

Development, Environment and Equity*

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I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude towards all the members of IIG and particularly the members of governing council of the institute, who have shown faith in me and have selected me as the President of the Institute for the year 2013-14. I am aware of the fact that it is a tremendous responsibility. When I remember the scholarly personalities who have graced this office in the past, I seriously doubt whether I deserve this honour. It is only the well wishes of my friends and the blessings of my teachers that give me some strength to stand here in front of this august gathering.

The focal theme of this 35th annual conference relates to one of the most pertinent topic of the contemporary world and that is **development, environment and equity**. Here, I am presenting a brief account of how the development is being perceived at global level. It is just an account of last 50 years (1972-2012) of the efforts scholars have put in for the concept of development. I do not intend to discuss details of environment or ecosystem. I suppose everyone in this august gathering is familiar with these concepts.

I would like to start by quoting the simple definitions that appeared in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED): Our Common Future. It states "*The 'environment' is where we live; and 'development' is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable.* Though expressed in simple words these definitions encompass almost everything about both the concept. The clause at the end considering the two to be inseparable, highlights their complementary nature.

When I started exploring on the relation between environment and development I came across large number of reports. This includes 'World Development Reports' by World Bank from 1978 to 2013; 'Human Development Reports by UNDP from

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1990 to 2013, besides classical reports like “Agenda 21”, “Stockholm Report of 1972”, Brundtland Report “*Our Common Future*” 1987, Global Environment Outlook “GEO 4” 2007, Atlas of Global Development by World Bank, “Rio +20” *The future we want* 2012, Post-2015 Development Agenda, as well as the text of address by UNDP Administrator Helen Clark “*Our World in 2050: More Equitable and Sustainable – or Less?*” November 2012. Certainly, I don’t claim that I have gone through all these reports. It is humanly impossible but I can say I have browsed a few of them..

Even a cursory look at the themes of “World Development Reports (WDR)” or “Human Development Reports (HDR)” gives us the idea about what the scholars have been thinking about these concepts at global level. Out of 35 WDRs 18 are directly devoted to the process of development and it indirectly continues to be a major thrust area for rest of the reports. The same may be said about the themes of HDRs.

When did the process of development should have started?

Development is basically an anthropogenic process. It would include all the activities done and being done by humans to make life more comfortable. Man depends on the natural capital provided by the environment for his survival and development. The excessive interest in economic development generally obscures the reality of long term nature of development and change. I suppose man acquired ‘resource using capacity’ when he could free his front two legs and could stand erect on the two hind legs. With front legs converted into hands he could “do something”. Till then whatever

changes were taking place in his physique were the result of process of evolution and adaptation. It is after getting the ability of “doing something”, I consider, he got into the real process of “development”. I suppose the process of development to be that ancient. The process of development is irreversible. Every step we move forward we cross ‘point(s) of no return’.

The development process involves a change or transition of some sort. Preferably this leads to economic, political or social improvement. Changes are mostly slow and their effects can be understood only in retrospect. At times, the changes are rapid, massive and episodic in nature. It means such changes affect large areas and larger sector of population in relatively shorter period of time. They are referred to as revolution. It involves fundamental transformation of society to its core. In the long history of development process there have been a number of such transitions. With most of the developmental attempts there has been enhancement of technology that led to greater ability of the society to harness greater proportion of natural capital.

Objective(s) of development

Development is not only anthropogenic but it is also anthropocentric one. Many scholars have emphasized that development is primarily and fundamentally about people. As stated in the 1990 HDR “the basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives”. The aim of development is not to make life ‘happier’, because no one can guarantee happiness. But what is expected is that, the process of development should at least create a

favorable conditions for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests. The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development. The UNDP has spelled out the objectives of development in terms of Millennium Goals, which we shall discuss at later stage.

Efforts at Global Level

In recent past there have been quite serious and concentrated efforts towards development at global level. First half of the 20th century was a period of major changes in world political order. Many colonial areas got freedom from their colonial masters in 40s and 50s. The model of development that was available to countries getting independence was to follow the industrially developed countries and achieve economic growth. The export list of most of these countries was heavily skewed towards raw materials. As the raw materials become exportable commodities and the trade strategies were aiming at increasing GNP, the exploitation of natural resources became rampant. In first half of last century, the development was being equated with economic prosperity and the GNP was being used as the main indicator of development. Even during colonial period the indiscriminate exploitation of resources had been leading to overall degradation of ecosystems. It took some time for realization of the fact.

In 30s following the Great Depression and the Dust bowl the issue of soil erosion attracted the attention of scholars. In 50s and 60s concerns got focused around pesticide use and air pollution. During

these decades individual factors causing harm to the environment were getting greater attention. 60s could be considered as period of growing awareness towards environmental degradation. In 70s public attention was just beginning to get directed towards environmental issues. It was with this background the world leaders assembled to take up the issue of human environment at Stockholm in 1972. The Stockholm Conference, one of the early attempts towards the concern about the Human environment, considered variety of aspects and there was general unanimity that despite the degradation of the environment “the philosophy of *no growth* was absolutely unacceptable”.

I would just quote in brief the things agreed upon and proclaimed at the Stockholm Conference. I have slightly changed the sequence of these seven proclamations appearing in Stockholm Report.

- 1) Of all things in the world, people are the most precious.
- 2) Man is both creature and moulders of his environment.
- 3) Man has acquired the power to transform his environment.
- 4) Man’s capability to transform his surroundings, if used wisely, can bring to all peoples the benefits of development and the opportunity to enhance the quality of life.
- 5) The protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue.
- 6) We must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment.

- 7) To achieve this environmental goal will demand the acceptance of responsibility by citizens and communities and by enterprises and institutions at every level.

Of the seven proclamations listed in the report first four highlight the anthropocentric nature of development. One of the proclamations is devoted to identification of ‘major issue’, the world is facing. Other proclamations relate to 1) the care we need to take of our actions and their environmental consequences and 2) the global cooperation that is needed at every level, from local to global, to tackle the problem of protection and improvement of human environment.

It is interesting to note that almost at the same time the world saw publication of the “The Limits to Growth”, a report by independent body ‘Club of Rome’. It used variables like population, food production, industrialization, pollution and resource depletion for the analysis. The publication had predicted that the world is on track for disaster. However, the study also noted that unlimited economic growth was possible, if governments forged policies and invested in technologies to regulate the expansion of humanity’s ecological footprint. There have been number of comments appreciating the model and criticising it as well. What I would like to point out that 70s appears to be a decade not only of realisation of darker side of development but also initiation of efforts to combat it at global level. Of course, right from Malthus (1798) many scholars have been discussing the uncertain future of humanity.

From “Our Common Future” to “The Future we want” to “The World We Want”

From Stockholm conference (1972) to Rio +20 (2012) in a period of 50 years, there have been number of serious attempts at global level to discuss the policies and strategies to resolve the problem of development keeping in mind our commitments towards the protection and improvement of human environment.

The Brundtland report of 87 changed the perspective of development with an introduction of concept of sustainable development. The thought of the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs itself proved to be revolutionary. Till then development processes / models did not have futuristic consideration. Certainly when we think of “needs of future generation” the time frame has to be at least of few centuries if not of millenniums.

Development and Sustainability

The major objective of development efforts is the satisfaction of human needs and aspirations. A region where poverty and inequity exist will always be prone to ecological and other crises. What is required of sustainable development is the meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life. The needs are mostly determined by social and cultural characteristics of a society. However, sustainable development requires that the society encourages consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible. Meeting essential needs depends in part on achieving full growth potential.

The technological developments may solve some immediate problems but it often leads to even greater ones. At a minimum, sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems (the atmosphere, the waters, the soils, and the living beings) that support life on Earth. Economic growth and development obviously involve changes in the physical ecosystem. Every ecosystem everywhere cannot be preserved intact. The use of non-renewable resources, like fossil fuels and minerals reduces the stock available for future generations. But this does not mean that such resources should not be used. However, they should be managed in such a way that in general the rate of depletion takes into account the criticality of that resource, the availability of technologies for minimizing depletion, and the likelihood of substitutes being (or becoming) available. In most cases the development tends to simplify ecosystems and this more often reduces the diversity of species. Sustainable development requires that the adverse impacts on the quality of air, water, and other natural elements are minimized so as to sustain the ecosystem's overall integrity. Sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

Immediately after the report "our common future" appeared in 87 the attention of world leaders moved towards the world climate change. Though since long the scientists were giving warnings regarding the anthropogenic nature of climate change, it was still confined to scientist community. In 1988 we find Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change was constituted by United Nations. By now, it is totally accepted that the climate changes are result of human interventions in functioning of the environment. IPCC has come out with a series of 'Assessment Reports', of which I would particularly like to mention report of Working Group III, on Economic and Social Dimensions of Climate Change from the second assessment report.

World leaders assembled at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Johannesburg in 2002. These conventions discussed the concept of sustainable development and environment. Through the deliberation of these conventions we have documents in the form of "Agenda 21" and "Report of the WSSD". After the Millennium Declaration of World Summit 2000, world leaders adopted Millennium Development Goals. These were expected to be achieved by 2015.

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality rates
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Of these eight goals, most important was to reduce the extreme poverty at least by 50 %. Certainly it was an ambitious programme and now with just two years left for the 2015, we can say that the MDGs are yet to be achieved. Of course there has

been progress, but ‘...the progress has been broken by regions and countries and even within countries’. The MDGs are goals and not action plans. They actually provide list of objectives that can be quantified and used for monitoring progress. ”... may be 15 years period is too short for the result to become visible”.

Between 2001 and 2005, different working groups completed the task of ‘ecosystem assessment’ and we have Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reports in the form of syntheses. These reports relate to *biodiversity, desertification, wetlands, health and business and industry*. They provide us a detailed analysis of state of ecosystems world over and give us a harsh warning that “*the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted*”. The benefits people obtain from ecosystem are termed as ‘ecosystem services’. These include *provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services*. These services directly influence human well-being. The Millennium Assessment was carried out with reference to the following nine key questions.

- *How have ecosystems changed?*
- *How have ecosystem services and their uses changed?*
- *How have ecosystem changes affected human well-being and poverty alleviation?*
- *What are the most critical factors causing ecosystem changes?*
- *How might ecosystems and their services change in the future under various plausible scenarios?*
- *What can be learned about the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being at sub-global scales?*

- *What is known about time scales, inertia, and the risk of nonlinear changes in ecosystems?*
- *What options exist to manage ecosystems sustainably?*
- *What are the most important uncertainties hindering decision-making concerning ecosystems?*

Major findings of the assessment are as follows

- *..... humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively,.....this has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth.*
- *...the changes have contributed to substantial net gains in human well-being and economic development, but at growing costs in the form of the degradation of many ecosystem services, increased risks of nonlinear changes, and the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of people. These problems..... will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations obtain from ecosystems.*
- *....the degradation of ecosystem services could grow significantly worse during the first half of this century*
- *....the challenge of reversing the degradation of ecosystems while meeting increasing demands for their services can be partially met under some scenarios that the MA has considered, but these involve significant changes in policies, institutions, and practices that are not currently under way. Many options exist to conserve or enhance specific ecosystem services in ways that reduce negative trade-offs or that provide positive synergies with other ecosystem services.*

UN Development Group(s) conducted large scale consultations, after the MDGs were publicized, with over a million respondents from different walks of life and from different parts of the Globe. These

consultations were carried out between October 2012 and June 2013. The results of these were published in 2013, as ‘**A Million Voices: The World we want**’. There appeared tremendous response from all countries and enthusiastic appetite to play a role in shaping and changing the world. Common people realized that their voice is being heard. These consultations were carried out in 88 countries.

As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, there are a growing number of preparations and debates on what should be a post-2015 agenda? The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, constituted in July 2012, puts on record that “in the 13 years, since the millennium, have seen the fastest reduction in poverty in human history’. It believes that there is a chance to do something that has never been done before to eradicate extreme poverty, once and for all, and to end hunger, illiteracy, and preventable deaths. The logic seems to be changing from alleviating poverty to eradicating poverty. Ending poverty is an essential part of sustainable development. Pursuing a single, sustainable development agenda is the right thing, the smart thing and the necessary thing to do.

For post 2015 agenda the panel recommends five transformative shifts. Implementations of MDGs need to consider these transformative shifts. These shifts are *1. Leave No One Behind, 2. Put Sustainable Development at the Core, 3. Transform Economies for Jobs and Inclusive Growth, 4. Build Peace and Effective, Open and Accountable Public Institutions and 5. Forge a new Global Partnership*. The Panel recommends that a limited number

of goals and targets be adopted in the post-2015 development agenda, and that each should be SMART: (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound). The panel believes that if developed and developing countries, and other partners too, committed themselves to implementing the goals and targets prescribed in Post-2015 Agenda we can have a world in 2030 that is more equal, more prosperous, more peaceful and more just than that of today.

I would like to conclude by saying the list of studies and warning produced by the scientific community on the gravity of environmental problems is endless. However, it is now a time for us, particularly the geographers, to think in terms the concepts of ecological footprint and bio-capacity that provide us measures bio-productive area required and the bio-productive supply that can be available within given area. All development activities at different spatial scales will have to seriously take up the resource accounting exercise. Through the developmental efforts we may have achieved spectacular progress as mentioned by the high level panel, yet the certain issues like **Peace, Inequality, Climate change, urbanization, gender equality, consumption and production patterns** need immediate attention and if attending is delayed for any reasons we shall be required to pay heavy price for such delay. I would also like to bring it to your notice that within 2 days from now that is on 13 Nov 2013 the WORLD WATCH institute is organizing a webinar and the theme of this webinar is, IS SUSTAINABILITY IS STILL POSSIBLE?

On behalf of the IIG, I thank the Organizers and particularly Dr. Narayan Jana and Dr. Gopa Samanta.

Thank You All!

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