Global Warming: Can India Walk the Talk ?

- Published on October 6, 2015

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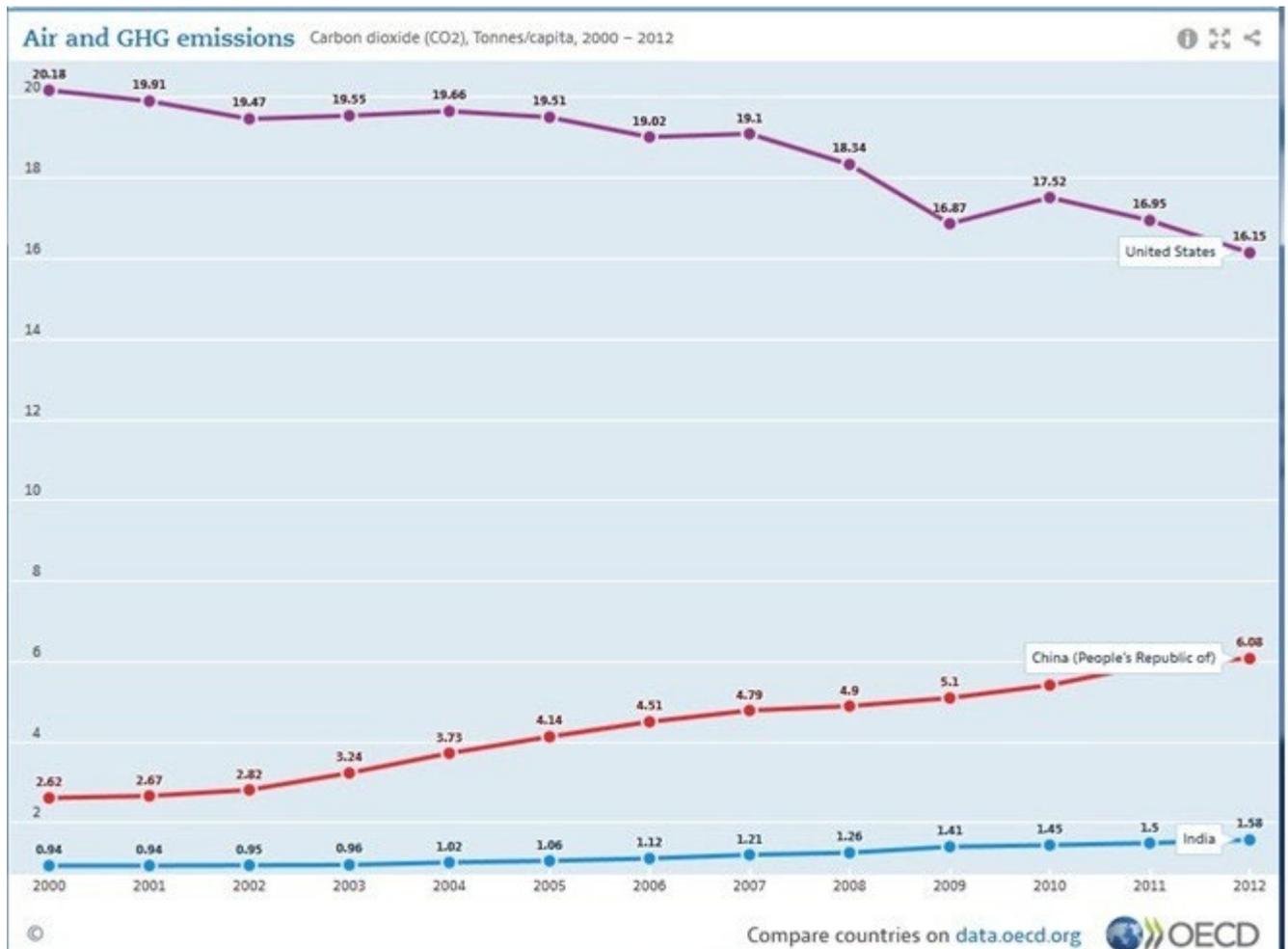
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India, in its commitment to reduce the global warming, agreed, on 2nd October 2015 (Mahatma Gandhi's birthday), to reduce the CO2 emissions by 33-35 % of its 2005-emission levels. India was the 147th country, among the 196 members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to agree to such an ambitious commitment. (*Last updated on 10th Oct 2015*)

A Native American Wisdom says "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; We borrow it from our children." It is more appropriate than ever for both the Developed and Developing nations to keep this wisdom in mind always.

According to the OECD data, the base-level year (2005) CO2 emissions, in Tonnes per capita, of USA, China, and India, the top three emitters in the world, are 19.51, 4.14, 1.06 tonnes per capita respectively.

Air and GHG emissions Carbon dioxide (CO2), Tonnes/capita, 2000 – 2012

United States: 20.18, 19.91, 19.47, 19.55, 19.66, 19.51, 19.02, 19.1, 18.34, 16.87, 17.52, 16.95, 16.15

China (People's Republic of): 2.62, 2.67, 2.82, 3.24, 3.73, 4.14, 4.51, 4.79, 4.9, 5.1, 6.08

India: 0.94, 0.94, 0.95, 0.96, 1.02, 1.06, 1.12, 1.21, 1.26, 1.41, 1.45, 1.5, 1.58

Compare countries on data.oecd.org OECD

At 2005-base level, India's commitment of 33% reductions comes to 0.35 tonnes per capita by 2030, i.e. in the next 15 years India has to reduce the CO2 emissions at a uniform rate of about 0.023 tonnes per capita, which in my opinion, is a formidable target. A quick calculation of CO2 emitted by a middle-class Indian family (of 4 persons) reveals that the CO2 emitted per year by the family is around 8-10 tonnes and this works out to 2 to 2.5 tonnes per capita. Unless we strictly follow some of the austerity measures as suggested below in our lifestyle, it is going to be a tough sailing for India to keep its CO2 emissions below the average target value of 0.023 tons per capita over the next 15 years.

Another important aspect of this story is that it is good and appreciable to note from the figure above that CO2 emissions in the USA have gradually come down from 2000 till 2012. Possibly, this correlates with US' strategy of becoming largely a consumption-based economy from being a production-based economy a couple of decades ago. Also, from the chart above, one can see that China's CO2 emission levels have gradually increased since 2000 owing to its unprecedented growth in the last 10-15 years. However, China is paying the price through the nose for its ill-planned accelerated growth. Beijing is becoming more and more less-habitable due its high-levels of pollution in the air Airpocalypse Now: Beijing's Toxic Smog and poor visibility at times. Apparently, Delhi is no better according to the report Beijing vs. Delhi: The Politics of Air Pollution

It is a small solace that, among the top three emitters of CO_2 into the atmosphere, India's emission level stands the least, at just 1.58 tonnes per capita, as compared to 6.08 of China and a whopping 16.15 of the USA as of 2012 data published by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

However, to keep the CO_2 emissions under check, every Indian should realize the damages done by CO_2 emissions to the climate and global warming and vow to be a responsible citizen by focusing on the following "controllable" areas of one's daily life.These contributions may be a small step for a man today, but it'll be a giant leap for our posterity.

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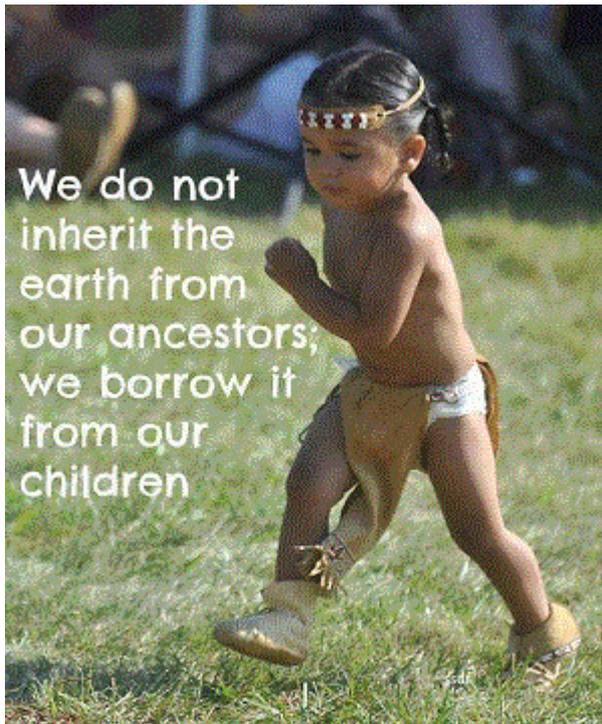
#Area1. Reduce wastage of electricity : Look for fans, a/c, lights running without humans utilizing them. Switch off such lights, fans and a/c. Electricity saved is electricity produced. Less demand for electricity will place less load on thermal power plants (60% electricity in India is produced by coal-fired thermal power plants. Thermal power plants are the major sources of CO_2 emissions).

#Area2. Reduce use of Cars, Motorbikes, Buses etc : All these vehicles consume a lot of petrol or diesel and emit lots of CO_2 into the air. Wherever possible we can slowly change over to the use bi-cycles for local movements, office commuting, shopping etc. Moderate use of bicycles not only saves petro-dollars (direct contribution to reducing Current Account Deficiency (CAD)) , but also helps reduce the healthcare costs.

#Area3. Support clean-energy power plants : With the kind of frequent protests by a host of stakeholders like NGOs, environmentalists, and the ill-advised land owners, almost every greenfield power project is being stalled in India for the sake of saving environment. However,projects should be permitted to take off if the promoter (be it government or private) agrees to do equal or more good than the harm by afforestation and adequate compensation. Whose land is it anyway? Which comes first? The nation's growth or the individual's growth? In an accelerated manner the government should make use of the

excellent alternate sources of energy and gift of Mother Nature to the human beings like solar, hydro, wind and nuclear power plants. Their potential is to be exploited fully as they emit literally NIL CO2 into the atmosphere compared to the conventional thermal power plants. It is high time a new NGO, sort of "Friends of Future Generation", was formed to counter those who protest any and every project promoted by the government and private owners in the name of environment without giving an concrete solution to unemployment and clean power generation. Projects, especially power projects, are very essential for the growth and sustenance of a developing nation like India.

The Indian government, meanwhile, should try to devise mechanisms to reduce transmission & distribution losses and prevent theft of electricity (more than 30% of electricity produced in India goes waste due to T&D loss and theft) thereby reduce the load / demand on the existing thermal power plants, which in turn, will reduce the consumption of coal in coal-fired thermal power plants. However, with the kind of protests staged by the NGOs, land-owners, vested political parties, and environmentalists for every new power project announced, the government's commitment of achieving 40% energy generation from non-fossil fuels or sources like wind, solar, and hydro has a remote possibility. It's high time Indians exercised their "freedom-to-protest", a status accorded by the democracy we are very proud of, with utmost care and in the larger & long-term interests of the Nation. Nehru once said, "Democracy without self-control and restraint leads to anarchy. Discipline is the very essence of democracy."

Freedom does not mean to do whatever one wants, whenever one wants, and wherever one wants to do something. Freedom is NOT doing whatever one wants, whenever one wants, and wherever one wants to do if that thing is likely the spoil the Nation's growth or image.

Freedom, a hard-earned status by our freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi, should be used with utmost care and should always be used for the betterment of the State or the Nation, and not for individual petty gains. Otherwise, days are not too far to embrace a China-like governance with "controlled-freedom", which may strip of the freedom from most of its miss-understood citizens and politicians who have not only led this beautiful & resourceful nation on a net-regressive path in the last 20-25 years but also abused their freedom for petty, short-term gains leaving behind a hazardous pollution-laden climate for our innocent posterity.

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Meet the President Trying to Save His Island Nation From Climate Change

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About the Author : The author, Ondiappan Arivazhagan, "Ari", is an Honors graduate in Civil / Structural Engineering from University of Madras. He is a certified PMP, PMI-SP, PMI-RMP from PMI, USA. He is also a Master Black Belt in Lean Six Sigma and has done Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) and Business Analytics from IIM,Bangalore. He has 31+ years of professional global project management experience and 14 years of consulting and teaching / training experience in Project management, Analytics, Risk Management and Lean Six Sigma in various countries around the World including Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Oman, etc. He is the Founder-CEO of International Institute of Project Management (IIPM), Chennai and can be reached at askari@iipmchennai.com