

Imagining sustainability: *insights from COVID-19 lockdown in India*

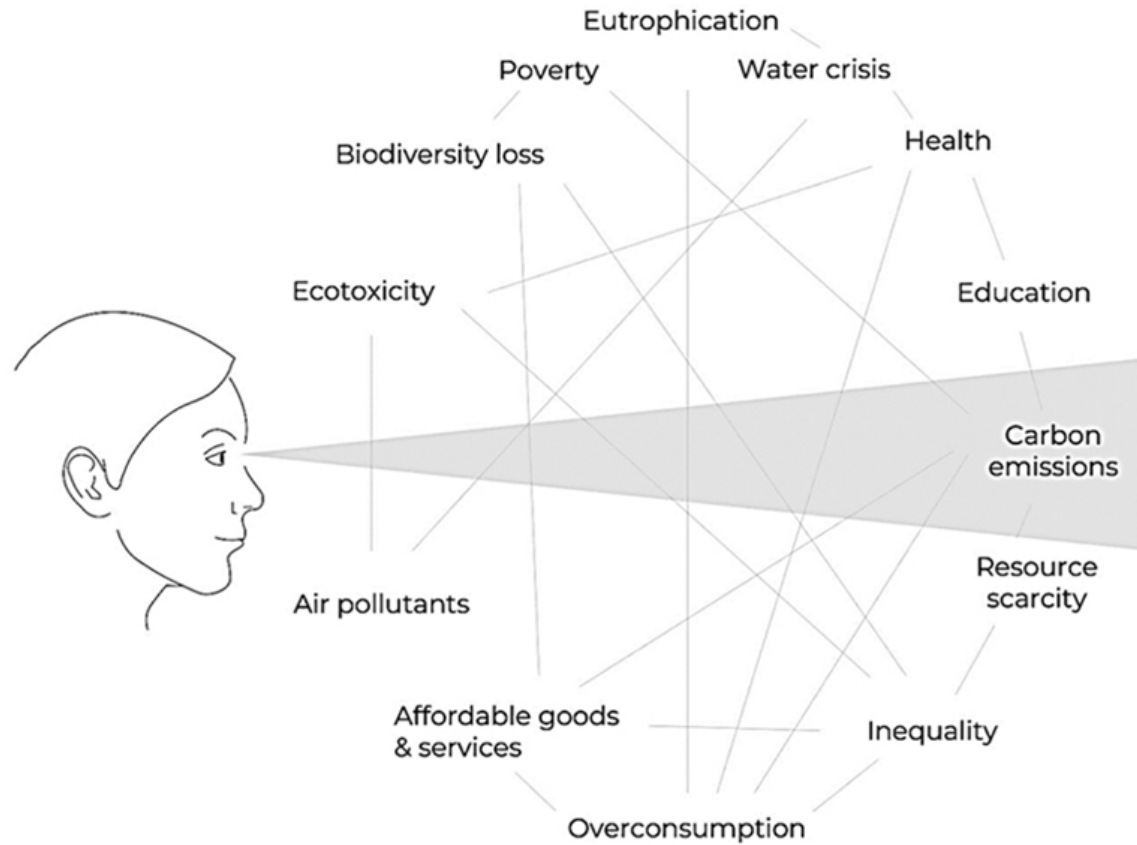
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Carbon Tunnel Vision



Sustainability transition

Graphic by Jan Konietzko

'Tunnel vision' during COVID-19

Jalandhar Residents Wake up to View of Himalayan Range as COVID-19 Lockdown Leaves Air Cleaner



The Dhauladhar mountain range, part of the Himalayan range in Himachal Pradesh, became visible in Jalandhar after years as pollution dipped across Punjab.

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Bengaluru Water Bodies Look Cleaner, 3 Weeks Into Coronavirus Lockdown

Videos are now being shared that show the water bodies in Bengaluru much clearer than usual.

All India | Written by Maya Sharma | Updated: April 15, 2020 9:42 pm IST



Science of The Total Environment

Volume 730, 15 August 2020, 139086



Effect of lockdown amid COVID-19 pandemic on air quality of the megacity Delhi, India

Susanta Mahato [✉](#), Swades Pal [✉](#), Krishna Gopal Ghosh [✉](#)

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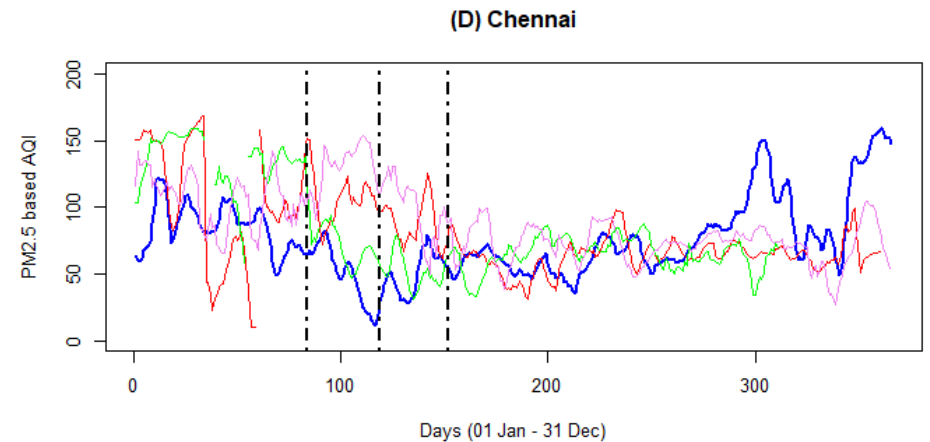
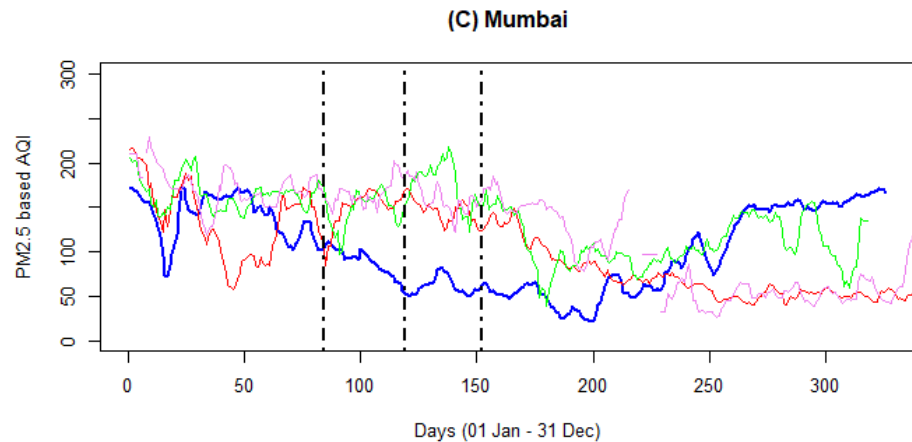
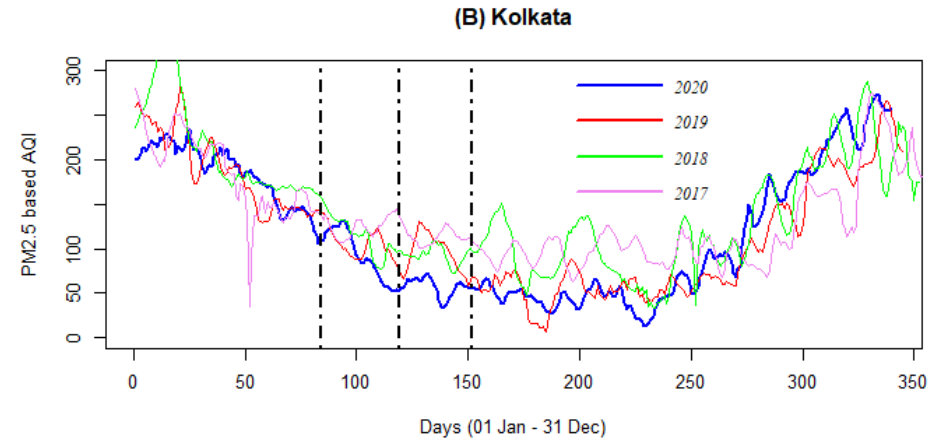
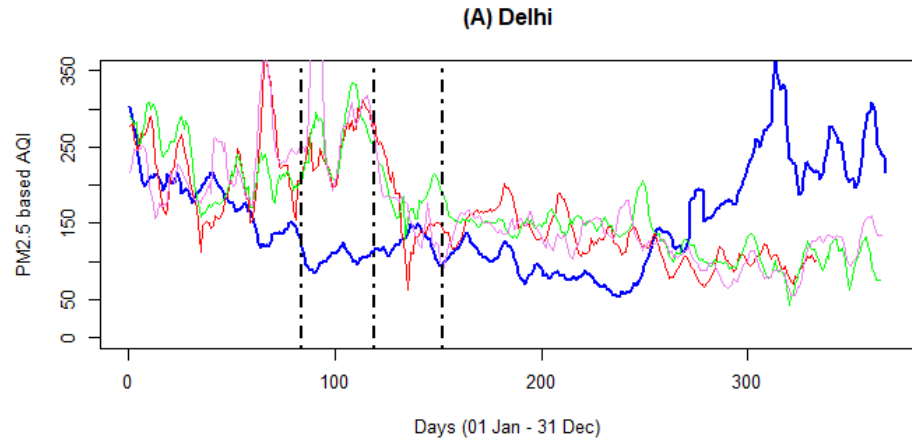
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.139086>

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Highlights

- PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} concentrations reduced by about half in compare to the pre-lockdown
- NO₂ and CO have also shown considerable decline during lockdown.

Environmental 'improvements' during 2020 lockdown



Social and economic impacts of the lockdown

- Massive economic slowdown: 23.9% drop in GDP during Apr-Jun 2020
- Unemployment: 7.8% to 23.5% between Feb and Apr 2020 (CMIE estimates)
- Most affected
 - urban poor, migrant labourers, agriculturists (initial stage)
 - Middle 'category' households (later stage): severe decline in consumption among the 40%-80% category (Kapoor et al, 2021, based on World Bank COVID survey data)
- What factors led to decrease in consumption?

Change in consumption and inequality

Average Household Consumption and Net Change in Average Household Consumption between February and September 2020

Average Household Consumption (INR)					Average Net change in Consumption (%)			
	Feb	May	Jul	Sep	Feb-May	May-Jul	Jul-Sep	Feb-Sep
Agriculture	2541.68	2320.60	1672.34	1839.86	-8.70%	-27.94%	10.02%	-27.61%
Non-cultivation	2235.19	2188.23	1648.64	1950.46	-2.10%	-24.66%	18.31%	-12.74%
Labour	2101.12	1964.97	1571.57	1629.03	-6.48%	-20.02%	3.66%	-22.47%

Inequality and Net Change in Inequality between February and September 2020

Household Consumption (Gini Coefficient)					Net change in Household Consumption (% change in Gini Coefficient)			
	Feb	May	Jul	Sep	Feb-May	May-Jul	Jul-Sep	Feb-Sep
Agriculture	0.4039	0.4495	0.4539	0.4703	11.31%	0.98%	3.61%	16.45%
Non-agriculture	0.3493	0.3875	0.3827	0.4108	10.91%	-1.24%	7.35%	17.59%
Labour	0.3771	0.4592	0.3940	0.3803	21.76%	-14.21%	-3.47%	0.84%

Joint work with S. Nag; Nag and Thomas, in preparation

Determinants of change in consumption

Variable	Coefficients
<i>AGRI</i>	-104.7905 (136.8611)
<i>LAB</i>	-128.6713 (172.7618)
<i>PPCON</i>	-0.5625*** (0.0198)
<i>REL</i>	-0.0053 (0.0299)
<i>SHG</i>	-189.9051* (106.2215)
<i>HHSIZE</i>	78.2504*** (17.0491)
<i>UC</i>	187.7876 (140.6255)
<i>MC</i>	252.9406** (115.6659)
<i>HE</i>	362.7067** (167.4975)
<i>ME</i>	91.3313 (154.5784)
<i>Constant</i>	568.1851*** (216.8827)
<i>Observations</i>	1634
<i>R</i> ²	0.335

- Consumption decreased and inequality increased during the first months of the lockdown
- Wealth, caste, household size and education determined change in consumption, but not whether the household is primarily agricultural or labour

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, p*<0.1

Questions of 'equity' and 'sustainability'

- Increasing inequality since 1980s (Chancel and Piketty, 2019)
 - 22% of income share held by richest 1%
 - Increase in Gini index (based on IHDS): .53 (2004-05) to .55 (2011-12)
- Consumption of the poorer and middle-income households is at subsistence or on essentials with the significant environmental footprint coming from the affluent

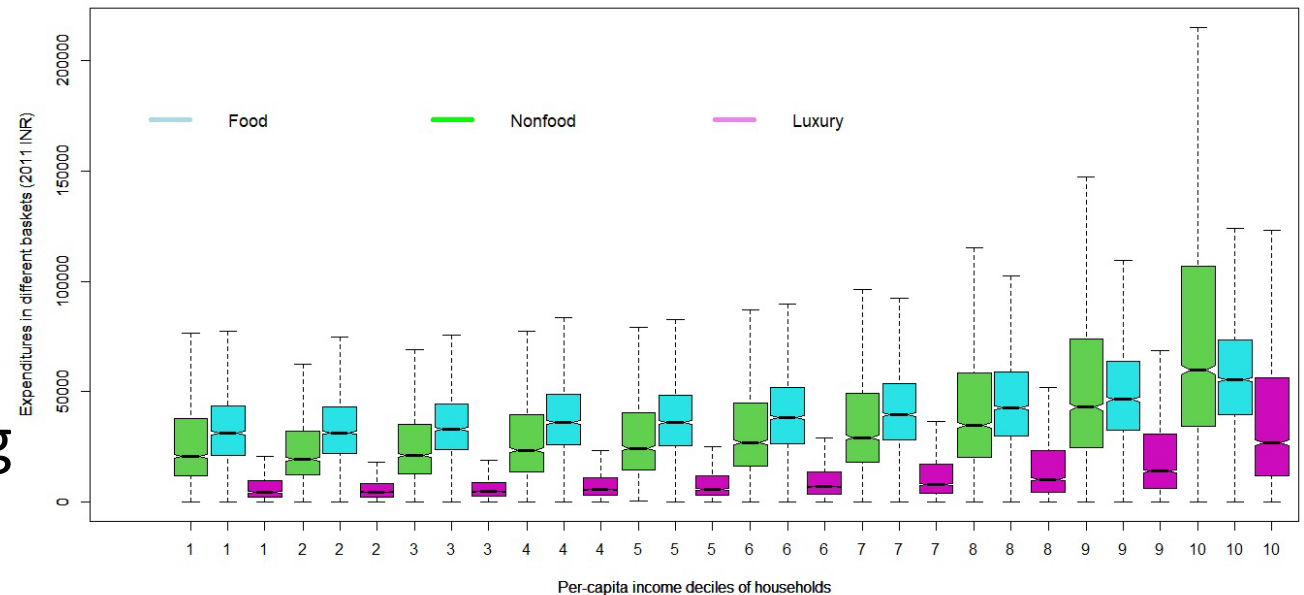


The scale and drivers of carbon footprints in households, cities and regions across India

Jemyung Lee, Oliver Taherzadeh, Keiichiro Kanemoto

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- 'Magical Thinking' and the redistribution numbers: Can we bring 86% of the Western population to accept the current mean global income of \$PPP 16? (Milanovic, 2021)



Source: IHDS 2011-2 (rural and urban), Thomas et al, 2021

Imagining sustainability

- Environmental concerns more relevant than ever; alongside huge socio-economic disparities
- Both were evident during COVID-19 lockdown
- Environmental sustainability post COVID-19
 - Green Growth – an oxymoron?
 - Degrowth – too idealistic? And Eurocentric?
 - Degrowth for the rich, and growth for the poor perhaps?