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Impacts of Post COVID19: An Overview of the Environmental Climate Changes in India

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Attention must be given to threats on the environment and natural resource bases as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and consequential social and economic impacts. Many rural and coastal populations rely on the sustainable use of the local environment and its natural resources whether they are small-holder farmers, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) involved in the production of Bio Trade, forestry and fishery products and ecotourism services.

As the crisis causes disruptions in their linkages to both national and international demand-side markets, rural producers, of whom many are women supporting entire households, are now no longer able to fully maintain their business models and livelihoods.If the crisis is prolonged, many will be forced to abandon existing sustainable production in order to generate income quickly in domestic markets, potentially resulting in further poverty and over-exploitation of natural resources and ecosystems.

Since December 2019, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has quickly spread all over the world. In March 2020, it was declared a global pandemic by the WHO, having affected virtually all countries and territories.

On March 24, the Government of India ordered a 21-day, nation-wide lockdown in order to contain the spread of COVID-19. At that point, total case numbers in India were relatively low, with only 492 confirmed. However, total tests conducted at that point were so low, in the order of 20,000, that it was impossible to know what the true infection rate was, or how the disease was spreading. The decision to impose lockdown was therefore taken in the face of deep uncertainty, and required weighing up the consequences to livelihoods against the risk of an uncontained outbreak. What are the likely impacts of COVID-19 on India, both on its healthcare and economic systems, and on its sustainable development and climate change agenda?

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Implications for the agenda of sustainable development and climate change:

Firstly, the government is likely to enter into the post-COVID period with a still worse fiscal position than was the case in 2019, when the consolidated fiscal deficit, including central government, state government, and off-balance sheet borrowings amounted to around 8.5% of GDP. This will constrain the capacity of the government to allocate additional resources to sustainability objectives, for example public transport. Fortunately, a number of decarbonisation options are negative cost in India, for example the transition to renewables in the power sector, where renewables are now cheaper than coal.

Secondly, we can expect substantial financial fragility and reduced risk-appetite in the corporate sector. This is already evident in the case of the electricity distribution companies, which were wallowing in debt before the COVID-19 crisis and are now facing a truly dire financial position. Indian and international investors are likely to be much more wary of allocating capital to risky new projects, which may slow down the transition in sectors where clean technologies are still being experimented with. On the other hand, investors are currently seeing first-hand how coal power has been the first to suffer in an economic crisis. Coal plant load factors were already abysmal as the economy slowed throughout 2019, well before the COVID-19 crisis; they have tanked as power demand has fallen about 25% as a result of the lockdown. It is hard to see how investors will front capital for new coal in India. On the more positive side, some of the behavioural adjustments made by households and the formal sector may continue after the crisis. Commuting in India's congested cities was already brutal: enforced work from home has shown that time, money and energy can be saved through teleworking. India's famously poor air quality has dramatically improved, which can raise awareness of how poor it was in the first place—annually more Indians die of air pollution than were ever likely to die of even an uncontrolled COVID outbreak. Greater investment in social resilience and healthcare can potentially be wound into a narrative around the need for governments to protect their citizens, including from climate change and filthy air. These are optimistic thoughts. For many Indians, however, the belly is currently speaking louder than the brain. Real, severe social hardship is being endured. How India emerges from this lockdown—socially and politically—remains to be seen.

Ensuring environment sustainability post COVID-19 lockdown:

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Post COVID19 Lessons Learnt:

- Covid19 has taught us to go with the needs and not with wants.
- It has taught to like with nature.
- It has taught not to exploit nature and its resources.
- It has taught the importance of sustainable consumption.
- It has taught that life and life style are two different things.
- Covid19 is not nature's declaration of war on humanity. The natural world is complex and interlinked.

Post covid19 to be adopted:

- Go Green
- Go for Eco - Friendly Products
- Go for Waste Food
- Go for Home Food
- Go for Healthy Food
- Go for Renewable Energy
- Go for Reusable's

Post covid19 – to be adopted:

- Say "No" to plastics
- Say "No" to junk foods
- Say "No" to soft drinks
- Say "No" to overconsumption / fuel/ energy/ water
- Say "No" to cutting of trees
- Say "No" to luxury consumables
- Post covid19 – to be adopted

Effects of Economic Shutdown on Environment:

- Data from the CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) shows that **pollution level in the Ganges water** has significantly **reduced**.
- Its **Biochemical Oxygen Demand** (BOD) and **total coliform concentration** has also fallen indicating **improved** water quality.
- Similar positive developments have been reported for the **Yamuna**.
- There are several reports that reflect the **improved air quality**:
  - The Delhi/NCR pollution level has significantly reduced.

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- Dhauladhar ranges from Jalandhar, Mt. Kanchenjunga from Siliguri and Mt. Everest from parts of Bihar were recently visible.

- **Groundwater levels improved** with the reduced industrial and commercial activity.
- **Municipal solid waste** (MSW) generation got reduced remarkably.

Ways to Maintain this Sustainability:

Nature-Based Solution (NBS):

- It refers to the sustainable use of nature for tackling **socio-environmental challenges**, such as climate change, water security, human health, and disaster risk management.
- **Example of NBS** may include:
  - Restoration of mangroves
  - Green roofs or walls in cities to moderate the impact of high temperatures.
  - Upsloping vegetation to reduce the risks of landslides.
  - Creating lesser concrete areas to help replenish groundwater in regions facing water scarcity.
- NBS are an **essential component** of the overall **global effort** to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Bio - Composites:

- These are structures that have naturally occurring **minerals woven together** into a matrix of natural fibres, such as cellulose and lignin.
- Their products are being used as **environmentally superior alternatives** to traditional raw materials such as wood and plastic due to their **strength**, **lower weight** and **recyclability**.
- For example, starch-based clay nanocomposites can be a possible alternative for food packaging.

Effective Waste Management:

- **Waste segregation** across urban India at household-level.
- **Generating organic manure** and megawatts of bioenergy through cost-effective means by using bio – recycling methods like vermicomposting.
- For the water-heavy industries of pharmaceuticals, paper, food and beverage, adopting best practices in minimising water consumption would progress them towards **Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD).**

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- **Bio-treatment** of industrial effluents such as chemicals, detergents and toxic sludge can also be done, but there must be mandatory compliance to keep the rivers clean.

Building Natural Infrastructure:

- It is defined as a **strategically** planned and managed network of natural lands that **conserves** or enhances **ecosystem values** and provides **associated benefits** to human populations.
- Establishing interconnected networks of green spaces can be one of the ways of building natural Infrastructure.
- Example: Concept of biosphere reserves. It **incorporates core protected** areas for nature conservation and **buffer zones** and **transition areas** where people live and work in a sustainable way.

Conclusion:

For long-term sustenance, bringing behavioural changes like sustainable consumption, mindful wastage is of utmost importance. Therefore, learn from COVID19 in future save the ecosystem we are all follow the 5Rs namely, 1.**Reduce, 2.Refuse, 3.Reuse, 4.Recycle, 5.Rethink.**

One Universe, One Earth, One Plant……..

Related Links:

- ✓ Covid-19: The history of pandemics https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200325-covid-19-the-history-of-pandemics
- ✓ IFC report https://mercomindia.com/an-estimated-24-7-trillion-investment-potential-green-buildings/
- ✓ Coronavirus (COVID-19) : News, Analysis and Resources
- ✓ Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development

News Papers:

- ✓ Times of India
- ✓ The Hindu

