

Media, Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Development

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Abstract—The terms such as ‘environmental awareness’, ‘environmental protection’ and ‘sustainable development’ that have caught media headlines, is the outcome of the search for ‘Safety of life on Earth’ and ‘the relevance of natural resources to ensure our survival on earth’. Media coverage of climate science and environment issues happened in the ‘New York Times’, the ‘Saturday Evening Post’ of U.S.A. and the ‘Guardian’ and the ‘Sunday Observer’ of U.K. in 1930s and 1950s that had contributed in shaping policy discourses, public understanding before it was an issue for international conference on ‘Climate Change’ at Stockholm in 1972. The term, ‘Sustainable development’, finds mentioned in the Bruntland Commission Report in 1983, having three dimensions—economic, social and environmental aspects. Later, another conference held in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro adopted ‘Agenda 21’ for achieving sustainable development. It also deliberated ten key factors such as environmental policy, combating poverty, agriculture and rural development, combating deforestation etc. to achieve sustainable development. Member countries also entered into several binding and non-binding agreements to protect the environment in those conferences. As per the UN findings, majority poor and populous countries fail to achieve sustainable development while some richer countries are protecting their economic interest. As for India, it has successfully laid out all the necessary policies, strategies and enacted all the necessary laws even amended the Indian constitution. India has also adopted unprecedented policies, schemes and programs- financial loans, schemes to alleviate poverty, food security act to provide food at cheaper rate, MGNREGA employment scheme, free education with free mid-day meals, free medical treatment upto Rs.5 lakhs for BPL card holders and several schemes for farmers. However, India fails to control its population that has affected other factors of sustainable development. India is still facing serious problems of environmental degradation because of its huge population.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental awareness, environmental protection and sustainable development are some of the terms that have caught media headlines and public attention whenever there is any dealing on environmental issues. These terms have gained currency as forming public opinion in the common gatherings, offices, in the national and international platforms because of its having a bearing on the survival of our lives on this earth. Climate Change got its coverage in the media in the 1930s. “In the *New York Times*, it was written “The earth must be

inevitably changing its aspects and its climate. How the change is slowly taking place and what the result will be has been considered...” (New York Times 1932,4). Media coverage of human contributions to climate change appeared more clearly in the 1950s. For instance, the *Saturday Evening Post* published a story entitled ‘Is the world getting warmer?’ “Today more carbon dioxide is being generated by man’s technological processes than by Volcanoes, geysers and hot springs...” (Kaempffert 1956,191)” [1]. UK media such as the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Observer* and *Financial Times* contributed in making environment a global issue.

Media coverage of issues has always been a key contributor, among a number of factors, that have shaped and effected a policy discourse as well as public understanding and action. It was media that had made climate change an issue for international conference at Stockholm in 1972. Beginning from the Stockholm conference, there continued to hold several international conferences. The United Nations established Bruntland Commission, in 1983. It was this Bruntland commission that defined sustainable development in its report, ‘Our Common Future’ as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, citing three principal dimensions: economic, social and environmental aspects. In 1992, United Nations held a conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro, in which most of the Heads of States signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the convention on Biological Diversity; endorsed and adopted the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 for achieving sustainable development. The Rio Convention also deliberated ten key factors to achieve sustainable development.

In the year 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were set to tackle the indignity of poverty and established measurable, universally agreed objectives for tackling extreme poverty and hunger, preventing deadly diseases, and expanding primary education to all children, among other development priorities. The MDGs were successful in several important areas: reducing poverty, providing access to much

needed water and sanitation, decreasing the child mortality rate, increasing maternal health and kicking off a global movement for free primary education. MDGs were also successful in combating HIV/AIDS. Some of the achievements of MDGs are: More than 1 billion people had been lifted out of extreme poverty while child mortality has dropped by more than half. The number of out of school children has dropped by more than half. HIV/AIDS infections fell by almost 40%.

In 2012, another conference at Rio was held and 17 Sustainable Development Goals were set. They are: 'No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice' and Strong Institutions and Partnership for the Goals'. However, the gravity of the goals is different from nation to nation as situations and circumstances vary from nation to nation. Out of the 17 goals, India has chosen 13 goals for SDG INDIA INDEX, leaving Goal No 12, 13, 14 and 17. India gives emphasis on agriculture, farmers, rural development as India dwells in the villages, and agriculture is the backbone of our economy. Without the development of the farmers and agriculture, achieving sustainable development is half the battle.

It is also a fact that the Rio conferences and other post Rio conferences emphasized the role of media and education to achieve sustainable development. Communication is regarded as being central to the achievement of empowerment and participation, the two critical pre-requisites of sustainable development. Communication is seen as being critical to building consensus and development of an understanding of new ideas and approaches.

SOME FACTS FOR DECISION ON SDGs:

"SDGs came into effect in January 2016 and they will continue to guide UNDP policy and funding until 2030. As the lead UN development agency, UNDP is uniquely placed to help implement the Goals in some 170 countries and territories"[2]. Some of the then facts, expected outcomes on the basis of which the UN had to take decisions of the SDGs and future occurrence that prove the SDG decisions as true, are given hereunder:

736 million people (10% of world population) still live in extreme poverty. One person in every ten is extremely poor. At least 400 million people have no basic healthcare, and 40 percent lack social protection. 5.7 million primary aged children remain out of school and 103 million youth worldwide lack basic literacy skills.

Forests are home to more than 80% of all terrestrial species of animals, plant and insects. More than 40% of the world population, 3 billion, relies on polluting and unhealthy fuels

for cooking. Energy is the main contributor to climate change. The world has lost 70% of its natural wetlands over the last century. 844 million people still lacked basic drinking water and 2.3 billion people still lack basic sanitations.

As regards equality and gender justice, women represent just 13% of agricultural landholders. 35% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence.

In 2016, 22% of global income was received by the top 1 % compared with 10% of income for the 50 %. In 2016, 22% of global income was received by the top 1 % compared with 10% of income for the 50 %. The number of under-nourished people reached 821 million and nearly 151 million children under five (22%) had stunted growth, in 2017. By the end of 2017, 68.5 million people had been forcibly displaced because of persecution, conflict, violence or human right violations An estimated 172 million people worldwide were without work in 2018.

In 2018, 4.2 billion people, 55% of the world's population, lived in cities. Cities account for 60 to 80% of energy consumption and at least 70 % of carbon emission.

As regards the 17 SDG goals, the target is to be achieved by 2030. It is a road map for future development trajectory to all nations with focus on poverty eradication, climate change, gender equality, reduced inequalities, peace and prosperity etc. It is the cumulative effect of all the decisions taken by all nations in the precedent conferences/conventions. As for India, NITI Aayog has been assigned the role of overseeing the implementation of SDGs, while the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation is evolving the related national indicators by carrying out a detailed mapping of the 17 indicators. Much of our national development agenda is mirrored in the SDGs. .

According to World Economic and Social Survey, 2013, achieving the sustainability of cities entails integration of four pillars- social and economic development, environmental management, and effective urban governance. According to the UN World Cities Report 2016, by 2030, India is expected to be home to seven mega cities with population above 10 million and is expected to reach 600 million. According to Census 2011, 377.1 million Indians comprising 31.16 percent of the country's population live in urban areas. India's urban population is projected to be about 600 million by 2031 by 2031 [3].

According to that 2016 UN Cities Report, many Indian cities are now struggling due to multiple problems of poverty, inadequate provision of urban services, congestion, air pollution, sizable slum population, lack of safety measures and challenges in terms of waste disposal, sanitation, affordable housing and public transport. The government of India has undertaken several measures to improve sustainable cities under its National Urban Housing & Habitat policy (2007) and Swachh Bharat Mission(Urban). It would require about Rs. 39 lakh crores for the creation of the urban infrastructure. India

has already constructed houses for the rural and urban poor with all the facilities of electricity, gas and water connections. The government has approved the regularization of the slums of Delhi.

As regards Sustainable Energy, India has made considerable progress in providing access to households to clean cooking around 64% in 2015 compared to world average of 33% to 38%, saving about 374 hours of a woman spent on collecting firewood. The time could be given to girl education. Reduction in gender gap in India is by half over the period 2008-2017. 78% rural households have been electrified and the Union Government aims at providing 24x7 electricity to all consumers. Up-till 2017, India could manage 18% of electricity from renewable resources.

As regards Climate Change, India is actively engaged in effective implementation of the Paris Agreement. A National Action Plan on Climate Change of which the Prime Minister himself is the in-Charge, includes eight national missions covering solar, energy efficiency, agriculture, water, sustainable habitat, forestry, Himalayan ecosystem and knowledge, and various other initiatives with a budget outlay of Rs 132.4 crores. National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change was established in 2015 to support concrete adaptation activities which are not covered under ongoing activities through the schemes of state and central Government continues till 31 March 2020 with a financial implication of Rs 364 crores. The Global Climate Risk Index has put India amongst the six most vulnerable countries in the world. A sizeable population under poverty lives in areas prone to climatic shifts and its impact.

The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Economic Survey 2018-19 on 4th July, 2019 in the Parliament. "The Survey cites current Government of India's policies in direction of achieving the SDGs. These include Swatchh Bharat Mission, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, Smart Cities, Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojna, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojna, and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna, among others"[4]. The Namami Gange Mission is a key policy priority, launched at a budget outlay of Rs 20,000 crores for the period 2015-2020. Major components include water use efficiency, urban and rural sanitation, sewerage project management, tackling industrial pollution, and quality improvement, ecosystem conservation and clean Ganga Fund.

To address the increasing air pollution, the government has launched a National Clean Air Programme in 2019 as a time bound national level strategy for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting the air quality-monitoring network across the country. A National Policy on RE (Resource Efficiency) to address multiple sectors should be devised for mainstreaming RE for achieving SDGs. Resource Efficiency can be a major tool to meet the resource needs of the country without much harm to the environment. It would help save Rs 6000 crores in the manufacturing sector.

The survey notes that India has continuously demonstrated its responsibility towards implementing climate actions. It reminds the Prime Minister commitment to do all this in a cleaner and greener way. As regards 'Climate Finance and India's Nationally Determined Contribution', the survey notes the role of climate finance in strengthening the global response to climate change. Quoting UNTAD, 2014 report, it says that there is a shortfall of US\$ 2.5 trillion per year for achieving SDGs against the claim of climate finance flows, requiring unprecedented contributions and investment. Keeping in mind global imperatives, the survey notes that India will endeavour to do the best possible within their own domestic resources.

It was India's commitment to adopt 'Clean Fuel' policy by using BS-VI petrol and diesel from April 2020 and to eliminate all single use plastics by 2022. India joined the International Solar Alliance (ISA) amongst 121 solar rich countries lying in the tropics to deploy 1000 GW of solar energy and mobilize more than \$1000 billion into solar power by 2030 and aims to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 percent by 2030 from 2005 level. India also aims to achieve 40% cumulative electric power from non-fossil based energy resources and to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 billion tons of CO₂ through additional forest and tree cover.

SOME SCHEMES TO TACKLE SDGs:

As India is a vast country having one sixth of the global community, of which majority are the poor with diverse customs, races, languages, culture and traditions at different geographical locations. The greatest challenges of India are No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Reducing Inequality (SDG 10), Sustainable Cities (SDG 11), and Life on Earth (SDG 15). The greatest achievement is that India has made ceaseless efforts to achieve sustainable development goals. As regards Goal No. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10 and 15, India has made much progress, despite its various challenges of being multi racial, multi lingual, different identities and cultural proximities in addition to a huge population, by adopting multifarious schemes and projects:

(a) National Mission for Green India is aiming at protecting, restoring and enhancing forest cover by setting the following goals: (i) To increase forest/ tree cover to the extent of five million hectares (mha) and improve quality of forest/tree cover on another 5 mha of forest/non-forest area. (ii) To improve/enhance eco system services like carbon sequestration and storage, hydrological services, biodiversity and provisioning services like fuel, fodder, and timber and non-timber forest produces. (iii) To increase forest based livelihood income for about 3 million households.[5]

(b) National Health Policy 2017 aims at opening 1.5 lakhs centers to provide comprehensive health care. PMJJAY aims to provide health insurance up-to Rs 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization at any public or private hospital across the country based on socio-economic database. National Rural Health Mission and

National Urban Health Mission are launched to provide health services to the urban and rural poor. Rastriya Arogya Nidhi aims to provide financial assistance to BPL patients who are suffering from major life threatening diseases at any of the 13 super listed super specialty institutes or government hospitals.

(c) On the occasion of World Food Day in 2017 (October 16), 'Zero Hunger programme' had been initiated in three districts of India i.e. Gorakhpur, Korapur and Thane. These three districts would act as a model of an integrated approach adopting suitable agricultural/ horticultural practices. Sahakar-22 aims to double the income of the farmers by providing new employment opportunities generated through co-operatives. For population control, 'Mission Parivar Vikash' was launched on World Population Day to accelerate access to high quality family planning, focusing on family planning initiatives and targeted approaches for population stabilization through better service delivery approach.,

(d) There are several enactments and schemes to alleviate poverty. Food Security Act aims at producing more crops and ensures the BPL cardholders to get rice and other food items at the cheaper price. There is free and compulsory education up-to class VIII with the provision of free mid-day meals. MGNREGA enables an unemployed person to get work and earn his livelihood easily. In financial sectors also, there are schemes under which an unemployed person can take loans to start business of their choice. BPL cardholders are given financial assistance up-to Rs. 5 lakhs or more for free medical treatment.

CONCLUSION

Majority poor and populous countries fail in achieving the goals of sustainable development due to the lack of awareness, shortage of funding, and lack of infrastructural facilities. Some rich/ advanced nations are not paying much heed to the goal of climate action as it stands on the way of their economic growth. They are spewing venom into the air by emitting toxic gases, harmful pollutants and poisonous compounds. For India, population and poverty are the major threats. In spite of multiple awareness campaigns through media, changes in school curriculum, free medical aids, advertisements, and awareness programs, India's progress is not up-to the mark as regards population control. There is no hard and fast rule to control population as in China, nor public awareness in the national interest as in Brazil or Japan. Most of the undertakings being in the form of schemes, it requires public awareness, public support and non-discrimination in its implementation as schemes are not enforceable as a matter of right or duty whenever there is any discrimination or disparity. The most serious issues of the under developed and developing countries are population growth and poverty. Zero Hunger programme only in three districts is a mockery. Population growth is the the main cause of environmental degradation, pollution, climate change and many chain reactions that fail all other factors of sustainable development. SDGs will just remain an international agreement if member

nations are not equally aware of the degrading environment and its consequences.

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