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**Imperatives of Sustainability and
India's Development Path**

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1. Editorial: Imperatives of Sustainability and India's Development Path

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For several years, India has been experiencing rapid economic growth and structural changes that are attracting attention of the academia, policy makers and administrators, both at national and global level. An analysis of the recent trends is important in order to understand and evaluate India's current developments in the context of the goals of equity and sustainability and their implications for future. Unfortunately, much of the current literature is concerned with the dynamics of economic growth and the possibility in maintaining it over the coming decades. Importantly, there has been a significant boost in the growth rate since the early 1990s and particularly after 2003-04. The major focus of the development strategy of the government has been promoting GDP and foreign trade. Now, there are serious apprehensions that the growth rate in GDP and foreign trade may not be able to withstand the global economic crises and encounter a setback, the GDP growth for the year 2011-12 being placed at below 5 per cent only by the International Monetary Fund.

An increasing importance of the federalist state is an important pillar in India's strategy for economic development. Indian federalism in the initial years after Independence was dominated by the central government. The launching of the measures of economic liberalization in the early 1990s created a strong interest in decentralised governance. It, to a certain extent, resulted in economic independence of the federal states. The states are now trying to achieve relatively higher economic growth through engagement of private entrepreneurship, both from within and outside the country, utilizing this opportunity of greater independence. Consequently, one sees a growing competition among the states or regions in recent years. One of the arenas of this interregional competi-

tion is foreign direct investment capital. Consequently, the economic cooperation of India is being managed, to an increasing degree, by the federal states or regional and city level authorities, with lesser role for the central government.

The 'shine' of high economic growth of India, however, is being impaired due to persistence of a high degree of poverty, widespread corruption, regional imbalance, unequal opportunity among social groups, overuse of water and other resources, environmental degradation and problems linked to climate change. A part of the problem is due to the high degree of heterogeneity and an absence of strong institutional system to provide a framework and a sense of discipline to participatory democracy within the country. The present volume, however, limits the scope to address the problems linked with sustainability of India's economic growth in future years focusing on the environmental parameters.

In the context of sustainable development, the emerging economies like India have argued that the current problems of environmental degradation confronting the global ecosystem are the outcome of the historical emissions and since even their present emission levels in per capita terms are very low, any equity based principle for setting caps on energy use should exempt them. Furthermore, an immediate curbing of emissions would be incompatible with meeting the challenge of poverty reduction and other MDG targets. They, therefore, plead that there must not be any externally imposed cap on their emissions and that they should be allowed to pursue carbon resilient strategy through their own programmes. India, for example, has committed not to allow its per capita emission level to go up above that of the industrialised countries.

It is unlikely that this ethical and normatively grounded position, which constituted the basis for Kyoto Protocol, would carry significant weight in future international negotiations, given the extreme inequity in political and economic power. On the other hand, the principle that the children are not responsible for parent's sins, particularly when the fact that action was a blunder or sinful was not the common knowledge in parent's generation, has started getting mileage. It would, therefore, be more realistic to accept 1990 or 1980 as the cut-off year for working out the cumulative accumulations, for designing a compensation system or providing development space that should currently be made available to the developing countries.

What is the hope for achieving the goal of limiting the temperature rise to 2 degrees and what is the road map for that? This question becomes particularly important when we hear many head of the states shouting from their nationalist platforms that the “life standards of my countrymen and women are not negotiable”. It should be clear that given the technological choices and allowing is significant breakthrough in this in the next few decades, the goal of increasing carbon efficiency by 800 per cent, necessary for achieving the goal, can be met only through changes in life style.

There is no legal mechanism at global or national levels to question or resist the temptation of eliciting the maximum yield from the earth system and build ecological resilience through resource management, backed up by low carbon growth strategy and adaptive governance system. Importantly, many among the developing countries are willing to link their current emission with that of the industrialized countries. This cap can indeed become operational in near future provided the developed countries agree to cut down drastically their current level of emissions. However, it is evident that if each country makes such conditional commitments, the business as usual scenario would prevail due to game theoretic considerations, and the global temperature may well go beyond the level of 2 degree, making life and livelihood particularly in small islands and coastal areas unsustainable within the next few decades. The danger that the development strategies pursued by a large number of countries can force the earth system onto a high growth path which is economically sustainable for a long time but progressively diminishing levels of resilience has turned out to be real.

It would be dangerous for the developing countries like India to be complacent with regard to environmental future by relegating the responsibility of saving the world from environmental disaster on to the developed countries, especially because the less developed countries have a greater stake in it. Given the urgent necessity to usher in fiscal and financial reforms to achieve the goal of common but differentiated responsibility incorporating the principle of equity, for all countries, it would be important to determine quantitatively the differential exposure and impact of developmental strategy on climate change parameters across different countries through rigorous empirical research.

The crucial question is whether the science of resilience has come up to a stage when it can make an impact on policy-making and practices of

environmental management. Going by the contemporary scientific research, it is possible to assess resilience in any system or subsystem with a reasonable level of accuracy which can provide a basis for designing the development strategy, management practices and legal framework at national and international levels. The science of resilience has expanded beyond ecology to reflect current social, economic and political concerns.

The need of the hour is to devise a system of incentives for the countries to go in not just for environment friendly technologies but life style changes, spatial reorganization of activities and restructuring their growth pattern. For putting the sustainability concerns within the framework of national or international law and governance, it is imperative that the degrees of vulnerability are determined at the country level without any ambiguity by taking into consideration nature's capacity to withstand and absorb anthropogenic impact. It would be important to unambiguously determine the dimensions of vulnerability and measure quantitatively the impact of the economy, society and system of governance on the vulnerability parameters with a reasonable degree of precision through rigorous empirical studies. Such studies based on scientific evidence would have to be undertaken at regular intervals, as technical knowledge regarding the parameters of vulnerability, environmental costs and benefits advances over time.

The emerging economies like India can make a strong case for adoption of a strong protocol and ensuring its compliance by the developed countries if they can demonstrate that the opportunity of exemption and accessing the adaptation funds are being utilised for restructuring their development strategy to reflect the concern for ecological sustainability. The success of the approach would depend on undertaking multi-disciplinary research studies based on robust database and transparent methodology.

The proposition that the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change should receive priority assistance has been contested on the ground that this would make the recipient countries complacent with regard to adaptation measures, conflicting with the principle of distributive justice over time. It would, therefore be important to analyse adaptation/mitigation strategies that are being designed in these countries at different levels. The efforts and seriousness of the countries in adopting mitigation and adaptation strategies adopted at national and local levels

need to be brought to the public domain. It is important that all the rapidly industrializing countries, on their own or through regional institutions, periodically review not only the state of the environment but also the strategies being adopted and the options that are opening up.

The present volume attempts to assess the relevance of this new paradigm of sustainable development in finding solutions to India's problems. India has announced a national strategy of sustainable growth, along the lines of sustainability defined by the Millennium Development Goals. It has been considered necessary to acknowledge and implement the tenets of the paradigm of sustainable development within the federal polity of the country. The country is endeavoring to work out an integration of three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e., ecologic, economic, and social, in the interests of the long term growth perspective. Of course, it must be conceded that a perfect balance between the three dimensions is the ideal case. There are, however, serious difficulties in designing such a strategy and implementing it in a socio-economically diverse country such as India, with active popular movements questioning state policies through diverse methods. Notwithstanding that, it would be important to take major steps in the direction leading toward this ideal balance. It is the belief of the authors and editors of the volume that serious research studies are needed to help in building India's strategy for sustainable development in a dispassionate and transparent manner so that they can have greater social and political acceptability. The volume attempts to make a modest contribution towards that objective.

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