



## A Safe and Just Space for Humanity

By  
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Dear Friends,

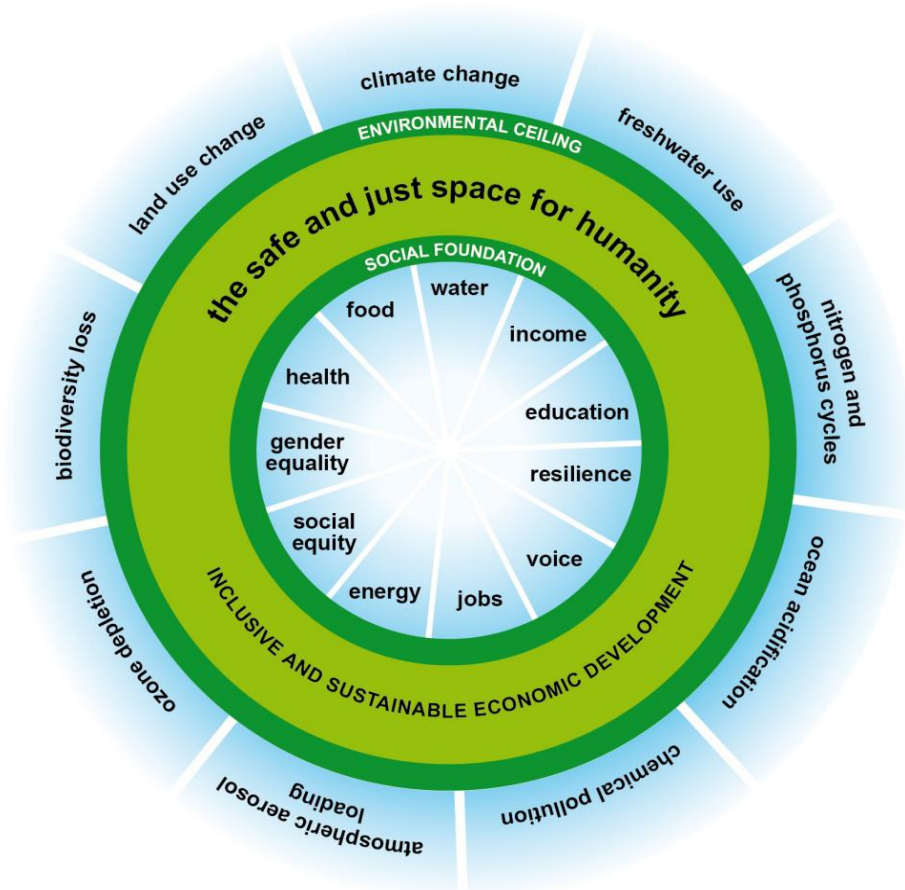
Greetings to all of you for the festive seasons, with wishes and prayers for universal wellbeing, the ultimate aim of Sustainable Development: Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhawantu.

This month, we shall try to get a basic insight contained in the 'Doughnut Principle' that was presented at the UN Rio+20 conference, in 2012 as a way forward, after the 15-year period of MDGs expired on December 31st, 2015.

Basically, this principle draws our attention to two limits for sustainable development that must be adhered to. One is derived from the concept of planetary boundaries, we discussed in our blogs in 2018. This forms the ceiling or the roof, under which we must remain.

The other limit is derived from the basic concepts of human rights, and the need for ensuring everybody in the world has access to basic needs such as: food, shelter, clothing, education, livelihood, and healthcare. Everyone should also have a certain degree of social equity and a voice in deciding one's own future.

As we have discussed the planetary boundaries and their importance at great length, now it's our turn to discuss the concepts of social equity and human rights and their links with sustainable development. This question of the link between sustainable development and social



equity, poverty alleviation and human rights has been a puzzle for me for quite some time. I could not really connect, for example, how the poor people in sub-Saharan Africa might affect sustainable development globally. I searched for the answer, and found that the response depends on its source. The most charitable response (if I may say so), from the developed world may be as under:

“Sustainable development, meaning economic growth that is environmentally sound, is a practical necessity. Environmental goals cannot be achieved without development. Poor people will circumvent environmental restrictions in their desperation for land, food, and sustenance”.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, the well renowned environmentalist reported as above.

On the other hand, Professor David Barkin, Mexico City: Center for Ecology and Development wrote:

“Investigations show that when given the chance and access to resources, the poor are more likely than other groups to engage in direct actions to protect and improve the environment.

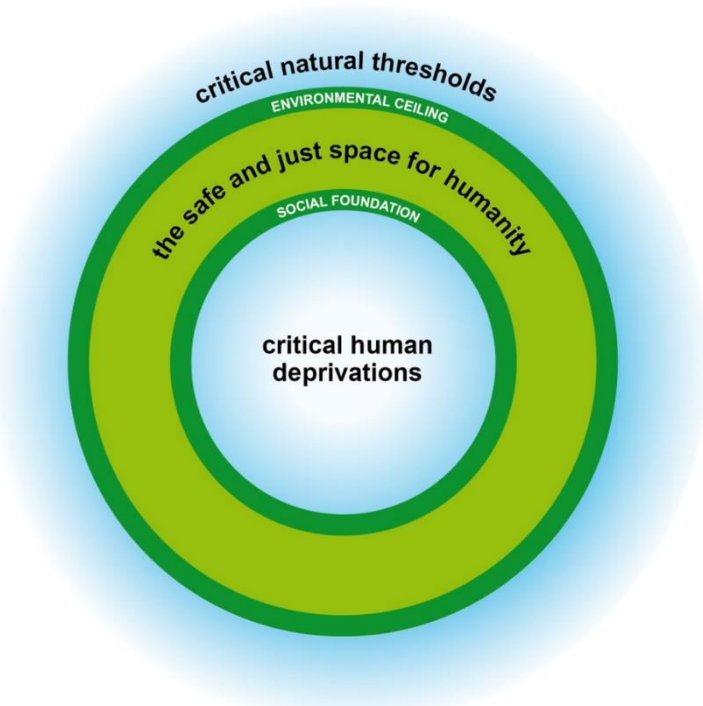
While the poor often survive in scandalous conditions and are forced to contribute to further degradation, they do so because they know no alternatives.

The concern for biodiversity, in its broadest sense, encompasses not only threatened flora and fauna, but also the survivability of these human communities, as stewards of the natural environment and as producers”.

Whichever way one looks at it, it becomes clear that poverty and sustainable development cannot co-exist. This is where the ‘Doughnut Principle’ comes in, specifying the ‘floor’ above which all efforts for sustainable development must be focussed. Please see the figure below.

The word ‘safe’ refers to the ceiling. We should for ever strive to stay within the planetary boundaries, forming the ceiling. The word ‘just’ refers to the floor. All human living under severe human deprivations must be helped to get the basic minimum for survival. The next figure below provides the details:

Inclusive and sustainable economic development is possible if and only if we remain within this space. The figure looks like a doughnut or our delicious ‘vada’, and that’s how it got its name.



A recent news item in BBC showed a family in Finland demonstrating how to live sustainably. Another one showed how the indigenous people feel about the currently raging forest fires in Amazon forests. Both are examples, from the two ends of the spectrum (rich and poor); of how people who are truly worried about our environment, respond.

The recently concluded SDG Summit of the UN (September 24-25, 2019) adopted the following resolution among others:

“We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We also resolve to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities”.

Source: Zero draft Political Declaration of the SDG Summit 17 May 2019



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jnSKDCV4cw>

In another video, an indigenous leader in Brazil says, ‘I will give my last drop of blood to save this forest:



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-49448135/i-will-give-my-last-drop-of-blood-for-this-forest>

I got my answer, sustainable development is not possible, without ensuring that the poor get a due share of all available resources to live. Hope you also got a flavour of it.

Wishing happy and sustainable living for all.

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhawantu.

