

Editorial Note

Reimagining Sustainability, Responsibilities and Solutions

Contemporary ecological challenges are multiscale and multidimensional on a global plane. For example, greenhouse gas emissions from the Northern Hemisphere are responsible for the ozone depletion over Antarctica, while the heavy scale of industrial pollution in Germany is a major cause of acid rainfall in Norway. The flooding of the river Koshi in Nepal impacted around 2.64 million people in both Nepal and India (Kafle et al, 2017). India has been experiencing climate change through unprecedented heat waves, floods and rising sea levels. This is a consequence of pollution and smog from emissions through automobiles and industrial production in urban areas, as well as, the use of biomass solid fuels in rural households. Such damaging consequences cut across the urban rural divide in further creating ill effects of widespread displacements of population, most part of the socially vulnerable. Climate changes are not restricted to the areas of acute pollution, rather their consequences are faced

by those areas that have never experienced emissions. A local level adverse change in an ecosystem may lead to a series of adverse changes to impact the global ecosystems and vice versa. The unpredictability of the monsoon is an instance of such interconnections. The consequences of environmental deterioration vary geographically so the concerns. In the Amazon forests, the loss of biodiversity becomes a concern, while in the tropics it is the warming of oceans. Europe, a continent with abundant water is undergoing heat waves and parched conditions (Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2022). Though all these events happen to occur in different geographical regions, they herald severe consequences of the unpredictability of climate change and reiterate the need for urgent intervention from the global community.

There have been attempts to remedy the recurrent global ecological instabilities and crises through institutional and legal approaches. The United Nations (UN) as a supranational institute has been working to unite all the countries through various rounds of negotiations; it has been convincing national governments to curb the emission of various pollutants and emerge with alternative technologies that would tread more softly over the earth's systems. Ironically, there have been complicated and contradictory responses from national governments to this call, as all the countries are not placed equally in terms of economic development and sharing of natural resources for the benefit of larger society. The Common but Differential Responsibility (CBDR) was formalized by the United Nations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) into international environmental laws; the latter state that all nation-states are responsible for global environmental destruction, though not equally (Epstein, 2015). The Highly Developed Countries (HDCs) are more responsible for global environmental destruction, than Less Developed Countries (LDCs). The same principle created a foreground for environmental and pressure geopolitics.

The negotiations between the HDCs and LDCs could be seen continuing till the most recent round of negotiations in Glasgow, United Kingdom United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC 2022). The Paris Agreement (2015), to which India is one of the signatories, has been one of the major initiatives that fixed the national governments legally to set limits to global warming through an international treaty. There have been several parallel efforts initiated by UN and other supranational institutions globally that also supports local, regional level climate change combat actions. The introduction of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 was meant for offering a blueprint for global peace and prosperity in terms of reduced poverty, inequality, improved health for the people and environmental preservation with climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience practices for the planet. Various national governments, specifically, European countries have been promptly proactive in promoting the policies that would encourage environmental protections. The educational curriculum in India has been focusing on environmental consciousness and sustainability for several decades now. In this spirit, the recent National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) continues to aim at making environment education an integral part of the curriculum to create sensitivity towards the conservation of the planet by promoting sustainable development (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). The UN member countries are expected to fulfill their commitments by the year 2030 and harmonize the three core elements of sustainable development – economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Agenda 21, a result of the Earth Summit held at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, outlines actions that are to be implemented at a global, national and local level by the member countries, the organizations of the United Nations system and major groups working in related areas (UNCED, 1992). The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was born out of the need to ensure effective follow-up of the UNCED. The CSD was tasked with the responsibility of monitoring and reporting about

the implementation of the agreements at all levels, from local to global (UNCED, 1992). Furthermore, there are several international institutions like IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), IFP (International Forum of National NGO Platform), OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development), Organisation of American States (OAS), International Labour Organisation (ILO) (PennState, 2022) and so on, apart from UN dedicated to encourage, engage and decipher the knowledge gained through research and technological innovations to shape policies and other positive interventions. India as a country had also represented its commitment towards environmental protection, since the first earth summit in Stockholm in 1972. The pioneering speech delivered by the then prime minister India Gandhi opened up the disparity between South and the North with respect to ecological responsibilities, given the inequities of poverty and need overwhelming the South. Moreover, it also highlighted the need for increasing institutionalized commitment to ecology through environmental laws, regulations and prescriptions for sustainability.

Yet these institutional and policy interventions at creating ecological awareness and an orientation to sustainability have not translated to material results. Despite several rounds of negotiations and initiatives to re-organise the economy and society into sustainable modes of production, distribution and consumption, the outcomes have been discouraging. The efforts to establish sustainability as a lifestyle have been posed with several limitations in public as well as private spheres of everyday life as sustainability practices are believed to be working against the market economy and its principles promoting conspicuous consumption. The 'invisible hand' (Smith, 2002) of the economy seems to play itself out in hindering sustainable practices. The core principle of the present market economy continues to evolve and revolve around maximization of profit leading to serious compromises and exploitation of people and the planet.

Mammoth transnational corporations control almost one third of total global production (OECD, 2018). Eighty percent of trade in the value chain is controlled by transnational corporations (UNCTAD, 2013), whereas one third of total world trade is happening within transnational corporations (Shaxson, 2019). If the entire world aims at tuning to sustainable lifestyle practices, the first step ought to be taken by transnational corporations so that the world can avail of better options in sustainable production, consumption and distribution. But this would in turn require rethinking monopoly capital whereby the mandate for sustainable consumption would come from societies, communities and people. In European countries like Germany, there have been several such mandates made functional by people and communities to create alternative commodity chains that are eco-friendly. In HDCs, environmental regulations have been made strident and legally punishable for the defiler. However, matters become more complex in LDCs where environmental regulations have been diluted to promote foreign direct investments. The terms like 'one window clearance', 'fast track clearance' refer to such modalities that bypass various regulations like environmental, labour, etc., to seek clearance. Additionally, business communities show reluctance in following the regulations. Thus, the LDCs confront the challenge between so-called development and ecological sustainability.

On an alternate note, rather than simply adopt top down approaches to the challenge, India's long history of sustainable lifestyle(s) and thinking could offer effective models for sustainability. There are unique everyday practices across space and time that represent the essence of sustainable living. The most important one is recycling. There has been an extraordinarily strong everyday practice of recycling and reuse. For example, use of different parts of coconut, reuse of daily wares for multiple purposes and over a long time, use of *khadi* and cotton that would last for a long period of time and so on. Use of flowers and leaves as offerings in the practice of worshipping is another interesting

everyday practice which invariably forces people to have some or the other plants in their galleries, backyards, and / or front yards. Yet one would also have to contextualise some of these practices, as overcultivating flowers has led or can lead to soil erosion. The grassroots' environmental and social movements in India to save its earthen systems for reckless exploitation have both underscored sustainability, while critiquing reckless exploitation of nature. States like Kerala, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu have continued the legacy and embedded environmental protection into everyday socio-political space. It is by turning to these lived practices that one could recover sustainable living that respects nature. Alas, such historical memory has not been consciously adopted on a wide scale and the state of the natural environment in India continues to worsen. This is also reflected in India's falling ranking on the SDG Index in the Sustainable Development Report over the years, from 115 in the year 2019 to 121 out of 163 countries in 2022 (Sachs et al., 2022). The lopsided pattern of development is responsible for intensifying the exploitation of natural resources.

Hence, the challenges to establish sustainability as a core development paradigm are plenty. The resolution can be only in terms of common shared responsibility of all the stakeholders irrespective of how they are positioned in socio-cultural and political hierarchies to think, plan and act sensibly vis-à-vis earth's systems. There have been several philosophical, theological, and intellectual discourses on how earth systems can be positioned in everyday life. Psychological theories tend to offer some guidance regarding this matter. There are two prominent theories, namely, the theory of planned behaviour and the value-belief-norm theory. While the former suggests that an individual's intention to engage in a particular behaviour precedes their decision to engage in the said behaviour, and is influenced by three factors, namely, personal attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1985), the latter suggests that an individual's values influence environmental beliefs, which in turn impacts the world;

this is regardless of whether one is likely to acknowledge the effects of an environmental issue, take some personal responsibility for it and eventually alter their behaviour to help solve the issue. Personal attitudes can be defined as those towards a particular behaviour (Stern et al., 1999). The earlier issue has elaborated on these aspects in detail. There have also been several scientific positions shaping the ethical and moral self on 'nature' of an individual and community. For example, IPCC represents hundreds of scientists working together to understand, visualize and scale the impact of climate change on earthen systems and living forms. Traditions and customs are yet another influential force to shape the human and environment relationship.

This second issue on sustainability attempts to capture such differential spaces of sustainability practices across economy and society. Titled "Reimagining Sustainable Responsibilities and Solutions", it has two sections. The first section on "Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development" explores the role and responsibilities envisioned by the corporate sector. The opening article by Santosh Jagdhane focuses on how sustainability has been brought as a major responsibility under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The reorganization of the business model and the work culture towards sustainable production is the crux of the piece by Ajit Menon. Shaibal Roy and Narayanan Neelakanteswaran highlight the sustainability trends in construction industries, while Alka Talwar explains how biodiversity can be embedded in CSR.

Section II of this volume, entitled "Solutions Towards Sustainability & Sustainable Development" offers the real time efforts by communities at local scales to recreate the spaces of environmental preservation. The effort of biodiversity audit at University of Mumbai has been shared by Aparna Phadke and the entire audit team while elaborating on ESDs (Education for Sustainable Development). Arun Sharma analyses the impact of COVID – 19 on the luxury services sector and suggests

sustainable resolutions. Vinita Kaur Chiragia offers experiments in sustainable architecture as a representative of the Design Jatra team. Dhanashree Patil and Anuradha Majumdar portray the journey of self-help group Swamini that has emerged as an ecosystem conservator through the mangrove safari in Vengurla. Komal Sharma and Sarita Sood delineate how job crafting can be linked with sustainable development in higher education. Juhi Deshmukh and Swarali Sahastrabudhe open the space to various kinds of environmental interventions to develop pro-environmental behaviour. Pragati Sahni and Shruti Pandey offer an ethical analysis of delay in climate action. Arpita Naik's review of *How to avoid a Climate Disaster* authored by Bill Gates and Nikhil Gawai's on Chetan Singh Solanki's *Energy Swaraj* are attempts to comprehend the planetary crisis, while exploring avenues for sustainability. The volume also pays tribute to Thich Nhat Hanh's ecological relevance through mindfulness.

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