

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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The Major Economies Are Not Doing Enough for the Environment

Last month I wrote my article about people not caring enough for the environment. Well, it is sad that the major developed countries are in the same category. Last year at COP 26 in Glasgow, many countries agreed to “phase down” rather than “phase out” global coal use. A good example is China’s plan to add more fossil fuel powered energy production until 2030 when its carbon dioxide emissions will peak. Fortunately, the country is adding renewable energy but it isn’t enough to meet its energy demand.

Coal consumption in India is expected to increase to about 1.5 billion tons by 2030 which would be an increase of 63% from the current demand. Country officials have stated that India’s energy transition away from coal is not happening in the foreseeable future. Modelling studies show that India’s electricity sector can be coal-free by 2050, with little impact on growth or jobs. Hopefully, the country will work diligently to achieve its goals.

The United States recently passed the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 which provides \$369 billion for climate and clean energy provisions. If implemented the country’s carbon emissions should be reduced by 40% by 2030. But let’s look back to what the U.S. agreed to do as a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1997 per the Kyoto Protocol. The overall goal was to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 60-80% below 1990 levels by 2050. But to make this goal more achievable, the target was changed to reduce the emissions below 2005 levels rather than 1990. Why? Because carbon emissions in 2005 were much greater than in 1990 which would make the target easier to achieve. You may remember that the IPCC also set a short term goal of reducing emissions by just 5% within the first 15 years of the plan. So in 2012, 15 years after 1997, instead of reducing emissions by 5%, they were increased by 58%. We set targets but not enough has been done to meet the targets.

Let’s take a look at what the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) reveals about the various countries. This index, published annually since 2005, tracks the climate protection performance of 60 countries and the EU. The criteria is based on 14 indicators in four categories: gas emissions (40% of overall score), renewable energy generation (20%), energy use (20%), and climate policy (20%). The leading country is Denmark with a score of 76.7 but is listed at number 4 because the CCPI feels that no country is worthy of being listed 1, 2, or 3. The big three economies discussed above are somewhat down on the CCPI. India is surprisingly ranked at number 10 with a score of 69.2, not bad. China, as expected, is much lower at number 38 with a score of 52.2. The United States is even lower at number 55 with a score of 37.3. Of the four categories, the U.S. is lowest in renewable energy generation with a score of 3.2.

When we talk about improving the environment, we must also consider other issues besides climate change. The over consumption of the biological natural resources is also very

critical. One of the metrics used by the Global Footprint Network is Earth Overshoot Day which is the day in the year that we will have consumed all the natural resources expected to be generated in that calendar year. For 2022, Earth Overshoot Day was July 28 which means that globally we are consuming the equivalent of 1.75 earths, and the real bad news is that this day is getting earlier and earlier every year. A ranking of countries in 2017 shows that Qatar is the greatest consumer of our natural resources at 36.3 acres per capita with the U.S. at number 8 consuming 19.8 acres per capita. But to really understand the problem, it is necessary to consider both the generation and the consumption or when considering both, what is the deficit? The country with the highest total ecological deficit is China because its consumption is 9.2 acres per capita while its bio capacity is only 2.3 acres per capita. Number 2 in this ranking is the United States that has a bio capacity of only 8.5 acres per capita but with a consumption of 19.8. And number 3 on this list is none other than India with a low consumption per capita of 2.9 acres but an even lower bio capacity of 1.1 acres which gives it the third highest deficit in the world.

If you recall, in 1987 the Brundtland Commission developed sustainable development, now known as sustainability, which was defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Later, in 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) developed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. A separate entity is measuring the progress for each country to achieve these goals. Not surprising, the top four countries are Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The United States is ranked number 41, between Cuba and Bulgaria. China is 56 and India is 121 out of a total of 163 countries. This report shows that the U.S. has dropped from number 32 in the previous report to its current ranking of 41. According to The Economist's Democracy Index, the U.S. is considered a "flawed democracy." This report also considers the U.S. as a "developing country" because its rank is between two developing countries, Cuba and Bulgaria.

I feel one of our problems is the fighting between our two political parties that is preventing our leaders from focusing on this major problem of improving the environment for the future generations. If we can all agree that we have a problem, then we can focus on resolving that problem.