

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Mrs. M. Nirmala, M.A., M.Phil., B.L.

Assistant Professor of Political Science, School of Excellence in Law,

ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation is the result of the dynamic interplay of socioeconomic, institutional and technological activities. Environmental changes may be driven by many factors including economic growth, population growth, urbanization, intensification of agriculture, rising energy use and transportation. Poverty still remains a problem at the root of several environmental problems. The impact of environmental degradation on society is presented in this study and the remedial measures to be taken by the Government for the sustainable development of the quality of life for the future generation. The purpose of this paper is to review the current state of the environment and identifying the policy issues for promoting sustainable development.

Key Words: *Environmental degradation, sustainable development, policy measures.*

INTRODUCTION

Economic development is a process whereby an economy's real national income increases over a long period of time. There is direct relationship between environment and economy. Economic development without environmental considerations can cause serious environmental damage in turn impairing the quality of life of present and future generations. In the process of economic development, the environmental problems have been ignored or less concentrated. Now, the need of the hour is to concentrate on sustainable development. Sustainable development means, "Meeting the needs of present generation without compromising with the needs of future generations". In 1983, the United Nations set up the World Commission on Environment and Development called 'the Brundtland Commission' to examine the problems related to this area. The Commission in its report entitled "Our Common

Future" submitted in 1987, used and defined this concept of sustainable development for the first time.

OBJECTIVES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development aims at the creation of the sustainable improvements in the quality of life for all people and this should be the principal goal of development policy. Accordingly, the main objectives of sustainable development are stated as under:(1) Accelerating economic growth (2) Meeting basic needs (3) Raising living standards (4) Helping in ensuring clean environment free from all types of pollution (5) Maximizing the net effects of economic development (6) Preservation and enhancement of the stock of the environmental, human and physical capital (7) Inter generational equity and (8) Overall strict control on gross exploitation of the natural resources of each country.

IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON SOCIETY:

Environmental degradation is the result of the dynamic interplay of socioeconomic, institutional and technological activities. Environmental changes may be driven by many factors including economic growth, population growth, urbanization, intensification of agriculture, rising energy use and transportation. Poverty still remains a problem at the root of several environmental problems. The impact of environmental degradation on society has been discussed in the following:

It has been estimated that the process of deforestation, bad soil and water management, submergence of and in dam reservoirs, industrial and urban expansion, overgrazing, wind and water erosion, salination, flooding, water logging and so on, contribute to a loss of productivity in roughly one million hectare of land annually. The above process results in desertification and creation of drought prone conditions, leading to the immersion of those dependent on land for their daily subsistence.

Given these processes and the resultant, decline in livelihood for the millions critically dependent on these resources, there are few options but to cultivate increasingly marginal lands, thereby compounding the sustainability crisis. The impact on women is even more severe, as the loss access to fuel, fodder and water forces them to walk miles to collect the essential necessities for their subsistence.

The consequent escalation in the pressure on available arable land is so enormous that it has contributed to the growth of criminalization in the country side with illegal occupation of community lands, the formation of land armies by land lords to oppose any demands by marginal farmers for land, as well as increasingly militant movements to assert local control over productive resources like land and forests. The latter process most often results in state repression, compounding the climate of social unrest.

Much of these have severally strained social relations within communities and between communities and the state. For instance, every year, over five lakh people are forcibly displaced by development projects alone. Most of them are not rehabilitated, and alternatives are rarely provided. In the process, communities and families are broken up, destroying structure of social and economic support.

Loss of cultural diversity is an inevitable consequence. For instance, a report based on a comprehensive survey of people displaced by the Rihau Dam stated that, "Many of the outsees, particularly the tribals, have fallen into the typical cycle of debt bondage, coupled with increasing destitution and intermittent employment as contract labourers in coal mines and elsewhere ... most were simply kicked out with nothing left to fend for themselves."

DIMENSIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN INDIA

Of the 266 million hectares considered productive, about 175 million hectares are degraded in varying degrees (arid, alkaline, saline, waterlogged, ravine and the like). About 90 million hectares are acutely degraded, chiefly on account of loss of tree cover and top soil, leading to floods and drought. Depletion of forest covers to about 19% of the total geographical area, instead of the desired 33%. India has only 2% of the forestland of the world but supports 16% of the world population. Shortage of fuel wood and fodder for rural needs, leading to more

pressure on the forests. Threats to faunal and floral species and biological diversity, because of disturbance of their habitat. Adverse impact of development activities such as mining, power generation, irrigation and industrialization.

Degradation of fragile ecosystems such as mangroves, irrigation lands, beaches and hill areas due to over exploitation, use of commercial agricultural practices, tourism and indiscriminate building activities. Pollution of water from domestic and industrial waste. Pollution of coastal areas and seas. Air pollution due to emission from industries. Increased production, transportation and use of hazardous chemicals. Degradation of the urban environment because of rapid expansion and inadequate basic services.

POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Environmental problems like air pollution, water pollution, soil degradation, deforestation, loss of bio-diversity, etc are caused by such diverse factors population growth, poverty, industrialization, agricultural development, transport development, urbanization, market failure etc. Such environmental degradation harms human health, reduces economic productivity and leads to the loss of amenities. Therefore, the damaging effects of environmental degradation can be reduced by a judicious choice of economic and environmental policies and environmental investments. The important policy measures for sustainable development are as follows:

1. **Reducing Poverty:** Reduction of poverty should be the foremost priority of the Government. It should select those projects which provide greater employment opportunities to the poor. It should expand health, family planning and education that will help reduce population growth. Supply of drinking water, sanitation facilities, and slum clearance should be given top priority.
2. **Removing Subsidies:** To reduce environmental degradation at no net financial cost to the Government, subsidies for resource use by the private and public sectors should be removed. Because, subsidies on the use of electricity, fertilizers, pesticides, diesel, petrol, gas, irrigation, water etc lead to their wasteful use and environmental problems.
3. **Clarifying and Extending Property Rights:** Lack of property rights over excessive use of resources leads to degradation of environment. This leads to overgrazing, deforestation and

over exploitation of minerals. Therefore, clarifying and assigning ownership titles to private owners will solve environmental problems.

4. **Market based Approaches:** Various market-based approaches should be adopted to protect environment. Market based instruments in the form of emission tax, pollution taxes, marketable permits, depositor fund system, input taxes, differential tax rates, user administrative charges, subsidies for pollution abatement equipment etc should be extensively used to protect environment.
5. **Regulatory Policies:** Regulatory policies are the other weapons for reducing environmental degradation. Regulators have to make decisions regarding price, quantity and technology. They decide the technical standards, regulations and charges on air, water and land pollutants.
6. **Public Participation:** Public awareness and participation are highly effective to improve environmental conditions. For this purpose, various formal & informal education programme, environmental awareness programmes, advertisement, public movements, afforestation, conservation of wild life etc are to be organized on a large scale.
7. **Trade and Environment:** The Government should formulate an environment friendly trade policy covering both domestic and international trade. It should encourage the establishment of less polluting industries, adoption of cleaner technologies, adoption of environment friendly processes etc to control environmental degradation.
8. **Participation in Global Environmental Efforts:** Participation in various international conventions and agreements on environmental protection and conservation can also help to minimize damages of environmental degradation. They include the Montreal protocol, the Basel convention, the Rio Declaration, the Agenda 21, the Earth summits, etc.
9. **Renewable energy:** Policies should be framed for the use of renewable energy like solar and wind in place of coal and petrol. Atomic Energy Agency predicted that renewable energy would overtake natural gas to become the second largest source of power generation worldwidewithin two years, and that global wind and solar generating capacity would increase by more than 30 per cent.

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

There is a scientific consensus that human activities are causing global warming that could result in significant impacts such as sea level rise, changes in weather patterns and adverse health effects. As it became apparent that major nations such as the United States and Japan would not meet the voluntary stabilization target by 2000, Parties to the Convention decided in 1995 to enter into negotiations on a protocol to establish legally binding limitations or reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It was decided by the Parties that this round of negotiations would establish limitations only for the developed countries, including the former Communist countries (called annex A countries).

Negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were completed December 11, 1997, committing the industrialized nations to specify, legally binding reductions in emissions of six greenhouse gases. The 6 major greenhouse gases covered by the protocol are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs), per fluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆).

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, who received the Sustainable Development Leadership Award 2009 at the Delhi Sustainable Summit said “a balanced, comprehensive and effective” international agreement will take place by the end of Dec.2009 at Copenhagen. As a regime, it must also be “rectifiable” as a successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

Mr. Ban said eradication poverty is not possible if we neglect or depleted our natural capital. He said science had shown that we were depleting the planet’s natural assets at an unsustainable rate. “Failure to combat climate change would increase poverty and hardships, destabilize economies, and breed insecurity in many countries.

CONCLUSION

Rapid environmental degradation that has been taking place all over the world in recent decades has alarmed economists and environmentalists alike. Fostering sustainable development requires the effective management of naturally human and physical capital. Improved coordination across the countries to share the global resources, technology and also scarce resources has become the need of the hour. Global level generosity in promoting and protecting

democracy, exchange of technology, maintaining stability of prices in the various economies, judicious use of all environmental material throughout to enhance human development and sustainable development. Sustainable development can be achieved only if the environment is conserved and improved.

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