

# Change Growth Model to Tackle Global Warming

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The climate change scenario in India is much worse than it looks. The inequity of climate change is writ large everywhere. The only glacier that feeds our seven rivers will flood India's waterways or the next 40 years and then will dry up completely. So our grandchildren will have no fresh water and face severe drought conditions within half a lifetime.

Yet, the action we are taking is nothing more than making a few movies and engaging in symbolic acts. It is an irony that while the world has been polluted by the rich industrialized North, the real sufferers of climate change will be the poor of the East and inhabitants of Africa.

The developing countries are being criticized today for being unmindful of environmental like India, China and Brazil. Whilst there can be no mercy for any kind of environmental damage caused by high growth economies pollution North countries have to realize that developing countries have a right to grow and that it is only fair that the North meets the costs of the South's growth, at least upto a take-off stage. In fact, it was this moral compulsion that brought in the concept of carbon credits. But over the years the price of these carbon credits has reduced so much that they have lost their shine.

They are already 25 million climate refugees displaced by climate-induced disasters such as those in the Papua New Guinean Carteret Islands. They have been forced to relocate because of the rising ocean level. Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. 259 km of river delta islands near the Bay of Bengal have vanished in the last 30 years.

The strategy, therefore, to deal with climate change, is going to be different for poor countries. While carbon tax, financial incentives and increased insurance premia can force people to go green in developed countries, the grim poverty of Asia and Africa calls for an integrated action plan, where the North implements the "polluter-pays" principle and provides scientific and technological know-how, as well as infrastructural support, and transfer of technology to the South to bring it to a level playing field.

The environmental footprint of the poor is a fraction of their rich counterparts. Creating wealth through unbridled consumerism and proliferation of products that create unneeded wants can be disastrous for the ecology. India's ecological footprint i.e. the natural material used per person per year, is one twelfth of US and Europe.

If the rapid rate at which the developing economies are growing translates itself into consumerism our mission of bridging the gap is going to result in Climate change calls for an approach designed to reduce the human footprint on the planet by making a 180 – degree shift in lifestyles an ecological catastrophe. We therefore need to change our growth model and move our economy from an acquisitional mode to an 'experiential' mode.

We have to find ways to dematerialize products and opt for minimalist designs. India will thus have an even more legitimate right to demand from the North, credits for saving the environment by adopting a dematerialized, low carbon, experiential model of growth.

Just as it is real that climate has changed due to human activity, humans have the power and technology to reverse the damage. For this to happen business has to be brought to the forefront of the climate change agenda. Our focus has to be on galvanizing businesses for a robust response to climate change in a way that opens new vistas of growth and development, advancing human happiness.

The 8th Environment Conference in Palampur brought to the fore an eleven-point plan called PROACTIVATE. The acronym denotes the action required for regeneration of the planet. It calls upon businesses to Price natural capital; Radically increase energy efficiency; Opt for minimalist lifestyles that emphasise the value of experience as opposed to acquisition; Adopt zero waste and closed loop systems; Capture CO2 through forestation; Turn to renewables; Invest in green issues; Vigorously pursue market mechanism to punish polluters; Activate women and children to drive the change; Train staff to eco-innovate and focus on Execution by example rather than exhortation.

Climate change calls for a holistic approach designed to reduce the human footprint on the planet by committing to make a 180-degree shift in lifestyles. It challenges our current paradigms of wealth and prosperity. Who would prefer to be a billionaire with a parched throat in the arid world of 2050?

It is time we started recognizing the price of natural capital – of greenery, rivers, mountains, oceans and glaciers and moved our natural assets way above the financial capital in the balance sheets. The pendulum of asset valuation has moved beyond tangibles. People have begun to question the very purpose of work and wealth creation.

In 1930 John Maynard Keynes imagined that richer societies would become more leisured ones, liberated from toil to enjoy the finer things in life, yet, most people today work harder, have less leisure and less happiness.

In 1927, Mahatma Gandhi wrote in Young India: **“A time is coming when those who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants, vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retrace their steps and say: ‘What have we done?’”**

After 80 years, these words ring true.

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