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# Scenario of Sustainability in India: A Review of Cases

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to throw a light on the present a scenario of sustainability in India with the help of two categories of cases and data i.e. unsustainable and sustainable pertaining to the scenario of sustainability in India. These cases and data encompass individuals, groups, communities and institutions, corporate and the administrative government in India which substantiate our argument in this regard. The rationale of the methodology of studying cases is to give a bigger picture of sustainability in India with the help of these examples and to approach the question in hand both with the help of both subjective observations and objective data from the existing bodies of knowledge.

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### Introduction

India is acknowledged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world; as a corollary, it faces the twin challenges of balancing consumption of fuel for its rapid growth with the equitable conservation of its key resources and the impact of striking this balance on the society (GIZ, 2012)□. Mismanagement and overuse of India's once abundant forests has resulted in desertification, contamination, and soil depletion throughout the sub-continent. This has serious repercussions for the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of Indians that live off the land (Foundation for Sustainable Development, 2016). After 68 years of independence, India continues to struggle to achieve food, water, livelihood, and socio-cultural security for its peoples. Additionally, there is increasing evidence of the ecological unsustainability of the current path of development, and of the growing chasm between rich and poor (Kothari, 2013).

The Indian peninsula has been subject to adverse environmental, economic and social conditions in the past as well as in the present (European External Action Service, 2007; Harriss-White, 2003; Kandlikar & Ramachandran, 2000; Raja & Bhat, 2016; Shiva, 1991). People as well as businesses in India have faced huge losses on different grounds from adverse environmental conditions (Dilley et al., 2005). Such conditions have risen because of uncontrolled exploitation of the environment by both the businesses and the people (Gadgil & Guha, 1993) and that sustainability hasn't been fully integrated in each and every activity in the country (Raja & Bhat, 2016). The acuteness of the ecological crisis in the country demands the rise of a new society (Bookchin, 2013) in which transactions are determined by their real costs and not by capitalist market rules that focus on maximizing profits and encourage wasteful life-styles.

Undeniably, sustainability has become a global strategic imperative (Fontaine & Ahmad, 2013) leading governments to develop policies (Ostrom, 2009), corporations to formulate strategies (Shrivastava, 1995), institutes to advocate for causes (Beckmann & Padmanabhan, 2009), communities to work for

and individuals to strive for a sustainable future (Raja & Bhat, 2016).

According to (Elkington, 2004) from 1960 to the present, three great waves of public pressure have shaped the environmental agenda with the third wave focusing on growing recognition that sustainable development will require profound changes in the governance of corporations and in the whole process of globalization, putting a renewed focus on government and on civil society. Increasing evidence suggests that the adoption of sustainability targets as part of mainstream innovation strategy is accelerating (Trifilova et al., 2013).

The concept of sustainability encompasses individuals, communities, sole institutions, corporate, and the government of India keeping cognizance of the sustenance of the People, Planet and Profit which are also called the three Ps of sustainability (Elkington, 1994). It is the beauty of the pillars of sustainability that they are mutually linked both in terms of benefits as well as losses. Ignoring any pillar of sustainability while taking beneficial decisions and actions in favour of others causes loses in the former which then ricochets its losses to the latter defeating the purpose of sustainability in the first place. However, if before doing anything all of them are taken on board, they mutually benefit each other creating multiple benefits which nurture the other pillars thereby reinforcing and others' development.

In this paper we present the scenario of sustainability in India with the help of data and cases from the existing bodies of knowledge at different levels viz. Individual, groups & communities, institutions, companies, government and Non-Government Organizations. The data and cases will exhibit the instances where India is unsustainable in terms of its economy, society and the natural environment and also where it is successfully going towards a sustainable path in certain other instances.

### Unsustainable Economy, Society and Environment of India:

Unsustainable Economy of India: Table 1 shows the relative economic position of India when compared to the

Assessment/Report	Description	Source	Year(s)	Rank of India
Human Development Index	Measures a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income-per-capita indicators.	United Nations Development Program	2015	130 <sup>th</sup> out of 188 evaluated countries
World Happiness Report	Measures happiness of countries using factors like generosity, GDP-per-capita, social support and healthy life expectancy.	United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network	2016	118 <sup>th</sup> out of 157 evaluated countries
Gross Domestic Product (PPP) per-capita	Monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity (ppp) rates and divided by total population.	International Monetary Fund	2016	126 <sup>th</sup> out of 189 evaluated countries
Gross Domestic Product (PPP) per-capita		World Bank	2011-15	123 <sup>rd</sup> out of 186 evaluated countries
Gross Domestic Product (nominal) per-capita	Monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period converted to international dollars using current market prices (nominal) and divided by total population.	International Monetary Fund	2015	140 <sup>th</sup> out of 184 assessed countries
Gross Domestic Product (nominal) per-capita		World Bank	2011-15	139 <sup>th</sup> out of 184 evaluated countries

Sources: (International Monetary Fund, 2016; United Nations Development Program, 2015; United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2016; World Bank, 2016).

assessed countries in respective studies, reports and assessments carried out by globally prominent institutions like World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) thereby revealing the unsustainable position of India's economy. (Global Footprint Network & Confederation of Indian Industry, 2008) report that India has the world's third biggest ecological footprint and it uses resources twice of its bio-capacity which itself has declined by half in the last few decades, which, in essence means that there are many more people today in India living on limited available resources. From 2002-2008 groundwater depletion was equivalent to a net loss of 109 km<sup>3</sup> of water, which was double the capacity of India's largest surface-water reservoir (Rodell, Velicogna, & Famiglietti, 2009). In terms of most polluted cities in the world 2 (out of top 3), 7 (out of 15 most polluted cities), 34 (out of 100 most polluted cities) and 122 (out of 2973 most polluted cities) are in India terms of particulate matter concentration, PM2.5 (World Health Organization, 2016).

(Saldanha, Naik, Joshi, & Sastry, 2006) reveal that during the process of putting together Five Year Plans, annual budgets, and macroeconomic measures that drive the country's development process, there is absolutely no assessment of their environmental impacts. Nor does sustainability get built into the design of macroeconomic policies (such as taxing speculative finance that has a bearing on the environment, or heavily taxing); environment is mostly an afterthought or an aside. India has many publicly funded programmes for the prevention and control of climate change and issues relating to sustainable development (GIZ, 2012). However, there is no indication of a comprehensive or systematic integration of the principles of sustainable development into India's policies and programmes (Kothari, 2013) five Year Plans, annual budgets, and macroeconomic measures that drive the country's development process (Saldanha et al., 2006). In the past there have been many

policies and programmes developed by the Government of India in support of environmental protection, social welfare and economic development: New Industrial Policy, 1991; National Mineral Policy, 2008; Integrated Energy Policy, 2008; Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006; Marketing Assistance Scheme for SME (Small and Medium Enterprises); Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme; National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001; Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, 2003; National Rural Health Mission, 2005; National Food Security Mission, 2007; National Environmental Policy, 2006; National Forestry Action Programme, 1999; National Forest Policy; National Agricultural Policy, 2002; National Afforestation Programme, 2002; National Mission for a Green India, 2011; Integrated Watershed Management Programme, 2009 etc (The Energy and Resources Institute, 2011) but they have not been framed and operated in unison with each other rendering them incapable of creating multi-faceted benefits.

#### **Towards Sustainability in India – Cases**

Here we discuss cases which encompass all the levels of the entities in India - Individuals, Groups, Communities, Institutions, Companies, Government and Non-Government Organizations. With the help of these in the country at each of the above mentioned levels of entities we throw some light on the scenario of sustainability in India.

#### **Individuals**

Every individual counts in the transition to better sustainability (Erdas, 2011). People at their individual levels in India have started to learned that their small steps towards a sustainable future of India can have a large impact in the long run. For example, Bollywood celebrities in India e.g. Shabana Azmi is a social and women rights activist (Dhaka Tribune, 2016) and Gul Panag supports causes like gender equality, addiction awareness, education, employment and disaster management (The Alternative, 2014). Similarly

Abhay Deol worked with Greenpeace, the environmental activist organisation, in a bid to convince the government to stop coal-mining in the country's depleting forests (The Indian Express, 2012).

### **Groups and Communities**

Sustainability has the ability to generate value by improving both internal and external collaboration which was profiled in a sustainability survey (Kiron, Kruschwitz, & Haanaes, 2012) which noted that "profiting from sustainability goes hand in hand with greater collaboration among many groups both internal and external to the operation". Since 2001, Philanthropic Relief, Altruistic Service and Development (PRASAD) Chikitsa has been implementing Sustainable Community Development Programs in India. Working closely with the members of the community it assess their needs and creates sustainable projects that improve their quality of life. From educating and training farmers on a myriad of issues like increase crop output, conserve water etc to planting thousands of trees around villages and schools PRASAD Chikitsa involves a group of people working for sustainable development (PRASAD, 2016).

Auroville, established in 1968 in the South of India, an eco village has consequently become a world-class leader in its compressed-earth building methods, harvesting of rainwater, plant-based sewage treatment and solar and wind energy (Sol, 2016). Similarly in Odisha's Koraput Valley community-centric eco-tourism is gaining ground by bringing the benefits of sustainable livelihoods to the local tribes of the region. Local Paraja tribe youth running hospitality and tourism operations; pre-schools to educate children; women manufacturing handicrafts and traditional jewellery; skill development scholarships for youth; age-old tribal culture and pristine landscape; food served on tree leaves; food festivals; yoga sessions and earning a reasonable profit from these operations, all exhibit the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the area inspiring others (Pal, 2016).

### **Institutions**

Institutions are a critical dimension of sustainability and without institutional change we will not move purposefully toward sustainability (Dovers & others, 2001; Kant & Berry, 2005). TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) University, for example, is the first of its kind in India dedicated to providing the most advanced education and training in Sustainable Development, Energy Studies, Bio-sciences, Environmental Studies, Management and Public Policy and offers an MA programme in Sustainable Development Practice, an MBA programme in Business Sustainability and other courses in the fields of energy, environment, environment law, public policy, climate science, renewable energy (Jain, Aggarwal, Sharma, & Sharma, 2013; TERI University, 2016)□ .

EHS+ (Environment Health and Safety) Centre of Institute for Sustainable Communities in India aims to provide factory managers with information and tools to improve environment, health and safety conditions for workers and surrounding communities. These trainings focus on increasing resource efficiency, enhancing gender equity and empowerment, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Institute for Sustainable Communities, 2017). Milaap, a social enterprise that enables people around the world to give a loan to the working poor in India. It is the world's first and currently, the only online micro lending platform that enables non-Indians & non-resident Indians (NRIs) to make a loan to

India. As of 2017, it has raised a total of Rs. 117.98 crore paving a new and sustainable way of raising money (Milaap, 2017).

### **Companies**

Indeed, the quest for sustainability is already starting to transform the competitive landscape, which will force companies to change the way they think about products, technologies, processes, and business models (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009). Sustainability thinking is driving innovation – innovation in technology, production, marketing and innovation in business models (McPhee, 2014).

ITC Hotels have revolutionized the hospitality sector by providing the "the greenest luxury hotel chain in the world" (Economic Times, 2016) with all of its eleven premium luxury hotels LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certified, the highest certification level. The world's first as well as largest LEED Platinum certified hotel belongs to ITC Hotels. Furthermore ITC Grand Central in Mumbai consumes 48% less water than LEED's standard for large size luxury hotels. ITC Maratha in Mumbai consumes 22% less energy than the USEPA's (United States Environment Protection Agency) benchmark for large size luxury hotels (ITC Portal, 2016). Hindustan Unilever Limited, the FMCG giant in India has devoted itself to operate and grow its business in a socially responsible way. Its blueprint for sustainable growth, Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) has three big goals viz. improving health and well being; reducing environmental impact and enhancing livelihoods (Hindustan Unilever Limited, 2016). Tata Sustainability Group aims to guide, support and provide thought leadership to all Tata group companies in embedding sustainability in their business strategies and demonstrating responsibility towards society and the environment (Tata Sustainability Group, 2016).

### **Government**

(Saha, 2009) reports that local governments play a vital role in fostering sustainable development. The Indian Council of Sustainable Development is a non-government initiative on advice, guidance and analysis on integrating environmental concerns with development; laying specific emphasis on removal of poverty and ensuring equitable growth of income and wealth in India.

Cochin International Airport at Kochi, Kerala, the first airport in the world to run completely on solar power (Menon, 2015). It was started as a small project with just 400 panels on its rooftop in 2013. With its success it has now be scaled up to a full-fledged solar power plant powering the airport with 46,000 solar panels generating 12 MWs of power. It is expected to recoup its development costs of \$9.5 million in less than six years and produces much more energy than needed by the airport and as such banks the rest with the state power grid for rainy days and night-time requirements.

The Smart Cities Mission from 2015-2020 of the Indian government is a significant step towards building sustainable infrastructure. These initiatives with the use of digital and information technologies, urban planning best practices, public-private partnerships, and policy change attempt to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'smart' solutions like assured water and power supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, robust IT connectivity, e-governance and citizen participation along with safety of its citizens (India.gov, 2016).

The Lighting a Billion Lives (LaBL) initiative launched by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) aims to replace kerosene-based lighting with cleaner, more efficient, and more reliable solar lighting devices. LaBL with a local entrepreneur trained by TERI and its partner organizations provisions to establish micro solar-enterprises in un-electrified or poorly electrified villages providing clean energy access to the community for an affordable fee. The initiative has reached to around half-a-million people in 1860 villages across 22 states of India (Climate and Development Knowledge Network, 2013).

#### Non-Government Organizations

Sustainability is an absolute necessity, and attaining it needs a comprehensive role of NGOs (Kong, Salzmann, Steger, & Ionescu-Somers, 2002). Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, to exemplify, was established in 2009 to assist India in transcending towards a future of sustainable energy by advocating policies that promote energy efficiency as well as the increased generation of renewable energy (Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, 2014). LEAD (Leadership for Environment and Development) in India, established in 1991 as a result of the Rio Summit on Environment and Development is a network of professionals and organizations engaged to the cause of development that is environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically viable. The LEAD Network has a repertoire of highly successful leaders, working on complex local, as well as global, environmental and development issues who go through a comprehensive Leadership program with it for one year and graduate to become LEAD Fellows. Currently LEAD has about 3000 Fellows internationally, spread over 90 countries across the globe including Anglophone West Africa, Brazil, Canada, China, Commonwealth of Independent States, Francophone Africa, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, Southern & Eastern Africa, USA and UK (LEAD India, 2014). Similarly Centre for Environmental Education (CEE), based in Ahmedabad was set up in 1984 to promote environmental issues and try to develop solutions for them. It aims to create environmental awareness in the communities and conducts widespread environmental education and training programmes through a very vast network. They have also taken up projects related to conservation of biodiversity and eco-development (EduGreen, 1999). Development Alternatives, based in New Delhi, established in 1983 works towards designing options and promote sustainable development through programmes of economic efficiency, equity and social justice, resource conservation and self-reliance in the entire nation (Development Alternatives, 2011). World Wide Fund for Nature, popularly known as the WWF was set up in India by WWF International in 1969. It aims to promote conservation of nature and environmental protection as the basis for sustainable and equitable development (WWF India, 2016).

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