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Kumar Prashant

Sustainable Development of India: Challenges and the way forward

Abstract

India is a land of physical, ecological, social, cultural and linguistic diversity. "Unity in diversity" has been the maxim of cultural pluralism in India. To maintain the unity of India with all its diversity remains a challenge but the binding forces evolved over centuries helped meet this challenge. India's population of 1.21 billion, showing a surge of about 181 million in a decade according to census of 2011. The challenge underlying limiting population growth should be addressed and the need for the country to take upon itself the challenge to deal with the population related issues which are inextricably linked to the total development of our nation should be emphasised.

Key words:

Sustainable development, Eco- development, participation, resource management, Eco-regional, Eco-technique

Introduction

Based on the ideals long cherished by its people, the constitution of India defines India as a "sovereign, socialistic, secular, and Democratic Republic". The system of government is parliamentary with a federal structure. Power and responsibility are shared between the centre, state governments, and the numerous local and district level authorities. The cooperation between various levels of government is crucial for development.

The task of finding the right blend between

centralised and decentralised decision-making and between micro level planning and macro level planning is a component of designing a development strategy tailor made for India. Decision making that involves people at various levels of governance brings in different perceptions and enriches the process. The importance of involving local people in decision-making, to bring a draw a better picture of their requirements and in finding implementable solutions, is also being recognised. Starting from colonial times several policies, laws and procedures have tended to alienate people from their natural resources. Evolving methods for the participation of local people in the management of common property resources is a major challenge for natural resource management.

Challenges

The flood plains of the great rivers from India's food bowls thanks to the green revolution. However, the ecological costs associated with it are questionable. High-yielding varieties are rapidly replacing the diverse locally adapted varieties, making crops more vulnerable to diseases, soil health problems such as deficiency of micronutrients and organic matter, incidence of soil salinity, and damage to the physical structure of soil that have arisen in the intensively cultivated areas. The native cropping patterns suffered a backlash. For example, the semi-arid zone of the Punjab plains underwent intensive irrigation. It led to increased soil salinity and a complete change of traditional cropping patterns. The need for more

resources for these water-intensive crops are sufficed by chemical inputs. It skyrocketed from about 131.89 million hectare of gross cropped area in 1950 to 198.36 million hectare in 2014. The challenge is not limited to sustaining and increasing agricultural growth, but to do so without damaging the environment.

India has the world's largest cattle population. 19th Livestock census released by the , Ministry of Fisheries, animal Husbandry and Dairying has pegged the total livestock population of India at 512.05 million. They are supported by approximately 13 million hectares or less than 4% of land which is classified as pasture lands, most of which are over grazed. The challenge of prevention of erosion and the restoration of India's land resources is intricately related to strategies for the management of land, water and vegetative cover.

Like indigenous people all over the world, the tribal communities that live in forests respect the trees and the birds and animals that give them sustenance. Strategies are being developed for a greater degree of people's participation in forest management. The role of forest dwelling communities in restoring conserving forests is now being increasingly recognised. With the increasing demand of water, plans were made to harness the mighty rivers through large irrigation projects. Typically, this would submerge forests, displace local communities while facilitating agriculture in the plains. The dam on the river Narmada and the Tehri dam became controversial when environmental activists raised their voice to protect the rights of natives. This is an issue that poses very difficult questions regarding the relationship between environment and development and resolving it is a tedious task. Balancing the two is like walking on a tightrope.

Large dams that replaced traditional water harvesting techniques in modern India were initially seen as the solution. But today the problems of displacement, submergence and drainage are subjects of serious debate. Increasing demand and new technologies are leading to over exploitation of groundwater leading to an alarming drop in water tables in certain areas. This has even led to the problem of extreme salinity in some parts of the

country. Rationalising the use of groundwater is another important issue.

Community wastes, industrial effluents and excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides are polluting surface water and affecting the quality of groundwater. The implications of this on human health and aquatic life are obvious. Finding optimal strategies for the conservation of water, provision of safe drinking water and keeping water bodies clean are hiccups in developmental story of India.

India is very rich in biodiversity. Preserving this resource is a major challenge, as also utilizing this for development purposes. Coping with rapid urbanisation is another issue that demands attention.

Several of India's cities started out as trading towns that encircled agricultural areas. As these grew agricultural lands were turned into urban lands. Location policies for urban and industrial growth from this point of view are other puzzles that need solving in India.

The problems of meeting India's growing energy requirements are many. The current use of bio sources for ensuring energy security is in excess of their regenerating capabilities. Few sources of renewable energy-Hydel, thermal and nuclear- has major environmental consequences and the challenge is to utilize these resources with the least environmental damage. These involves determining the optimal technology, scale and location of such projects. Major investment would be required in the area of technology upgradation for increasing efficiency of generation, transmission and utilisation of commercial energy. New sources of energy like the ethanol blending of petrol or hydrogen as the source are potential answers to energy security of India.

Poverty remains the central issue even after 75 years of independence. More than 25% of the population were below poverty line in 2017 according to the Reserve Bank of India. The challenge is therefore, not only to find out development and models that are environmentally sustainable but also socially just and culturally acceptable. Environment degradation has compounded the maladies of a large number of poor who depend on the resources of their immediate environment. The problem of poverty and

environment degradation are therefore not two different problems but two facets of the same problem.

Reorienting today's conditions and needs with institutions, attitudes and infrastructures essentially build up during the colonial times such as the civil services is another issue that needs our attention. This change must take into account India's traditions of resources use, management, education etc. An overhaul is required in the education system, in attitudes, in administrative procedures and in institutions, so it improves the way people view technology, resources and indeed development itself. The dream of digital inclusion of all the people can be realised by educating masses and nudging them to adopt this new way of life that increases efficiency and improves the 'ease of living'.

The problems are complex and the choices are difficult. Each issue needs its own resolution, not a borrowed solution. A large number of areas need research and constant monitoring. Citizens and decision makers need to become more aware of their environment and the intricate relationship it bears with development. Today in India we see the green shoots emerging out of efforts of the people, NGO's and the government.

A national ministry of environment and forests was set up in 1985. Most states have set up Department of Environment and associated agencies. Several hundreds institutions and several thousand NGOs are today, in one way or the other working towards coping with the challenges of environment and development. The most hopeful sign is perhaps the increasing number of people who individually or through their communities, are taking interest and actions that lead to better environment and a better life. The need is to take interest in formulating an Eco-development planning for sustainable development.

Eco-development planning

Most of the impacts on ecosystems stem from activities of socio-economic development. Ecological criteria need, therefore to be introduced into development planning and policies. The inclusion of ecological criteria in development process and the new planning concept of eco-development has been

advocated by United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The same organisation also offered one of the first explicit definitions of eco-development as Development at "regional and local levels- consistent with the potentials of the area involved with attention given to the adequate and rational use of the natural resource and to applications of technological styles and organisational forms that respect there are natural ecosystems and local social cultural patterns."

This definition suggests a new "eco-regional" approach to Development planning, referring to both, ecological and socio-cultural habitat. The term has been used, however, as a synonym for environmentally sound development, irrespective of the geographical (local, national or international) boundaries to which environmental and socio-economic planning should be applied.

The eco-development planning was picked, on behalf of the UNEP, by non-governmental organizations. This organization developed numerous pilot studies and established the following main features of eco development-

- Resource development for the satisfaction of basic needs;
- Development of a satisfactory social ecosystem;
- Rational (non degrading and non wasteful) use of natural resources in solidarity with future generation;
- Use of alternative energy sources, in particular to the regional capacity for photosynthesis;
- Use of alternative environmentally sound production procedures;
- Development and use of eco-techniques;
- Establishment of a horizontal authority ensuring participation of the population concerned and preventing any plundering of the results of eco-development;
- Preparatory education to create social awareness of ecological values in development.

Conclusion

Human welfare or improvement in the quality of human life is now regarded as the ultimate goal of any development strategy. It consists of income and employment generation and poverty alleviation as well

as mass participation and self reliance in order to neutralise the actions that leads to deprivation and marginalisation of the weaker sections of the society. Decentralisation of the administration and strengthening of local authorities and institutions may also help in motivating these groups. The new development strategy should not only aim to enhance economic growth but also to ensure equitable distribution of the income it produces because rural poverty is not a production problem but distribution problem.

World conference for agrarian reform and rural development proposed the strategy of "balanced participatory growth" and formulated seven focal

points. The elimination of rural poverty through targeted development programs in the economic and social sectors, access to land, water and other natural resources, participation, integration of women into rural development, access to production means, markets and services, development of rural job opportunities outside agriculture and education, training and extension services. These seven focal points should be the pivot of developmental planning for India.

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