

## COMMENT 257 – Moving Towards Lifestyle Changes for the Environment and Sustainable Development

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### Background

The world is grappling with several challenges today. Billions of people continue poverty-stricken, without adequate dignity. Inequalities are rising both within and among countries. Disparities in opportunities, wealth and power are wide. Gender inequalities, unemployment (especially youth unemployment), health threats, spiraling conflicts, violent extremism and terrorism, forced displacements, violations of human rights, and lack of equitable access to education have been major global concerns. In addition to this, natural resource depletion and environmental degradation, which include severe land degradation, scarcity of freshwater, as well as desertification and drought, much worsen matters (United Nations Organisation, 2015).

Climate change has emerged as an 'existential challenge' in our time. It does not require any visa or passport to traverse. Any change in one part of the globe affects the other parts. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) attributes the phenomenon of climate change largely to anthropogenic activities, i.e., human activity. Climate change has induced many perceptible changes in terms of rising global temperatures and sea levels, melting glaciers, and an increased frequency of extreme weather events such as cyclones and other impacts severely affecting all

aspects of people's lives. Coastal areas and low-lying islands/countries, encompassing several least-developed countries and small island developing states, are estimated to be on the verge of submersion. The existence of many societies and biological support systems is at great risk. Assorted works of literature concerning the question as to which countries are responsible for global warming and climate change are available. Accusations and recrimination are often seen at multilateral forums on the matter. The United Nations Organisation is committed to addressing the prevailing challenges by reaffirming 'all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development' based on 'the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities.'

### **Lifestyle Changes for the Environment and Sustainable Development**

Environmental degradation and climate-induced changes impinge upon our ecosystem and populations across the globe. If timely action is not taken, 800 million to 3 billion people are projected to face chronic scarcity of water caused by droughts occurring at a mere 2°C warming. The global economy could lose up to 18 per cent of its GDP by 2050 if urgent collective action is not ensured to address the problem. The United States accounts for five per cent of the world's population and yet constitutes the 'world's second-largest emitter and largest per capita emitter among industrialised countries.' The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, in its report on 'Lifestyle for Environment', highlights that "India's per capita carbon footprint is 60 per cent lower than the global average. This is because our lifestyle is still rooted in sustainable traditional practices. Sustainability has always been a part of our tradition, culture and values." The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) states that carbon emissions could drop up to twenty per cent globally if 1 out of 8 billion citizens worldwide adopt environment-friendly behaviours in their everyday lives. This indicates that 'changes in individual and community behaviour alone can make a significant dent in the environment and climate crises.'

Against this backdrop, the demand for lifestyle changes that could be in harmony with the environment has culminated in a global voice. On 1st September 2021, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced the concept of 'Lifestyle for the

Environment (LiFE)’ at the Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, United Kingdom. The LiFE has taken the shape of an international mass movement under an Indian leadership. The mantra of LiFE called upon the global community of both individuals and institutions for “mindful and deliberate utilization, instead of mindless and destructive consumption” so as to protect and preserve the environment. It exhorts both individuals and communities to practice a lifestyle that could contribute towards saving our environment, a key to combating climate change. In other words, it can be said that lifestyle practices must be synchronous with nature. India has become the first country to include LiFE in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). India is resolved to propagate a healthy and sustainable lifestyle that is ‘based on its traditions and the values of conservation and moderation.’ LiFE constitutes an attempt towards ‘transitioning from throwaway culture to a circular economy.’ The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog states that ‘Lifestyle for Environment’ also finds its roots in India’s environment—a friendly culture and traditional practices such as the use of clayware (for cooking and serving purposes), various unique water harvesting techniques suited to local conditions, and dietary preferences for plant-based foods and millets.

**Figure 1** *Cadets of Bidhan Chandra College, Rishra (University of Calcutta), taking the Mission LiFE (Life for Environment) pledge to protect the environment on 27th May 2023*



Note 1: Taken by the author.

Note 2: The Mission LiFE pledge was undertaken by all the NCC Cadets of all NCC Group Headquarters as part of environment-friendly awareness programs as per the direction from NCC Directorate (West Bengal & Sikkim) - letter No. 1107/WBNCC/G (Trg) dated 11 May 2023.

**Figure 2** *Lifestyle Changes: Cadets of Bidhan Chandra College, Rishra, (University of Calcutta) celebrating 'International Year of Millets 2023' on 13th April 2023 to create awareness among the citizens about the health benefits of millets consumption and its promotion for healthy living.*



Note 1: Taken by the author.

Note 2: The event was organised at Bidhan Chandra College, Rishra, as per the direction from NCC Group Headquarters, Kolkata-B (letter No. 0155/74/G dated 24 March 2023).

On [1st December 2022](#), India assumed the G20 Presidency (from Indonesia). The theme of India's G20 Presidency is '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*', which means 'the World is One Family'. India is a nation deeply committed to democracy and multilateralism, which has sought to play an important part by finding pragmatic solutions for the well-being of all. The G20 theme has been drawn from the ancient [Sanskrit text of Maha Upanishad](#). The theme affirms the value of all life forms – including humans, animals, plants and microorganisms and their interconnections on planet Earth. Mission LiFE has also been the priority area of India's G20 Presidency. India believes that the world is one family with one future as we share Mother Earth. Such future can only be saved if we bring positive and transformational changes in our daily lifestyles.

Mission LiFE, aiming to bring about environment-friendly changes in our lifestyle, has identified a comprehensive and non-exhaustive list of 75 actions under 7 categories as a global programme to be followed. These categories include energy saving, water saving, reduction in single-use plastics, the adoption of sustainable food systems, waste management (Swachhta Actions), the adoption of healthy lifestyle practices, and e-waste management. These actions are also in consonance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is a comprehensive document - a global agenda - for the all-round development of people and of the planet. It constitutes 17 goals with 169 targets adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. Some of the SDGs focus on sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), climate change (SDG 13), life on land (SDG 15), and life under water (SDG 14). These goals are framed to call upon individuals to ensure that “their lifestyles are in sync with the resources available on the planet.” The principles of ‘Lifestyle for Environment’ are related to almost all the SDGs, either directly or indirectly. India’s G20 Presidency is transpiring at a crucial midpoint of the 2030 Agenda. India understands the detrimental impacts of covid 19 that have changed the current decade of action into a decade of recovery. India has recommitted to G20’s efforts to achieve goals and targets enumerated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **Conclusion**

Lifestyle changes that are environment-friendly and lead to a sustainable development approach in both individual and community behaviour will take the world to a new and unprecedented level of peace, progress and prosperity. The time has come for everyone to act as ‘pro-planet people’ so as to save the planet. At the macro level, the government is taking significant ‘steps towards a greener and energy-efficient country’. Nevertheless, micro steps will help much in turning the tide. Behavioural changes in day-to-day life, such as switching off the car/scooter engines at traffic lights and railway crossings, turning off running taps when not in use, avoiding single-use plastics, etc., are critical steps in combating climate change and ensuring a sustainable environment.

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