

Redefining Development

RECESION is receding globally but the pace is said to be slow and among many limiting factors, environment is becoming one major. This is due to the increasing realisation that it is high time to review our development approach and this thrusts on us a responsibility to re-visit our future strategy.

The issue that needs to be raised is whether we should continue to focus on the current development approach or sustainability of the ecosystem, which is threatened due to lopsided development, should also have an equal space in our plan. The past focus of planners on economic development only has largely caused the depletion of fundamental resources which made human life miserable.

The true economic processes must be learnt from the age-old rural economy. There was a striking balance between production and consumption and all economic intricacies were addressed within the community. Any surplus produce was shared with other communities for their respective products and services.

Greed causing depletion of resources

There was a balance between development and natural resources. Genuine prosperity can only be enjoyed through the primary production of forest, water, food and soil, which form the true capital of any state.

Our greed has, in fact, been a major reason for resource depletion. There are a few examples that need to be quoted here. None of us had ever thought that water will be sold in bottles. This is roughly a business of more than Rs 1,000 crore today.

Drinking water, which is a fundamental resource, has been commercialised today. Billions of bottled water lay in shops hampering the natural cycle. The currently stored water would have otherwise irrigated millions of tonnes of food. This resource was unfortunately poorly managed. A better quality of water would not have encouraged commercialisation of this resource. The days are not far when other basic commodities, considered to be essential for life, will also be commercialised. This is greed and an unscrupulous approach towards natural resources. Since it is a matter of our survival, we should not allow this to happen and should resist the tendency. We are deliberately ignoring this fact and unfortunately are becoming a victim of the same.

We have not created any mechanism to measure the status of our natural resources periodically. We have also not laid any growth rules for these resources in our economic development plan or gross domestic product. Our lopsided economic development strategy has suddenly brought us to a dilemma. We must know that there can be a control on the curse of industrialisation but we cannot escape from nature's tyranny as the recovery of resources is difficult or next to impossible. Thus, there must be some measure to check the gain/ loss of natural resources periodically for future.

Another important natural resource where we have long back crossed the limit is soil. There is no soil in the country left without being tainted by chemical fertilizers. The latter have been highly subsidised by the government to get higher productivity. The result is with us now. Many fertile lands in the country have been transformed into chemical grounds. Food hazards due to an intensive chemical use are also reported often. It is again commercialisation of soil (chemicals) that has caused this jeopardy.

The forests, which constitute the essential environment of any village and nation, are vanishing. This resource that helps the overall delivery of water, air and soil is threatening human existence. There is no serious plan to conserve or develop this resource.

Every physical effort is mechanised

The lust for luxury basically began with urbanised culture. Every physical effort was mechanised and energy for the same was exploited from nature. The unabated exploitation of natural resources has continued for a long time and no serious assessment has been done to review the depletion of resources. Forests, water and soil have been the mainstay of our life. Their constant depletion has been observed and factors for the same are also well known, but largely neglected in the lust for gaining industrial benefits.

We are at present passing through an ecologically unproductive economic phase. We should immediately focus on the productive development of reserves i.e. soil, water, air. Such capital can only ensure us an ecologically sound economy. A prudent approach will bring a balance between nature and human activities, rural and urban, and between need and comfort. This will only be possible when we also measure through some indices the growth of resources periodically. An "annual gross environmental productivity" of natural resources can only serve such a purpose.

The 80 per cent population of the nation which has a heavy dependence on water, soil, forests etc is not covered under the current GDP ambit. It is important to quote here that a majority of the population depends and survives on and draws its livelihood from the local natural resources. Agriculture, horticulture fisheries and other local community trades largely depend upon these resources. Unfortunately, due to the growing paucity of these resources, various trades have suffered major setbacks and migration has become more intense.

There are no parameters to define the status of water, soil, fodder and fuel needs of a community, whether these have been addressed adequately or neglected. A majority of villages in the country depend on natural resources for the above needs. Many villages have just been vacated mainly because of the loss of forest and water resources. There is as such no data available with any development agency to determine the current status of these resources and the health of the country's environment.

Socio-ecological disasters waiting to happen

Development needs to be redefined. Should we place industrialisation, real-estate business and infrastructure as development indicators? Such a development model cannot be enjoyed, particularly when the corresponding loss of resources is not acknowledged. There must be a parallel analysis which should measure the periodical growth of life resources i.e. water recharging, forest cover, soil enrichment and air quality. Extreme physical achievements for comfort have already hampered our ecological cycle. Constant negligence will lead to irreparable losses and other socio-ecological disasters.

It has to be commonly understood that an economy, be it local or national, cannot sustain without the ecology. The changing climate issue is the most important example today. Our agricultural productivity today cannot be forecast as climate shift makes it unpredictable. There are records available on this issue. Off-time heavy rains have jeopardised many natural productive cycles of flora. This slow change needs to be understood seriously. Constant negligence otherwise would take a large toll in future.

The nation has never thought of having ecological growth indicators that can point out our gross environmental productivity, indicators that can highlight water, soil, air conservation measures and projects that have been undertaken by the nation to recover the same. These indicators can collectively display our inclusive growth in development.

The environment of a state is the prime need as it can only enable us to check our lopsided development approach and will relieve us from growing environmental stresses. Thus planners must be forced to produce "gross environmental productivity" figures annually besides the gross domestic product data. This will also

help us decide the ecological status of the country. High GEP and GDP may point out rationality in our development plan and will be an example for the developed and developing countries which are constantly engaged in unproductive debates on the economy and ecology of the globe.

Source :Tribune