



Development vs. Environment Preservation Conundrum: Issues and Challenges

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General Note



Article is recommended to print as color version in recycled paper. *Save Trees, Save Climate.*

ABSTRACT

The pre-eminence between development and environment has long been debated. From the first United Nations Human Environment Conference at Stockholm in 1972 to the Paris Agreement in 2016, the countries have consistently weighed whether the developing countries can follow Environment Kuznets curve and the responsibility for cleaner environment should lie on the shoulders of developed nations or whether the time has arrived where both the developing and developed countries work collaboratively to ensure sustainable development. The policy makers of developing nations argue that they cannot be denied of their right of industrial growth and material prosperity and thus should not be burdened to make environment preservation their priority but a developed country style industrialisation based on the expensive resources that remain, is therefore probably foredoomed by enormous if not insurmountable economic and environmental obstacles. Therefore, however much we clamour that we have a natural right to seek industrial development with greater rapacity to catch up with the industrialised nations, odds are heavily stacked against the environment. The present paper focuses on the trade off between development and environment preservation, issues like water level depletion, low air quality, health hazards etc and the challenges faced by the countries in transiting the economy to green economy. It also emphasizes on the importance of cleaner and greener technologies and concludes

that the need of the hour is to see development and environment as complementary rather than antagonistic terms and harness natural resources in a sustainable manner to ensure the well-being of our future generation.

Keywords: Environment preservation, trade-off, Development, health hazards

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of development and environment preservation has long been debated. Whether, it is the development that the nations should focus on while the environment preservation takes a backseat or vice versa has been a persistent but futile debate. From the Rio summit in 1992 to the Paris agreement in 2016, economists, parliamentarians, policy makers of various countries have concerned themselves on the importance of economic growth and development vs. environment preservation. Today, when the world is facing detrimental consequences of global warming viz. rise in temperature, frequent floods, droughts and depletion of natural resources at a much faster rate than at what they can renewed, the significance of environment preservation and conservation is of paramount importance. After all, which development will we boast of if there is no earth left?

Another important question that is often discussed (rather debated) is whether it is the responsibility of the developed nations to make the environment preservation their priority or should the burden of environment conservation should also be borne by developing nations. As per the Kuznets curve hypothesis (EKC), economic development initially leads to deterioration in environment but after a certain level of economic growth, the society begins to improve its relationship with environment and environment degradation reduces. As the nation moves on the road to development, it requires a faster growth rate in industrial development, investment on mining, refineries etc which are often the pollution-causing industries but after a certain level of growth rate is achieved, economic growth will improve the environment as the governments can enact and enforce stricter pollution control regulations like pollution tax, carbon emission tax etc.

The policy makers of developing nations advocate that they should not be burdened with the responsibility of environment preservation as they need to focus more on economic growth than environment preservation, to end their dependence on developed nations. One of the argument often put forward is that developed nations already impose a number of safety and environmental regulation on imports from developing nations that their exports aren't as profitable as expected and now if environment tax, rules and regulations are also imposed on them they would always remain backward and dependent on developed nations This view appears to be consistent with the larger public opinion in India. When the World Values Survey was conducted across more than 80 countries reported its findings from India in 2014, about half the people interviewed agreed that we should focus on economic growth even if it comes at the expense of the environment.

The cost of green technology and money that goes into the research and development of cleaner technology is also one major factor which makes such equipments and machinery less profitable for developing nations. On the other hand, the policy makers of developed nations believe that it is the outdated and traditional methods of developing nations that cause pollution and degrade the environment. Thus, the laws for environment protection should equally be applicable to both developed and developing countries, which is often considered as an unfair and hypocritical argument coming from developed nations who themselves have developed through the path of industrialisation.

However, much we as a developing nation clamour that we have a natural right to seek industrial development with greater rapacity to catch up with the industrialised nations, odds are heavily stacked against the environment. A developed country style industrialisation of the LDCs, based on the expensive resources that remain, is therefore probably foredoomed by enormous if not insurmountable economic and environmental obstacles. If all the people in India and China seek to own passenger cars at the rate of the US or own as much air conditioners, that would be an environmental disaster. The issue of environment preservation has now become an issue of global significance as the environment degradation is one of the greatest challenges which affect both the developed and developing nations.

2. WHAT THE STATISTICS REVEAL

Every year 55 billion tonnes of biomass, fossil energy, metal and minerals are extracted from the earth. This is almost 10 tonnes for every person in the world. This number is even higher for western countries. At the current consumption pattern, we are using up 50% more natural resources than the Earth can provide.

As per the WHO report, greenhouse gas emission in Latin America and Caribbean region has increased by 29% from 2000 to 2010. Air pollution is recorded at 85.9 in Monterrey (Mexico) which is far above the permissible limit of 20.

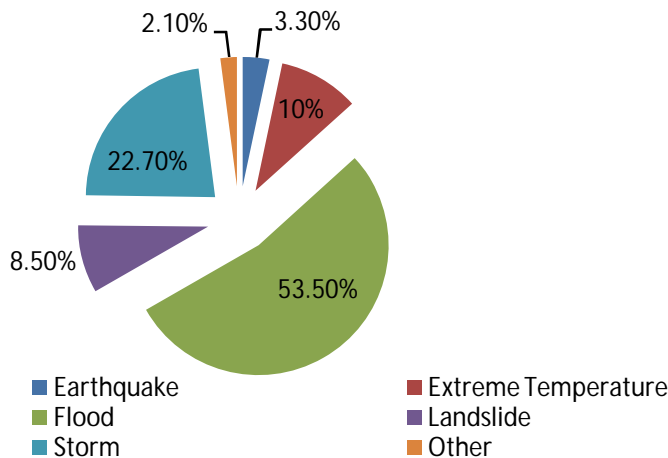
In Asia and the Pacific, increasing unsustainable consumption patterns have led to worsening air pollution, water scarcity and waste generation, threatening human and environmental health. About 41% of all natural disasters reported over the last two

decades occurred in the Asia-Pacific region (<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>), which also accounts for 91% for world's death attributable to natural disasters in the last century. In Southeast Asia, the average area deforested is more than 1 million hectares between 2005 and 2015. The world has already lost 80% of its forests which has imbalanced the ecosystem to a great extent.

On the other side, West Asia is suffering from an increase in water demand, overexploitation of groundwater resources and deteriorating water quality, as well as unsustainable patterns of consumption that threaten the region's ability to secure its sources of food, water and energy. Warming in the Arctic has doubled since 1980 which has important effects on North America in particular and on the world as a whole. The largest contributions to global glacier ice loss, which accounts for at least 80 percent of ice loss, during the early 21st century, were from glaciers in Alaska, Asian mountains, Southern Andes, the Canadian Arctic, and the periphery of the Greenland ice sheet.

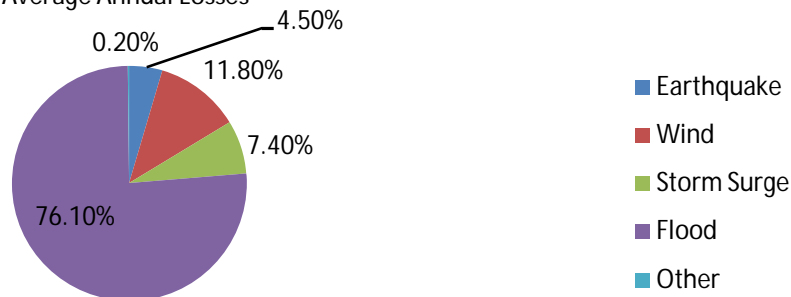
According to Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015, internationally reported losses from 1990-2014 in economic terms (000, US\$) is 4,384,925.

Figure 1: Frequency Of Disasters



Source: Global Assessment Report on Disaster Reduction 2015

Figure 2: Hazard Contribution to Average Annual Losses



Source: Global Assessment Report on Disaster Reduction 2015

3. MAJOR CHALLENGES

Large scale deforestation, unrestricted mining, increasing pollution levels with the ever increasing number of vehicles and industries, population growth rate etc have all contributed to the adverse effects of climate change and global warming. The extreme weather conditions, heat waves, droughts, frequent floods have posed a number of challenges in front of humanity, which if goes unaddressed may prove to be fatal.

- **Large scale deforestation:** it has been estimated that about half of earth's mature tropical forests have been lost since 1947. Some scientists have estimated that if significant measures are not taken globally, by 2030 only 10% of the forest would be left.
- **Water scarcity:** The world's thirst for water is likely to become one of the most pressing resource issues of the 21st Century. Global water consumption rose six-fold between 1900 and 1995 (<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/>), more than double the rate of population growth. It estimates that by 2025 the proportion of the world's population experiencing moderate to high water stress will rise to two out of every three people. Water pollution adds enormously to existing problems of water scarcity by contaminating large volumes of available water, thus making it unsuitable for use. This situation is worst in third world countries; human health is gravely damaged by accelerating contamination of water supplies by eutrophication, persistent organic pollutants and sewage pollution.
- **Loss of biodiversity:** Biodiversity underpins the health of the planet and has a direct impact on all our lives. Since human intervention is now altering various environmental factors – air quality, surface temperatures, sea level, water quality etc. it is required for us to maintain as many areas as possible with high biodiversity. Highly diverse ecosystems act as a natural stabilizing agent to reduce the ill-effects of changes in the environment due to human intervention.
- **Pollution:** Pollution, in whatever form, whether it is air, water, land or noise is harmful for the environment. Air pollution (<http://www.conserve-energy-future.com>) pollutes the air that we breathe which causes health issues. According to a report published by WHO, no country is at greater risk than India. India is home to 22 out of 50 most polluted cities in the world. Noise pollution can cause irreparable damage to our ears when exposed to continuous large sounds like honking of vehicles on a busy road or machines producing large noise in a factory or a mill.
- **Mismanagement of waste:** poor waste management continues spreading disease and polluting the air, land, and water and put a variety of plants and animals at the risk of extinction
- **Ozone depletion:** Ozone layer is responsible for protecting earth from harmful ultraviolet rays. The presence of chlorofluorocarbons, hydro chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere is causing the ozone layer to deplete. As it will deplete, it will emit harmful radiations back to the earth which can cause deadly diseases like skin cancer.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

Some significant damage has already been caused to our precious environment in the name of economic growth and development but still there is scope to reverse the adverse effects of reckless and unplanned growth. Economic development in its true spirit can be achieved only if we plan and act upon "sustainable development", simply put, development should take place in such a way that it caters to the needs of the present generation without compromising on the needs of future generation.

To reverse the current trends and enact the solution to improve current pattern of production and consumption, use resources sustainably, a number of way outs have been proposed both locally and on international level so that both developed and developing countries can work collaboratively to reach the targets of sustainable development goals set by UNDP.

- Invest in urban planning, such as through the better use of environmentally sound infrastructure and clean transport, which can turn the urban challenge into opportunities for sustainable development.
- Governments will likely need to find innovative solutions to allow for the decoupling of economic growth and resource consumption and enact policy to strengthen the same.
- Reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and diversify energy sources.
- Improve gathering, processing and sharing of data and information to inform decision-making.
- Collaboration with International organisations
- Partnership between developed and developing countries for the use of Green technology.
- More awareness & sensitivity towards the environment is the key to environmental conservation.
- Identify trade-off between economic benefit and ecological impact of development projects

5. CONCLUSION

The need of the hour is to see development and environment preservation as complementary rather than antagonistic terms. The nations loose much more from environment degradation than they gain from industrialisation. The catastrophic consequences of environment degradation for achieving growth rapidly have been largely visible as the number of floods as well as torrential rains, droughts, earthquakes etc. rose over the last few decades. The rate of natural disasters has only increased with so-called increase in economic growth. The time has come to focus on development rather than on GDP numbers. The development of a nation depends on the quality of life of its citizens- literacy rate, life expectancy, poverty rates, leisure time, environment quality etc. Thus it's both the developed and developing nations which need to work in partnership to strike a balance between economic development and environment and work for sustainable development.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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