

Chapter 17

Sustainable Development Goals - The Path To Social Harmony

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Abstract

People are the wealth of any nation. The 2030 agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. In each and every definition of sustainability and sustainable development people represent an integral part. Sustainability as defined by the Brundtland commission aims to achieve economic, environmental and social development that meets the needs of the people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As the concept of sustainable development evolved over time, the importance of human development and the culture to attain sustainability was realized. In defining a complex and holistic understanding of sustainability the united nations has asserted that in the context of global climate change, intensifying urbanisation, increased transitional insecurities and the heightening divide between the rich and the poor, there is a pressing need to find a balance across the domains of political, ecological and cultural sustainability depending upon the place where we live. Social and cultural sustainability concerns ,issues regarding social justice, health, human rights, peace, education, religion motivation and balance in life as long term process shaping social conditions for future generations.

The scale, ambition and approach of the Agenda are unprecedented. One key feature is that the SDGs are global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account national realities, capacities and levels of development and specific challenges. All countries have a shared responsibility to achieve the SDGs, and all have a meaningful role to play locally, nationally as well as on the global scale. This paper explores the concept of social and cultural sustainability and the legal aspects in relation to human rights, social, economic,

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cultural and environmental objectives offering the latest thinking on a wide range of current themes on sustainability.

Introduction

The world has witnessed significant rise in violent extremism, religious intolerance, oppression of ethnic, religious and other minorities during the last few years. While there is universal consensus on the need to deal with all these issues at origin, the international community is still on the lookout for adopting the right approach to address the challenges of our time and foster peaceful and inclusive societies. Achieving sustainable development in an atmosphere of ethnic and religious disharmony, radicalisation and violent extremism is indeed a challenging task. Peace is the foremost prerequisite for progress and every citizen has to keep in mind that development can be attained only if we ensure social harmony in our country. The objective of development is to raise the quality of life for all people through development programmes and policies aimed at achieving population control, poverty eradication, economic, social and human resource development, environmental protection and sustainable patterns of production and consumption and guarantee of all human rights²⁰⁶. Sustainable development are not mere social goals but obligations included in the most basic international human rights agreements and thus the right to sustainable development is a human right.

The Sustainable Development Agenda :

The 17 sustainable developmental goals of the 2030 agenda adopted by world leaders at a historic UN summit on September 2015 was officially declared as come into effect on 1st January 2016. These new goals applicable to all countries universally whether rich, poor over the next 15 years with the commitment ‘ to leave no one behind’ and to ‘reach the furthest behind first’ will take all efforts to fight inequalities, tackle climate change and end all forms of poverty and address a range of social needs including education, job opportunities, health and social protection. The core feature of the SDG’s unlike the MDG’s is their strong focus on implementation – mobilisation of financial resources – capacity building and technology as well as data and institutions²⁰⁷. The sustainable development goals are not legally binding on nations but countries are expected to take ownership for implementation and follow up and review.

²⁰⁶ Pdhre.org. (2019). PDHRE: Development. [online] Available at: <https://www.pdhre.org/rights/development.html> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²⁰⁷ United Nations Sustainable Development. (2019). The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development. [online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

Traditional development efforts have often focussed on single issues at a time like hunger, then clean energy and inclusive institutions for example. The SDG's recognised that interventions in one area will effect outcomes in others and therefore development should balance economic, environmental and social sustainability. Targeting investments and development efforts at those furthest behind first, SDG's are designed in such a manner to bring about the several life changing 'zeros' in the world including zero hunger, child death's, AID's, human trafficking, poverty, tuberculosis and malaria and discrimination against women and girls, leaving no one behind. Risk informed sustainable development programs to boost resilience against environmental degradation, financial shocks, conflict and war and pandemics will go a long way in saving money, resources and lives

Women and sustainable development goals :

“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development²⁰⁸” (principle 20, Rio Declaration),there can be no sustainable development without gender equality. The goals of justice and inclusion, economies that work for all and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations, can be ensured only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals²⁰⁹. Women empowerment is a process, through targeted policies and gender main streaming, key steps to create a safe, just and enabling environment are under taken after identifying the nature of the problem where women continue to be at a disadvantage. Women's organisations, alliances and networks are playing an important role in addressing gender equality perspectives in environmental protection and sustainable development²¹⁰. Initiatives and support by the civil society, private sector, friends and family and relevant legal reforms and policy measures at the government and municipality levels are required to create an enabling environment for women. The primary care givers for children, elderly family members and disabled family, women are put at a disadvantage being taken out of labour force with lesser pension contributions and risk of old age poverty. Over the years women have voiced their concern for policies and practices that do not threaten the health and well-being of future generation. Studies have found that the greatest burden of environmental pollution and degradation are borne by the women from the poor and under developed countries. Playing a major role as farmer, water and fuel collectors, animal tenderers women play an important role in

²⁰⁸ United Nations Sustainable Development. (2019). *The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development*. [online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²⁰⁹ UN Women. (2019). *In focus: Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²¹⁰ Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. (2019). *Empowering Women For Sustainable Development*. [online] Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/549ece4.pdf> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

environmental management, therefore an integrated approach to sustainable development is necessary since environmental, social, political and economic issues are closely interlinked.

Sustainable Development an Indian Perspective

‘Sustainable Development means that the richness of the earth’s biodiversity will be conserved for future generations by greatly slowing and if possible halting extinctions, habitat and eco system destructions and also by not risking significant alternations of the global environment that might – by increase in sea level or changing rainfall and vegetation patterns or increasing ultraviolet radiation – alter the opportunities available for future generation²¹¹. In the decision of the supreme court in Narmada Bachao Andolan V. Union Of India²¹², it was observed that sustainable development means the extent or type of development that can take place which could be sustained by nature/ecology with or without mitigation’ and development primarily meant economic or material progress. In India it has been proved beyond doubt that through the implementation of good legislations sustainable development with economic progress and without environmental regression can be ensured within the Indian legal frame work. In the Taj Trapezium case²¹³ the supreme court has recognised the ethical mix or sustainable development where ecological sacrifices, developmental as well as environmental goals are prioritised keeping in mind the future generations. On several occasions the supreme court of India in a bid to safeguard the environment played a significant role in shaping and adopting the doctrine of sustainable development. In the case of Vellore Citizen Welfare Forum V. Union Of India²¹⁴ where in the petitioners had filed a petition in public interest under Article 32 of the constitution of India against the pollution caused by discharge of untreated effluent by the tanneries and other industries in the river Palar in the state of Tamil Nadu, the supreme court held that “remediation of the damaged environment is part of the process of ‘sustainable development’ and as such polluter is liable to pay the cost to the individual sufferers as well as the cost of reversing the damaged ecology²¹⁵”. In Indian Council of Enviro-Legal Action V. Union of India²¹⁶ the apex court held “while economic development should not be allowed to take place at the cost of ecology or by causing wide

²¹¹ Scribd. (n.d.). India | Sustainability | Judiciaries. [online] Available at:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/165147872/India> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²¹² Narmada Bachao Andolan V. Union Of India and Others, W.P (C) No. 319 of 1994

²¹³ M.C Mehta and Anr. V. Union Of India and Ors., 1987 AIR 1086, 1987 SCR (1) 819

²¹⁴ Vellore Citizen Welfare Forum V. Union Of India, AIR 1996 SC 2715 : (1996) 5 SCC 647

²¹⁵ Ghosh, S. (n.d.). Sustainable Development and Indian Judiciary - Article 21. [online]

Legalserviceindia.com. Available at: <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/jud.htm> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019]

²¹⁶ Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action V. Union Of India, 1996 AIR 1446, 1996 SCC (3) 212

spread environment destruction²¹⁷ and violation, at the same time the necessity to preserve ecology and environment should not hamper economic and other developments²¹⁸”. Adherence to the principle of sustainable development is now a constitutional requirement and the quest is to maintain a balance between economic and environmental development. Under Article 21 of the Constitution, the right to healthy environment has been construed as a part of right to life. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010 was established for effective and expeditious disposal of cases involving multidisciplinary issues relating to environment. Under Section 19 of the act, The National Green Tribunal has been empowered to hear all civil matters related to environment and is not bound by the procedures of the code of civil procedure, 1908 and is bound by the principles of natural justice. While deciding a case the NGT should apply the principles of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle. In *Sterlite Industries (India) Pvt. Ltd V. Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board & Ors*²¹⁹, the NGT held that “the environmental restrictions must operate with all their rigour but no action should be suspicion – based which itself is not well- founded. Precautionary principle should be invoked when the reasonable scientific data suggests that without taking appropriate preventive measures there is a possible indication of some environmental injury or health hazard”. On the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi India ratified the Paris agreement on 2.10.2016 showing its strong commitment to combating climate change and emission reduction, increased power capacity from non - fossil fuel waste energy resources like wind and solar power and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tons of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. In furtherance of its INDC’s and national action plan on climate change the Indian government has taken steps to encourage the use of green and energy efficient measures by developers and avoid or minimise environmental degradation.

Youth and 2030 Agenda

The future of humanity and of our planet lies in the hands of today’s young people who will pass the torch to future generation ensuring that the journey to sustainable development is successful and its gains irreversible. The world “youth report on youth and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development” prepared by the UN department of economic and social affairs provides insight into the role of young people in the implementation of the

²¹⁷ Team, B. (2019). *Concept of Sustainable Development – An Indian Perspective*. [online] Biyani Group of Colleges. Available at: <https://www.biyanicolleges.org/concept-of-sustainable-development-an-indian-perspective/> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²¹⁸ Tiwari, A. (n.d.). *Economic Growth vis-a-vis Environmental Conservation: A study of Sustainability in Asia-Pacific*. [online] Legalserviceindia.com. Available at: http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/eco_gr.htm [Accessed 24 Aug. 2019].

²¹⁹ *Sterlite Industries (India) Pvt. Ltd V. Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board & Ors*, (2013) 4 SCC 575

2030 agenda for sustainable development and related frameworks. The active contribution of the 16% of the global population amounting to 1.2 billion young people aged 15-24 years to avert the worst challenges of climate change, gender inequality, unemployment, poverty, conflict and migration is very crucial to the success of sustainable development goals. The United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, mandated by the general assembly is the “official, formal and self - organised space for children and youth to contribute to and engage in certain intergovernmental and allied policy processes at the United Nations” it acts as a bridge facilitating and conducting online and offline activities associated with capacity – building, knowledge generation, policy and advocacy and youth action. The world youth report addresses issues related to other SDG’s such as gender equality (SDG-5), Good health (SDG-3), Reducing inequality (SDG-10), Combating poverty (SDG-1), Hunger (SDG-2), Action on environmental issues (SDG-14,15), Climate Change (SDG-13) In addition to education and employment. Young people and youth-led organisations should be given the opportunity and recognition to participate in the conversion of the 2030 agenda into regional, local and national policy, in implementation, in review and monitoring and in holding governments answerable. A structured mechanism for participation through decision making especially in areas that have a clear impact on young people should be offered. They have the power to engage people at the grassroot level and act as drivers of change in local communities with adequate fund allocation, right political commitment and an enabling environment the sustainable development agenda would be the achievement of the youth in our generation.

SDG’s In A Changing World – Conclusion

The success of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development lies in the transformation of its global aspirational language into local realities. Three years into implementation in the light of an ever changing national, global and economic environment the 2030 agenda requires knowledge at the global, national and sub national levels, mobilization of resources and partnerships. Active localisation is essential for the achievement of the SDG’s and its implementation need to be fully owned and shaped by local and regional governments and their communities’ other local stake holders like research institutions, business community to make the 2030 agenda a reality leaving no one and no place behind. After several years of intensive dialogue and negotiations bringing together millions of ordinary people around the world UN member states have unanimously agreed that the 2030 agenda is the “most inclusive development agenda the world has ever seen”.