



Integrating environment and development

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Sustainability considerations have always been integral to Indian culture, and have now become intrinsic to the national planning process. Following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the National Council for Environment Policy and Planning was set up within the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. This Council later evolved into a full-fledged MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forests) in 1985. Today, the MoEF is India's apex administrative body for environmental policy making. In 1976, environmental concerns were incorporated into the Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Rights and Duties.

In 1992, the MoEF brought out the Policy Statement for Abatement of Pollution and the National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development. These are aimed at developing and promoting initiatives for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Environmental Action Programme was formulated in 1993 with the objective of improving environmental services and integrating environmental considerations into development programmes.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) explicitly recognizes the synergies among environment, health, and development, and identifies as one of its core objectives the need for ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilization and participation of people at all levels (Planning Commission 1997).

The Approach Paper to the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–07) links economic development and poverty with environmental degradation. As the poor are dependent on nature for their livelihoods, they are highly vulnerable to natural calamities, environmental degradation, and ecological disasters. Any economic development, which destroys the environment, will aggravate problems of poverty, unemployment, and disease. Among the worst affected are women, who have to travel great distances to collect fuelwood, fodder, and water.

The Approach Paper emphasizes that while India must target a high rate of economic growth, it must simultaneously strive for enhancement of human well-being. This includes adequate levels of consumption of food and other consumer goods, access to basic social services (education, health, drinking water, and basic sanitation), expansion of economic and social opportunities for all individuals and groups, reduction of disparities, and greater participation in decision making. This is the key challenge for the Indian economy at the start of the new millennium.

*‘What of thee I dig out,
Let it quickly grow over
Let me not hit thy vitals,
Or thy heart’*

Atharva Veda

Targets set for India’s Tenth Plan period (2002–07) and beyond

- Growth in gross domestic product at 8% for the period 2002–07
- Reduction of poverty ratio by 5% by 2007 and by 15% by 2012
- Providing gainful high-quality employment to the addition to the labour force over the Plan period
- Admittance of all children in school by 2003; completion of five years of education by children by 2007
- Reduction of gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by at least 50% by 2007
- Reduction in the decadal rate of population growth between 2001 and 2011 to 16.2%
- Increase in literacy rate to 75% within the Plan period
- Reduction of infant mortality rate to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 28 per 1000 live births by 2012
- Reduction of maternal mortality ratio to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 1 per 1000 live births by 2012
- Increase in forest and tree cover to 25% by 2007 and to 33% by 2012
- Sustained access to potable drinking water for all villages within the Plan period
- Cleaning of major polluted rivers by 2007 and other notified stretches by 2012

Source Planning Commission (2001)