



Studying Sustainability, Sustainable Development and Prison Health

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Abstract:

Health is wealth and health of everyone is important. The concept of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) echo the same. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contains an extensive list of commitments to end diseases by the year 2030. Besides, it also aims at bringing everyone into universal health coverage by 2030. Universal health coverage is a real challenge, and inequality is one of the factors behind it. When we say 'universal' or 'all', prisoners cannot be excluded. They may be in prison for time being, but they are very much a part of the country's population. Thus, the prisons should not be of any exception. As a prisoner he or she has basic human rights. The present paper by employing an analytical method attempts to understand the status of healthcare facilities of the prisoners globally, the hurdles, and how implementation of the goals under Sustainable Development Goals and the proper maintenance of prison healthcare facilities are closely related to each other.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals, Prison, Health, human rights.

Sustainability is the key to our living in present times. We tend to use the two terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' synonymously. But there are some differences between the two. The concept of sustainable development is broader in scope than sustainability. Sustainability is something related to programme implementations, indicators, etc. Sustainable development is a process. It is an alternative way of development. It stands against development that comes from overexploitation of resources, discrimination, lack of inclusiveness, etc. The core values inherent to the concept of sustainable development are peace, solidarity, democracy, accountability, transparency, etc. The approach of sustainable development is bottom up, where decentralisation is the key. Every policy should be formed on the basis of grassroots level experience. The actual stakeholders should be given the most importance (Shiva, 2005). Health, as a concept is considered to be a state free of disease. But, the definition of health cannot be this narrow. Health is essentially an element of various dynamics of society. It depends on the social positioning and status, lifestyle, and both the biological and physical environment around us. Health is something which cannot be understood properly without knowing the society and economy of the state of one person. Thus, health has to be contextualised. It is a social,

economic, and ecological concept (Kjærgård, 2014). Taking up the third element or theme of the paper, i.e., prison health, let us first understand prison. Prison can be defined as “any jail or place used permanently or temporarily under the general or special orders of a State Government for the detention of prisoners, and includes all lands and buildings appurtenant” (GOI). In earlier times, the concept of prison was different than what it is today. Criminals were punished in front of all publicly in order to discourage others from doing the crimes. It was the British and the French who started to use prisons for captivating political prisoners. But they also did not use prison to confine everyone who is found guilty. The modern and excessive use of prison is the result of criticism against the barbaric methods of punishment. Thus, in order to bring in practice a civilised method of punishment, prisons were started to be used. Although modern prison system came with the promise of being civilised, taking care of human rights of the prisoners, it paved the way towards overcrowding and many more serious issues. There has been a common concern in prisons all over the world today. The concern is the overcrowding of prisons. If you look at some statistics, the number of prisoners has increased from 8.7 million in the year 2000 to more than 11 million at present (WPB). Surprisingly this scene is similar in both developed and underdeveloped countries. Overcrowding brings many more problems like spread of diseases, increase in violence in prisons, and more amount of human rights violation. Overcrowding and health problems of the prison inmates are directly related. Sustainable development is a comprehensive approach to development. So, health must be added to it. Besides, it should adopt an inclusive method. So, no one should be left behind in its implementation process, not even the prisoners, who form one of the most vulnerable groups of our societies. This paper is concerned about prison and the health of the prisoners. The terms mentioned in the title, ‘prison health’ means the health of the prisoners. The paper takes up the analytical method to understand the relationship between sustainable development goals and prison health. It tries to understand how sustainable development goals can be implemented properly only by including every aspect of each goal. In case of health, everyone’s health must be taken into consideration. This study will concentrate on the prisoners and their health.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contains an extensive list of commitments to end diseases of almost all forms by the year 2030. Diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, AIDS, etc. get special attention in this regard. Other important aims of the sustainable development goals is to ensure medicines which are safe and which can be afforded by all. Vaccines also come under this purview. Besides, it also aims at bringing everyone by 2030 into universal health coverage. Universal health coverage is a real challenge, and inequality is one of the factors behind it. In many countries, especially the low-income ones, the educated and wealthy people get more access to healthcare due to the obvious reasons. A huge number of people worldwide still does not have proper access to healthcare. If a single person is also out of the health coverage, the aim of the sustainable development goals will not be fulfilled. Thus, it is very much necessary to find out the disparities. There are many factors which determine health and they are of environmental and commercial in nature.

These are to be properly addressed to ensure the fulfilment of the sustainable development goals. Health is wealth, and to build a strong nation, the population must be healthy. Thus, the countries must take actions to mitigate and prevent health related challenges proactively. Immunization is one of the best ways to prevent diseases. When we talk about population, prisoners cannot be excluded. They may be in prison for time being, but they are very much a part of the country's population. Thus, the prisons should not be of any exception. In simple terms, prisons are the places where those who break laws are generally confined. A person may have committed a crime, but when someone is in prison it means that he is there as a part of punishment decided by the judiciary for his crime. As a prisoner he or she has basic human rights. The present paper by employing an analytical method attempts to understand the status of healthcare facilities of the prisoners globally, the hurdles, and how implementation of the goals under Sustainable Development Goals and the proper maintenance of prison healthcare facilities are closely related to each other (UN, The 17 Goals, n.d.).

A prisoner cannot be deprived of basic healthcare services provided by the state. Thus, it is the responsibility of the state to take care of safety, and right to health of the prisoners. The prison should be having a system of primary healthcare which includes healthcare resources and expert staffs. The standard of healthcare must not be of inferior quality. The healthcare professionals appointed in prisons must not discriminate or should not be less attentive towards the prisoners. Just like any other person in society, a prisoner should also be treated as a patient and his or her right to confidentiality must be protected. The prisoners must be given special treatment facility on the advice of the medical staff. The continuity of proper healthcare is a big step towards sustainability. The prisoners must not be made to involve into work which can be harmful for their health. Above all, it must be believed and maintained that prison healthcare is not a separate part, but it is very well connected to national health of a country. The prisoners on release will mingle with the society and can prove to be human resources for the country.

The Covid pandemic has shown the ugly state of inequality in the society. The privileged got the best healthcare and the poor section got deprived. The people in prison are in the category of sufferers. They are one of the most vulnerable groups of population in the whole world. The predecessor of the sustainable development goals was millennium development goals (MDGs). But, none of them mentioned specifically about health and healthcare of the prisoners. This is vital gap indeed. The absence of prisoners and their health in SDGs makes them even more vulnerable and marginalised. But, one thing is very clear that without being inclusive, SDGs cannot be implemented properly.

The long list of goals in the SDGs are interrelated. When we talk about health, it includes the overall wellbeing of a person. Health is not only about diseases, but it is also about mental health. Health is also about being socially well or social wellbeing. Thus, education, poverty, etc. are also closely related to health. When we try to look at health or prisoners' health in relation to the SDGs, almost all the goals are related somehow or the other. In many studies, it is found that, a large number of prisoners come from socially and

economically disadvantaged background. They are in need of good healthcare. Once released they will again go to the same old community with loads of disadvantages, and poverty. Prison can give them the healthcare they need removing inequalities they generally face in society, and return them back as healthy citizens capable of working with dignity.

If we closely study the SDGs, there are no less than six goals which are very significantly connected to the health of the prisoners. The goals which are directly linked are- 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 16. The 1st goal talks about ending poverty in all its forms. There is a close relationship between health and poverty, and thus a well-developed health service will lead to proper achievement of all the targets of the 1st goal. The 2nd goal stands for end of hunger, achieving food security, and implementation of sustainable agriculture. The prison inmates should be given nutritious and healthy food to ensure their good health. Sustainable agriculture can be practised inside the prison by training the inmates on producing vegetable and other eatables within the prison only. The 3rd goal and its targets show the ways as to how to achieve well-being of all, everyone's health irrespective of age. There are rules set for prisons staffs who has to give extra care to the elderly inmates, and the women prisoners who are pregnant, new mothers, etc. starting with the 5th goal that talks about empowerment of women and girls, gender specific health services need to be provided. Here women prisoners are also included. The 6th goal talks about water and sanitation. It advocates for ensuring safe and pure drinking water to all, sustainable water management, and proper sanitation everywhere. Naturally, prisons are not excluded. The 7th goal stands for "ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all." In Prisons it can be achieved by bringing changes in the infrastructure of the prisons, and adopting clean energy. The 8th goal is about promoting inclusive and sustainable development, providing decent and productive employment to all eligible people. By starting substantive rehabilitation programmes, the prisons can promote a healthy population. There are many ways to achieve this. The prisoners can be given proper vocational training and arrangements can be made where the employers will employ people with past record of imprisonment. The prisoners can be made aware of various welfare programmes that they can avail after getting released. Entrepreneurship among the prisoners after release can be encouraged. They can take care of their health When they will be earning and leading a good life post release. The 9th goal talks about "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation". By building research and engagement networks like, the Worldwide Prison Health Research & Engagement Network, it is very much possible to keep a watch on the development and status of prison health. Goal 11 stands for inclusive human settlements, and cities which are safe and resilient. The prisons, at present, are not at all safe, sustainable and resilient. They are suffering from overcrowding which further results into diseases, infection, and other health problems. Further, the infrastructure is also not proper. Thus, these areas must be addressed by the authorities which can play a great role in achievement of the sustainable development goals. The 12th aim stands for "responsible consumption and production". It also talks about recycling, reusing, reduction of wastage of food, etc. goal number 13 is

about taking actions for tackling climate change and the impacts of it. The countries should include prisons and the inmates, their health, any impact of climate change on all these while making nation policies to deal climate disasters, making recovery plans, etc. It is also very necessary to conduct programmes to make the prisoners and staffs aware about climate change impacts, and hazards related to it. Talking about resilience planning, the pandemic made it crystal clear that it is important to include the prisons in such planning. Goal 17 advocates to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.” The global partnerships such as the WHO Health in Prisons Programme and other such arrangements can prove to be beneficial for maintaining a system of surveillance on the prison health. Such initiative can pave the way to a programme on prison health in a global scale (Ismail N, 2012).

Although prison health is connected to the SDGs, there are so many hurdles in the way to proper implementation. The implementation process of the SDGs is very much politically dependent. Each state and government have its own way of implementing the goals. Besides, the goals are not binding on the states. The states take it up voluntarily. Generally, the implementation process is connected to the national planning process, and the monitoring is done by the method called Voluntary National Reviews. Sometimes, the implementation process gets hampered due to the socio-economic constraints (UN, 2015). The pandemic made it worse. It brought with it global economic crisis. Resources were started to be utilised for mainstream Covid fights. Naturally, the resources which were supposed to be utilised for prisons and prisoners’ health got curtailed. The prisoners come from poor backgrounds with poor health condition and immunity. Thus, there was every possibility of them getting infected. Besides, the prison staff’s movement also posed a threat. In many prisons the standard of sanitation cleanliness facilities is not at par. There is also overcrowding. Further, due to financial crunch and layoff, there were reduction in staffs of the prisons worldwide leading to increase in violence inside the prisons, suicides, etc. (N., 2020). Adequate amount of resources were not released for health as well as welfare in the criminal justice system making the possibility of the area of prison health contributing towards realisation the SDGs a distant dream. Popular opinion can also go against prison health. Crime and punishment are not taken very positively in most of the societies. Thus, people are not in favour of much resource allotment for prisoners’ health. Considering the resource crunch, it is not possible for the governments to maintain more imprisonment. Thus, the concept of decarceration may be considered on case-to-case basis. This will be a big step towards reformation of criminal justice system and it will be complementing the process of realising the SDGs.

There are many international agreements and declarations which take a stand in favour of the prisoners, their health, human rights, and an overall wellbeing. The Moscow Declaration of the World Health Organisation declared the health of prisoners an issue of public health. The Mandela Rules (Gilmour) is another such example. It was first approved in 1957 and revised in 2015. These rules are named after Nelson Mandela talks about giving humane treatment to prisoners, the idea of prisoners being part of the society, and the work

of the staffs of the prisons as important social service. The Tokyo Rules (United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures 1990) (UN, 1990) talks about reducing the imprisonment rate by the states and thinking about better alternatives. The Beijing Rules (UN, 1989) (United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice 1985) and the Havana Rules (UN, 1990) (United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty 1990) are about the health, human rights, and wellbeing of the young prisoners. According to these rules, imprisonment of young people should be the last resort of punishment by every member state of the United Nations. They should be provided with counselling in the detention stage, and there should be early release of such prisoners. The Bangkok Rules (United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders 2010) (Crime, 2010) are advocating the causes like education and health of the women prisoners in particular.

Prison is a part of our communities, and it is not out if it. Those who are in prison now were in the community before and will be reintegrated with the same communities again. Prison stay is for their reformation and rehabilitation. Just because they are imprisoned for a period of time does not make them less human. Their health is also important. It is better to receive them back to the society as a reformed and healthy person on their release. Thus, community and prison health programmes should go hand in hand. Everyone here should be included and no one should be missed when people move from one social setting to another, that is from society/community to prison and vice versa. The implementation the the Sustainable Development Goals must benefit all, be it a free man or a prisoner.

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