

***AN ANALYSIS OF HEALTH CONCERNIN INDIA AS ONE OF THE TARGET OF  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS***

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**Abstract:**

Sustainable development is a guide of natural resource utilisation which targets to meet human needs while preserving and protecting the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations. The Millennium Development Goals which were launched in the year 2000 had set 2015 as the target year. The United Nations recognizing the success of the Goals and the fact that a new development agenda was needed beyond 2015, urged to establish an open working group to develop a set of sustainable development goals. After more than a year of negotiations, the Open Working Group presented its recommendation for the 17 sustainable development goals. In August 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted the new agenda “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Accordingly, the countries adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. For the goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part i.e. the respective governments, the private sector, civil society and people like us. But the question arises that whether our country like India has successfully adopted the Millennium Development Goals and are we really in a position to adopt and implement the Sustainable Development goals of 2030. In this article, I would like to lay emphasis on the present environmental scenario of our country and how it is severely affecting the health and lives of numerous people.

**Introduction:**

The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 comprises of the 17 Goals including new areas such as

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climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, health, peace and justice. These goals are however interconnected. These Goals are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations. They are also determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

These goals and targets envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where everybody can flourish. For the goals to be reached, everyone including the governments, the private sector, community and the individuals needs to do their part. But we are going through massive challenges to sustainable development. Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity. Some of the Development goals remain uninhibited, in particular those related to maternal, new-born and child health and to reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sustainable Development and Health of citizens in India:**

India is considered to be the largest democracy in the world. The approach of politicians on health issues is not at all a vital agenda in national or state elections. However, India has outstanding growth in health industries, such as drugs and also have the capability of the research community to enhance their projects. In spite of these huge organizational and technological successes, India is not able to cope up with the multifarious health issues of its citizens.

Some chronic diseases like tuberculosis, leprosy, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, mental health disorders, and injuries are the foremost causes of death in India. Most chronic diseases are generally prevalent in poor and rural populations. Although a wide range of cost-effective primary and secondary prevention strategies are available, their treatment is generally low, especially in poor and rural populations. Much of the care for chronic diseases and injuries is provided in the private hospitals which is very expensive. These health-care expenses literally aggravate poverty, and huge population is becoming poor every year as a result of such expenditures. It is therefore necessary to have improved public health and

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<sup>2</sup><https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> visited on 09/12/2016

primary health-care systems which should be cost-effective and ultimately help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

India has many challenges in improving the health and nutrition of its citizens. There has been decline in fertility, maternal, infant and child mortalities, and also the occurrence of nutritional deficiencies, but the pace has been very slow. The expected explanations for this can be social injustices, discrepancies in health systems and consequences of urbanisation and geographical changes. The Government introduced the National Rural Health Mission to strengthen the health systems. However, coverage of these programs remains inadequate. Absence of well-functioning health systems is indicated by the inadequacies related to planning, financing, human resources, infrastructure, supply systems, governance, information, and monitoring. This agenda needs political commitment of the leading mandate and the development of a people's movement.<sup>3</sup>

### **Role of State:**

In a welfare State, it is the obligation of the State to ensure the creation and sustaining of conditions congenial to good health. The framers of the constitution incorporated relevant provisions regarding health in the Directive Principles of State policy which directs the State to provide comprehensive, preventive, and rehabilitative health services and proper nutrition to all the people of India. Therefore, entitlement to healthcare must be ensured by developing specific statutes, programs and services.

The Indian Judiciary has interpreted health as a right to life which is fundamental to all human beings under Article 21 of the constitution. Article 48 A of Indian Constitution ensures that State shall endeavour to protect and impose the pollution free environment for good health and at the same time impose above obligations on citizens through Article 51A(g) to protect environment. Even Panchayat and Municipalities are liable to improve and protect public health.

Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." The Universal Declaration makes additional accommodations for security in case of physical disability, and makes special mention of care given to those in motherhood

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<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right\\_to\\_health](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_health) visited on 27/11/2016

or childhood. The enforceability of this provision of international declaration is again a mandate to the Government to ensure better healthy conditions to its citizens.

The Court has upheld the State's obligation to maintain health services through public interest Litigations filed under Article 21 of Indian Constitution in response to violations of the right to health. Failure of a government hospital to provide a patient timely medical treatment results in violation of the patient's right to life. In the recent past, many complaints of alleged medical negligence and deficient service by private and government hospitals and medical professionals have been filed with the National or State Human Rights Commissions.

In *Research Center v. UOI*<sup>4</sup>, the Court explicitly held that the right to health was an integral factor of a meaningful right to life. The court held that the right to health and medical care is a fundamental right under Article 21. The Supreme Court, while examining the issue of the constitutional right to health care under arts 21, 41 and 47 of the Constitution of India in *State of Punjab v Ram Lubhaya Bagga*,<sup>5</sup> observed that the right of one person co-relates to a duty of another, individual, employer, government or authority. Hence, the right of a citizen to live under art 21 casts an obligation on the state.

There is no doubt that the government is rendering this obligation by opening government hospitals and health centers, but to be meaningful, they must be within the reach of its people. Since it is one of the most sacrosanct and valuable rights of a citizen, and an equally revered obligation of the state, every citizen of this welfare state looks towards the state to perform this obligation with top priority, including by way of allocation of sufficient funds. This in turn will not only secure the rights of its citizens to their satisfaction, but will benefit the state in achieving its social, political and economic goals as well.

Pollution is linked to Health and is violation of right to life with dignity. In *T. Ramakrishna Rao vs. Hyderabad Development Authority*, the Andhra Pradesh High Court observed, Protection of the environment is not only the duty of the citizens but also the obligation of the State and its all other organs including the Courts. The enjoyment of life and its attainment and fulfilment guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution embraces the protection and preservation of nature's gift without which life cannot be enjoyed fruitfully. The slow poisoning of the atmosphere caused by the environmental pollution and spoliation should be regarded as amounting to violation of Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

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<sup>4</sup>AIR 1995 SC 636

<sup>5</sup>AIR 1998 SC 1703.

In *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum Vs. Union of India*<sup>6</sup>, a landmark judgment where the principle of sustainable development has been adopted by the Supreme Court of India as a balancing concept, while rejecting the old notion that development and environmental protection cannot go together, the apex court held the view that sustainable development has now come to be accepted as “a viable concept to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the supporting eco system.”

However, it could be seen that in spite of observing the existing principles of sustainable development, various kinds of pollution are taking aggravated form and hampering the health of its citizens. Some of the serious impacts of various pollutions is discussed below.

#### *Impact of Water Pollution:*

The State has made stricter regulation of industrial effluents to control water pollution, but still greater efforts are required to reduce the risk to public health as toxic pollutants which are mainly colourless and odourless are released into the ecosystems. Groundwater has been used for drinking for a long time, but its quality has been degraded because of various organic and inorganic pollutants. Excessive use of nitrogenous fertilizers in agriculture has been one of the primary sources of high nitrate in groundwater. As and when the nitrate rich groundwater is pumped out and used for drinking, it causes number of health disorders in humans, like Gastric Cancer and also lead to the birth of a malformed child<sup>7</sup>. Prevention is always better than cure, which suggests that apart from cautious application of water and fertilizers in cultivated fields, water containing dangerous levels of nitrate should not be used as drinking water. This is possible only when the levels of nitrate in water are known, which can be done by regular monitoring of the drinking water. Community education and participation in this regard is also essential. But still today in many areas this monitoring is not done which ultimately leads to poor health of individuals and acts as an obstacle in achieving the development goals.

#### *Impact of Pesticides:*

The Green Revolution in India was a period when agriculture in India increased its yields due to improved agronomic technology. But the excessive use of chemical fertilizers

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<sup>6</sup> AIR 1996 SC 2715

<sup>7</sup><http://www.inderscienceonline.com/doi/abs/10.1504/IJGENVI.2011.040249> last visited on 21/11/2016

decreased soil fertility and also the use of electric tube wells decreased groundwater table below the previous level. The Green Revolution hardly seems to have made much of an impact in terms of well-being here. Furthermore, it has been observed that the pesticides exposures are increasingly linked to immune suppression, hormone disruption, diminished intelligence, reproductive abnormalities and cancer. In addition to its linkage with cancers, pesticide toxicity has been shown to be severely damaging in pregnancy, leading to recurrent miscarriages or infertility in women. The impact on children proves particularly disturbing because it illustrates that the major health issues will be transmitted to future generations<sup>8</sup>.

In this context, pesticide safety, regulation of pesticide use, proper application technologies, and integrated pest management are some of the key strategies for minimizing human exposure to pesticides. There is a lack of studies related to these issues in India which requires an urgent attention.

#### *Impact of Hazardous waste:*

Industry has become an essential part of modern society, and waste production is an inevitable outcome of the developmental activities. These wastes may pose a potential hazard to the human health or the environment comprising of soil, air and water when improperly treated, stored, transported or disposed of or managed. Currently in India even though hazardous wastes, discharges and effluents are regulated, solid wastes often are disposed of indiscriminately posing health and environmental risk. It is therefore necessary to take steps towards planning and development of models for effective hazardous waste management, treatment, approaches and regulations for disposal of hazardous waste. Considering the whole situation with reference to Indian scenario a better cost effective strategies for waste management is required to be evolved in future.

#### *Impact of Air Pollution:*

Hazardous chemicals escape to the environment by a number of natural and anthropogenic activities and may cause adverse effects on human health and the environment. Increased combustion of fossil fuels in the last century is responsible for the progressive change in the atmospheric composition. Air pollution has both acute and chronic effects on human health, affecting a number of different systems and organs. It ranges from minor upper

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2008/07/07/the-toxic-consequences-of-the-green-revolution> visited on 09/12/2016.

respiratory irritation to chronic respiratory and heart disease, lung cancer, acute respiratory infections in children and chronic bronchitis in adults, aggravating pre-existing heart and lung disease, or asthmatic attacks. In addition, short and long term exposures have also been linked with premature mortality and reduced life expectancy.

*Impact of Thermal pollution:*

Thermal pollution is defined as sudden increase or decrease in temperature of a natural body of water which may be ocean, lake, river or pond by human influence. With the constant flow of high temperature discharge from industries, there is a huge increase in toxins that are being released into the natural body of water. These toxins may contain chemicals or radiation that may have harsh impact on the local ecology and make them susceptible to various diseases.

On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the Paris Agreement on climate change entered into force, addressing the need to limit the rise of global temperatures. The historic Paris Agreement provides an opportunity for countries to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius. Even India is party to this agreement, and it is really a great challenge for our country to maintain this constant rise in temperature in our eco system.

*Occupational health diseases:*

India being a developing nation is faced with traditional public health problems like communicable diseases, malnutrition, poor environmental sanitation and inadequate medical care. However, globalization and rapid industrial growth in the last few years has resulted in emergence of occupational health related issues. The major occupational diseases which are of severe concern in India are silicosis, musculoskeletal injuries, coal workers' pneumoconiosis, chronic obstructive lung diseases, asbestosis, byssinosis, pesticide poisoning and noise induced hearing loss.

There are many agencies like National Institute of Occupational Health, Industrial Toxicology Research Centre, Central Labour Institute, etc. are working on researchable issues like Asbestos and asbestos related diseases, Pesticide poisoning and Musculoskeletal disorders. Still much more is to be done for improving the occupational health research. The measures such as creation of advanced research facilities, human resources development,

creation of environmental and occupational health cells and development of database and information system should be taken<sup>9</sup>.

These are the various kinds of pollutants causing ill effects on the human beings. It is the responsibility of the State to take note of all these issues and proper control mechanism and rehabilitation and reparation mechanism should be created to prevent the dilapidation of citizen's health. Development is an essential element of any State but it should not be at the cost of the health of its citizens, because it is only the healthy citizens that can provide a prosperous State. Government should focus on increasing the budget and maximum allocation of funds on health care services. It should also take steps for providing Medical insurance of all its citizens. Those who require urgent attention include all children, youth, persons with disabilities of whom more than 80% live in poverty, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, and indigenous people. The Government should introduce the Human Health Audit Mechanism, wherein it would be helpful to analyse the subsequent effects of various kinds of pollutions on the health of its citizens. The sustainable development concept can also be influentially executed by the government with the initiatives of the individuals, civil societies and the non-governmental organizations.

### **Conclusion:**

In India, though the mortality rate has decreased, but the deteriorating health of its citizens of all ages cannot be neglected due to environmental degradation. It is necessary to speed up the pace of progress made in fighting various diseases and epidemics, including the problem of unattended diseases which constitute a major challenge for achieving the sustainable development goal relating to health and well of all individuals. Our constitution makers were much aware about the public health or right to health that's why they imposed liability on the State through some provisions mentioned in Directive Principles of State policies. Under the garb of development, the State cannot neglect the hap hazards on the health of its citizens. If there is no such Human Health Audit Mechanism apart from regulation of flora and fauna, there is no use of having advanced lifestyle. Human resource is a valuable asset of a State and it has to be fostered and protected. So in order to achieve the sustainable developmental goals of 2030, it is of utmost importance to take care of human health of all ages. Therefore, the thrust of this article is to review and analyse the various environment related health problems in the light of sustainable development principles.

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<sup>9</sup> An article on "Occupational Health Research in India" by Habibullah N Saiyed and Rajnarayan R Tiwari published by National Institute of Occupational Health on 14/10/2016.