

Green Initiatives : Challenges In Sustainment

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INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that awareness among citizens on '*Environment*' is created with a view to stress the importance of little steps taken can make a big difference to our surroundings. In the past few months, we have heard of few major impacts on the environment by way of radioactive material landing in the scrap yard and creating fatality due to radiation in Delhi. Furthermore, a major oil spillage occurred in one of the British Petroleum's oil rigs near coastal America, the leakage of which is still to be plugged. The collision of two ships off the Mumbai Coast and spilling of oil into the sea is another major disaster. The Japanese nuclear plant - the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant developing leakages due to natural calamities like the tsunami, etc. These events have made a major impact on our ecosystem, and it has clearly exposed our unpreparedness for dealing with such eventualities. Many lessons need to be learnt from these episodes. Climate Change has assumed so much of global significance as the Global warming is felt by one and all and its implications are affecting the common man in many ways. There have been droughts, floods and failure of monsoon. The variations in temperatures across the globe are fluctuating to unprecedented levels year after year.

But there is not much of awareness among the common citizens as to its root cause. Even if the cause is known, there is no attempt being made to rectify the situation. In this context, the role of NGOs and of course, the role of the Government is significant. At the global level, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) plays a critical role on climate change by coordinating with member nations and by initiating many steps towards the improvement in the Global environment.

The main cause for global warming is burning of fossil oils and emission of Carbon- di- oxide, methane, etc. and curtailment in these emission levels will make a significant improvement in the climate. The practical impediment is the implementation part, which will require huge spending in controlling these emission levels. The Copenhagen agreement made the initial breakthrough towards Climate Change when United States, China, and India took major initiatives and signed a legally non - binding agreement. Many criticized the summit as a failure, as out of about 192 member countries, there could be no unanimous accord, or legally binding accord. Nevertheless, it was appreciated by others; that it is better to have some agreement than no agreement. Viewed from that perspective, the Copenhagen summit could be considered as a partial success as subsequent to the summit, about 55 countries pledged to cut carbon emissions by certain levels by 2020. These 55 countries have also submitted their respective targets, which taken at face value, workout to 78% of global emissions from energy use. Though the conference did not end up making these targets legally binding, it was a welcome initiative, considering the practicalities each country is facing and the need to find a balance between economic growth and moving towards climate-change targets requiring huge cost. India has committed for 20 to 25 % reduction in emission levels by 2020, over the base year of 2005, while China has indicated a cut of about 30 % and US by about 17%.

BACKGROUND OF THE COPENHAGEN SUMMIT

The UN Sponsored Copenhagen accord was preceded by a conference held in Kyoto, which ended up in reaching an accord signed by many developed countries. Since the Kyoto Protocol will lapse by 2012, the Copenhagen Accord assumes significance. It is to be lauded that EU, which set a target of about 30% reduction is already on the verge of achieving its target, while others are way behind. This provides hope that all these concerted global pressures will certainly yield results if there are genuine efforts by countries. Under the Kyoto Protocol, a mechanism named Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) was created and under this project, firms can get Certified Emission Reduction (CER) credits, which are tradable. It is to be lauded that 505 out of the 2194 projects pertain to India, and have the potential to earn 639 million CER credits. The current value of 1 CER is Euro 12. It is only hoped that the project CDM is not allowed to die with the lapse of the Kyoto Protocol, which is due to end by 2012. The afore-mentioned summits

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have created a divide between developed and developing countries, as each blamed the other for the climate mess. Any reduction in emission level is possible only by huge spending, which the developing countries were not in a position to accept as it affects their growth. Each country was worried about their immediate or short term objective of achieving economic growth than contributing on long term issues such as climate.

CANCUN CONFERENCE 2010 AND DURBAN CONFERENCE 2011

The conference at Copenhagen 2009 initiated the setting up of a Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the same was stressed upon in the Cancun 2010 conference also. However, only in Durban 2011 conference, the governing instrument for GCF was agreed upon. The countries insisted that developed nations should contribute mainly for the fund as historically, they were the main culprits to the climate change. In the end, the conference only created an empty shell – a fund with no money. The Durban conference agreed to wait for four more years to finalize a deal and nine years to act on it! This makes it all the more important for countries like India to make it clear (in the next round of the conference at Qatar in 2012) to the rest of the world that the time is running out, and tough actions are needed. They should also make it clear that the right to development should not be mistaken for the right to pollute.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS A COUNTRY CAN HAVE ON GREEN INITIATIVES?

1) Legal Compulsion / Regulation : For example, when city buses were polluting the capital city of Delhi, a Supreme Court directive necessitated all city buses to switch over to CNG.

2) Policy On Recycling Of Products : The Government is toying with the idea of bearing 50% of capex for e-waste recycling facilities on public private partnership mode as indicated by Jt. Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests, on May 26, 2010 in CII sponsored meet on National forum on e-waste. In many countries, the producers have the obligation to collect the used waste products as part of their marketing arrangement.

3) E- Waste Disposal Methods : India currently being a world power in IT/ITES/Electronic /telecommunication sector also needs to bring in regulations to manage e-waste generation. India has a high subscription rate of new mobile users and is still expanding. It is believed that India generates about 4 lakh tones of e-waste per annum and is likely to touch 8 lakh tones per annum by 2012. Many countries have adopted for recycling methods as part of the e-waste management. It also encourages specialized e-waste disposal firms. There are many private firms who have started handling e-waste disposal with latest technical know how, and with the approval of regulating bodies.

4) Regulations On Environmental Compliances – Incentives – Disincentives : Now, automobiles like cars (4 wheelers) have to conform to Bharat IV (equivalent to Euro 4) emission norms and outdated vehicles are not allowed in the market, as a consequence of which, Maruti 800 vehicles are out of major cities in India. There are companies in India who have voluntarily opted to get themselves certified under ISO 14000, even though statutorily, it is not mandatory. They will be better off once the legal regulations become effective at a future date and more over, they get a competitive advantage with such certification right away.

5) Alternate Forms Of Energies Are Replacing Coal : There is encouragement to use renewable energies like solar, wind energy, etc. Considering India's energy security needs due to its fast pace of economic development and the need to sustain or improve its growth, the nuclear deal has been opted for, even though India is not a signatory to the Non - Proliferation Treaty. Nuclear energy is also considered as a clean energy as it is not obtained out of combustion of fossil fuels, and it is sustainable . Of course, India needs to bring in improved and sophisticated methods to handle and to dispose nuclear waste that is generated.

6) Reduction In Import Of Fossil Oils: Reduction in import of fossil oils is imperative as crude oil prices have touched \$ 109 per barrel (May, 2012). It creates a great impact on our spending as the prices have crossed the \$ 100 per barrel mark. This aspect should create discipline among the users to curb consumption and help the country to devote our spending on other priority areas.

7) Awareness Creation Among Public Is Essential : For example, April 22 is observed as the “*Earth Day*” and most of the global cities switch off their lights symbolically to create an awareness and appreciation among the public about the earth's environment. Similarly, 5th June is celebrated as the “*World Environment Day*”. Many green initiatives

events like taking out rallies to create awareness or tree planting etc. are carried out on that day.

8) Becoming Energy Efficient Is Pertinent : For example, Hewlett Packard Company has set a target to bring down global energy use by 20% by making all products and services energy efficient and all its operations in facilities worldwide energy efficient by instituting energy efficient practices in 2010.

9) Waste Minimization And Waste Recycling : India is already a signatory to the BASEL convention, and the need of the hour is that it encourages innovations in re-designing of electronic items with a view to prevention or minimization of e-waste generation. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to strengthen the regulations/ monitoring mechanisms for the safe disposal of hazardous waste materials to avoid incidents like the one when radioactive materials from the University of Delhi landed as scrap in the Delhi scrap market and caused a radiation hazard.

10) Prevention Of Misuse Of Forest Produce, Increasing The Forest Cover : India has about 25% of the geographical area under forest cover and it is critical that the status is improved or at least sustained by initiating steps to prevent acts leading to forest degradation.

11) Lifestyle Modifications, Mass Transportation Models, Sharing/Pooling Of Resources : This aspect of lifestyle modification can literally contribute to faster restoration of climate degradation, but is the most difficult to implement. This so because it is concerned with the human mindset, societal influences, pride, fashion, etc. It is not practical to suggest to society currently to forego driving a car and instead, opt for cycling. But someone needs to set a trend so that others can follow. It might take some generations to realize the goals as educating a society is effective, but we have to exhibit patience for the results.

12) Encouragement Of Green Marketing, Green Products, Provision Of Incentives For Such Products : Business firms need to make substantial investments in R & D in developing low carbon technologies, which will also bring about competitive advantage to the firm. According to market researcher Mintel, about 12% of the U.S. population can be identified as True Greens (consumers who seek out and regularly buy the so-called green products). Another 68% can be classified as Light Greens (consumers who buy green products sometimes). Green marketing is all about environmentally safe products and will involve taking the society back by a few years. This is because we created technologies to make our life convenient in the short run, and it has had its impact on the environment. To rectify the damage that has been done, we now have to go back to our olden days. We have to repose our trust in our past lifestyles by resisting the temptations of succumbing to the promises of our current technological advancements.

13) Industry - Academia Partnerships : TERI, the not- for- profit research forum that focuses on sustainable green environment also initiated setting up of a university, TERI University, which was granted a Deemed University status in 1999, with the goal to spread knowledge on sustainable environment.

14) Fiscal Incentives/Disincentives : The Government is already mulling with an idea to make CSR contributions tradable like trading of carbon credits.

Any new initiative has to start from the HOME front if it has to be successful. Once the awareness is created, a normal household can make a significant contribution towards the climate initiative. It is revealed that Co₂ emission levels from a typical household are as follows:

Automobiles	: 33 %
Hot water	: 20%
Heating	: 13%
Cooking/washing	: 5%
Lighting	: 3%
Refrigeration	: 2%
Television	: 2%
Cooling	: 2%
Heat retention	: 1%
Laundry	: 1%
Others	: 16%

At the household level, any reduction from the above will substantially reduce emission levels. Some initiatives at the national level can also be of use. It is estimated that by 2030-2032, our oil import will be at 750 million tones / year and coal imports will be at 1300 million tones. The opportunities for savings here are huge, especially when the crude oil prices have exceeded \$100 per barrel in 2012 . The savings can be ploughed back into green initiatives to sustain economic growth as well as sustain climate initiatives.

Also, the Government can set aside an increased share of its GDP to encourage energy efficiency in old/new buildings, renewable-energy technology, hybrid vehicles, rapid mass transportation, minimizing wasteful consumption, etc. to name a few opportunities for sustainable efforts. Adam Werback, a premier thought leader on business initiatives around sustainability in his book "*Strategy For Sustainability*" observes that merely making efforts towards "green" are not enough as they are not sustainable. In order to be sustainable, he recommends firms to have green initiatives to be part of the strategies in order to be sustainable. The firms need to display their commitment in green initiatives in order to distinguish themselves from "green washing" firms. Werback has even developed a tool for mapping the firm's opportunities called "STaR" (an analysis of Society, Technology and Resources) whereby, firms can test the relevance of their green strategies and opportunities available due to changes happening in Society, Technology and Resources. Based on this analysis, the firm is expected to develop a North Star goal (it is an overreaching business goal of the firm) to guide the whole organization towards executing a strategy that is sustainable. Companies like Procter & Gamble, Hilton have initiated many steps in setting their own goals. For example, Hilton set for themselves a target that all their hotels around the world will work towards achieving a reduction of energy consumption by 20%, reduce Co₂ emissions by 20%, reduce waste output by 20%, and reduce water consumption by 10%. Similarly, P&G set a five-year goal by when they will sell \$20 billion worth of sustainable innovation products, reduce Co₂ emission, energy use, water use and waste by 10% and deliver 2 billion liters of clean water to children around the world. A highly soluble alkyl sulphate (HSAS) was innovated and incorporated in their TIDE detergent, replacing the traditional anionic surfactant when it was established as a dirt removal agent, and cleaning is more effective in hot water than it is in cold water. In view of this, the HSAS was invented, which has proven the effectiveness of the detergent in both - cold water and hot water. This benefitted the consumers in conservation of cold water, which otherwise would have been wasted.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is nature's response to the human society, for what it did to nature over centuries. Now, the cycle has to be reversed, and the whole society owes a duty in rectifying the acts that have led to such a degradation. Whether it is a small step or a leap forward, it has to happen and there is no escape.

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