

Ethics and Environment

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Concerted actions of the people, community at large, Environmental Organizations, the Corporates, the Construction and Manufacturing industry and the Government can contribute to limit the declining trends for the preservation of natural resources leading to sustainability in Environment.

Man, Animal and Nature are mutually dependent. Man depends on Animals and Nature's endowments for his sustenance in the planet. For thousands of years, these three entities were in balance and in equilibrium. However, during the last hundred years, rapid increase in human population and rising consumption per person have led to heavy pressure on animals and Nature. Thousands of animals and plant species have become extinct. Forest cover and pasture land have shrunk. Air and water bodies have been heavily polluted. Non-renewable energy resources are declining fast. Soils are heavily eroded and desertification is reducing land available for agriculture and forestry. These dangerous trends, if they continue at the present pace, may endanger human existence in the planet.

The present adult generation, who are responsible for such destruction of environment have realized to some extent the need for reducing consumption, pollution and exploitation of natural resources. United Nations Organizations and National Governments are taking a number of measures to arrest deterioration and to maintain sustainable development.

In this context the concerted actions of the people, community at large, Environmental Organizations, the Corporates, the Construction and Manufacturing industry and the Government can contribute to limit the declining trends for the preservation of natural resources leading to sustainability in Environment. Ethics in the utilization of natural resources by humans at every level play an important part to achieve the desired objectives. Environmental Ethics makes us to respect, appreciate, protect and regenerate environment. Each culture has its own perceptions, beliefs and Value

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systems derived from its natural surroundings which in turn govern the interaction with the environment. This is the first in the series of articles on Ethics and Environment.

Environmental Initiatives at International Level

United Nations Conference on Human Environment - held in 1972 at Stockholm, Sweden, represented by 114 Nations, stressed the importance of preserving and enhancing human environment. UNEP was set up to organize global environment and planning. World Environment Day is celebrated on 5th June every year in various parts of the globe and by various organizations in commemoration of this important Conference.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development - It is also known as Rio Earth Summit, held at Rio De Janeiro in Brazil, in June 1992, represented by 178 Nations and over 100 heads of States and 1000 NGOs reached major agreements on :

- a) Principles of sustainable development
- b) Bringing a halt to climatic change by reducing Green House Carbon (G.H.C.) emissions and stabilizing G.H.C. concentration followed by Kyoto Protocol of 1997.

Kyoto Protocol

In December 1997, representatives of many nations of the world assembled in Kyoto (Japan) and a protocol was drawn up to stabilize the Carbon Dioxide at 1990 levels by the year 2010 and achieve a subsequent reduction of 5% by 2015. This protocol was ratified by many countries, but the major

defaulters U.S.A. and Russia are yet to sign. Russia has recently agreed to ratify and with her participation the percentage of acceptance would be 55 and the Kyoto protocol would become effective. If these are implemented by all signatories, global warming could be controlled. This is a positive step towards SUSTAINABILITY.

United Nations Conference on September 25, 2002, at Johannesburg, South Africa - The need and implementation of Sustainable Development - Deepening poverty and degrading environment - Production and use of natural chemicals for better human health and environment were the issues discussed. India's main concern was food security for its below poverty line population and our viewpoint was also taken up in the discussion. The W.T.O. agreement and its effects on the livelihood of poor farmers of the country were also a concern for the country.

US-led Methane to Market Relationship

On November 16, 2004, the ministers from India, Brazil, Russia, China, the US, and nine other countries signed the US-led Methane to Market Relationship - an initiative to capture the emission of the greenhouse gas methane and use it as a fuel. Second to carbon dioxide methane is the most important gas, the levels of which are to be contained to minimize global warming. The goal of the partnership is to capture 9 million tons of methane a year by 2015.

Present Scenario

In spite of the above initiatives taken at the International levels the present state of

Environment of the Planet Earth is far from satisfactory as brought out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climatic Change (IPCC) in the year 2007. It is important to understand the seriousness of the Climatic Change problem if we are to appreciate the need for global action to combat it. Most of the observed increase in global temperature since the mid 20th Century is very likely due to observed increase in human induced Green House Gases (G.H.G.) concentration, says Sri R.K. Pachauri, the Chairman of the I.P.C.C.

Projections of average global temperatures by the end of this century range from a best estimate at the lower end of 1.8 and at the upper end of 4.0 degrees C. Climate change will not proceed in a smooth and linear manner, and there is already enough evidence of an increase in intensity and frequency of heat waves, droughts, floods and extreme precipitation events (perhaps similar to what occurred in Mumbai in 2005) adds Shri R.K. Pachauri.

Other problems are associated with the melting of glaciers and overall scarcity of water across the world. The problem of sea level rise would have serious implications not only for various parts of our extensive coastline, but also in our neighbourhood - in Bangladesh and the Maldives.

Agriculture in India will also be significantly affected by climate change. The effects of

warming are being observed in the form of decline in productivity of certain crops, such as wheat. The problem of rain-fed agriculture on which a large number of lives are dependent in this country is particularly important since adverse conditions arising out of changes in precipitation and water availability would affect the livelihoods of almost half a billion people. Given the fact that even if the concentration of GHGs were to be stabilized today we would still have to encounter climate change for several decades, this country as well as other regions of the world will have to adapt to climate change to minimize risk. Against this backdrop, it is essential for the global community to stabilize the earth's climate by stabilizing the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere.

There is the need for India to be counted among nations that seek stringent mitigation of GHG emissions because India is in several respects one of the countries likely to be seriously affected by the impacts of climate change. India would also gain a position of moral and political leadership by doing what it takes to be part of a global solution. India's principled stand of asking developed countries to take the first steps in mitigation remains valid, but inaction to establish a pattern of sustainable development in this country would carry a heavy price. It is becoming clear that emulating the example of the developed nations is not only flawed in a global context but also harmful for our own future.

"Mind pollution is more dangerous than environmental pollution."