



Human Rights and Sustainable Development

By

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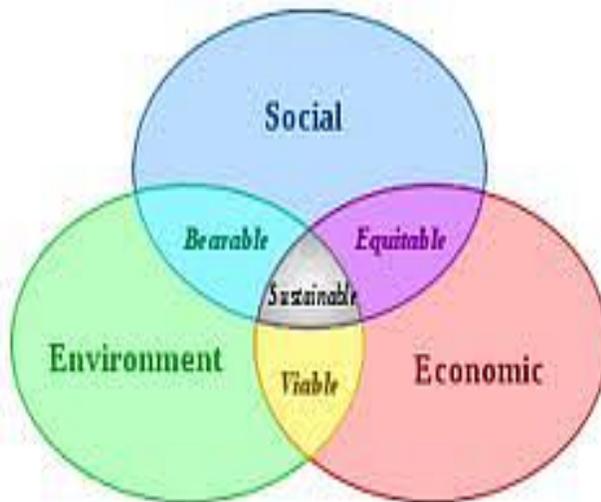
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Dear Friends,

In this blog we shall discuss with you the links between Human Rights and Sustainable Development (SD). In a very simple terms, access to basic human rights like food, shelter,

education, energy, healthcare, voice etc. for the entire mankind on Mother Earth (Captured by the term 'Equity') is an essential prerequisite for continued economic development (Economy), while retaining the essential balance of our natural environment (Ecology). Thus the principal theme of SD is to retain the balance between equity, ecology and economy.



Another easy way to remember this triad (equity, ecology and economy) is to think in terms of people, planet and profit respectively. The concept of equity essentially revolves around people, ecology is all about our planet Earth and the driving force of all economic activity today is the profit motive.

Let us go back in history to 1948, when the entire world was still recovering from the shocks of the Second World War. The League of Nations was dissolved, and the United Nation was formed in 1945, along with the Security Council. Everybody agreed on one thing, there should not be any third World War. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the then US President proposed in the UN that every human being on Earth should have a set of well defined 'Human Rights' irrespective of her / his background like nationality, political belief, religion, race, etc. under all circumstances including war and other calamities. She was inspired to propose these universal 'Human Rights' after witnessing the suffering of common citizen on both sides of the WWII. This is how the UN HDR (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Universal-Declaration-of-Human-Rights>) was adopted in December 1948 with no objections but a few abstentions.

You may ask a question here, 'What is the link between Human Rights and Sustainable Development'? Let us explore this point a little. The two fundamental tenets of UN HDR are human dignity and indiscriminate. Consider for example the compulsion for open defecation that so many villagers and urban slum dwellers face every day. In modern days, these practices are certainly not dignified. Women in particular are worse off, as they have to wait for dark hours. In

addition, open defecation on this scale leads to the spread of infectious diseases, which may not leave out the rich. AMMA gives a simple example. Suppose I am living on the 11th floor of a high-rise building, and there is fire in the ground floor. If I think that I am safe, I am sadly mistaken. Similarly on a global scale, when we remove the forest cover in the Amazon delta or in Indonesia, the effects of global warming are felt all over the globe. This is why basic wellbeing of everybody everywhere is a primary pre-requisite for sustainable development. As we shall see later, affluence is the primary driver of the present non-sustainable development.

The basic human rights include right to food, drinking water, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, livelihood etc. As another example, consider non-availability of safe drinking water, leading to so many water borne diseases. Sooner or later, the disease would catch up with the rich as well.

As a last example, consider non-availability of clean fuel for cooking. We have WHO data showing the large number of deaths due to pulmonary (related to lungs) diseases, caused by inhalation of smoke regularly.

These are some instances of humanity's interactions with the environment; and the linkage between equity and ecology. The very nature of global linkages ensure that no one is safe anywhere, if someone is affected somewhere.

These general concepts were beautifully captured in the Doughnut Economics model for sustainable development proposed by Ms. Kate Rayworth in 2012. We shall discuss them later, but let me quote some figures from her report. Globally, nearly 900 million people face hunger; 1.4 billion live on less than \$1.25 a day, and 2.7 billion have no access to clean cooking facilities.

For now, it would suffice, if each one of us who have the resources live a less affluent lifestyle, and extend a helping hand for the under-privileged. My favorite example is to support a child's education through the Kendra. If one person can save just Rs. 5 per day, (by smoking one less cigarette for example), he can support a child's education for a full year. Yes, this is precisely the calculations!

Wishing you all sustainable development.

