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Balancing infrastructure growth and environment conservation



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India is recovering from the Covid-19 effects. Economy also starts to register positive growth, hopes and aspirations have started flowing throughout the nation. The nation has once again started its journey towards becoming the fastest growing economy across the globe. This has been possible due to the robustness of the economy due to the large domestic demand and constant efforts & measures by the government. The government has been launching various programs in order to revive the economy. The National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission, setting up Development Finance Institution (DFI), increased spending on healthcare, etc are some of the initiatives which have proved to be the game changers in the fight against economic slowdown.

Of all the above-mentioned programs, the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission is the most ambitious and futurist program. This program focuses on making India self-reliant in terms of production of as many commodities as possible. Developing entrepreneurial spirit among the Indians lies at the core of the Mission. The program will not only make India self-reliant but also help the country boost its exports capacity. It will also generate employment for millions and prepare the country for any future Covid-19 like situation.

However, there is a catch. In order to make the country self-reliant, India needs to invest heavily in infrastructure to ensure increased & constant production and the movement of the commodities across the economy. Infrastructure development has huge economic and environmental cost for any country. They can significantly impact the local climate, landscape, population and culture. If not planned properly, these projects can spell disasters.

Infrastructure projects needs to be planned carefully in order to minimize

their environmental impact. Below are mentioned some of the points that AEC players need to keep in mind in order to build environmentally viable infrastructure projects.

Plan for future

This is perhaps the most important point to be considered before developing any infrastructure project. The developers should consider the viability of their projects for at least 50 years down the line. In a dynamic and fast-growing nation like India, planning for 5 to 10 years can lead to failures. The toll-plaza built on the Delhi-Gurgaon border is a recent example of failure due to short-sightedness of the planners. The Amsterdam ring road project is an excellent example of designed and built to serve for several decades in the future.

Use of geo-spatial technologies and BIM in construction

Technology is playing a crucial role in infrastructure development across the globe. With the right usage of technology, the developers can now predict the future of their projects in terms of demand, maintenance, and impact on local flora, fauna, community and environment. Government should make the use of technologies like GIS, GPS, GPRS, BIM etc compulsory in infrastructure development. The developers should do thorough analysis of the environmental impact before starting any project and implement measures to minimize its ecological cost. Developers should also be ready to move their projects to locations where the damage to the environment could be minimized.

Involve local communities

Involvement of local communities is one of the key aspects of developing sustainable infrastructure. Local communities staying in a particular area. They have much more experience and understanding of the climatic conditions, landscape, flora & fauna and the needs of their area. Their inputs can be instrumental in customizing the projects according to the local environmental needs and maintain ecological balance. It has been observed in the past that huge infrastructure projects disrupt local ecological harmony and sometimes force entire communities to migrate. Such mass migrations might be disastrous for environment of the places where they migrate. Therefore, involving local communities in infrastructure development can help minimize the ecological impact.

Learn from global experience

In the past, several other countries have been at the similar stages of development as India is today. The country needs to be open to learn from the global experiences of how other countries tackled environmental issues during infrastructure development. Their successes and failures could be lessons for India. For example, in the USA a dam was removed from the river Elwha in Washington as it was causing negative impact to the species of salmon fish. This could be taken as a moral to first study the impact of the project on local fauna before investing in it.

India is a country in dire need of world-class infrastructure to fuel its ambitious growth targets. However, it is also the nation with some of most polluted cities in world. While India cannot compromise on its growth, it can also not damage its environment any further. Therefore, the need of the hour is to strike the delicate balance between growth and environment. The Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission could also be an opportunity to develop SMEs offering environmental services to help minimize the environmental impact of the rapid development in the country.

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