

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

by
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The U.S. Ranks Low in Protecting the Environment

There is no question that we must all do more to protect the environment. By “we”, I mean everyone in the U.S. as well as everyone in every other country in world. In just the past 80 years, we have gone from two billion people on this earth to close to eight billion, and we are adding about 10 million people every six weeks. If we are going to provide a healthy life for all of these people, we must do more in terms of the following areas:

- Agriculture
- Air quality
- Biodiversity and habitat
- Climate and energy
- Fisheries
- Forests
- Health impacts
- Water resources
- Water and sanitation

In a recent Yale University report on Environmental Performance Index (EPI), the U.S. is ranked 26 in the world in terms of environmental performance. I consider this unacceptable, but some would say it is not so bad when considering this report evaluated 180 countries in the world. The top five countries in order are Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Denmark and Slovenia while the bottom five are Afghanistan, Niger, Madagascar, Eritrea, and Somalia.

The world is making progress in some of the environmental issues like health impacts and access to water and sanitation. Air quality and fisheries, however, exhibit troubling declines. It is also performing poorly in terms of carbon intensity which impacts our climate. Despite all of the international climate change conferences, the world is doing poorly in reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases which are slowly increasing the atmospheric temperature.

As nations have become wealthier, particularly in Asia, their governments invest in sanitation infrastructure and fewer people are exposed to unsafe water, leading to fewer deaths from waterborne illnesses. But as countries develop, increased industrial production, shipping, and automotive transportation foul the air, exposing human populations to dangerous airborne compounds. Thus, deaths attributed to air pollution have risen steadily in the past decade in step with exposure. Air pollution is a growing global problem; worse in rapidly developing economies, like China and India, than in

wealthy or very poor nations. Yet dangerous air pollution is not confined to any one country or group of countries – it is a global issue.

It is well known in operations that you cannot manage anything if you cannot measure something related to the subject task. When measurement is poor or not aligned with proper management, environmental and human health both suffer. EPI shows that sectors with weak measurement are also areas exhibiting decline. Marine fisheries are poorly monitored, for instance, as many fleets misreport or fail to report catch data, and international policy targets are ad hoc and incomplete. It is no surprise that fish stocks around the world are in stark decline. At least 30% of the fisheries have been overexploited and have collapsed.

To improve the environmental situation in this world, it is the obligation of the country leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGO), corporations large and small, and the individual citizens. How can we do it? As the EPI shows, progress occurs only when measurement and management align. We must all work toward developing a sustainable environment and accept our obligation to protect God's gift.