

A Shared World



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We all are dealing with a common resource, the Environment- the shared world. The idea of 'commons' was first outlined in 1833 by William Forster Lloyd, an English economist, discussing grazing of livestock in shared rural areas. More than a century later, ecologist Garrett Hardin reintroduced the term to describe what occurs when a large number of persons share a finite resource, such as grazing land, fishing grounds, living space, or even pure air. Today modern civilization is rooted in this discussion for the commons led to maintaining three realms, Local, Regional and Global. The Global commons refers to shared resources. UNESCAP defines the global environmental commons as the high seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica and space, plus biomes within national borders whose thriving like rainforests, land and biodiversity is vital for the planet.

India has a rich history of commons, from village ponds and forests to lakes, pastures and age old trees, used by communities for resource and recreation. Not only in rural areas that are privately- owned or are held by the state, cities too have commons providing equity, health and happiness. Like a scared tree with a platform around it where people can sit, talk, and children can play. Historically, commons are places where, people get to know each other, feel familiar and learn to collaborate.

Such commons are under grave threat globally now, the Anthropocene embodying their over-exploitation by a few. These gathering places are becoming dumping grounds- sewage and garbage got thrown there and construction filled up wetlands. This is described by 'tragedy of the

commons', happens without shared management systems where people refuse to cooperate on a common resource. And today, the 'Tragedy of commons' speaks in grim statistics- UNEP finds plastic in seas measures 199 million tons, turning the azure into marine 'dead zones'. The degradation of plastic is an even bigger environmental issue, as the breaking down of plastics into microscopic particles pollutes our ocean, air and ecosystems. The health implications of microplastic deposits in our bodies are not yet fully known. As nations discharge emissions into a shared atmosphere, WHO finds 99% of the global population breathes dangerous air with low- and middle-income countries suffering from the highest exposures. Household combustion devices, motor vehicles, industrial facilities and forest fires are common sources of air pollution. Pollutants of major public health concern include particulate matter, carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide. Outdoor and indoor air pollution cause respiratory and other diseases and are important sources of morbidity and mortality. Uncontrolled urbanization, mining and ranching are causing huge deforestation and erosion. The World Atlas of Desertification estimates 75% of Earth's land are degraded; the UN fearing soil desertification could impact two billion people by 2030. Concurrently, a 2022 study published in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, which surveyed more than 3,000 experts, states that "global biodiversity loss and its impacts may be greater than previously thought," and estimates that roughly 30% of species "have been globally threatened or driven extinct since the year 1500. Earth is losing birds, animals, insects and plants

at extraordinary speed. Trampling the natural world generates a vicious cycle, as we overdraw on the elements; we lose natural resources and the species which rejuvenate nature itself.

The global commons show how interconnected we are i.e. the shared world we live in. If one country emits, it impacts the others. Climate justice is fundamentally based on the management of the global commons. How they are treated must lie at the heart of cooperation among nations, guiding ambitious climate agreements. We should revisit the 1997's Kyoto Protocol that was based on the principle of equity, recognizing the responsibilities and contributions of countries, which would help set their emissions reduction targets. Following it, the 2015 Paris Agreement was established saying, that a finite amount of CO₂ can be emitted by a country into

the world's atmosphere to keep the temperatures under 1.5 °C. This sum must be divided globally, based on nations' per capita, etc. It should be understood that if a country has exceeded its share, it must cut by a certain amount and it can also trade and buy from other countries' share. And the review of countries commitment cutting emission should be done every five years. So, to mitigate climate change and maintaining the shared world, we need a rule-based government around the global commons, along with local actors. From this awareness we can stem more sustainable behavior, including global action against pollution, expanding agroforestry, and habitat restoration, creating protected areas for biodiversity, replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy as these being the only places in the world where everyone has the right to some water and some shade in this shared world.