

## **Pollution Free Environment; A Sustainable Approach For The Indian Economic Development**

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Environmental and pollution related aspects are normally discussed in the context of health and societal aspects only. This is correct also as society by a large directly barely gets effected in this context. It does not mean that this problem is merely confined to such limited area. The impact is huge and gigantic for the economy of the developed and developing countries. It doesn't mean that the under developed countries will not have any impact. The impact will be on them also but they have very less to lose.

The environmental factor exacts costs on the economy with additional health expenditures. It leads to the increasing number of lost working day and decreased productivity and production. The agricultural aspect also gets affected due to high ozone concentrations and slow plant growth which resulted into reduced crop yields.

As one of the world's fastest-growing economies, India aims to reach the five-trillion-dollar mark over the next few years. But according to the World Bank, the country lost over 8.5 percent of its GDP in 2013 due to air pollution. And the latest research from the Indian Statistical Institute shows that reducing pollution would help the country gain billions.

The hazard has reached to a level that 15 of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India. As far as exposure to unhealthy air is concern, some studies revealed that nearly 700 million Indians are sufferer of it.

The Indian Statistical Institute exposed in one of its report that If India could cut air pollution to zero, every Indian would be willing to pay about \$300 per year to cut that risk. The total benefit would be about \$300bn or \$400bn per year.

Some of the countries have taken the threat and opportunity seriously and also have acted on it. An example of China can be taken the way it has initiated to fixing the country's poor air quality. They made it a official mission of the government.

The country puts air pollution not as part of an environment agenda, it is part of the national planning process. In this process the fight against the pollution and poor air quality automatically and inevitably became the economic agenda.

The need of the hour for India is to adopt the same pathway. India undoubtedly require to integrate air within development policy. It is imprudent to separate the pollution as specific and environment at large from the economy or development policy of any nation. This is

the time when India should also reassess that what extra can be gained or achieved if the environmental issues are effectively handled.

Apart from the economy the impact of the issues cannot be avoided. More specifically some time developing countries including India hesitate in confessing that by a large the issue is directly related with the health problem of the citizens. The government has consistently maintained there is no direct correlation between air pollution and deaths though air pollution has been linked to a third of all lung cancer deaths in India. There are increasing number of doctors and various reports categorically indicates that there is a clear link between air pollution and mortality.

The governments should be honest and should not correlate it with the obligations and other consequences if they accept that there is enough data available to substantially prove the fact air pollution kills. Actions should not await the results of scientific studies because that may take 10, 20 years and by that time countries would have lost millions of people unnecessarily to this menace.

In 2015, WHO and OECD estimated that the economic cost of premature death and disability from air pollution in Europe is close to USD 1.6 trillion. Air pollution has already taken and continues taking its toll on the economy in several ways: it costs human lives, it reduces people's ability to work, it affects vital products like food, it damages cultural and historical monuments, it reduces the ability of ecosystems to perform functions societies need and it costs money in remediation or restoration.

Reducing emissions is a wise long term investment that contributes to several development goals and ultimately will yield substantial benefits.

Strong policy action must be taken. According to projections by the OECD the population-weighted average concentrations of PM<sub>2.5</sub> the finest, most harmful particles are projected to increase threefold by 2060 if ambitious action is not taken. Premature deaths from being exposed to pollution are projected to increase up to five times. This is a staggering number, and represents up to a third of global projected deaths in 2060. Incidences of illness will similarly worsen. Lost working days will increase significantly, to levels equivalent to more than six million people missing work on a daily basis by 2060.

Market costs to the Indian economy are projected to increase eightfold to over USD 280 billion by 2060, this is more than 7% of India's current GDP (in 2005 Purchasing Power Parities exchange rates). The social costs from mortality due to air pollution would increase 15 to 33 times, as both the number of premature deaths and the value per death increase.

Air pollution is a global local problem: it is a global phenomenon with local environmental and human health impacts, particularly in high-density urban areas. As such, public policies to reduce emissions must be undertaken both at the national and local levels. International co-operation on limiting concentrations and implementing the best emission reduction technologies is essential for countries to put into motion solutions and policy tools to bring down air pollution. Urban planning and transport have a central role to play here.

Air pollution is also strongly linked to another global problem: climate change. This week at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP23) in Bonn, policymakers face decisions on their level of commitment in combatting climate change. Taking a closer look at its link with air pollution could provide impetus for immediate policy action. It would prevent higher numbers of premature deaths, and have a positive impact on the economy too.

Collaboration between businesses, civil society, and governments is essential, as we need government and policymakers to help pave the way for changes to happen more easily and efficiently, to reduce risk and enable more businesses to confidently take steps in the right direction.

As drivers of innovation, and both polluters and solution providers, business leaders are in a key position to lead the change we need to see in policy through pioneering case studies emphasizing the benefits of tackling air pollution for sustainable economic growth.

For this reason, the Confederation of Indian Industry is mobilizing business leaders in India to commit to reducing air pollution. Leaders will convene via the CEO Forum on Air Pollution in India to learn from each other, and build multi-sectoral partnerships to drive cross-sectoral action. Regular interaction between industry leaders and policymakers will spur the process of decoupling economic growth from air pollution, ultimately helping in the design and implementation of new regulations to control air pollution from specific sectors.

## References and links

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