

Debating Concept of Sustainable Development in Global Affairs: Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Amna Mirza

Assistant Professor, SPM College, University Of Delhi

Abstract—Today, there are rising concern for international commitments, efforts and focus of analysis towards twin aims of both sustainability and development.

With the rise of nontraditional security dimensions like ecological degeneration, global warming, climate change, and emergence of international environmental agreements, the interlocking of issues of international relations and sustainable development is evident too. Although Sustainable development and issues of Sustainability emerged as a distinctly in many discipline only in the last quarter of the 20th century, yet today no issue in any discipline, - global politics, domestic policy making, international business, is isolated & immune from its impacts.

The article will give examples from changing everyday international business practices as well issues emerging at international forums which have an impact on global affairs and also point towards other aspects namely, resources, equity, growth, and demand development of expertise in international relations and situating Sustainability therein, with focus on circular economy and draw attention towards tensions involved in global issues in working towards sustainability.

INTRODUCTION:

With the advent of industrialization and consequently globalization, there is a race among nations for fuelling their economic growth. In this process, depletion of natural resources is taking place at a very faster rate. In today's era of globalization the rise of new forms of technology, new advancements and new infrastructure have a drastic impact on environment. So there is an urgent need to make balance between economic growth and environmental protection. The emergence of the concept of sustainable development in 1987 by Brundtland commission is an outcome of such a need. Since the Rio Earth summit in 1992, sustainable development has emerged as a new paradigm of development by integrating economic growth, social development and environmental protection. These three key components are considered as interdependent and mutually supportive elements of long term development.

Though there is a global consensus on the importance of sustainable development but there are challenges in the implementation process. Along with numerous challenges, the concept of sustainable development brings out several opportunities. This article is an attempt to understand the

challenges and opportunities implied within the concept of sustainable development.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING:

The relationship between development and environment has given birth to the idea of sustainable development. The most used definition of sustainable development is proposed by Brundtland commission in its report- "Our Common Future" in 1987. This report defines Sustainable development as "a kind of development that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs."

This definition links the issues of economic development and environmental stability. It intends to foster economic advancement while conserving the long term value of natural resources. Thus it requires a framework for integration of environmental policies and development strategies.

Sustainable development doesn't put any limit to growth but it gives an unique meaning to development and sets a goal of development which is a combination of parameters- economic status, poverty, health, education, women empowerment, harmony and environmental aspects. So the concept of sustainable development means a harmonious integration of economic progress, responsible governance, social inclusiveness and environmental stability.

GLOBALISATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

Globalization is a process in which all economies of the world are increasingly integrated and interdependent. It can be defined as a system of development which all countries whether developed or developing are making efforts to follow. The idea implies that when government allows free flow of goods across borders then it promote economic growth and when government restricts the free flow of goods by charging tax on goods on crossing borders, then economic growth is hampered. Globalization is based on the free market economy which means that countries have to allow goods of all other countries to be sold in their markets.

Though globalization isn't a new phenomenon as movement of ideas and people has always been there since the beginning of human civilization but the rapid pace and rampant outreach of contemporary neo-liberal process of globalization implies new challenges.

On the one hand, the process of globalization has brought a new era of economic prosperity and opened up vast channels of development but on the other hand it resulted into deterioration of environmental resources. As globalization has led to faster increase in trade, communication, technology, innovation, transportation, it creates new challenges for biodiversity, wetlands, oceans, survival of islands and availability of fresh water. Globalization depends majorly upon those industries which extract a lot of minerals such as coal, petroleum, gas from earth. So more globalization increase more industrialization and increase in pollution.

The countries that are rapidly adopting industrialization such as India, China, Brazil, South Africa and Nigeria are also facing a rapid decline of their environment. For more development of economy, there must be more production of goods and more production of goods puts stress on the environment.

Global warming and consequently climate change are among most pressing international issues on which governments around the world are coming together in multilateral forums. Impacts of global warming began to be felt in various parts of the world since last forty years, from mid 1970s. The most notable effects can be seen in Arctic as glaciers are melting rapidly. Global warming is damaging environment in various ways such as- Desertification, increasing melting of snow and ice, rise of sea level, depletion and degradation of ozone layer, impact on agriculture, ecosystem, stronger hurricane and cyclones. The effects and sources of carbon-dioxide have cross border impact. Carbon dioxide generated in the US affect the Maldives. The main sources of CO₂ are industrial production, transportation, deforestation. Increasing amount of CO₂ has caused rise in temperature. Another major worry is that a significant portion of CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for thousands of years.

Thus globalization generated a race among nations to foster their economies which in turn affected various aspects of human life. The most prominent among these is environmental aspects. This condition created the need of idea of sustainable development.

ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS- FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL:

Environment began to be a major subject of discussion at international level only in 1970s. United Nation conference on human environment held in Stockholm placed environment at the centre of international diplomatic relations. The evidences such as acid rain, smog, oil tanker spill brought environmental issues to limelight and environment protection became the major focus of international cooperation. Sustainable

development began to be understood in several ways and broadly defined in Brundtland Report.

However trade issues related to developed or developing countries has always been a part of global negotiations, in the course of time more and more ecological issues have been put into discussion table. United Nation conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 identified the importance of connection between environmental protection and social and economic development. This has raised new concerns in international affairs and creates new areas of global cooperation, besides traditional ones.

As issues like acidification, biodiversity, climate change, chemical and nuclear activities, ozone layer depletion, waste transport need harmonious environmental policies, these gained wider attention in both domestic and international relations. This identified the problem of environmental regulation. There was emergence of social movement to put pressure on governments to co-operate with other countries on environmental protection.

Today, environmental issues are everyone's concern. Countries all over the world are worried about the hazardous impact of environmental degradation on social and economic life. Thus environmental sustainability is common policy concerns of all nations whether it is developed or developing. Agenda 21, Framework Convention on Climate change (FCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are important examples to show that there is global concern over environment security needs international cooperation to tackle with every local to global issue.

Policymakers are confronted with a question that whether developmental benefits urge countries to injudiciously use their forests, fisheries and other natural resources. Debate on intellectual property rights (IPR), Montreal Protocol to the convention for the protection of ozone layer posed a question that till what extent mere tariffs on trade can help to ensure environmental sustainability.

This is the reason why the goal of sustainability is the basic criteria of governance process of all countries. It evolved as a foundation of leading global frame work for cooperation at international level and sustainable development goals. If we try to understand the 2030 goals of sustainable development then we find that each goal has its specific target to be achieved by 2030. The most notable point is that the goals and targets are universal, applies to all nations around the world and it requires action on all fronts namely government, businesses, civil society etc.

Various health hazardous ecological issues like global warming, green house emissions, and climate-change have caused nations all over the world to focus on the need for Re-use and Re-cycling which posits the idea of circular economy.

Various serious efforts made at international level, national policies to pursue sustainable development, protect

environment. In 1992 Rio Earth Summit, 170 countries agreed on making efforts to achieve the goal of sustainable development but 25 years later natural environment continued to be declined. Broadly we find three types of failures: economic, political and communication.

The economic failure comes from government attitude. Environmentally damaged activities are supported by state in the name of increased productivity, Political failure arises when government is unable to implement effective policies, Communication failure arise when communities are excluded from policy process.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

The following challenges are faced by both developed and developing countries while trying to achieve the goals of sustainable development-

Improper and inadequate data creates various problems. Gathering detailed data is the most useful tool for city policy makers to assess their resident's needs and helps in better policy formulation. Generally, many cities in developing countries lack essential up to date information on subjects like the location and characteristics of their slums, ghettos, and the state of their housing stock or transport network. It is well recognized that good disaggregated data is of utmost importance and citizen generated data especially collected by slum dwellers helps in filling information gaps.

Nations across the globe should pick their targets and proper monitoring of political and social initiatives is crucial. Real risk of short term political calculations giving priority to targets that are easier to achieve should be avoided.

There is only one way to achieve this- civil society and nongovernmental organizations must keep a close eye on sustainable development goals progress and hold city governments to account.

Adequate and timely availability of funds is equally important. The SDGs and other targets have raised the global community's ambition. Estimates of their cost reach into the billions of dollars. Though at level of cities governance, responsibilities vary by nation, they are often the one feeling the pressure of having to deliver basic services- from water sanitation to affordable housing while urban population rises. But the question remains on in what way these entities get required funds in timely manner.

Though reforms to devolve power to local governments are underway in many developed and developing countries, funding and support to improve local government capacity is still inadequate. Many local governments particularly in secondary cities lack the technical capacity to manage service delivery on the scale needed to manage increasing populations and find difficult to negotiate commercial contracts with MNCs and private players.

Unless urban planning capacities are strengthened, cities and local government will struggle to address the challenges posed by rapid urbanization.

Also, inadequate skills, infrastructure bottlenecks (mainly in developing countries) lack of proper disaster management plan generally ruins all efforts made at local level and create impediments in achieving SDGs.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Sustainable development recognize that ending poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection while tackling climate change and environmental degradation.

Sustainable development also includes and recognizes need for eliminating all forms of exploitation against women. Women deserve fundamental human rights and the sustainable development goals highlight this human responsibility and seek to achieve gender parity socially, economically and politically.

Sustainable development involves building resilient infrastructure promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. It provides vast opportunities in field of developing latest skills, filling skill gaps and provides pathway for innovation led growth in lieu of fourth industrial revolution in sustainable manner.

Though various innovative solutions and partnerships for achieving sustainable development goals, we can ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages. Here sharing best practices among nations, use of appropriate technologies provides vast opportunities for improving health standards particularly in rural areas.

Also, sustainable development provides vast opportunities in ensuring sustainable, quality and accessibility in education sector. Issues like school dropouts infrastructure bottlenecks in schools, quality of teaching, education standards can be addressed well by sharing best global practices, use of appropriate technologies, availability of adequate funds etc.

Overall, by improving education and health standards, sustainable development most importantly helps in developing human capital and creating new opportunities for achieving socioeconomic growth by making efficient use of limited resources.

Way forward:

As achieving Sustainable development requires integrated, multi-sectoral approach, proper coordination and collaboration among nations is the key. Also, there should be proper monitoring of targets by independent agencies for checking whether concerned country achieves their respective goals. Developed world must provide adequate funds and technology transfers to developing world so that they can efficiently

utilize their resources and helps them in achieving various Sustainable development goals.

REFERENCES:-

- [1] *Our Common Future*, World Commission on Environment and Development, Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [2] Niko Roorda, *Fundamentals of Sustainable Development*, Routledge London, 2017.
- [3] Stephen Bass, *Sustainable Development Strategies: A Resource Book*, Earthscan UK, 2002.
- [4] Katrien Van Poeck, Leif Östman, Johan Öhman, .Ed. *Sustainable Development Teaching: Ethical and Political Challenges*, Routledge Oxon, 2019