

The interconnected realities of human development and sustainable practices: the general considerations in Indian context

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Abstract

The concept of human development encompasses three interconnected fields essential to lead a social life, i.e., economic activities, social development, and the dynamics of the environment. Sustainability is based on the nature of human interaction with the surrounding environment and the resources thereof. The interdependence between human development and the sustainable development lies in the fact that human development embarks upon a long sustaining and healthy life with proper access to education (needed for economic enhancement and financial stability) and the available goods and services. Sustainable development too, emphasizes on a development that will sustain the present without compromising the need of the future generation to access the resources for survival. India, a country of diversity in every possible way, ranks 132 out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) enumerated by the United Nations Development Programme (2021-2022). Back in 1972 in the Stockholm Conference, the then Indian Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, spoke at length and emphasized the need of poverty eradication to promote the development process. Now, it has become clear that a true development can be achieved through sustainability and thus the Sustainable Development Goals aim at the eradication of poverty along with other major goals such as gender equality, environment sustenance, etc. The present paper will investigate the relationship of the two- human development and sustainability to understand that human development is basically something that is for the people, by the people and most importantly of the people.

Keywords: *human development, sustainable development, Human Development Index (HDI).*

Introduction

“Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with the more limited visions of development, such as identifying development with the growth of the gross national product, with the increase in the personal income or with social modernization. The GDP growth or that of individual incomes can, of course, be important as a means of expanding human freedoms, just like industrialization, technological or social modernization. But freedoms also depend on other factors such as social and economic arrangements (for example, access to education, health care and social assistance, access to the labor market) as well as civil and political rights (e.g., the freedom to participate discussions and debates)” (Sen, 2004).

The literatures and scholarly articles debate on the relationship between human development and sustainability. Human development is the essentially the interconnected concept of economic activities, social well-being, and a sustainable environment. Sustainability always advocates the sustainable resource allocation and extraction, thus pointing out that a true human development needs sustainable practices. It has often been argued that countries very high Human Development Index often becomes the areas of strong unsustainable uses of resources in terms of carbon dioxide emission and ecological footprints (Neuyamer, 2010). Growth and sustainability have been the most sought-after topic during the last century and the best definition of sustainability was given in the Brundtland Report (WECD, 1987): “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The definition contains two important concepts- the idea of limitations and the concept of needs (Behboudi and Moosavi, 2014). Human development is a composite of education, life expectancy and income. In 2010, another tier, i.e., Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (HDI) was introduced (UNDP, 2012). Sustainable development gained its momentum in the early 70s, more precisely in 1972 in Stockholm under the leadership and initiative of the Scandinavian countries and the United States of America, there took place a conference named the Stockholm Conference or more accurately the Conference on the Human Environment. Following the Conference, the famous Stockholm Declaration came into existence in December, 1972 (Halmaghi and Mosteanu, 2014). India ranks 130 among 189 countries on the HDI rank released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). India’s HDI value for 2017 is 0.640, which put the country in the medium human development category. Between 1990 and 2017, India’s HDI value increased from 0.427 to 0.640, an increase of nearly 50 per cent – and an indicator of the country’s remarkable achievement in lifting millions of people out of poverty. Countries leading the list are Norway, Sweden, Germany, and Ireland while countries like Niger and Burundi with the lowest value are mostly in the African continent (UNDP India, 2018). Removal of poverty and an increase in the value of the HDI goes hand in hand, and thus, in 1972, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi emphasised in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm that eradication of poverty should be an integral part of the sustainable policy goals and further stressed on the interdependent nature of environmental protection and human development (Sustainable Development, retrieved from http://envfor.nic.in/divisions/ic/wssd/doc4/consul_book_persp.pdf on November 30, 2018).

The first Human Development Report of 1990 conceptualised human development as “People are the real wealth of a nation”. This phrase made a huge impact and shaped the policies around the world (About Human Development, retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev> on February 5, 2014). Human development as described by the UN is increasing the choices given to people by enhancing their capabilities and is expressed as a ratio between the vital human needs and the factors to meet the end (Neag, 2009).

Literature Review

Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate, believed that “human development as approach that involves what I consider to be the basic idea of human development, namely, the development of the richness of human life and not the wealth of the economy in which the human beings live, which is just a part of it.” The concept of human development has evolved dynamically and established a long-standing relationship with basic human rights. Human rights enhance the continuous improvement of the social systems and infrastructure needed for the facilitation of opportunities and freedoms to formulate the expansion and growth of human development process. There is a paradigm shift where human development is no longer seen as opportunities but also seen as real freedoms that people enjoy to develop the existing human capital (Halmaghi and Mosteanu, 2014). Human development, no longer takes into its ambit the political, social, and economic aspects, but also the much-explored idea of sustainability. Sustainable development brings along with it the much-needed attributes related to freedom and equity. It speaks about the utilisation of resources without dwindling the available resource base. According to the Human Development Report, 2013, countries like Spain witnessed unemployment around 20 per cent due to the recession that struck the world around that time. Therefore, it is debated that a sustainable model of production and consumption is required to achieve positive human development and growth.

India is such a country where people depend the most on the natural resources to sustain life and livelihood and thus the inter-relationship between degraded natural environment and poverty are prominently visible in this nation. Poverty eradication is not only important to achieve an upward mobility along the HDI rank list but also important to save the ecology. The poor population of this country has little or no other option but to extract and drain out the already degraded environment, thus making the base narrow. According to Reddy in his work on human development (2009), many economists have pointed out that lack of utilisation of natural resources kept the developing countries underdeveloped. The work also spoke about the fact that economic growth is merely a means to achieve human development and the final goal of the entire exercise is to enhance the quality of life and expanding people’s choices. The private companies are only after profit making ventures; thus, a sustainable model of growth will not be encouraged to work. Therefore, huge investments in public sectors are required to ensure that the reform process of human development works well in favour of a sustained growth. According to a report published by the Press Trust of India on September, 2018, UNDP country head Francine Pickup showed concern over the gender disparity and even said that with the present rate of progress to attain global gender equality, it will take another 200 years to achieve equality in workforce. Moreover, she pointed out that in a country like India, women contribute lesser than their male counterpart, mainly due to lack of education and participation in formal sectors. She also remarked that climate change human development is linked very closely. It has often been seen that the displacement and migration create a change in livelihood, which again affects the development process. Expectancy at birth is one of the main parameters of calculating the HDI of a country. According to Ms Pickup, India shows a high pollution level and thus deteriorates the health condition of the people and specifically children largely. In Ms Pickup’s words “The success of the Sustainable Development Goals globally hinges on India. India’s national development schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Bharat, Make in India and initiatives aimed at universalising school education and healthcare, will be crucial in ensuring that the upward trend in human development accelerates”.

Objective

The present paper will try to investigate the relationship between human development and sustainable growth or sustainability. There will be an effort to see the situation of India from the

point of view of development, growth and the HDI value for India in the current UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) rank table. Moreover, special emphasis will also be given on the alternative model, proposed by many economists and the UNDP itself, based on innovation and sustainable practices.

Methodology

The paper focuses on the secondary and tertiary data related to the title work and for that works of various scholars and researchers were analysed. Moreover, library work was also carried out to get the scholarly articles and newspaper reports.

Link between human development and sustainability with reference to India

Human development is the sum of three key factors- life expectancy, education, and income. Life expectancy at birth automatically considers the health standards and facilities of a given country; likewise, education includes the total years of enrolment in educational institutions and the last is living standard index (income and financial stability) which further affects the first two parameters. Human Development Report (2013) showed that there were increases all round the world in terms of longevity, enrolment in educational institutions and income. The Report also revealed that three countries- Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe recorded a lower level of HDI compared to the other countries. Development does not imply to economic growth; it also refers to the quality of life and social well-being. According to a report by the Business Standard (2018), India is far below than other less developed countries in terms of poverty index, HDI and health indicators. India is very rich in natural resources but the policies and methods of extraction are unsustainable. Dwindling resource base further poses problem in terms of displacement and migration resulting in livelihood changes and challenges, poverty, and food insecurity. These are the main reasons behind under rated growth in India. Thus, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would not be possible to achieve. On this note it is mentioning worthy that scholars are continuously voicing for an innovative sustainable model that will support the dual goal of growth and sustainability. Majority of India's population resides in the rural set-up and the economy is agrarian. The marginal and small farmers and sharecroppers generally work in the unorganised sectors and to earn a higher living flock to other cities. This migration proves disastrous both to the marginal poor and the tribal population of the country. They are generally adapted to a livelihood based on either agriculture or forest resources or both; thus, when they migrate to other cities in search of a better livelihood, ends up landing in slums and squatters. The end results are deteriorating physical and mental health along with the issue of identity crisis.

Summary and conclusion

The domain of sustainability has undergone overhauling configuration encompassing broader perspectives of environmental protection and ecological safeguards through the lens of economics, society, and culture. The purpose is to rethink sustainable model of development in the context of human development aligning the above three factors through sustainable interaction between human and nature for a satisfactory impact on growth and development. The focus is to distribute the fruits of economic growth and benefits of equality without challenging the man-nature harmony.

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