**A contradiction between consumerism and ecological credit crunch (Part 2)**

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Apart from this – SDG 12 focuses on sustainable practices related to food also. In this context, target 12.3 aims to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses, by 2030. The data on its indicators for indexes of food loss and food waste is not available to fully gauge the performance on this particular target. In 1798, Malthus predicted that eventually the human population would outstrip food production.

Amidst all the technological breakthroughs, can this prediction be true? This is a dire question to be considered. Food waste has a direct linkage to land degradation and water loss. Domestic and international shocks, natural disasters, institutional and internal security issues – all have paved a way for escalating food insecurity. The changed weather patterns have also led to a loss in crops. In 2018, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that developing countries waste around 40 percent food items. Pakistan cultivates enough food to export and is among the top producers in the world in the case of commodities like wheat, sugarcane, milk etc. Before reaching the retail level – much of the produce gets wasted. In the third quarterly report 2019-20, on the state of the economy by the State Bank of Pakistan, it was reported that Balochistan had the least number of food secure households. The National Nutritional Survey of 2018 reported that 36.9 percent of the households were food insecure. The results also showed that only one in four children receive the minimum number of meals a day. As a result, we face a risk of losing a lot of potential and productivity in the future.

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Another major issue covered by this SDG relates to the practices related to reduction of waste. Target 12.5 commits to substantially reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse by 2030. The data on this target is also not available for Pakistan. The Pakistan Economic Survey of 2015-16 reported that the estimated quantity of solid waste generation in Pakistan ranged between 0.283 to 0.612 kg per capita per day. In the absence of any infrastructure, this waste is left to rot, and thus accumulate and cause havoc for citizens. Moreover, the burning of solid waste leads to deterioration of the air quality. Pakistan Plastic Manufacturers Association reported that around 55 billion plastic bags are used annually in the country. In the case of Pakistan, waste paper, metal, glass and plastic are some of the items that are recycled. The current trajectory of banning plastic bags is a good initiative – provided it is here to stay in the long run. The phenomenon of demographic and economic growth including urbanization has fueled the use of many metals and minerals. Pakistan can enhance its efforts towards overall recycling. One of the action plans in this regard could be to recycle products containing metal and minerals, such as aluminum, iron and steel – all this might lead to lesser energy and finances – not to mention, that this method will be far better than mining.

Here, it should not be forgotten that in our country, much of the solid waste is dealt with by the informal sector, where practices such as burning of waste are a common sight, which obviously leads to harmful chemicals released in the air. Apart from this, pollutants such as CFCs, carbon monoxide, and nitrates and sulfates lead to a lot of pollution. They are the results of vehicles, air conditioners and industrial wastage – obviously resulting from the culture of consumerism. The adverse consequences of these pollutants are many, including health concerns for us and our future generations. A 2013 report by the United Nations Environment Program titled, ‘The Environment and Climate Change Outlook of Pakistan’ stated that for urban air pollution – the economic cost is estimated to be about Rs 65 billion per year. Thus, we need to be aware of the ecological repercussions of the above mentioned issues we face ‘now’ and whose results are predicted to be increased in the future as well.

Our existing development paradigm faces the threats of land degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity, and economic and environmental costs. The repetitive cycles of extract, manufacture and throw should be reduced, if not eliminated. Our cities should divert towards a more vertical mode of growth to conserve our land. We need to harness technological solutions such as employing artificial intelligence to map out our water resources and existing plantation. We can employ the latest technologies in irrigation, and educate our farmers to deal with the latest events in the field of agriculture. Rainwater harvesting can be used as a conservation measure for water. Other than the modernization of agricultural production, an increase in the capacity of warehouses including refrigerated ones, for fresh produce, can help in saving much wastage. All these changes should not be cosmetic, and would definitely require institutional and technological barriers to be removed. Here it should not be forgotten that our efforts should not be hindered from uncalculated decisions such as falling in traps like ‘prius paradox’ – a concept which can be understood as one’s effort to do good for their country’s environment but which turns out to be not as good globally. To explain further, one might buy a car which is environmentally friendly such as being less pollution causing – however, the production process might consume more resources globally – lesser than the harm caused by the pollution of one car. Hence, we are all the inhabitants of the same planet and should make responsible decisions for its sustainability.

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