

## The cost of pollution

Pollution is a challenge to developing countries which try to achieve rapid economic development without adequately managing the environment. In recent years, the pollution load has increased, sometimes beyond the carrying capacity of the environment. Though various measures have been adopted to manage pollution, significant progress has not been achieved.

### The environmental Kuznets curve

India's developmental activities are affecting the environment to a considerable extent, through over-exploitation of natural resources and indiscriminate discharge of waste. This has been interpreted by the **environmental Kuznets curve** (EKC) hypothesis which suggests that as per capita income grows, the increase in environmental impact hits the maximum and thereafter declines. According to the hypothesis, in the initial stages of economic growth, when more resources are used, there is greater waste generation and more emissions. But when a country has achieved a certain level of development, pollution reduces with greater protection of the environment, technological improvements, diversification of the economy from manufacturing to services, and increasing scarcity and prices of environmental resources, leading to lower consumption.

India is on the upward part of the EKC. For achieving sustainable development, it must move to the second stage. However, it is not wise to wait for that stage. India can't ignore the environmental consequences of its rapid growth. Over the last few decades, water-intensive and polluting industries such as textiles, leather, sugar and paper have shifted from developed to developing countries. They withdraw huge quantities of water and discharge effluents without adequate treatment. Before 1980, countries like the U.K. and the U.S. played a vital role in textile production and export. But by 2000, their dominance had substantially reduced and the share of developing countries like India and China had increased. One of the factors attributed to this shift is that there are relatively less stringent environmental policies in developing nations. Countries like India are now manufacturing products which contribute to pollution for domestic and international markets.

At the household level, the economic loss on account of pollution includes the cost of treatment and wage loss during sickness. Pollution impacts ecosystems and related economic activities like agriculture and livestock. Air pollution causes climate change. Hence, pollution leads to the real and potential loss of the overall development opportunity in an economy. Generally, pollution impacts the socially vulnerable and poor communities more due to their weak coping options. When traditional drinking water sources get contaminated, the rich can buy packaged water. But the poor cannot afford it and are hence compelled to use contaminated water. They are also less aware of the health hazards caused by pollution.

Pollution is not a disease, it is only a symptom. Hence, its root cause should be investigated. For instance, in developing countries, water pollution has not been a major topic of political debate, but political instruments including Environmental Quality Objectives and Uniform Standards are in the political agendas of Western countries. Natural resources management agencies have centralised structures and function without the consultation of multi stakeholders. Emission-based standards have not been very effective so far, since they are rarely monitored and only occasionally enforced. The 'polluters pay' principle is not in force. For the most part, polluters are not willing to internalise the external and social costs. Pollution is also neglected by funding agencies worldwide and by governments in budgets. However, experiences from the U.S. and Europe reveal that

pollution mitigation can yield large gains to human health and the economy.

## Remedial measures

Economic growth is an inevitable requirement, but it need not be at the cost of health. To tackle pollution, there should be public awareness about its consequences, adequate pollution-linked databases, integration of pollution prevention policies into the development sector, strict enforcement of pollution control policies, eco-friendly inputs in production, reliance on renewable energy, introduction of market-based/economic instruments (charges/taxes/levies, tradable permits, subsidies and soft loans), and increase in ecosystem resilience through the conservation of biodiversity.

*Prakash Nelliya works with the Centre for Biodiversity Policy and Law, National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai. The views expressed are personal*

Receive the best of The Hindu delivered to your inbox everyday!

Please enter a valid email address.

YES | Syed Ata Hasnain India risks its national security with low allocations to defence spending  
Syed Ata Hasnain For a developing country that is

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com