

Corporate Sustainability – Environmental Opportunities and Competitive Advantage **Lt. Gen. Surinder Nath, PVSM, AVSM (retd.)**

1. **Sustainable Development** is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It means building our communities so that we can all live comfortably without consuming all of our resources. The biggest challenge confronting the humanity today is whether the growth which has taken place so far, it is sustainable? Today almost two thirds of humanity lives in high income or high growth countries. Unfortunately the remaining 2 billion live in countries with stagnant or even declining incomes. Even within countries there are stark disparities, big gap between the rich and the poor. World population would increase by 30 % and the income 4 ½ times by 2050. But 2/3 of the 3 billion increase in global population expected will live in countries today enjoying little or no growth. The question that arises whether the planet will have enough room and resources for 7-10 billion people by 2050. Since industrial revolution, we have been exploiting the natural capital like air, green, glacier, rivers, forests and oceans. The result is massive glacier melt, ground water depletion, habitat destruction and more toxic chemicals and pollutants. Urban air-pollution and deteriorating water quality are having major health problem, economic and social impacts. Pure water is in short supply. Nearly 20 % of the world population does not have access to safe drinking water.

We have had series of international conferences on climate change and identified steps to be taken by international community to take care of the adverse effects, though some ground has been covered to counter effects, but still a lot needs to be done & formalized. The tussle and blame game between the developed countries and the developing countries goes on, each one asking the other party to reduce greenhouse emissions. After Copenhagen conference in 2009, much was expected from the conference held at Cancun, Mexico held during 29 Nov-10 - Dec 2010. Somehow in this conference also concrete decisions on various issues of critical importance could not be taken or finalized. All eyes are now on Durban. Conference to be held in December 2011 this year. It is sincerely hoped that all initial issues will be resolved and formalized. Time is running out and any further delay can have devastating effects on healthcare, and particularly on the safety of coastal areas and island territories. Amongst the nations, there has to be greater envisioning, understanding, cooperation and enforcement of jointly arrived at goals and objectives, strategies and policy decisions, technology transfers and capacity building.

Future Course of Action

Economic growth has to go on but it must ensure environmental and human health safeguards are adequately taken care of at all times. Two huge tasks facing the international community are:-

- a. Viable solutions for inherited problems to restore natural resources and achieve human health protection.
- b. Policy formulation and plans to allow for future growth while protecting the environment by maintaining bio-diversity safeguards, human health and preserving social and cultural values.

Corporates don't exist for profits only. Welfare of people consumers, shareholders and society at large are to be taken care of. It is the quality of product which will matter in sustainability and not the profit. The public at large has to realize that sustainable development is not just about conserving our resources. It is about changing our attitudes, mindset and culture to make conservation a way of life. The earth has a natural balance and over-consumption of its resources whether it is polluting or diverting water or over-using land for building or agriculture or mining or clear cutting of forests or over-fishing the oceans or burning too many fossil fuels throws that balance off and makes it difficult for the earth to renew itself. Living sustainably means only

consuming as much as we need, while making sure to never consume so much that it cannot be replaced. Changing habits in daily or community life, in government or in business is often referred to as greening practices. The term green is used to refer to anything that is built or working towards a sustainable, environmental-friendly future. Sustainable development creates long term economic stability but with innovations it can create many short term business opportunity also. Governments, businesses and consumers all need to change their habits for sustainable development to be the norm, not the exception. By cooperating in sustainable development, we can all look forward to a green future.

A quote from our great leader Mahatama Gandhi concludes best:

“The earth has enough resources to meet people’s needs
But will never have enough to satisfy people’s greed”

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