,
3. Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Biological Diversity Rules, 2004,
4. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, and
5. Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Further, the Environmental Principles such as:

- Precautionary Principle,
- Polluter Pays Principle,
- Public Trust Law Doctrine,
- Inter-generational Equity and Absolute Liability, as well have been accepted in India as part of Article 21 of Right to Life of the Constitution.

More particularly, in India, the following Legislations/Acts in the Social and Economic perspectives promoting sustainable development have been brought out.

2.8 On the Social front:

- Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993,
- National Trust Act, 1999,
- Commissions for the Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005,
- Right to Information Act, 2005,
- Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2009 and
- Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 have been enacted.

On the Economic Front

- ❖ Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992,
- ❖ Competition Act, 2002,
- ❖ Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003, and
- ❖ Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 have also been enacted. In spite of the challenges in implementation, in true spirit, the above are the remarkable ones in the Indian legal provisioning of sustainable development.

It is also a fact that sustainable development, to be a reality in true sense, requires domestic institutional coordination⁹. Such a co-ordination should be of institutions both horizontally and vertically with a strong local focus. The Departments of Commerce, Drinking Water Supply, Education, Home Affairs, Industrial Policy and Promotion, Land Resources and of Women and Child Development, as well as the Ministries of Agriculture, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Commerce and Industry, Communication and Information Technology, Tribal Affairs, Environmental and Forests, Earth Sciences, Home Affairs, Health and Family Welfare, Housing and Poverty Alleviation, Human Resource Development, Labour, Law and Justice, Power, Panchayati Raj, New and Renewable Energy, Rural Development, SSIs, Social Justice and Empowerment, Science and Technology, Urban Development, and of Water Resources are the ones whose effective coordination is required as these have different roles, at the national and state levels, to play and responsibilities to discharge in attaining sustainable development in the country as a whole. Apart from these, a large number of Universities (Central, State, Private and the Deemed ones), the National Institutes (the ITIs, IIMs, CSRI, ICSSR, ICMR, ICPR, NCAER and others) are also making regular contributions, by way of research and policy recommendations to the government, to the thinking on sustainable development in the country¹⁰.

It is needless to say that sustainable development agenda will not be materialised without adequate financial provisioning for the same. In this regard, between the period 1974-79 and

2007-11, the allocation of resources has increased from Rs. 394.26 billion to Rs. 36,447.18 billion. The budgeted spending on major sustainability programmes like the MGNREGS during 2011-12 stood at as high as Rs. 40 lakh million followed by the National Rural Health Mission (Rs. 16.14 lakh million) and the Indira Awas Yojana (Rs.8.99 lakh million). India has also recognized that economic development without environmental conservation can cause serious environmental damage. Accordingly, India's expenditure on adaption oriented schemes has increased from 1.45 per cent of GDP in 2000-01 to 2.84 per cent in 2009-10. Also, prevention and control of population has been given due attention under the financial provisioning of sustainable development¹¹. Nevertheless, resource crunch would continue to bother the governments at different levels, in India, as the country is vast in area which houses a huge population.

Sustainable Development – Achievements and Challenges

This part of the paper is on the Achievements and Challenges of sustainable development in India with reference to the three pillars (SEE) of the latter discussed above.

Social

India, currently, has been experiencing the process of demographic transition from high fertility, high mortality to low fertility and low mortality rates. The average growth rate of population declined from 2.2 to 1.9 per cent between 1994 and 2001. Also, between 1990 and 2010 the total fertility rate has come down from 3.9 to 2.8 per cent. It is heartening to note that in India the life expectancy has increased; the infant mortality and the under-five mortality rates have declined¹². As well, the number of underweight children below the age of three has gone down from 53.4 per cent in 1992-93 to 45.9 per cent in 2005-06. The Maternal Care Programme (Janani Suraksha Yojana), under the NRHM, did well reducing the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) targeting 34 million women in the country by 2010. By the year 2011, the total literacy rate in the country rose to 74.04 per cent from a mere 52.2 per cent in 1991 – a remarkable achievement in the social field¹³.

Economic

The share of agriculture in GDP has reduced to 14.2 per cent in 2012-13 from 25 per cent in 2000. Still, India is the second largest producer of rice and wheat in the world. In the early 1990s, the tertiary sector has witnessed rapid growth whose share in GDP has increased from 47 per cent in 1990 to 56.3 per cent in 2012-13, where the IT and ITeS have contributed considerably by generating income, employment and growth¹⁴. The Economic Survey 2010-11 reported that MSMEs sector has grown to 26 million units which provided employment to about 60 million persons and contributed about 08 per cent of the GDP. The FDI increased from US\$ 148.0 million in 1991-92 to US\$ 18,800 million in 2009-10. The exports, almost during the same period, have increased from 06 per cent to 12 per cent. The employment

pattern, over the years, has also increased where the share of tertiary sector stood at 25.4 per cent (from 21.2% in 1993-14) during 2007-08; while share of agriculture has declined to 55.9 per cent.

Environment

In terms of percentage of total geographical area, the forest cover in India is estimated at 21.02 per cent. Initiatives through Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Green India Mission have been taken to involve local communities in natural resource management in the country. India, to her credit, has some major achievements in the area of clean energy. There has also been an increase in the renewable grid capacity amounting to about 11 per cent of the total grid installed capacity as on March 2011.

Thus, from the above, it is evident that, in all the three pillars of sustainable development, India has made noticeable progress over the years. Yet, in order the development to be more inclusive and broad based, a greater focus on social equity, green economy, and social ecology is required for a vibrant India in the near future in the continued global competitive environment.

Challenges

In the Indian context, due to multifarious factors, addressing the issues involved in sustainable development has always been challenging.

Urban Sprawl, Consumption and Health

In the last few years, India has been witnessing rapid urbanisation. The urban sprawl creates the mobility challenge – access to transportation that is required to meet the broad scope of economic and social needs. The growing transport demand accompanied by excessive urbanisation creates several problems/ challenges of concern around energy security and environmental quality. With increasing purchasing power, consumption linked to market driven consumerism puts further stress on the resource base in the country. Continuation of unsustainable patterns of consumption and life styles turns to a challenge. Despite growth, in the health sector, child malnutrition and under nutrition in particular remains high- a challenge; access to public health seems inadequate.

The major areas of challenge, in making growth sustainable, in the country may be listed as:

- Regional Disparities
- Sanitation and Drinking Water
- Education Access
- Inclusive Growth
- Infrastructure
- Environmental Quality and Urban Air Quality
- Water Quality

- Resource Security, Energy Security,
- Climate Change, Natural Disaster,
- Biodiversity related Challenges, and others.

Thus, despite India's concerted efforts in achieving sustainable development across the pillars, many problems are persistent; challenges are many. Therefore, efforts must be continuously on and on so that challenges may be effectively tackled in the continued process of Nation Building.

Future Outlook

The OECD has brought out the Economic Outlook for South East Asia, China and India-2014 in 2013. It is worth here, in the context of sustainable development, to have a glimpse of the same. The Report says that the real GDP growth in the Emerging Asian Economies is projected to be moderating gradually but remains robust over the 2014-18 period; according to the OECD's Medium – term Projection Framework (MPF-2014), the average GDP growth of Emerging Asia in 2018 would be 6.9 per cent where China would touch 7.5 and India is expected to register a GDP growth rate of 6.1 per cent. The Policy Focus for China will be/should be on improving Fiscal Efficiency through Institutional Reform and for India, improving Teaching and National Assessment Systems to raise Education Standards in the country.

The Outlook also records that India's economy has developed quickly in the last decade improving living standards and experiencing strong growth in the ICT. The domestic constraints of inflationary pressures and rising fiscal and Current Account Deficits need to be addressed effectively. The 12th FYP stresses on Teacher Training, Evaluation and Accountability, Higher Quality Research and Infrastructure. Further, it is a matter of pride for us that some emerging Asian countries- China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and VietNam- are poised to join Japan, Korea and Singapore in the ranks of advanced high income countries within the next two decades. However, the Report cautions us of sustaining fast growth at rates comparable to those we have enjoyed until now. The emerging Asian economies are required to develop, further, institutional capacities and keep pace with changing economic needs.

Recently (on 19th Jan 2015), the Oxfam Charity in Paris came out with a Report that: Wealth accumulated by the richest 01 per cent will exceed that of the other 99 per cent in 2016. *"The Scale of Global Inequality is quite simply staggering and despite the issues shooting up the global agenda, the gap between the richest and the rest is widening fast"*, Oxfam Executive Director, Winnie Byanyima said. It is astonishing to note that the richest 01 per cent's share of global wealth increased from 44 per cent in 2009 to 48 per cent in 2014; it will be more than 50 per cent in 2016. About 80 per cent poorest share just 5.5 per cent (of

wealth) with an average wealth of US\$ 3,851 per adult, the Report said. As result, the poor are hurt twice by rising inequality for they get a smaller share in the economic pie- extreme inequality hinders/ hurts growth. The 45th World Economic Forum Summit Davos, Switzerland (Jan, 21-24, 2015) is expected to ponder over this pertinent issue and come out with suitable strategies to resolve.

Despite the above, for India, silver lines of better prospects, in the near future, are forecast. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects came out that India would emerge as the world's fastest growing major economy in two years. The Washington-based Development Institution releases the Global Economic Prospects Report twice a year. The WB is optimistic regarding India, the Report said, *"after several years of stalled progress, the newly elected government (May 2014, Narendra Modi led) has begun to implement measures to cut red tape, raise infrastructure investment, deregulate key parts of the economy and shrink the role of government"*¹⁵. The bank also expects India to match China's GDP growth rate of 7 per cent. *Also, by 2017-18, India is expected to emerge at the top of the global growth pile by holding steady at 7 per cent growth narrowly edging China at 6.9 per cent.*

Conclusion

The issue of sustainable development would not be a conclusive one. For every economy on the globe, it should be a continued process; the efforts should never halt anywhere and anytime. Only with the concerted, undivided, dedicated efforts put by every country on the planet earth, sustainable development can be a reality in true sense. Development of human capital, promotion of innovation, institutional and infrastructure development- all will go a long way in making development sustainable in the present competitive globalised environment. Let us all hope for the best to come by.

Notes:

1. The synergy between environment, health and development has been explicitly recognised during the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) in India.
2. The agricultural sector accounts for about 58% of the employment in the country. Thus this sector need special attention in policy formulation and programme implementation.
3. The NAP stated that improving the quality of land and soil, rational utilization and conservation of water, and sensitizing the farming community to environmental concerns would receive high priority-Govt. of India, 2000.
4. Further, the policy also stated that spread of industrialization to backward areas of the country will be actively promoted through appropriate incentives, institutions and infrastructure investments.

5. Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), State Financial Corporations (SFCs), State Industrial Corporation (SIDCs), Technology Development and Modernization Fund (TDMF) and Venture Capital Funds (VCF) are the leading financial institutions involved in direct lending to the SSIs sector in India, at the Central and State levels.
6. It should be noted that peak tariff rates were reduced steeply from 350 per cent in 1991 to less than 20 per cent in 2009. Also, the Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) on imports were abolished for most capital and intermediate goods in 1991.
7. As well, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) provisions have been relaxed which encouraged private sector financing by large firms in the highway sector.
8. The institutions like Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) have been playing important role in creating international standards in the Indian Capital market, while simultaneously protecting the interests of the investors.
9. Sustainable development also requires not only cross – sectoral, but also multi-level coordination with the active involvement of all stakeholders.
10. Notably, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), which is under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, carries out wildlife research in: wildlife management, wildlife forensics, spatial modelling, eco-development and climate change – a commendable job indeed!
11. Significant investment is also being made to make the national rivers, water and air pollution free. A special allocation of Rs. 2 billion was proposed (during 2011-12) for clean-up of important lakes and rivers. The present Government at the Centre has opened up separate Ministry to take all the care of river Ganga-the life line of India.
12. The life expectancy stood at 63.5 years, infant mortality rate at 50 (per 1000 live birth in 2009) and the under-five mortality rate stood at 69.4 (per 1000 live births) in 2005-06.
13. Yet, in respect of reducing the under-five mortality rate, Maternal Mortality Rate, and in reversing the incidence of malaria and other major diseases, the progress achieved in the country is slow or off-track; concerted efforts are still more to be put on place.
14. Currently, India has about 45 million internet users. The overall tele-density has sharply increased from 0.67/1000 population in 1991 to 36.98 in March 2009, by March 2010 it reached to 52.74 per cent.
15. The Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi in his speech to the Nation, after assuming office, promised the people of India of “small (size) government and more governance”. Better and effective governance is also expected of in the days to come.

Acknowledgement

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