

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DURING COVID19 - AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Sustainable development has a long-term, co-ordinated approach to developing and achieving a vibrant community by jointly addressing economic, environmental, and social issues, while reducing the high consumption of vital natural resources.

India's objective towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and positive approach towards them seems to have slowed down on account of COVID19 crisis.

The impact of this novel pandemic across the world and the resulting mayhem in world markets are dominating global attention. The pandemic is turning into an unprecedented global crisis, with serious impact on people's health and economic growth. Although they may be to put it mildly severe, the effects are likely to be temporary.

Impetus and ambitious plans, incentives are being put up by the Governments of India to encounter the economic damage from this pandemic.

This paper discusses the impact of Covid19 pandemic in attaining the social sustainability goals which comprises of economic development, social equity and justice, and environmental protection. The paper further discusses the proper plan which will help India to go through the crisis and at the same time attaining social sustainability goals.

Keywords: COVID19, environmental protection, social equity and justice, sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION:

The main aim of sustainable development is securing robust economic growth, social equality and justice, and environmental protection. Although these three factors can work in tandem, they are usually found to conflict with each another. We are in the period of Industrial

revolution 4.0, where technology plays a major role in economic development of any nation and is considered as an important indicator of better standard of living. However this technology has been instrumental in hurting the environment. We must understand that economic growth will remain the anchor for human development, but it must undergo change and has to become less environmentally destructive. The challenge of sustainable development is to put this understanding into practice, changing the use of technology into more sustainable ones.

The objective of sustainable development is to balance our economic, environmental and social requirements, so as to achieve prosperity for the present as well as future generations. Sustainable development encourages us to conserve and enhance our resource potential, by gradually changing the ways in which we develop and use technologies. Countries must be in a position to meet the basic needs of its citizens namely employment, food, energy, water and sanitation.

Everyone has the right to a healthy, safe and non-polluting environment. This can be achieved by cleanliness, reducing poverty, building houses for poorer sections of the society and tackling unemployment. No one, in this generation, or in the future should be treated unfairly. Global environmental threats, such as rapid climate change and pathetic air quality must be reduced to protect human and environmental health. Everybody has the right to a good standard of living, with vibrant job opportunities. Economic prosperity is a must if our country is to prosper and our businesses must therefore offer a higher standard of products that consumers throughout the world want, at affordable prices. For this, we need a dynamic workforce equipped with suitable skills and quality education within a framework to support them.

Now the world is facing an unprecedented crisis. The Corona virus pandemic is first and foremost a humanitarian crisis. Efforts must be taken to contain the virus and support all those who are directly impacted by this virus are of utmost importance. Our rapidly developing economy is severely threatened in the wake of this new global pandemic. We should not let this virus allow today's crisis to compromise our efforts to tackle other inescapable challenges that our country face. Impetus plans and incentives are being put up by the Governments to encounter the damage from the coronavirus. In this paper we shall discuss few such challenges faced by our country.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. Andy Sumner, Chris Hoy and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez in their paper titled “Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty” made estimates on the potential short term impact of

COVID19 pandemic on global poverty by taking into consideration the percapita household consumption. They have concluded in their study that there may be reduction in consumption by around 20% and the number of people living below the poverty line may also increase.

2. Wang, Z and Tang, K in their paper titled “Combating COVID-19: health equity matters”, has stated that COVID-19 has affected vulnerable populations disproportionately across China. They concluded that health equity should be at the centre of all policies designed to strengthen China’s health system and emergency responses during the current epidemics and other public-health crises in the future.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the impact of COVID 19 in India’s achievement of sustainable development goals.
2. To identify areas where,our country can meet the challenges posed by COVID19 by converting them into opportunities to achieve social sustainability goals.

IMPACT OF COVID19 ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The pandemic corona virus has also overwhelmingly harmed the world economy: consumers are staying at home, businesses are losing revenue and they are forced to lay off workers.

This is resulting in raising unemployment levels sharply. Irrespective of the economic categorization, many countries are struggling to prevent further economic damage caused by this pandemic.

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis can potentially inflict long-lasting emotional trauma and disturb the psychological well-being of humanity. In addition to the huge stress on people, this pandemic has also hampered the psychology of sustainability. We will discuss about the impact of COVID 19 in achieving sustainable development goals keeping India in mind.

Environmental Impact:

The forced economic shutdown due to Covid-19 pandemic has had two huge positive impacts on our environment.The air in dense cities like New Delhi is lot cleaner, the rivers have become clearerwhich resulted in a greener environment. It has improved our air and water quality incredibly. The pandemic has also slashed our material consumption and water usage owing to closure of factories. Data from the Government shows that the river Ganga’s water along its most polluted stretch in Uttar Pradesh is carrying more dissolved oxygen and less nitrates. These conditions are perfect for the survival of aquatic life. Its biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) has correspondingly fallen, along with the concentration of total

coliform, which is a testament to improved water quality. Similar positive developments have been reported for the river Yamuna also.

Most remarkably, the nation-wide lockdown has considerably reduced municipal solid waste (MSW) generation. Pune's daily tonnage of MSW has fallen by 29 per cent, while Chennai's and Nagpur's have dropped by 28 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively. Even in other big cities and towns, we can expect a similar drop owing to a shift in consumer demand and behavioral changes towards sustainable consumption.

The crux is that even though our normal life has changed considerably, the lockdown has given us a unique opportunity to focus and assess our impact on the environment. We are witnessing clean air, water like never before in recent.

Social Impact:

While declaring the lockdown, the government had to ignore about its Economic Survey 2018-19, which estimated the total size of India's informal workforce as 93%. This had its impact on migrants. The poorer states of central and north India witnessed the highest net out-migration rates and states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh remained popular migration destinations.

When Government declared a complete lockdown during the first phase, lakhs of unskilled workers lost earning their livelihoods and was rendered penniless. This triggered a mass exodus among the poor informal sector workers, forcing almost one-third of the 1.3 billion people who are living a hand-to-mouth existence, to gather on the streets and trek back home with their belongings. This factor was triggered in Delhi and started spreading to other areas of India. Not receiving assistance nor any clear reassurance that they will be taken care of during the lockdown, these labourers—suddenly finding themselves out of jobs—were forced to walk their way home. Although Government came out with steps to solve the issue, there was a communication failure, which resulted in huge migrant exodus.

That such a large number of labourers are without recourse to savings or food stocks is a confirmation that they have been living in a subsistence manner. This ultimately became the biggest challenge for the governments, both central as well states.

Economic Impact:

The economic impact of the COVID19 pandemic in India has been widely disruptive. The international rating agencies and the World Bank had downgraded India's economic growth for the financial year 2021 at 1.5 to 2.8% which is slowest since economic of 1990s. After the

announcement of the economic package on 15th May, India's GDP estimates were downgraded even more to negative figures, signalling a deep recession. On 26 May, CRISIL announced that this will probably be India's worst economic recession since independence.

Private consumption has seen the biggest blow due to COVID-19 outbreak. Investment demand has slowed down drastically. Government revenues have been impacted severely due to decline in economic activity amid corona virus outbreak,

Many developed and developing countries, including India, face several economic challenges. These include volatility and sudden fall in capital markets and commodity prices, and increasing financing gap due to shrinking fiscal revenues and growing expenditure. Liquidity crunch, almost zero international trade, and transport, continuous depletion of foreign exchange reserves, and contraction in global markets has resulted in unprecedented economic impact. Many countries also face the prospects of a global food, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies crisis as producing countries impose export control and stockpiling.

A vibrant industrial, trade and economic policy is needed to strengthen our entrepreneurs to be makers, not just traders. They must build a Make in India hub to meet domestic and global Covid-19 related demand and subsequent rebound and revenge consumption. The adversity bought on by the virus can become a transformative economic opportunity to “Build Back Better”. As the government saying goes, Think local and act global should be the new mantra.

MEASURES TO GET THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BACK ON TRACK:

The lockdown provides a strategic opportunity to plan sustainable development in the following ways:

1. India's manufacturing industry is hugely diversified. A large majority of all industrial workers are employed in the millions of small-scale handicraft enterprises. 32% of the total population of India depend on daily wages for survival. The prevailing lockdown has disrupted the livelihood of these people. We are even seeing a rapid de-urbanization with people migrating out of larger cities to their home towns. This is the time where state Governments can also work on the employment creation in the different sectors by strengthening employment friendly schemes, encouraging local start-ups and financially supporting small-medium enterprises to ensure employment for these migrants.

2. Organisations focussed on technology and research can draft policies which support going digital such as work from home and conducting conference calls instead of face to face meeting.
3. The government needs to focus on core areas which can help the most vulnerable of our population and strengthen healthy living for all.
4. All the stakeholders could be more focused on the webinars, online training programs, seminars that could be benefitted commercially.
5. Recently, the government announced an economic stimulus package of Rs 20 lakh crore and big-bang systemic reforms under the AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (self-reliant India). The intended objective of this plan is two-fold.
 - First, interim measures such as liquidity infusion and direct cash transfers for the poor will work as shock absorbers for those in acute stress.
 - The second, long-term reforms in growth-critical sectors to make them globally competitive and attractive.

Together, these steps may revive the economic activity, impacted by Covid-19 pandemic and create new opportunities for growth in sectors like agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), power, coal and mining, defence and aviation, etc.

However the economic package for the country emerging out of the lockdown requires a stimulus enhancing demand across the economy. Hence the package should help the poor in overcoming the crisis and also boost the manufacturing sector. The coronavirus crisis should be seen as an opportunity, laying emphasis on domestic products and "economic self-reliance", Atmanirbhar Bharat.

CONCLUSION:

As India heals from the pandemic, it is important to revisit our sustainable development ambitions and provide for healthier cities. COVID-19 is not the last of viral infections that the world might see and with the right foresight and effective action we can ensure that we are better prepared for the uncertain future. Hence, it is imperative that we not only make sure to prioritize our social, economic and environmental concerns while fighting the pandemic but also ensure that sustainability postCOVID-19 encompasses healthy living for all.

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