■ INDIA

Ill-founded growth leads to environmental disaster

The lack of long-term planning that has characterized India's governments is seen clearly in its demographic growth and increasing CO_2 emissions. The recently proposed "missions" (or sustainable development initiatives) are not only insufficient but their effectiveness, however minimal, remains uncertain. Recent amendments to the heavily criticized 1894 Land Acquisition Act are unclear and fail to address the problems in the legislation. The Government must fully support renewable energy sources and integrate climate risk management in development planning. If it does not, all future scenarios for the country will be murky.
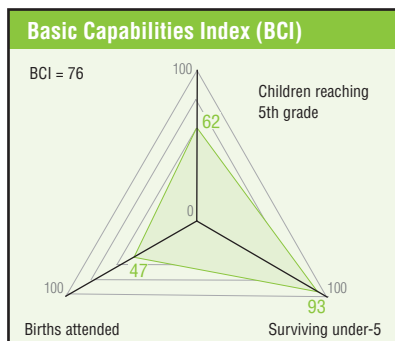
Social Watch India
Himanshu Jha

The country faces several social challenges, such as inequitable economic growth, poor natural resource management, the exclusion of the majority of the population from decision making and from access to basic services, unabated environmental degradation and failure of institutions to sufficiently integrate environmental and social development considerations into economic policy objectives. Over the last decade it has been hit by a series of natural disasters that have severely damaged the economy and depleted natural resources, threatening the livelihoods of millions. Currently, 77% of the population lives below the poverty line.

The country is especially vulnerable to natural disasters, including cyclones and annual monsoon floods. If we add poor resource management, inadequate infrastructure and unsustainable practices, the country's future looks bleak. Global warming has already had an impact: increasing cyclonic activity, rising sea levels and ambient temperature and precipitation changes are being reported and will worsen in the near future. Rising temperatures in particular will change the ice and snow patterns of the Himalayas, which will have a huge impact on the region's ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as on the livelihoods of millions of people.

It is estimated that the country's population will increase to about 1.2 billion by 2016,[1] putting enormous pressure on natural resources, so water shortages, soil exhaustion and erosion, deforestation and water and air pollution are expected.
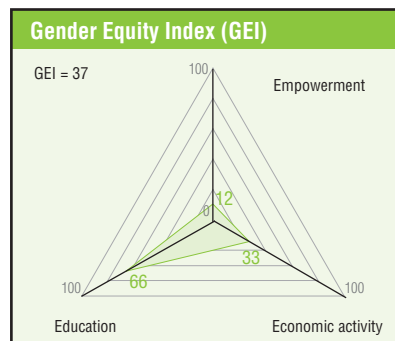
The missions

Climate change is due largely to the unsustainable consumption patterns of rich industrialized nations, which are responsible for more than 70% of total global CO_2 emissions and consume 75-80% of the world's resources, while containing only 25% of the global population. Whereas an Indian citizen emits an equivalent of less than 2 tons of carbon per year, a citizen of the USA emits

Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)

BCI = 76

Children reaching 5th grade — 62

Births attended — 47

Surviving under-5 — 93

an equivalent of more than 20 tons.[2] Yet despite its relative poverty, India's economy is already affecting the climate. In 2008 India was the world's fourth-largest emitter of CO_2.[3]

The Government has proposed a National Action Plan to curb CO_2 emissions, and is also outlining the 'Missions' programme, a set of sustainable development strategies to serve as the country's domestic climate legislation in the immediate future. Yet, these policies are driven more by adaptation imperatives and unsustainable development models than by a realistic and appropriate approach to environmental sustainability. In fact, India, along with the G77 and China, expects the developed world to agree to a 40% reduction in CO_2 emissions for 2020, so that developing countries get the appropriate "atmospheric space" required to develop.[4]

The projected missions include a National Solar Mission (to generate 20,000 MW of solar power in 2020), a National Mission for Sustainable Habitat (focused on energy efficiency in residential and commercial buildings, and on improved solid waste management), a National Water Mission (to improve water management and river conservation), a National Mission for a Green India (focused on reforestation), and a National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture.

Gender Equity Index (GEI)

GEI = 37

Empowerment — 12

Education — 66

Economic activity — 33

The first to be launched was the solar mission; the others have been approved but not yet implemented, and draft mission documents are prepared for all of them. However, it is still not clear if the Government will propose these as its main strategy for reducing the country's CO_2 emissions. The Minister of Environment and Forests has already claimed that India will enact a mandatory fuel efficiency standard by 2011 and aspires to have 20% of its electricity supplied by renewable energy by 2020. The Government also aims to reduce the country's energy intensity by 15-20% within the next 20 years and increase the area under forest or tree cover by 15%, for carbon sequestration. This will result in more than a 9% deviation compare to the business-as-usual scenario, as calculated by local NGOs.[5]

The impact of large-scale infrastructure projects

There is dire need to reconceptualize large-scale infrastructure projects within a sustainable development framework, and to look at the existing policy and regulatory framework for such projects. "From the standpoint of defining a sustainable low carbon trajectory of economic development, it is important not to see large scale infrastructure projects restrictively as something to be contained for the benefit of the environment and the society."[6] Among the current policy initiatives are the National Action Plan on Climate Change and National Appropria-

1   Wikipedia, *Environmental issues in india* <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_issues_in_India>.

2   See: *Citizens Report on Governance and Development 2010*, (Sage Publications, 2010), <socialwatchindia.net/publications/citizens-report/citizens-report-on-governance-and-development-2010-executive-summary>.

3   Wikipedia, *List of countries by carbon dioxide emissions*, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_carbon_dioxide_emissions>.

4   *Citizens Report on Governance and Development*, op.cit.

5   Ibid.

6   V. Upadhyay, *Infrastructure Regulation For the Low Carbon Economy: Survey of Key Issues and Concerns, India Infrastructure Report*, <www.idfc.com/pdf/report/Chapter-1.pdf>.

te Mitigation Action Plan for low carbon energy, the 2003 Electricity Act, the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, the 1981 Air Act for emission regulation and the National Green Tribunal Act, to name a few.

Despite the existing regulatory framework legal challenges to pollution issues have been weak. As a 2002 Planning Commission evaluation of the State's Pollution Control Boards stated: "Non installation of abatement mechanisms by the polluting units is a direct consequence of the absence of any effective punitive and deterrent mechanism in case of non-compliance."

Another study notes that most of India's Environmental Acts and Rules are procedural and lack clear policy guidelines. Their approach to pollution focuses on prevention rather than enforcement of existing legislation.[7] Moreover, in most cases infrastructure projects are handled through non-judicial processes and are increasingly resolved by contracts and legislative or executive means. A review of India's National Highway Authority projects found that contractors do not integrate environment management into their plans, and also that there is almost no voluntary adoption of good environmental management practices.[8]

Water supply and sanitation

Despite the efforts made by the Government, water supply and sanitation remains inadequate. In 2008, only 54% of the urban population had access to sanitation services including connection to a public sewer and to a septic system, and pour-flush latrines and ventilated pit latrines, while in rural areas the number dropes to an alarming 21%.[9]

Institutions in charge of operating and maintaining the water supply and sanitation infrastructure are often seen as inefficient, and in most cases lack needed financial resources. Even so, the situation is gradually improving: in 1980, the rural population's rate of access to sanitation services was estimated at 1%, and grew to the above-mentioned 21% in 2008.

THE ISSUE OF LAND ACQUISITION

Land acquisition by the State has become a major issue. The Government has taken some 147 million ha of agricultural land for urban development, and 2.81 million ha are no longer fertile due to industrialization and urbanization. The Ministry of Commerce has taken over 200,000 acres for development projects, while development projects have displaced up to 21 million people.

The 1894 Land Acquisition Act, enacted during the colonial period, remains the primary legislation in operation. It allows the Government to acquire private land for public purposes, including residential facilities for poor people and those affected by natural disasters, but economic compensation was based on estimated agricultural land values, and has gradually depreciated, making it extremely difficult for the former owners to acquire new land.

The Land Acquisition Act has been criticized by scores of activists, politicians and economists. An amendment was introduced in 2007, accompanied by a Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, but both had failed to be implemented by 2009, so they were reframed and finally reintroduced – by the Government's National Advisory Council – in May 2011. This amendment redefined the concept of "public purpose" as being either for defensive purposes or for any project which is "useful for the general public"; however, the definition of "public purpose" remains unclear.

Pollution in the Ganges and illegal mining

The River Ganges, considered holy by Hindus, is heavily polluted, filled with chemical wastes, sewage waters and human and animal remains. One of the causes of this is illegal mining, specially in the Haridwar district, where most of the illegal stone crushing and mining operations are located, plundering the river bed and polluting its waters with debris and chemical waste. Mining for sand and stone (mostly for construction purposes) has increased the risk of flooding and caused severe deforestation.[10] Illegal mining has generated controversy throughout the country. Some of these cases (e.g., the mining concession in Andhra Pradesh) involve members of the Government.[11]

Recommendations

The threats to sustainable development make it urgent that the Government take the following steps:

• Make a detailed assessment of state-level energy efficiency potential to support the efforts of Central Government;

• Support renewable energy through tax holidays, subsidies, better market conditions, soft loans from financial institutions, etc.;

• Integrate climate risk management into existing national development plans;

• Establish a multi-donor coordinating committee in order to facilitate climate actions on mitigation and adaptation;

• Make scientific climate information available and accessible to communities, in order to inform their analysis, and support the identification of sustainable solutions, while ensuring that Effective Disaster Risk Reduction remains based on local knowledge, and built upon local level participatory analysis of vulnerabilities and capacities. ▪

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7   K. Priyadarshini and G. K . Omprakash, "Compliance to Environmental regulations: The Indian Context," *International Journal of Business and Economics*, Vol.2, No.1 (2003): 9-26

8   Videh, op.cit.

9   Wikipedia, *Water supply and sanitation in India,* <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_supply_and_sanitation_in_India#cite_note-JMP-0>.

10 NDTV, *Exposing the illegal mining in Haridwar,* (16 June 2011), <www.ndtv.com/article/india/exposing-the-illegal-mining-in-haridwar-112580>.

11 Wikipedia, *Illegal mining in India* ,<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_mining_in_India>.