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Earth Overshoot Day: India a role model for global consumption

India does not have an overshoot day yet, but danger lurks

Politics August 22, 2020 / By [Ranvir Nayar](https://mediaindia.eu/author/ranvir/) (https://mediaindia.eu/author/ranvir/) / Mumbai

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Beef production is most ecologically damaging & food accounts for over 50 pc of global bioresources

Even though Earth Overshoot Day 2020 has been delayed by three weeks due to coronavirus pandemic, humanity is racing ahead to rapidly devour all global resources.

If the whole world lived like Qatar, global resources for an entire year would be exhausted by February 11. For Luxembourg it is February 16. In the UAE the occasion would be March 7. For France, Germany & UK, the date would be in May, China in June and Indonesia on December 18, the latest for a big nation, according to dataset released by Global Footprint Network (GFN), an organisation that collects consumption data from each nation and compares with its total biocapacity as well as the biocapacity of entire Earth to reach an annual Earth Overshoot Day.

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Mercifully, India does not yet figure in the list of nations that are consuming resources faster than the entire Earth can manage if every human followed

suit. The per capita consumption of world's second largest nation is not yet in the danger zone of being unsustainable.

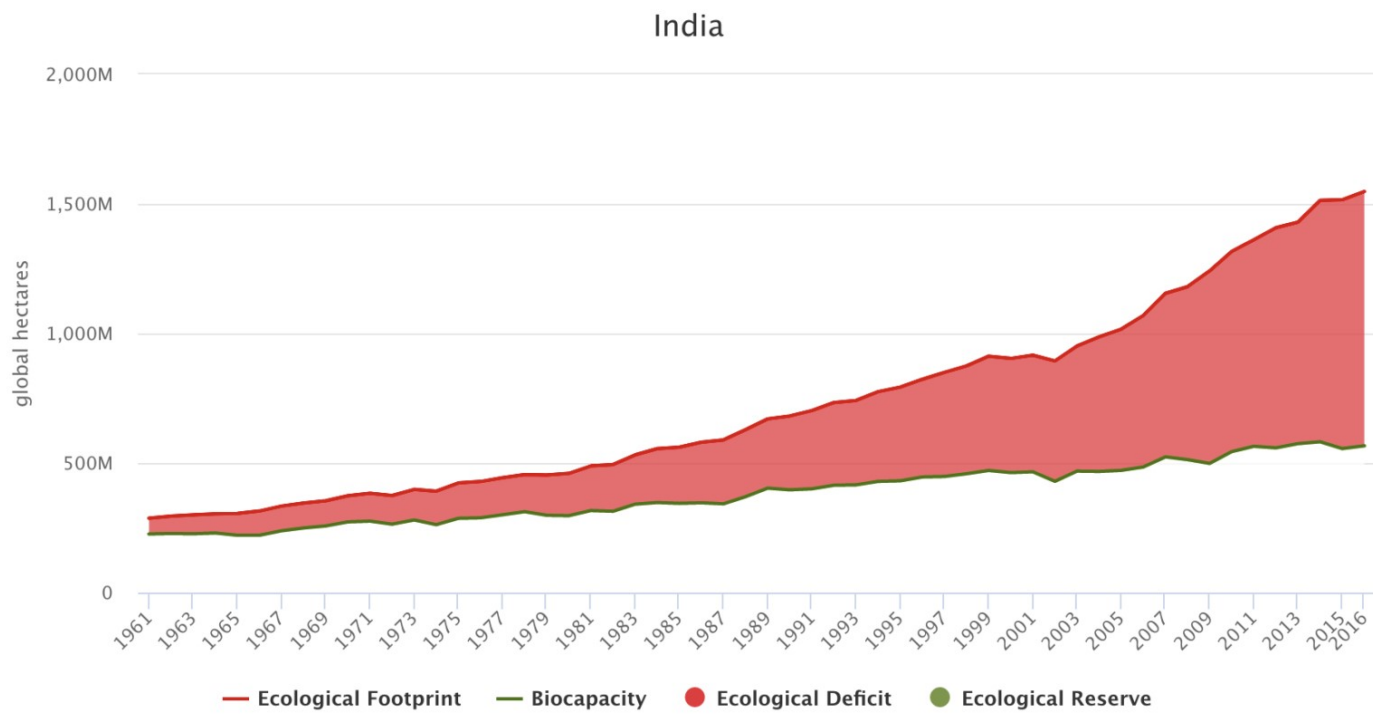
Indeed, while if every human being lived like an American citizen, five Earths would be needed to sustain life, while it is 4.1 Earths for Australian, 2.2 for the Chinese and a mere 0.7 for India, says GFN. "Fiftyone other countries are in the same case as India, i.e. if everyone in the world lived like their average resident, humanity would use less than the resources of the planet and there would be no Earth Overshoot Day. That's just under a third of all the countries in the world, representing 2.9 billion people or 39% of the world population," GFN tells *Media India Group*.

Of these 51, India is the largest and hence a critical point of reference for the global ecological security. On practically all the counts, the current Indian lifestyle is best suited for protecting the environment. India's per capita power consumption was a third of the global average last year, while the country's per capita carbon emission was 40 pc of the global average.

Indeed, the list is long and there are many aspects of India's current consumption patterns that could be the solution to the world's resources challenges. However, India faces several challenges of its own. First is that broadly the low consumption per capita of resources is not by choice, but rather by limited economic means of consuming more. Practically across all parametres, per capita Indian consumption has risen rapidly in the past two decades thanks to the economic boom which has enabled people to spend more for everything – from food and automobiles to household gadgets and luxury products.

Take luxury products for instance. Just in the past seven years, annual per capita spend on luxury goods has grown nearly three-fold, from USD 3217 in 2012 to USD 7518 in 2019. While the number of domestic tourism trips per capita has jumped seven times from 0.2 trips a year in 2000 to 1.6 per year in 2018. The story of rapid, and unsustainable, rise in consumption is repeated in all aspects of the economy.

This rapid rise in consumption rings a warning bell, according to GFN. "India Overshoot Day is not listed because if everyone in the world lived like the average resident of India, humanity would use less than the resources of the planet. But bear in mind that the average ecological footprint per capita has been rising 42 pc from 2002-14, (unchanged since then) driven by the carbon footprint," GFN tells *Media India Group*.



Global Footprint Network, 2019 National Footprint Accounts
 India's biocapacity has declined from 1961-2016 as resource utilisation increased, creating a significant deficit

Another cause for worry for India is that even though the country has been blessed by nature with bountiful resources, India is already living beyond its means. In 2016, India's per capita biocapacity stood at 0.4 gha (global hectares), but its ecological footprint per person stood at 1.2 gha, meaning that if all the bioresources needed for India have to be found within India, the country's area should increase 2.5 times. What is worrying is that the per capita biocapacity has declined 20 pc in the past 55 years, from 0.5 gha in 1961 to 0.4 gha in 2016.

The situation is just as gloomy elsewhere in the world, says GFN. "Coronavirus-induced lockdowns caused the global ecological footprint to contract about 10% but this still leaves us many ecological resources still used as 1.4 Earths. As public health and economic recovery have resumed, we

almost 10 pc but we still use as many ecological resources as if we lived on 1.6 Earths. As public health and economic recovery have emerged as dominant concerns globally, decision makers are called to act on the unprecedented current disruption to build a future where all thrive within the means of our planet. Sustainability requires both ecological balance and people's well-being ensured over the long-term, therefore this year's sudden Ecological Footprint contraction cannot be mistaken for progress," said Global Footprint Network CEO Laurel Hanscom, adding, "This year more than ever, Earth Overshoot Day highlights the need for strategies that increase resilience for all."

One major area of improvement would be in food production, which accounts for 50 pc of the planet's biocapacity. Policies aimed at promoting lower carbon-intensity of food and the impact of food production on biodiversity are urgently needed. Beef is by far the most damaging for ecology as to produce one kg of beef, a total of 60 kg of carbon dioxide is released. For a kg of wheat, 1.4 kg of CO₂ is released and each kilo of bananas leads to 700 gm of carbon emission.

Indeed, a shift towards eco-responsible eating habits could itself push the overshoot day towards much later in the year. But for that to happen, humanity has to give up its greed first, a very daunting task.

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