

Developing the sustainable way!

It's early hours, you pick up the newspaper while sipping your morning coffee (Sorry! Tea lovers). Page after page, articles are flooded with covid-19, climate change, soaring inequalities. Eager to alleviate this tribulation, your eyes fix upon the now common term 'sustainable development'. It is named as the panacea of all troubles, but the nuances are left unexplained.

Hello readers! We will be succinctly exploring and sharing about this panacea which everyone calls 'sustainable development' in two series articles.

So, what is exactly sustainable development?

Sustainable development implies that growth must be accomplished in coherence with nature and humankind. In simpler words, development must entail three dimensions to be called sustainable: increase in real GDP (economy), social welfare and conservation of environment.



But, can major economic development happen while being socially responsible and protecting the environment? Well, it's a YES!

For instance, offering eco-design products and packaging that use resources judiciously; saves materials and reduces shipping costs. Similarly, improving employees' quality of life at work and helping them develop their skills aids in scaffolding their engagement, which translates to better overall performance. Creating products which are accessible to the world's poorest populations not only helps in improving their lifestyle, but also helps in reaching a new market, the one which is expanding at greater rate than developed countries. Likewise, monitoring the working conditions offered by suppliers and subcontractors means minimising risks that could damage a company's image.

This proves that the economy can indeed develop in coherence with social well being and nurturing environment. However, many choose to feel otherwise, leading to ignorance of social and environmental development. For instance, child labour and gender inequality in name of cheap labour, ignoring safety in name of cost-cutting.

How did it all start?

The idea first emerged in 1980s as a response to the world's growing social and environmental problems such as economic and social inequality; depleting resources; environment degradation; biodiversity depletion; climate change

As a part of the preparations for the Rio Earth Summit, 'sustainable development' was officially defined for the first time in Brundtland Report 1987 which was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The report, also called '*Our Common Future*', defined sustainable development as the development which meets the needs of current generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs

Why does it matter to you?

By now, you understand what it means. Surely, the purpose of global dictum is lucid. However, there is some confusion left. Why does it matter to you?

If you are wondering that the approach is significant only for the countries, global communities or corporates and not for a common man! Then, you will be surprised to know that 'sustainable development is beneficial for everyone, including you.'

COVID19 pandemic that has disrupted your life is the result of exploitive development which ignores the environment. The recent increase in frequency of severe intensity cyclones like Tauktae is due to accelerated global warming which is a byproduct of lopsided development. Unequal access to basic resources like food, water, education is because the social aspect is ignored when considering economic growth.

From the food on your plate to your lifestyle, everything is influenced by it. Hence, sustainable development is the panacea we talk about.

However, we have a long way to go!

What's hindering the sustainable way?

Decades have passed since the publication of Brundtland Report in 1987 and we are still far from realising the dreams.

As, degradation of the environment in form of deforestation; land degradation; soil salinisation; air pollution along with rapid depletion of resources like fossil fuels, potable water have been acting as an impediment. Further, lack of political will and presence of crony capitalism exacerbates the problem.

But, efforts are taking place and one such major measure was development of 'Sustainable Development Goals'.

Achieving SDGs for achieving sustainable development

Set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" by 2030.

These 17 goals with universal, integrated and transformative agenda aims to spur actions that build a more sustainable world over the next 15 years.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Implementation is the key

Reaching the goals requires sustained action on all fronts.

To push for accountability, the Sustainable Development Report is published annually. The report is a global assessment of countries' progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Governments and civil society alike utilise the SDR to identify priorities for action, understand key implementation challenges, track progress, ensure accountability, and identify gaps that must be closed in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The latest SDR gave an overview of countries in the context of COVID-19 and ranked them accordingly. In SDR 2020, India slipped three spots from 117 to rank at 120 out of 165 countries.

The report recorded declining trends on SDG 4 (Quality Education) due to lower secondary completion rate, and SDG 15 (Life on Land) due to increased extinction risk across groups of species listed on the Red List of Threatened Species.

On the bright side, India has been on track to achieve SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Though challenges persist, the report helps in streamlining resources in the needed directions.

Significantly, interest in the global SDG Index has also spurred many initiatives to develop localised assessments of SDG progress. One such initiative by India is SDG India Index and Dashboard, published annually by NITI Aayog.

Launched in 2018, SDG India Index monitors the country's progress on the goals through data-driven assessment, and fosters a competitive spirit among the States and Union Territories in achieving them.

The NITI Aayog's SDG Index is one of the many efforts by India to timely realise sustainable development goals. There are various national, regional and local initiatives in this context that undertake nuanced approaches to succeed the 2030 timeline. We will be discussing them further in our second series of this part.

See you next time with promised content!

