



PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The concept of Sustainable Development gained widespread acceptance as a new policy goal to govern human course of action. Etymologically the phrase 'Sustainable Development' refers to any development which is ongoing. Internationally the term sustainable development made its first major appearance in the World Conservation Strategy of the 1980's in the context of global threats to Ecosystem. The Brundtland Report presented by the World Commission on Environment and Development highlighted and brought into full prominence the notion of sustainable development.

Key Words: Sustainable Development, Principles, Brundtland Report & Rio Declaration.

Introduction:

The concept of sustainable development has grown since its inception at the international level and it has acquired different dimensions in terms of economic growth, development and environment protection. However, some of the salient principles of sustainable development are mentioned from Brundtland Report and other international documents such as Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 are as follows:

1. Inter-Generational Equity:

The central theme of the theory of intergenerational equity is the right of each generation of human beings to benefit from the cultural and natural inheritance of the past generations as well as the 'obligation' to preserve such heritage for future generations. Intergenerational equity requires conserving the diversity and quality of biological resources and of renewable resources such as forest, water and soil.

Meeting the essential needs depends in part on achieving full growth potential and sustainable development clearly requires economic growth in places where such needs are not being met. The Brundtland Report has defined the sustainable development as the development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs".

Similarly, 3rd Principle of the Rio Declaration of 1992 says that "the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations". The natural resources, land, air and water on the planet earth cannot be exhausted by the present generations to meet their needs.

Economic growth and development obviously involve changes in the physical ecosystem in general; renewable resources like forest and fish stocks need not be depleted provided the rate of use is within the limits of regeneration and natural growth. As for as non-renewable resources like fossil fuels and minerals are concerned, their use reduces the stock available for future generation. According to Brundtland Report, the rate of depletion should take into account. Further the availability of technologies for minimizing depletion and the likelihood of substitute being available should be taken into consideration.

2. Use and Conservation of Natural Resources:

In order to meet the needs on sustainable basis, it's absolutely necessary to use the natural resources carefully and the natural resources base must be conserved and

enhanced. It is part of our moral obligation to other living beings and future generations. The resources must be conserved and enhanced to meet the needs of growing population.

Principle 23 of the Rio Declaration specifically says that the environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected. Similarly in Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration it is stated that to achieve sustainable development and a high quality of life for all people, states should reduce and eliminate unsustainable pattern of production and consumption. Thus, use and conservation of natural resources is an essential principle of sustainable development.

3. Environment Protection:

The protection of the environment is an essential part of sustainable development without adequate environment protection, development is undermined; without development, resources will be inadequate for needed investments and environmental protection will fail.

The environmental problems can and do undermine the goals of development in many ways. Take for example – pollution free water and air is itself a part of improvement and welfare that development attempts to bring. If the benefits from the rising incomes are offset by costs imposed on health and the quality of life by pollution, this cannot be called development. Also environmental damage can undermine future productivity and thus it affects the sustainability.

It must be remembered that environment is not a separate sector, distinct from industry, agriculture and energy. Hence environment protection must become an integral part of the decision making at all levels.

4. The Precautionary Principle:

‘Prevention is better than cure’, - This is the sum and substance of the concept. This principle has widely been recognized as the most important principle of “sustainable development”. Principle 15 of the Rio declaration states that: “in order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by states according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”ⁱⁱ.

The principle of precaution involves the anticipation of environmental harm and taking measures to avoid it or to choose the least environmentally harmful activity. It is based on scientific uncertainty. Environmental protection should not only aim at protecting health, property and economic interests but also protect the environment for its own sake. Precautionary duties must not only be triggered by the suspicion of concrete danger but also by justified concern or risk potential. The precautionary principle was recommended by the United Nations Environment Program in 1989. The Bamako Convention also lowered the threshold at which scientific evidence might require action by not referring to ‘serious’ or ‘irreversible’ as adjectives qualifying harm. The legal status of the precautionary principle, ‘evolving’ for though it is accepted as part of the international customary law, the consequences of its application in any potential situation will be influenced by the circumstances of each caseⁱⁱⁱ.

5. The Polluter Pays Principle:

‘Guilty should be punished’ is the gist of this principle. In 1972, the member countries of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development agreed to base their environmental policies on a polluter pays principle.

The polluter pays principle as interpreted by the Supreme Court of India means that the absolute liability for harm to the environment extends not only to compensate the victims of pollution but also the cost of restoring the environmental degradation. Thus, it includes environmental costs as well as direct costs to people or property. Remediation of the damaged environment is part of the process of sustainable development and as such the polluter is liable to pay the cost to the individual suffers as well as the cost of reversing the damaged ecology. Under this principle it is not the role of government to meet the costs involved in either prevention of such damage or in carrying out remedial action because the effect of this would be the shift the financial burden of the pollution incident to the taxpayer^{iv}.

The World Commission on Environment and Development in its report, has suggested that 'Environment Cost' of 'Economic Activity' can be internalized paid by the enterprises. It may be in the form of investment to prevent the damages or to restore unavoidable damages example a forestation, restocking fish, rehabilitation of man and land, etc. or compensating the victims of health and property damage. Thus, enterprises may be encouraged to invest in preventive restorative compensatory measures. But it was the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), who for the first time agreed to base their environmental policies on a 'polluter pays principle' and it was recommended by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1972 as an 'essentially economic efficiency measure to internalize environmental costs. Polluter pays principle which was initially recognized as one of the economic and administrative measures to restrain and contain the pollution problem, has recently been adopted as a strong legal measure to minimize environmental pollution^v.

Principle 16 of the Rio Declaration of 1992 also states polluter pays principle. It is quite obvious that the object of this principle was to make the polluter liable not only for the compensation to the victims but also for the cost of restoring of environmental degradation^{vi}.

6. Obligation to Assist and Cooperate:

The environmental problem is not the problem of an individual or that of one country. It is a global problem and it can be tackled only with the assistance and cooperation of all. Principle 9 of the Rio Declaration provides that the state should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge and by enhancing the development, adoption, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.

Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration further provides that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. Similarly Article 12 of the Rio Declaration provides that the states should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would let to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation.

7. Eradication of Poverty:

The sustainable development has to address the problem of the large number of people who live in absolute poverty and who can not satisfy even their basis needs. The Brundtland report has rightly pointed out that poverty reduces people capacity to use resources in a sustainable manner and hence it intensifies pressure on the environment. Most of the developing countries are under the stress of poverty. Therefore, it is necessary that the growth must be revived in developing countries because that is

where the links between economic growth, the alleviation of poverty and environmental conditions operate most directly.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, that is “Earth Summit’ of 1992 has brought about a leap in public awareness of key environment and development issue and rightly projected that elimination of poverty is a must for sustainable development particularly in developing countries. The key to achieve sustainability is to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

8. Financial Assistance to Developing Countries:

The people in the developing countries strain their natural resources and over exploit them to meet their basic needs. The developing countries also do not have the finances and modern technology to follow the path of development which is sustainable. Therefore, the financial assistance and transfer of technology from the developed nations to the developing nations is a must to achieve the goal of sustainable development and environment protection.

In Chapter 33 of Agenda – 21 it was provided that the provision to developing countries of effective means, inter alia, financial resources and technology, without which it will be difficult for them to fully implement their commitment, will serve the common interest of developed and developing countries and of human kind in general, including future generations. It is worth mentioning here that the World Bank, in addition to various other international institutions, has been playing a key role in response to the clarion call of sustainable development at “Earth Summit”^{vii}.

9. Conclusion:

The challenges of environmental protection and sustainable development are daunting. The concept of sustainable development has grown from Stockholm Conference to Rio Declaration and thereafter through various national and international forums. Some of the salient principles of the sustainable development have been identified. But the real task which lies ahead is that of implementation. To achieve the same there is a need of political will of the North and the South to act in coordination to protect this planet earth from further deterioration.

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