

**DRAWING LINKAGES BETWEEN SOCIAL  
SCIENCES, DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONEMNT,  
POPULATION AND HEALTH**

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## **Abstract**

Subjects such as economics, management and psychology have dominated the realm of social sciences as the focus today is to manage business and create profits, and this creation of profits is projected as 'development'. Cutting down trees, encroaching lakes, polluting rivers and other water bodies, generating toxic wastes, generating noise etc are approved and sanctified in the name of development.

Statics are screaming at the population of India with startling social indicators. Mind boggling are the statistics with respect to sex ratios, more alarming are the indication when one looks at Child sex ratios in the most developed of the states of India. Further alarming are the statistics with respect to ignorance about one's own health. Are these indicators indicating development?

Although the general health of the population is improving every censes, there has been an increase in case of malnutrition, rise in opportunistic diseases like heart attacks, liver and kidney disease. There has been an alarming increase in the cases of cancers indicating alarming increase in levels of pollutants in the environment. Very little is known about the mental health of the general population. Are these indicators of development?

## **Objectives**

1. To study the linkages between Population, environment, health and (Social sciences and development).
2. Examine the need to redefine terms such as Development and health.
3. Examine the level of awareness about health, and Environment in the population.

## Drawing linkages between

### social sciences, development, environment, population and health.

#### **Social science**

Social sciences are a set of subjects that study the human aspect of interaction between people. Social science saw their origins in the mid 1700's as a consequence of the development and maturation of several social institutions. The maturation of these institutions happened due to several well-known and documented factors like the French revolution, Industrial revolution, which was preceded by the period called renaissance. Several not so famous factors like the development of banking and financial institutions, shipping as an industry, establishment of naval powers, colonization as a virtue, acceptance of democratic structures, decline in the power of monarchies and the power of the church all contributed to the development of all social sciences.

Some of the social sciences subjects gained popularity as they aided directly in the process of economic advancements. Some other subjects did not develop as they did not contribute to the economic wellbeing of the society. Such subjects have had a stunted growth or are being killed or have already succumbed to the pressure of society.

The saying today is to make subjects more and more employable. This is an attempt to make people more economically productive. How do you make courses like sociology, history or anthropology more employable? Are we forgetting something here?

How do we build a social structure without understanding the very basic social institutions? For instance- Can we understand the family by the pure economic functions it performs and negate all other functions of the family. What do we phantom will be the social realities of societies then?

## **Development**

Development may be defined as “The process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions”. One may deduce that development may not take place without culture and environment interacting with each other.

Development is not unidirectional as envisioned by some of the early thinkers. Development may take society from a perceived sense of wellbeing to another. For instance- Absence of disease may be seen as an indication of development. But while achieving this society may create other hurdles that need serious thinking.

Vaccinations have eliminated several diseases or are in the process of achieving this or, one may say that invention of contraceptive have given families great control over determining family size. How can this be seen as a sign of development?

Modern science and technology have enhanced our understanding about diseases, its causes, and its cures. Does it mean that we are going to engineer our societies and environment? Creating perfect human beings, disease free, deformity free and somehow make them more intelligent. Create uniformities in terms of height weight and other vital parameters. Eliminate disease through genetic engineering.

We have created an educational system that trains people to think in specific ways and negate other realities. Development will never take place if society produces people who study other people’s books, Perfect the art created by others but by inventing new art, and new methods of understand social realities. Does society only need engineers, doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants? Do we not require poets, writers, philosophers, artists, TEACHERS.

Another relevant question that needs to be answered is the question of consumerism. This is relevant in the light of development because we seem to mix consumerism and

development. Are economic indicators like **Per capita Income, Gross Domestic product, inflation, unemployment rate** etc. just indicators of a culture of consumerism instead of development? Would it be appropriate to replace such indicators with **malnutrition rate, literacy rate, carbon footprints, etc?**

## **Environment**

Humans are the only species so far that has altered the fragile ecosystem that they live in. They have altered the environment so much that irreversible changes have been initiated in the environment. From converting evergreen forests of the world to mono crops like in the case of the Brazilian rain forests or converting grasslands to fields of paddy or wheat or converting cultivable land into land for the purposes of urbanization, housing and other infrastructure projects, or to alter the fertility of the soil by adding fertilizers and pesticides, humans have done everything possible to alter the environment for ever.

We already have the ability to destroy the world over several times in the form of nuclear technology. Millions of dollars are spent every year for the upkeep of these stalk piles of nuclear weapons. The world is aware of uselessness of such weapons, yet in the name of deterrent we maintain them. Strangely making nuclear weapons and maintaining them does not require any clearance from the environment ministry, but harnessing nuclear energy for the purposes of generating electricity requires several permits and permissions.

Statistics on consumerism indicate that there are three electronic gadgets per individual of the world today. Technology is changing so rapidly that all these gadgets become redundant in one or two years. The aligations against organization today is that they are changing technology so rapidly just to make revenues. Advertisements and incentives are directed to the very young so that they become addicted to this pattern of consumption forgetting the kind of damage that this is going to do to the environment.

The situation of the environment is so bleak that world forum like the UN called a conference in 2015 titled 2015 “United Nations Climate Change Conference” to discuss the effects of climate change on population and nations of the world. Many other world forums have conducted seminars, conferences and workshops on the same topic. There have been several topics that have been discussed starting from the effects of climate change on trade and commerce to the effects of climate change on agriculture and health.

The situation is so bleak that the head of the Christian belief released a paper titled “laudate si” appealing to nations and populations to do small things whatever possible in our capacities as humans to protect the environment. Many other religious heads have endorsed this view.

Another important reason to get up and notice is that the environmentalists are today talking about run away environmental changes. Some estimates suggest that these changes could start and finish in a span of just under a decade. Are we prepared for such drastic environmental changes? Can we look at alternative sources of energy, renewable sources of energy and sustainable development as important action items for social sciences to introspect and find solutions, for as these changes are not possible without the involvement of the general population. There needs to be a general awareness of the state of environment and a conscious effort on the part of all the stake holders governments, scientist, social sciences, and population to ensure the protection of the environment.

## **Population**

The world’s population today stands at 7.22 billion. The top eight most populous nations of the world namely China, India, United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh respectively constitute 54.5% of the world’s population. Apart from United States all other countries are underdeveloped. The economic indicators of people living in

these countries reveal a very poor state of affairs. For instance- the per-capita income of an Indian is a mere \$ 1,250/- per annum in 2013. And the purchasing power parity of \$ 5,350. Whereas the Gross domestic product was at 1.87 trillion USD.

What about the other indicators? Can we identify other non-economic indicators to understand development? Perhaps political participation, literacy levels, health indicators, average age of marriage, fertility rate, crime rate, infant mortality rate, sex ratio etc to determine the levels of development of a nation. Perhaps other indications could be added to make it more inclusive and an overall picture of development could emerge.

Social sciences have a major role to play in changing these mind sets and foster social development rather than a lopsided understanding of economic wellbeing and instil a culture of consumerism.

## **Health**

Health is the level of functional or metabolic efficiency of a living organism. In humans it is the ability of individuals or communities to adapt and self-manage when facing physical, mental or social challenges. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in its broader sense in its 1948 constitution as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

It is being recognised world over that the definition of health needs to be revamped as most communities still believe that the absence of diseases is an indication of good health paying very low attention to the aspects of mental health of the general populations. Mental disease is still seen as a stigma and people with such disease are shunned away from society or are ridiculed and ostracised.

There exist a vacuum in the minds of people with respect to Sexually transmitted diseases. It is a crime to contract such diseases in most developing countries as treatment is expensive and the social stigma is immense.

Diseases that occur due to change in life styles are also on the increase. There is a sharp increase in the number of people who have or are being treated for heart diseases, or are turning diabetic. The change in life style is directly linked to the culture of consumerism. Can we change these life styles before it is too late.

Cancers are another type of disease that is on the rise in the populations. The increase in the kind and quantity of pollutants in the environment is directly linked to the increase cases of cancer. Substances like tobacco, environmental pollutants like lead Arsenic, plastic, etc in the environment are responsible for an increased amount of different kinds of organ failures or malfunctions.

It is the responsibility of a social scientist to piece these things together bring about a gradual change in both physical and mental health of the population.



## **Conclusion**

There exist clear linkage between social sciences, population, environment, health and development. It is not possible for one to stand without the other. Lopsided development in society is the result of the lopsided development in social sciences and vice versa.

There is a clear need to redefine the terms such as development, and health, because the existing ways of looking at development look at a very narrow view on the topic. Development cannot be measured only using indicators such as Purchasing power parity, Gross domestic product, or inflation. These terms only indicate a certain economic view of development. Other socio, political indicators need to be incorporated to this view to indicate the correct picture of development.

There exists a very shallow understanding about concepts such as environment, health as it is clear that there are several apprehensions about Sexually Transmitted diseases, or other indicators of health like food and nutrition, environmental pollutant and their effects on health or opportunistic diseases.

A lot of work can be done towards the improvement of the above mentioned points as social sciences has a promising future in the new emerging ways of social interactions.

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