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# UNIT 4 INDIA'S INITIATIVES

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

identify the dilemmas around population and sustainable development debate in the Indian context; and

identify the key aspects and critical issues of sustainable development in India by focussing on the challenges and initiatives in the areas of education, food security, employment and environment.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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*“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”*  
Rio Declaration, Principle 1 (UN 1992).

The Rio Declaration agreed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as well as the Programme of Action agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994 places humans at the center of development. Both declarations recognize and emphasize the need to promote human well-being and higher living standards, but at the same time they stress the need to do be in harmony with nature. To this end, both political declarations suggest policies that promote more sustainable patterns of production and consumption, which is the hallmark of the green economy, and policies that address population dynamics.

It was a significant moment in the history of India as well when it became a signatory to the Cairo Declaration which brought about huge shift in our approach towards addressing a rising concern over *population explosion* - a term used in the mid 1960s to signify an unprecedented growth in population due to rapid fall in the death rates. It was a moment of alarming concern as India, being a young democracy, was grappling with many challenges like poverty, unemployment, epidemics and illiteracy. The apprehension was that 'population explosion' would only augment these problems manifold.

In this unit we will be studying about the initiatives taken up in India in the field of achieving sustainable development in the era of growing population.

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## 4.2 POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT: THE STORY SO FAR

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This obsession of associating population with numbers got reflected in the beginning of the five year development plans in 1951-52. A national programme was launched that emphasized on 'family planning' with a projection of reduced birth rates to stabilize population to a level that could be economically sustainable. A Family Planning Research and Programme Committee were constituted in 1953 that widened the perspective of family planning beyond the narrow sense of birth control or controlling numbers. As mentioned in the report: "The functions of a Family Planning Centre would include sex education, marriage counselling, marriage hygiene, the spacing of children, and advice on such other issues(including on infertility) as necessary to promote welfare of families."

However this comprehensive view was reduced to a mere target based approach influenced by the Chinese experiment of 'one child norm', grossly misinterpreted and implicated in the Indian case as the 'two child norm'. Although the programme was integrated with maternal and child health during Fourth Plan (1969-74) and further with health and nutrition in the Fifth Plan (1974-79), it eventually turned to interventionist contraceptive programmes with targets of male and female sterilization. This approach faced a major setback in the 1970s when the government sponsored a mass sterilization campaign, in which illiterate people were duped or paid to have vasectomies (permanent birth control for males) or salpingectomy. (removal of the fallopian tubes in females). It was a highly unpopular scheme during the 'Indira Gandhi' regime.

It was not until 1990s that a paradigm shift came with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that critiqued the target based approach and suggested the significance of 'gender equality' and reproductive rights and choices of women to address issues related to population growth.

The most important contribution of this forum was a change in the nomenclature and association of population with demography and birth control to a richer concept of sustainable development based on individuals at the centre of development strengthened by pillars of human rights, gender equity and equality.

As discussed in the previous units, the central aspect of ICPD was to provide a balanced approach integrating three crucial elements: population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. Unlike previously, where factors like contraceptive prevalence rate was a deciding factor to track population control, new factors came to be recognized, like, quality of care, informed choice, women's empowerment and accessibility to reproductive health services.

#### **4.2.1 The Dilemmas Around Population and Sustainable Development Debate**

These were welcome changes for India as well, considering the panic that was catching up regarding population explosion which could destabilise the nation's economy. To begin with, India accepted the 'reproductive health approach' to population and even added an important component of 'child health' thus acquiring the now popular nomenclature 'Reproductive and Child health' (RCH).

The landmark policy that changed the Indian approach to population issues for all times to come was the historic National Population Policy in 2000 based on ICPD. It brought the most critical issues of human development, gender equality and equity, adolescent reproductive health and rights at the forefront that redefined the government's approach towards population growth.

The National Population Policy, 2000 began with an affirmation that "...the over-riding objective of economic and social development is to improve quality of life that people lead, to enhance their well-being and to provide them with opportunities and choices to become productive assets in society." NPP was gender sensitive, and incorporated a holistic approach to health and education needs of women, adolescents and the girl child. It further pointed out that "stabilizing population is not merely a question of making reproductive health services accessible and affordable, but also of increasing the coverage and outreach of primary and secondary education, extending amenities like sanitation, safe drinking water, housing, empowering women with enhanced access to education and employment."

The policy opened new avenues of some very positive interventions by the government. It did not limit itself merely to reduction of numbers but create provision for quality services (mentioned above) and supplies, information and counselling and offer contraceptive options. This would be pursued through access to comprehensive health care in which women would feel enabled to make free informed choices around methods of fertility regulation without any coercive imperatives. It further envisages 16 promotional measures that may facilitate implementation of the appropriate intervention at community levels.

This has been a slow and difficult process, especially in the rural areas where men have a greater say in these matters than women. There is also a visible reluctance on the part of state governments to adopt the RCH approach in totality with a special focus on empowerment of women in rural and urban areas in the context of decision making and freedom of choice. One of the major failures and challenges to sustainable population stabilization strategy has been a dangerous link formed between a 'small family norm' and hence a natural preference for a male child leading to an alarming rise in sex-selective abortions to eliminate female foetuses. This development has been a highly pressing issue resulting in falling child sex ratio both in rural and urban areas. This trend is a result of a dangerous alliance between private clinics equipped with the latest technology to diagnose sex of the foetus, medical practitioners who support this and men and women steeped in patriarchal beliefs that a small family ideally should be an 'all son' family. Of course this mentality has deep rooted connections with our patriarchal society which considers the girl child to be a burden, a financial liability, inferior to the male child. It has origins in unequal gender relations that are all pervasive in public and private domains where women are deprived or duped into making decisions that are detrimental to their own well-being. Any approach to population policy that seeks sustainable development needs to first break such unholy alliances between culprits in private and public sectors and most importantly raise consciousness among women to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health like abortion, spacing between children and maternal health. This would need an integrated approach involving the government agencies, health sector and civil society groups.

Thus the issue of population needs to be brought outside the domain of demographic boundaries and redefine it in terms of sustainable development where the question is not of how to manage the numbers. Instead it is about how to direct and guide population growth towards a sustainable development that intrinsically entails ideas of human development, gender equality and a healthy community life.

Recent developments in the land, water, and energy sectors have been wake-up calls for global food security: the stark reality is that the world needs to produce more food with fewer resources, while eliminating wasteful practices and policies. Demographic changes, income increases, climate change, and poor policies and institutions are endangering natural resources in ways that threaten food security as well as the environment. Food security is now inextricably linked to developments in the water, energy, and land sectors. Some of the challenges before us are rise of energy prices affecting farmers' costs for fuel and fertilizer, increasing demand for biofuel crops, land scarcity in terms of quantity and quality, etc. The scarcity of farmland coupled with short-sighted bio energy policies has led to major foreign investments in land putting local people's land rights at risk. In addition, water is scarce and likely to become scarcer with climate change.

To change this trend, more holistic strategies are needed for dealing with land, water, energy, and food, and they are needed soon. To manage natural resources sustainably, it is important to secure land and water rights; phase out inefficient subsidies on water, energy, and fertilizers; and create a macroeconomic environment that promotes efficient use of natural resources. It is important to scale up technical solutions, particularly those that conserve

natural resources and foster more efficient and effective use of land, energy, and water along the value chain. It is also crucial to tame the depleting factors that affect natural resources for example, addressing demographic change, women's access to education, and reproductive health; raising incomes and lowering inequality; and mitigating and adapting to climate change through agriculture.

### 4.3 THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is an index designed to measure the level of hunger in countries and regions. The index is to trace levels of hunger, reasons of hunger, sections of societies most affected by it and some possible ways to alleviate it. It comprises of three main components: Undernourishment, Child underweight and child mortality, and providing regional and country variations for a better understanding of food security status of people.

According to the global hunger Index 2012, India ranks at the 65<sup>th</sup> positions in an overall country ranking. In spite of its higher economic growth in past few years, India has failed to improve its ranking. At this juncture, 43.5 percent of children under five are underweight (WHO 2012). Based on the 2005–06 National Family Health Survey this rate accounts for almost two-thirds of the country's alarmingly high GHI score. According to the latest data on child under-nutrition, from 2005–10, India has ranked second last on child underweight out of 129 countries—below Ethiopia, Niger, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

These figures are alarming and suggest a crisis in food security for children and the underprivileged in India. Having said that, it is also important to observe that malnutrition cannot be totally attributed to lack of food in households but many socio-cultural factors like women's low status and lack of accessibility to resources, preference in providing nutrition to boys as compared to girls, lack of nutrition in expecting mothers and so on.

Now let's assess what are the main issues that are almost imperative and needs to be discussed when we talk about sustainable development? What critical dimensions does it entail in the Indian context?

#### Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** a) Use the space below for your answer.  
 b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What was the most crucial aspect of the ICPD declaration that changed the discourse on population issues?

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- 2) Discuss the main features of the National Population policy 2000 with an emphasis on its limitations in India?

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- 3) How do you rate the current status of India on the Global Hunger Index? What according to you is a determining factor in the increasing abysmal state of hunger and malnutrition in India?

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#### **4.4 FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND INITIATIVES**

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Since past few decades, series of discussions and debates reflected through various social movements in India to expand the concept of food security, has established the idea that that the question of food security has a number of dimensions that extend beyond the production, availability, and demand for food.

There has been a paradigm shift in the concept of food security, from food availability and stability to household food insecurity, and from assessment of input measures like energy intake to output indicators such as anthropometric measures and clinical signs of malnutrition. Let's begin with a thought on what do we mean by 'Food security'? Does it simply refer to equal accessibility to some average minimum measurement of food required by an individual each day? Or does it mean availability of healthy food according to nutritional requirements to all sections of society equally? And does it take in to account the food security of the weaker members within a family structure like mothers or girls as compared to their male counterparts?

##### **4.4.1 The Concept and Components of Food Security**

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has three components, viz., availability, access, and absorption (nutrition). The three are interconnected. Many studies have shown that improvement in nutrition is important, even for increase in productivity of workers. Thus, food security has intrinsic (for its own sake) as well as instrumental (for increasing productivity) value. Food security at the national level refers mainly to availability in the country of sufficient stocks of food to meet domestic demand, either through domestic supply or through imports.

##### **4.4.2 The Status of Food Security or Food Crisis in India**

In this section we will first look at the status of food production in India followed by its implications on the availability of food to the vulnerable sections of society as studied by some agencies and Government sectors. Attainment

of self sufficiency in food grains at the national level is one of the country's major achievements in the post-independence period. After remaining a food deficit country for about two decades after independence, India became largely self-sufficient in food grain production at the macro level. There have hardly been any food grain imports after the mid-1970s. Food grain production in the country increased from about 50 million tonnes in 1950-51 to around 233.9 million tonnes in 2008-09. The growth rate of food grains has been around 2.5 per cent per annum between 1951 and 2006-07. The production of oilseeds, cotton, sugarcane, fruits, vegetables, and milk has also increased appreciably.

The experience of the last two decades shows that growth rates of production and yield have declined for crop groups/crops during the period 1996-2008 as compared to the period 1986-97. The growth rate of food grain production declined from 2.93 per cent to 0.93 per cent during the same period. The growth rate of production was much lower than that of population in the latter period. Similarly, growth rate of yields of food grains declined from 3.21 per cent to 1.04 per cent. There was also a decline in growth rates of production and yields for cereals, pulses, oilseeds, rice, and wheat (Source: CACP, Ministry of Agriculture (2009)).

#### 4.4.3 Initiatives by the Government Sector

Considering that 'poverty' and 'food crisis' are problems we inherited from the British colonial rule, poverty reduction policies have always formed an important aspect of most government programmes and five year plans since Independence.

Further, there have been many emerging issues in the context of food security in India in the last two decades. These are: (i) economic liberalization in the 1990s and its impact on agriculture and food security; (ii) establishment of WTO: particularly the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) under it; (iii) challenges of climate change; crisis of the three Fs, viz., food prices, fuel prices, and financial crisis; (iv) the phenomenon of hunger amidst plenty, i.e., accumulation of stocks in the early years of this decade and in 2008-09 along with high levels of poverty; (v) introduction of targeting in the Public Distribution System (PDS) for the first time in the 1990s; (vi) 'Right to Food' campaign for improving food security in the country and the Supreme Court Orders on mid-day meal schemes; (vii) proposal for National Food Security Law (Right to Food); and (viii) monitorable targets under the Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans similar to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty and women and child nutrition. These developments in the last two decades have provided both opportunities and challenges for food and nutrition security of the country.

First, let's begin with an overview of some general social protection measures of the government to address the problems of access to food and malnutrition. The social protection measures are basically non-contributory targeted transfer programmes to the poor and vulnerable groups.

The State has a role in terms of helping the poor in times of insecurity and in terms of ensuring minimum levels of provision to those unable to gain from the growth process. Government interventions are required to blend elements of both redistribution and insurance (World Bank 1990) in this regard. India

has many social protection programmes. The present major schemes for the poor in India fall into four broad categories: (i) food transfer like public distribution system (PDS) and supplementary nutrition (ii) wage employment (iii) self employment, and (iv) social security programmes for unorganized workers.

Focussing on the food security aspect, we shall discuss initiatives especially in this area.

#### 4.4.3.1 Public Distribution System (PDS)

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is one of the instruments for improving food security at the household level in India. The PDS ensures availability of essential commodities like rice, wheat, edible oils, and kerosene to the consumers through a network of outlets or fair price shops. These commodities are supplied at below market prices to consumers. With a network of more than 28462,000 Fair Price shops (FPS) distributing commodities worth more than Rs. 300 billion annually to about 160 million families, the PDS in India is perhaps the largest distribution network of its kind in the world. It is an important instrument of government policy for management of scarcity and for distribution of food grains at affordable prices. The nature of the scheme is supplemental i.e the scheme is not intended to make available the entire requirements of food grains of the households.

The Targeted PDS (TPDS) was introduced in 1997 and under this scheme special cards were issued to families below poverty line (BPL) and food grains were distributed at a lower price for these families compared to those above the poverty line (known as APL families). The entire population was divided into three categories – BPL (Below Poverty Line), APL (Above Poverty Line) and AAY – Antyodaya Anna Yojana (destitute). The BPL population are provided 35 kg of food grains per month at subsidized price. AAY, the destitute households (part of BPL households) are provided a monthly provision of 35 kg of food grains at specially subsidized rates (Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 for rice). About 25 million (38 per cent of BPL) people have been covered under AAY. The central government allocates food grains to different states of India based on poverty ratios. According to the central government there are around 65 million poor households in the country. States in turn distribute food grains based on the BPL list. Targeting is done by states based on 13 non-income indicators to select BPL population. If we add together the households on the states' BPL lists, there are 100 million poor households. There is competitive populism to include more households in the BPL list.

TPDS is subsidized by the central government and to some extent by state governments. The total subsidy for TPDS is distributed as follows: 18 per cent for APL, 46 per cent for BPL and 36 per cent for AAY households.

The main problem with regard to PDS is its inability to reach to the target groups in most parts of the country. PDS food grain purchase constituted only 11 per cent of the total per capita monthly food grains consumption in 2004-05. It is also marked with regional disparity as the impact of PDS on southern and north-eastern states is much better; it has hardly any impact on some of the poorest states (Bihar, Assam, U.P.).

#### 4.4.3.2 Nutrition Programmes

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched in 1975, aims at the holistic development of children up to six years of age with a special focus on children up to two years, besides expectant and nursing mothers. This is done through a package of six services: health check-ups, immunization, referral services, supplementary feeding, non-formal pre-school education, and advice on health and nutrition. In spite of its expansion in the last three decades, the impact on child nutrition and protecting the rights of the children is quite limited. The ICDS, which has been in existence for over three decades, was intended to address the problem of child and maternal malnutrition, but has clearly had limited impact. Child malnutrition has barely declined at all in a decade and a half, anaemia among women and children has actually risen and a third of all adult women were undernourished at the end of 1990s and also in 2005–06. The scheme has also had limited coverage. Therefore, the answers are increasing coverage to ensure rapid universalisation; changing the design; and planning the implementation in sufficient detail that the objectives are not vitiated by the design of implementation (GOI, 2008).

The ICDS scheme accordingly needs to be restructured in a manner that addresses some of the weaknesses that have emerged and renders it suitable for universalisation. The programme must effectively integrate the different elements that affect nutrition and reflect the different needs of children in different age groups.

#### 4.4.3.3 Mid-day Meal Scheme

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) has been revised and universalised at the primary level from 1 September 2004. Recently, the MDMS has been extended to Upper Primary School from 1 October 2007. MDMS was supposed to cover about 18 crores children by 2008–09. There are problems with MDMS with regard to financial allocations and the quality of the scheme. The Sixth Report of the Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court also points out inadequate infrastructure for mid-day meals. Of the sixteen states that sent data to the Commissioner in this regard, thirteen stated that less than 45 per cent schools have a separate kitchen.

The 11th Five Year Plan has given the following suggestions for improving the performance of MDMS: (i) MDM to be managed by the local community and PRI (Panchayati Raj Institutions/NGOs, and not contractor-driven: civic quality and safety to be prime considerations; (ii) to sensitize teachers and others involved in nutrition, hygiene, cleanliness, and safety norms to rectify observed deficiencies; (iii) to involve nutrition experts in planning low cost nutrition menu and for periodic testing of samples of prepared food; (iv) to promote locally grown nutritionally rich food items through kitchen gardens in school, etc.; (v) to revive the School Health Programme; disseminate and replicate best practices adopted by states; (vi) to provide drinking facilities in all schools on an urgent basis; (vii) to display status regarding supplies, funds, norms, weekly menu, and coverage in schools to ensure transparency; (viii) central assistance to cooking cost should be based on the actual number of beneficiary children and not on enrolment; (ix) promote social audit; and, (x) online monitoring.

#### 4.4.4 Right to food and National Food Security Bill

The Presidential Address to Parliament in 2009 indicates that implementation of the National Food Security Act will provide a statutory basis for a framework which assures food security for all. According to this proposed law, every family below the poverty line in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled by law, to 25 kilograms of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3 per kilogram. It is felt that the statutory guarantee to food with fixed entitlements to the poor would be an important step in the direction of ensuring food and nutritional security of the country. Although the ongoing 'targeted public distribution system' (TPDS) is supposed to provide subsidized food grains to the BPL population, the legislative measure may lead to better accountability by making the PDS system more responsive in reaching out to the targeted population. Since the announcement of the proposed food security law, several people have raised a number of policy level and operational issues that need to be addressed while extending food guarantee to the citizens through a statutory mandate.

The Right to Food campaign demands a comprehensive 'Food Entitlements Act' that goes beyond the narrow promise of supplying food grains to BPL population. "Aside from an overarching obligation to protect everyone from hunger, as well as to promote sustainable and equitable food production, essential provisions of the proposed Act include: a universal public distribution system (providing at least 35 kgs of grain per family); special food entitlements for destitute households (including an expanded Antyodaya Programme); consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court Orders (e.g. cooked mid-day meals in primary schools and universalisation of ICDS); support for effective breastfeeding (including maternity entitlements and crèches); safeguards against the invasion of corporate interests in food policy; and elimination of all social discrimination in food related matters. Further, the Act must include strong accountability and grievance redressal provisions, including mandatory penalties for any violation of the Act and compensation for those whose entitlements have been denied". The Right to Food Campaign argues that "any statute enacted ought to, at the very minimum, protect existing legal entitlements created by the Supreme Court orders passed in PUCV Versus UOI currently pending in the Supreme Court, and preferably go beyond". According to the draft prepared by this campaign, the Food Entitlements Act, 2009 should be: "an Act to ensure dignified economic and social access to adequate food and other requirements of good nutrition for all residents of the country, at all times, in pursuance of their fundamental right to be free from hunger, malnutrition and other deprivations associated with the lack of food."

The general view is that at the very least the RTF Act has to build on four major types of interventions: (i) nutrition schemes for children; (ii) the PDS; (iii) social assistance for vulnerable groups (e.g., pensions, Antyodaya Anna Yojana); and (iv) other interventions. The dominant view is that the present National Food Security Act proposed by the government is a narrow one. The alternative draft 'Food Entitlements Act, 2009' prepared by the Right to Food Campaign needs to be discussed and the government needs to consider the comprehensive nature of the food insecurity and malnutrition problems prevalent in the country.

Basically, we argue that Right to Food in terms of providing food and nutritional security to all is a much broader concept than the proposed National Food Security Act of providing 25 kilograms of food grains at Rs.3. Many things have to be included in order to have genuine 'Right to Food'. India is signatory to many international treaties and the Indian Constitution also indirectly refers to the Right to Food, which is obligatory for the government to fulfil. As Dreze (2004) mentions, Right to Food can be seen from three perspectives: the Indian Constitution, international declarations, as well as moral and social right. The core content of the Right to Food refers to availability, accessibility, adequacy, and sustainability.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** a) Use the space below for your answer.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What were the main recommendations of the GOI's 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan for the improvement of the mid-day meal scheme?

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2) What is the main objective of the Right to Food act? What are its main intervention areas?

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3) What are the main provisions under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)?

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**4.5 ENVIRONMENT, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

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'Sustainable development' connotes the processes by which people satisfy their needs and improve their quality of life in the present while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. For most people, a better quality of life means a higher standard of living, usually measured in terms of income level and uses of resources and technology. Inherent in the concept of sustainable development is the principle of equity: in order to achieve economic and environmental goals, social goals – such as universal access to education, health care and economic opportunity – must also be achieved (UNDP). This process is, thus not about controlling numbers but channelizing population in to a productive force through an integrated process of empowerment of people and management of resources. One such significant

move in this direction that brought several countries, international agencies and non-governmental organizations at a common platform was The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, a milestone event, effectively focussing the world's attention on environmental and development problems we face as a global community.

Agenda 21 adopted at the conference, represents a *global consensus and political commitment at the highest level* on socio-economic development and environmental cooperation [1]. The foremost responsibility for leading this change was placed on national governments. Each government was expected to design national strategies, plans, and policies for sustainable development a national Agenda 21 in consonance with the country's particular situation, capacity and priorities. This was to be done in partnership with international organizations, business organisations, regional, state and local governments, non-government organizations and citizens groups. The Agenda also recognized the need for new assistance for developing countries to support the incremental cost of actions to deal with global environmental problems, and to accelerate sustainable development.

Agenda 21 constituted a significant guideline and direction to the Indian Government that got reflected in its five year plans prominently. We have made significant advancements in various sectors like education and employment but yet to a long way if we look at sectors like maternal health, environmental degradation or water shortage. To provide an analysis of developments and shortfalls in various sectors is beyond the scope of this unit. However, it would be useful to look at the most recent steps taken by the Indian Government in the form of policies or programmes towards sustainable development.

#### **4.5.1 Education: The Future Ahead**

Education is the primary vehicle for human, economic and social development, profiting both the individual and society. It is very difficult for individuals to exercise their civil, political, economic and social rights unless they receive the basic education. The Supreme Court in Mohini Jain and Unnikrishnan cases recognized the right to education is an implied fundamental right. According to the court, education has proximate relationship with life, protection of environment, eradication of untouchability, child prostitution and other related rights. The National Commission on review of the working of the Constitution has also endorsed the similar view. As a result the parliament inserted Article 21-A to the Constitution by the 86th Constitutional amendment in 2002. This amendment also introduced new fundamental duty on parents to provide education to their children under Article 51-A to take affirmative action to full-fill the Constitutional mandate, the Parliament passed the Right to Education Act, 2009 w.e.f. April 1st 2010. The Act deals with various facets like appointment of teachers, standards, curriculum, infrastructure, community participation and responsibility of the State to provide primary education etc.

The Right to Education act states that *every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education. This Act provides the scope to pursue and complete the elementary education without any kind of fee or charges or expenses.*

Among the various criticisms made by the RTE activists like Harsh Mander and Vinod Raina the one made on the status of the implementation of the ACT so far was of utmost importance. As per the recent Economic Survey 2012-2013, 95% of schools did not comply with the RTE norm, which is also corroborated by the ASER school report card 2012. It was also evident from both the reports that the issues of adequate financing, regulation of private providers, setting up transparency and redressal mechanism have not been addressed on the ground yet.

However, on a positive note it has been reported that 77% of schools complied with the neighbourhood norms as required under the ACT and were indeed within three kilometres radius of the community. Thus in future Indian society needs to bridge these gaps with a combined support of schools, government agencies and civil society organizations to make this act achieve its objective in every letter.

#### 4.5.2 Environment: What is at Stake?

Coming to the second issue of environment, India has made some progress towards the Seventh Millennium Development Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. Forest cover has increased to 21.02 percent and protected areas cover to about 4.83 percent of the country's total land area. Reducing the energy intensity of GDP growth through higher energy efficiency will be the key to achieving energy security.

India is on-track in achieving the MDG target for sustainable access to safe drinking water. The overall proportion of households having access to improved water sources increased from 68.2 percent in 1992-93 to 84.4 percent in 2007-08.

However India, which is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has not recorded similar progress in improving sanitation facilities over the last decade. The proportion of households without toilet facilities declined from 70 percent in 1992-93 to about 51 percent in 2007-08. At current progress, the country is unlikely to achieve the target of reducing the proportion of households having no access to sanitation to 38 percent by 2015. The rural urban gap in access and use of sanitation facility continues to be very high. Sixty-six percent of rural households do not have toilet facilities as against 19 percent of urban households in 2007-08.

The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12) had set several targets to further India's progress in achieving MDG VII. These include:

- Increase forest and tree cover by 5 percent

- Attain WHO standards of air quality in all major cities by 2011-12

- Treat all urban waste water by 2011-12 to clean river waters

- Clean drinking water to be available for all by 2009, ensuring that there are no slip-backs by the end of the Eleventh Plan

- Increase energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2016-17

- Ensure electricity connection to all villages and Below Poverty Line households by 2009 and reliable power by the end of the Plan

Ensure all-weather road connections to all habitations with population of 1000 and above (500 and above in hilly and tribal areas) by 2009, and all significant habitations by 2015

Connect every village by telephone and provide broadband connectivity to all villages by 2012

Provide homestead sites to all by 2012 and step up the pace of house construction for rural poor to cover all the poor by 2016–17

Several government schemes also focus on this Goal. They include:

National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

Total Sanitation Campaign

Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), a component of the Bharat Nirman Programme and Nirmal Gram Puraskar

Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)

The erosion of India's biodiversity and natural resources is threatening the livelihoods of millions typically dependant on the forest. Recognising the close communion between communities and natural resources, the United Nations Development Programme is supporting several initiatives in the state of Chhattisgarh to help communities conserve traditional knowledge, build awareness on conservation-friendly gathering practices and help people, particularly women, access the market to sell their produce. In doing so, it aims to demonstrate a model of community based natural resource management that supports a sustainable forest ecosystem for all.

### **4.5.3 Employment: Bridging the Gaps**

India has been struggling with the issue of poverty since Independence. Though the rate of absolute poverty has declined since Independence, there are still more than 488 million poor people in India today—more than the entire pre-Independence population. And that makes India home to one third of the World's poor. Though India's economic growth is most often compared to China, in terms of poverty, India has more in common with sub-Saharan Africa—languishing in the ranks of the United Nations' human development index at 134<sup>th</sup>.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, or NREGA, promised 100 days of guaranteed employment to one member of a rural household in every financial year. Unlike previous poverty alleviation schemes, NREGA includes measures of accountability. The legislation encourages public auditing, centralising records on the ministry's website and making administration transparent. There are also consequences. If local authorities fail to provide an applicant work within 15 days, an unemployment allowance of 25 rupees per day has to be paid by the state government.

Since its founding, massive public funding has been pumped into NREGA. In 2006, it was first implemented in India's 200 most backward districts. To date, NREGA covers 619 of India's 626 districts. As of 31 March 2010, the Ministry of Finance has released 784 billion rupees under NREGA, and if the 2010-11 budget is also included, the figure jumps to 1.185 trillion rupees, making it the world's largest social welfare scheme.

The programme has provided employment to 44.1 million people, and this February, NREGA celebrated its fourth anniversary. The ultimate goal of poverty alleviation, however, is still incomplete. Until 2004, India had 456 million people living below the international poverty line. Yet after four years of NREGA, the number of poor, which was expected to decline, has increased from 456 to 488 million.

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## 4.6 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX: WHERE DOES INDIA STAND?

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The concepts of Human Development and Human Development Index (HDI) have already been discussed in previous sections. Let us figure out and assess the status of India in the latest HDI 2013. India has been ranked 136 among 187 countries evaluated for Human Development Index (HDI) — a measure for assessing progress in life expectancy, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living or Gross National Income per capita.

The Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for 2013 puts India's HDI value for the last year at 0.554, placing it in the medium human development category, which it shares with Equatorial Guinea. On the positive side, India's HDI value went up from 0.345 to 0.554 between 1980 and 2012, an increase of 61 per cent or an average annual increase of 1.5 per cent. Life expectancy at birth increased by 10.5 years, mean years of schooling by 2.5 years and expected years of schooling by 4.4 years. Importantly, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita went up 273 per cent, the report says. Interestingly, the report notes that social movements and the specific issues media highlight do not always result in political transformations benefiting the broader society.

There is a word of appreciation for India in the WDR for the country's policies on internal conflicts. "India has shown that while policing may be more effective in curbing violence in the short term, redistribution and overall development are better strategies to prevent and contain civil unrest in the medium term," the report says, referring to Operation Green Hunt launched against Maoists, which has come under sharp criticism from human rights activists within the country. The other initiatives that have been lauded are the right to education and the rural employment guarantee scheme that provides up to 100 days of unskilled manual labour to eligible poor at a statutory minimum wage. "This initiative [the job guarantee scheme] is promising because it provides access to income and some insurance for the poor against the vagaries of seasonal work and affords individual the self-respect and empowerment associated with work."

Despite India's progress, its HDI of 0.554 is below the average of 0.64 for countries in the medium human development group, and of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. From South Asia, countries which are close to India's HDI rank and population size are Bangladesh and Pakistan with HDIs ranked 146 each. But the report points out that the ranking masks inequality in the distribution of human development across the population.

The Human Development Index is like a blueprint of a country's development growth as it encapsulates three integral components of the development agenda: Income, Education and Health. In a way, this dismal index in the context of

India also reflects various problems, challenges and issues discussed in the above sections that are closely related to the three components like employment, environment, food security, population control, and women's reproductive rights and so on. The central issue that links all these elements to create a complete and a broader idea is the issue of 'sustainable development' that envisages an environment sensitive, equitable and growth-oriented model of development that is also futuristic, leaving enough for our future generations to come. But for this, India needs to break barriers of corruption, nepotism, poverty, unemployment and socio-economic inequalities, moving constantly towards new horizons of freedom, equality and justice.

### Check Your Progress 3

**Note:** a) Use the space below for your answer.  
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What is the strength of the Right to Education Act?

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2) What are the main aspects of the Eleventh year plan towards environmental sustainability?

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3) What are the main criticisms against the NREGA scheme?

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4) What is India's rank amongst other countries on the basis of the Human Development Index?

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## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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India is going through an interesting phase. Whereas some developments like passing of the right to Education Act, Food Security Bill, Land Acquisition Bill (by one house), stricter measures for the Mid-day Meal Schemes and more transparency in working of public institutions show great hope in the pursuit of sustainable development. On the other hand, economic crisis in terms of

falling value of the rupee and soaring prices of basic resources, gas and fuel, failing accountability of the our political system, increasing privatization of educational institutions are making life of common people more and more difficult.

India has never been short of progressive policies and programmes to challenge poverty, food crisis, environmental degradation and lack of education. However, an urgent need of the hour is an efficient structure and political accountability that would ensure a flawless implementation of these policies and programmes. Only then would India's tryst with destiny that began six decades ago would be worth a step.

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## 4.8 KEY WORDS

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**Global Hunger Index** : The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is an index designed to measure the level of hunger in countries and regions of countries.

**Mid- Day Meal Scheme:** The Mid Day Meal Scheme is a multi-faceted programme of the Government of India that, among other things, seeks to address issues of food security, lack of nutrition and access to education on a pan nation scale.

**NREGA** : Now known as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Act). It is a job guarantee scheme for rural Indians.

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## 4.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answers must include the following points:
  - balanced approach integrating three crucial elements
  - how different from the previous conferences
- 2) Your answers must include the following points:
  - gender sensitive and a holistic approach to health and education
  - implication of son preference on population dynamics
- 3) Your answers must include the following points:
  - The gravity of the crisis in India
  - Malnutrition cannot be totally attributed to lack of food in households.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Your answers must include the following points
  - Various action points for improving the performance of MDMS
- 2) Your answers must include the following points
  - Its comprehensive nature that goes beyond the narrow promise of supplying food grains to BPL population.
  - The four main kinds of interventions suggested for a comprehensive idea of food security.
- 3) Your answers must include the following points
  - The holistic development of children up to six years of age with a special focus on children up to two years.
  - The package of six services

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Your answers must include the following points
  - Compulsory, accessibility and beyond social/gender barriers
- 2) Your answers must include the following points
  - Mention the main targets as described in the unit

3) Your answers must include the following points

The corruption and manipulation of money ,  
ignorance of the farmers about the act itself that  
the absence of any effective grievance redressal system  
the impending anarchy

4) Your answers must include the following points

India's progress and its location vis-a-vis other south Asian countries