

ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development. Advancing gender equality may be one of the best ways of saving the environment, and countering the dangers of overcrowding and other adversities associated with population pressure. The voice of women is critically important for the world's future not just for women's future. Women have unique concerns, values, and perceptions in terms of environmental protection class, race and ethnicity. They play a critical role in bringing about changes in attitudes and encouraging the adoption of greener lifestyles and climate-friendly values by their children.

Introduction

Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development. All generations, past, present and future had a responsibility to keep a good balance between humans and the environment and, at long last, humanity was beginning to realize that the balance was off for a number of reasons. One was the undue pressure that was being put on the environment and its natural resources. Another was the incidence of large population movements in migration. Finally, the spread of industrialization to poorer parts of the world was leading to serious environmental degradation.

Degradation of resources, destruction of the ozone layer, destruction of biological diversity and desertification were just a few of the great environmental disasters facing humanity today. She reviewed the steps being taken to reverse those trends, such as the recommendations contained in the Stockholm Convention on organic pollutants.

According to Idiatou Camara women had a greater awareness than men of the need to protect the environment for all humans. Motivating them to take part in protecting the environment and managing disasters would harness their enthusiasm for the effort. They would help develop the sense of responsibility all humans needed to maintain a good balance between humans and the earth's resources. Women needed to participate at the national level. They needed to get their countries to empower women to protect the environment in regions that could not afford such activities, such as in Africa. All women must use their influence to encourage democratization and discourage the economic oppression that led to massive population movements. Finally, women must mobilize to reverse the poverty that excluded the poor from participating in protecting the environment.

The world is unique for every human being, but, in general, women's lives vary greatly from those of men because of patterns of socialization

related to gender. In terms of the environment, women around the world play distinct roles: in managing plants and animals in forests, drylands, wetlands and agriculture; in collecting water, fuel and fodder for domestic use and income generation; and in overseeing land and water resources. By so doing, they contribute time, energy, skills and personal visions to family and community development. Women's extensive experience makes them an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise on environmental management and appropriate actions.

Women particularly those living in rural areas or mountain areas have special relationship with the environment. All women have relationship with environment but the approach is different from Urban Areas. They are more close to the nature than men and this very close relationship makes them perfect managers of an eco-system. The life of mountain women is so much intertwined with the environment that whole ecosystem revolves around her and she can't even think of her survival without it. For her forest is her mother's home as she is entirely dependent on the forest to meet her daily needs such as - water, fodder, fuels, minor forest product etc.

Aguilar (2002) argues, sustainable development is not possible without equity. In fact, it is a prerequisite for any action aimed at improving people's quality of life. This implies that gender equality and equity are not only a question of fundamental human rights and social justice, but are also instrumental, and a precondition, for environmental conservation, sustainable development and human security.

Women are among the groups most affected by negative environmental conditions yet they also have a significant accumulation of experience on environment. In addition, they are at a key position when exploitation of natural resources is concerned. However, women are kept rather behind in terms of their participation in decision-making mechanisms and the development of environmental policies. As they constitute a group both affected by and affecting the environment,

ensuring equal participation of women in environmental policies is necessary and important also in terms of protecting women's human rights. Nevertheless, participation of women in the protection and management of the environment and the development, planning and execution of environmental policies is not yet at the desired level.

Involving women in protecting the environment would help societies develop the sense of responsibility needed to maintain a good balance between humans and the earth's resources.

Objective of the Study

For mitigating climate change, women propose more comprehensive approaches to those advocated by men, but they have less power and influence to affect public policy. Women tend to focus more on lifestyle and social changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing the impact of unsustainable consumption and production patterns on the environment and promoting actions such as energy-saving and greener purchasing. This paper aims to analysis the role played by women in environment protection.

The paper is divided into nine sections including the introductory section. The second section of the paper deals with the objective of the paper. Role of women in conservation of environment is analyzed in the third section. Environment degradation has been presented in the fourth section. In the fifth section important women in environmental movement has been discussed. Ecological movements initiated by women are presented in sixth section and theoretical perspectives are analyzed in seventh section. In eighth section women and sustainable consumption are discussed. Finally, the concluding section provides a summary of the present study and its main conclusions.

Role of Women in Conservation of Environment

Traditionally, women have been responsible for subsistence and survival for water, food, fuel, fodder

and habitat, though they rarely get the credit for nurturing these life support systems. Women have always been the principal conservers of bio-diversity. Even today they perform duties such as seed selection, multiplication and conservation. The on-farm conservation traditions of rural and tribal women, with reference to agro-biodiversity are well known. It is important to expand the basis of food security by including large numbers of species and varieties of food plants still maintained by tribal and rural families.

Traditionally, women have dealt with non-monetized biomass based subsistence economy of the household i.e. firewood, cow dung, crop wastes, organic manure, etc. In comparison men tend to destroy nature to earn cash even if it means creating hardship in their own families for their womenfolk to collect fuel and fodder e.g. sale of herbs and wood. The upshot is that women work as unpaid labourers on family farms with a greater role than men in operational decision making. The population pressure has increased male migration, which in turn adds to the women's work load. In effect this means that women's responsibilities extend from the household duties to working in the fields as well.

In developing areas of the world, women are considered the primary users of natural resources because they are the ones who are responsible for gathering food, fuel and fodder. Although in these countries, women mostly can't own the land and farms outright, they are the ones who spend most of their time working on the farms to feed the household. Shouldering this responsibility leads them to learn more about soil, plants, and trees and not misuse them. Although, technological inputs increase male involvement with land, many of them leave the farm to go to cities to find jobs; so women become increasingly responsible for an increasing portion of farm tasks. These rural women tend to have a closer relationship with land and other natural resources, which promotes a new culture of respectful use and preservation of natural resources and the environment, ensuring that the following generations can meet their needs. Besides

considering how to achieve appropriate agricultural production and human nutrition, women want to secure access to the land. Women's perspectives and values for the environment are somewhat different than men's. Women give greater priority to protection of and improving the capacity of nature, maintaining farming lands, and caring for nature and environment's future.

Considering the concept "Women and Environment" from a gender perspective, three main issues can be distinguished:

- i) Women as parties affecting environment;
- ii) Women as parties affected by environment;
- iii) Under-representation of women in policy development and decision-making processes pertaining to environment (Policy document, Women and Environment, 2008, p.6).

Women have a stake in environment and this stake is reflected in the degree to which they care about natural resources. Ecofeminism refers to women's and feminist perspectives on the environment - where the domination and exploitation of women, of poorly resourced peoples and of nature is at the heart of the ecofeminist movement. By establishing domestic and international non-governmental organizations, many women have recognized themselves and acknowledge to the world that they not only have the right to participate in environmental dilemmas but they have different relationship with environment including different needs, responsibilities, and knowledge about natural resources. This is why women are affected differently than men by environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution and over pollution.

Women are often the most directly affected by environmental issues, so they become more concerned about environmental problems. Studies have shown the direct effects of chemicals and pesticides on human health. According to United Nations Chronicle journal researchers have found an association between breast cancer and the pesticide DDT and its derivative DDE; and also one study by

the World Health Organization has found that women who are exposed to pesticides face a higher risk of abortion. These kinds of health problems cause women to feel more responsible regarding environmental issues.

The environmental degradation caused while men have had dominance over women, and women's large investment in environmental sustainability, some have theorized that women would protect the Earth better than men if in power. Although there is no evidence for this hypothesis, recent movements have shown that women are more sensitive to the earth and its problems. They have created a special value system about environmental issues. People's approaches to environmental issues may depend on their relationship with nature ex. Peepal, Awala, Tulsi, Bargad are Holistic plants & tree. Both women and nature have been considered as subordinates entities by men throughout history, which conveys a close affiliation between them.

Idiatou Camara, Guinea's National Environment Director, one of four environmental protection experts exchanging views with the Commission on the theme of the gender perspective in environmental management and disaster mitigation, said women needed to participate at the national level and get their countries to empower women in regions unable to afford protection activities. They must encourage democratization and discourage the economic oppression that led to massive population movements degrading the environment. They must mobilize to reverse the poverty which excluded the poor from protecting the environment because limited knowledge and technical ability prevented them from addressing problems.

Another panelist, Marie Yolene Surena, Director, Civil Protection, Ministry of Interior of Haiti, said investing in women for roles in environmental risk management was not only beneficial, but profitable. Managing environmental risk was part of the development process, while managing disasters now was a drain on development funds. The priorities must be to develop human resources,

change laws, address food security and slow population increases.

Though the Government of India is working towards an environmentally sound and sustainable quality of life, the problems, challenges and issues are multi-faceted. However, women in India are playing a crucial role in protection and conservation of environment. Women in our country have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. Poor women in our country have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. Poor women's lives are not compartmentalized and they see the issues in a broad and holistic perspective. They understand clearly that economics and environment are compatible. Their experience reveals to them that soil water and vegetation, necessary for their day-to-day living, requires, care and good management. Environmental degradation is related not only to the biosphere alone, but to the social sphere as well.

Keeping in view the inherent capabilities of women in the management as well as the need for women entrepreneurship, development, educational and vocational training in various fields, communication skills, creativity and innovation, quality management and control and production management need to be strengthened throughout the length and breadth of the country. To achieve this, resources and strength of women need to be channelized to develop their full potential so as to take their rightful place as equal partners in all spheres.

As the world moves forward at a phenomenal speed with scientists and technological advances, there is a growing feeling that biotechnological empowerment of women is absolutely essential for progress. With this in view and taking note of the potential of Biotechnology, the Department of Biotechnology has initiated programmes since 1998 to empower women and rural population by imparting skills for additional income generation. The programme has been designed to train the human resources in absorbing the technology to be adopted and practiced by them

and finally how the product can be developed and sold in the market. Therefore the marketing skill has been considered as one of the major aspects. The programme also envisages training for the entrepreneurship so that it can attract women and rural youth to start their small enterprises for their livelihood. While designing such programmes adequate emphasis has been given on managerial aspects including financial management. The Department supported projects mainly in three different modes, namely, field demonstration, extension oriented activities and development of entrepreneurs in the proven biotechnologies and R & D Programmes specially addressed to specific problems to the women.

Environment Degradation

Environmental degradation has become a crucial issue in the contemporary world. Although women and men relate to the environment the same way in many ways, they also use plant and animals, land and water in different ways. Whether the air, water or land is clean or polluted may not have the same affect on men and women because of their different activities and socio economic role. Impacts of environmental degradation are divergent for various social groups and for different contexts.

Impact of Environmental Degradation on Women

Environmental degradation affects the Third World countries most adversely because of the vicious circle of poverty. In the Third World countries women constitute half of the entire population and they are the poorest of the poor—not merely in wealth but in every other index of development. So naturally women are the worst victims of environmental degradation as they depend upon the renewability of natural systems to provide them food, fuel, water and shelter for existence. Environment has both direct and indirect bearing on women.

Environmental Degradation: Theoretical Perspective

In the contemporary social science literature many different theoretical perspectives are developed to root out the causes and consequences of environmental degradation. The major theoretical perspectives of environmental degradation are as follows:

i) Pessimists or Neo-Malthusian Perspective

According to this perspective, population growth is the main cause of the socio-economic problem including environmental degradation. Among other supporters of Malthus, Ehrlich and Ehrlich (1968, 1990) in their books *Population Bomb* and *Population explosion* have explored the idea. According to this view, pollution, desertification, deforestation and other environmental problems are the product of population growth (Rahman, 1999, p.258). Overpopulation and poverty lead to uncontrolled use of resources which results in environmental degradation.

ii) Optimists or Cornucopian Perspective

In this view, population growth seems to be an asset rather than a burden for the balance of environment. Julian Simon and E. Boserup (1965) are the pioneers of this view. They argue that population is not a problem rather a solution. Innovations of technology, creativity, development of new ideas have created enormous alternatives and renewable resources (Rahman, 1999, p. 258). Similarly, innovation of different cleaning methods and ideas are the product of population explosion (Rahman, 1999, Sarre and Blunden 1995).

iii) Neutral or Marxist Perspective

According to this third view, population growth is not the cause of environmental degradation rather pattern of consumptions, distribution of resources, different social organizations and pattern of ownerships represent different state of environment. And fundamentally, pollution and environmental degradation of contemporary third world countries

can be explained in terms of their incorporation with the capitalist world (Rahman, 1999).

Rural Women and Environmental Degradation

Rural women collect food, fodder and fuel for family consumption from trees and forests. Deforestation results in the reduction in the variety of forest products which is of particular relevance for women. If the supply shrinks then the women are affected disproportionately by less food, less fuel, harder work.

Urban Women and Environmental Degradation

In urban areas women do not have the same close relationship with the natural environment as they do in the rural areas, but they are still affected by the degradation, being faced with problems such as poor housing, overcrowding and inadequate water supply and sanitation (Irshad, 2002, p.212). Many women have to live in urban slums located at unsuitable land in unhygienic condition. In both urban and rural areas environmental degradation results in negative impacts on the health, livelihood opportunities, well being and quality of life of population at large, especially women.

Important Women in Environmental movement

One of the outstanding women environmentalists is Rachel Carson. Rachel Carson (1907-1964) was a scientist, writer, and ecologist. Her book 'silent spring' advanced the global environmental movement; she has made a great contribution to environmental protection in theory and practice. In the book Carson documented the threats chemical pesticides posed to humans and the plants and animals with whom we share the earth, she spoke out chemical companies and government agencies that pursued pest eradication campaigns at the expense of natural environment.

Maria Cherkasova (1938) is a journalists, ecologist, and director of Centre for Independent Ecological Programmes (CIEP). She is famous because of coordinating a 4-year campaign to stop construction of hydro-electric dam on the Katun River. After Cherkasova involvement in the student movement on environmental protection in 1960's, she began to work for the Red Data Book for the Department of Environmental Protection in 1960's; she began to work for the Red Data Book for the Department of Environmental Protection Institute. She co founded the Socio-Ecological Union, which has become the largest ecological NGO in the former Soviet Union. In 1990, she became director of CIEP, which arrange and drives activities in an extensive range of ecologically related areas on both domestic and international fronts.

Wangari Maathai founded Green Belt Movement and also the first environmentalist with Nobel Prize. Besides, there are numerous lay women fighting for their environmental rights. Those who were involved in Chipko movement in India; those who were main component of Warren County Protest, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and Women in Development Europe (WIDE).

Ecological movements initiated by women

a) Chipko movement

One of the first environmentalist movements which was inspired by women was the [Chipko movement](#) (Women tree-huggers in India). "Its name comes from a Hindi word meaning "to stick" (as in glue). The movement was an act of defiance against the state government's permission given to a corporation for commercial logging. Women of the villages resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles which were dependent on the forests. Deforestation could qualitatively alter the lives of all village residents but it was the women who agitated for saving the forests. Organized by a non-governmental organization that Chandi Prasad Bhatt led, the

Chipko movement adopted the slogan “ecology is permanent economy.” The women embracing the trees did not tag their action as feminist activism; however, as a movement that demonstrated resistance against oppression, it had all the markings of such”.

It began when [Maharajah](#) of [Jodhpur](#) wanted to build a new palace in [Rajasthan](#) which is India’s [Himalayan](#) foot hills. While the [axemen](#) were cutting the trees, martyr [Amrita Devi](#) hugged one of the trees. This is because in Jodhpur each child had a tree that could talk to it. The axmen ignored Devi and after taking her off the tree cut it down.

b) Green Belt movement

The Green Belt Movement was one of the first efforts to incorporate the links between gender and natural resources within a grassroots environmental campaign – in this case, by mobilizing women to plant indigenous trees. [Nobel Prize](#) winner [Wangari Maathai](#) founded this movement in Kenya on Earth Day in 1977. The starting ceremony was very simple: a few women planted seven trees in Maathai’s backyard. By 2005, 30 million trees had been planted by participants in the Green Belt movement on public and private lands.

The Green Belt movement aims to bring environmental restoration along with society’s economic growth. This movement led by Maathai focused on restoration of [Kenya](#)’s rapidly diminishing forests as well as empowering the rural women through environmental preservation, with a special emphasis on planting indigenous trees. This conflict started because men wanted to cut the trees to use them for industrial purposes while women wanted to keep them since it was their food resource and deforestation was a survival matter for local people.

c) Navdanya Movement

[Navdanya](#) also known as the 'Nine Seeds Movement' seeks to empower local Indian farmers to move away from growing any [genetically modified organism](#) (GMOs) on their land and return to organic, chemical-free practices. This movement has reached over 5,000,000 Indian farmers and created

over 65 seed banks around India. Navdanya fights to eliminate the [commercialization of indigenous knowledge](#) also known as 'Biopiracy'. Navdanya addresses multiple other international issues including climate change, food security, misapplication of technology, food sovereignty, fair trade, and many others. This movement also created a learning center entitled Bija Vidyapeeth. Bija Vidyapeeth, in collaboration with Schumacher College in the United Kingdom, seeks to educate participants in sustainability and ecological principles.

d) Kenyan land takeover

In Kenya, starting in the mid 1980s, women protested against the elites and big foreign corporations who were coercing and controlling the production of the land. Rather than allowing food to be grown for survival, women were pressured by both their husbands and the government to cultivate coffee for foreign profit. Protests continued and gained strength over the next couple of decades. The protests eventually ended in a Kenyan power shift enforcing democratic national elections which resulted in redistribution of land possible.

Theoretical perspectives

A) Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism says that women are closer to nature than men are. This closeness, therefore, makes women more nurturing and caring towards their environment. Ecofeminism encompasses a variety of views but has a focus of patriarchal oppression and the social constructions relating to women and the environment. Some indicate the biology of women as the reason behind the closeness, while others credit culture and historical factors. An ecofeminist believes in a direct connection between oppression of nature and the subordination of women. Vandana Shiva is credited with bringing ecofeminism into public consciousness by her reports of the [Chipko](#) movement .

b) Environmental or Ecological Feminism

Environmental or ecological feminism differs from ecofeminism in that it is more focused on the actual, specific interactions with the environment. Connections between environment and gender can be made by looking at the gender division of labor and environmental roles rather than an inherent connection with nature. The gender division of labor requires a more nurturing and caring role for women, therefore that caring nature places women closer with the environment. The knowledge of nature is shaped by the experiences an individual has. Women have a distinct knowledge of the land, yet are excluded from policy decisions of development on that land. This is prominent in many developing countries where the responsibility of collecting fuel and fodder is placed upon the women. Both the resources and the meanings are taken into consideration with environmental feminism. There is a challenge to not only focus on the gender division of labor but also the actual appropriation methods of the resources. In other words, there is not simply an inherent connection between women and nature, rather there are material realities that exist.

Women and Sustainable Consumption

In terms of resource impacts, women tend to leave a smaller ecological footprint than men due to their more sustainable consumption patterns. Sustainable consumption is using resources in a way that minimizes harm to the environment while supporting the well-being of people. Men's lifestyles and consumer patterns, whether they are rich or poor, tend to be more resource-intensive and less sustainable than women's (Johnsson-Latham, 2006). Impressing a more feminine footprint would result in a smaller impact on the environment as well as better access to goods and services that take into account the needs of both women and men.

Surveys show that women tend to be more sustainable consumers. Women are more likely to recycle, buy organic food and eco-labelled products and place a higher value on energy-efficient transport (OECD, 2008a). They make more ethical consumer choices, paying closer attention to issues

including child labour and sustainable livelihoods. For example, in Sweden, statistics indicate that the group that is most concerned about eco-labelling and green purchasing includes some of the poorest members of society: single mothers. Women also use public transportation, even in households with cars, more often than men and travel short distances closer to home, while men more often travel in their own car and for greater distances (Johnsson-Latham, 2007).

These patterns of consumption not only reflect the differing financial means at the disposal of men and women, but also their broader orientations towards society and conceptions of self-identity. Assessments find that girls more than boys report higher levels of concern for the environment and a greater sense of responsibility for sustainable development starting as young as 15 (OECD, 2007e). Although consumer choices are influenced by income levels, social conditions and biases, gender is also a major factor. In their consumption choices, women throughout their lives affirm their reproductive role and concern about the longer-term well-being of families and children (UNEP, 2004).

In surveys, women support more government intervention in the marketplace to promote sustainable consumption behaviour. They advocate bans on unsustainable products, lower prices for environmentally-friendly goods, and better labelling of the environmental and social impacts of products and their production. In the home, women support government grants to make green energy choices cheaper and more easily available, comprehensive recycling programmes and facilities, and more stringent standards for housing stocks and energy conservation. To make travel more sustainable, women would like to see taxes imposed to account for the true environmental and social costs of various forms of transport (WEN, 2007).

Summary & Conclusion

Land and water resources form the basis of all agricultural systems and the protection of these resources is of vital importance for sustainable and

improved food production. Water is a major priority for rural women. They bring water into the house, they manage its domestic exploitation, they grow agricultural products with and without irrigation, they know how to store water, when water will become scarce, and they know whether a given water supply is domestically usable or not. Women have unique concerns, values, and perceptions in terms of environmental protection class, race and ethnicity. Throughout history men have looked at natural resources as commercial entities or income generating tools, while women have tended to see the environment as a resource support their basic needs. As an example, rural Indian women collect the dead branches which are cut by storm for fuel wood to use rather than cutting the live trees. Since African, Asian and Latin American women use the land to produce food for their family; they acquire the knowledge of the land / soil conditions, water, and other environmental features. Any changes in the environment on these areas, like deforestation, have the most effect on women of that area, and cause them to suffer until they can cope with these changes.

India is one of the few countries of the world that have made a specific reference in the constitution of to the need for environmental protection, control and preservation. The constitution (42nd Amendment) Act of 1976 has made it a Fundamental duty to protect and improve the natural environment. Article 51 (a) provides that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and have compassion for living creatures. Article 21 of Constitution guarantee the right to life; a life of dignity, to be lived in a proper environment, free from danger of disease and infection.

As the primary caregivers and educators of the next generation, women give greater emphasis to the role of communications and education in mitigating climate change. They play a critical role in bringing about changes in attitudes and encouraging the adoption of greener lifestyles and climate-friendly values by their children. More education

about climate change, its causes and ways to avoid it for all age groups is among the steps they advocate. Women themselves would like to know more about the science and technology of climate change, indicating a role for better training in this area. Worldwide, women organizations have contributed greatly to achieving sustainable development, promoting development and encouraging progress, which will help reduce or eliminate poverty. This is done by spelling out actions which would transform the lives of hundreds of millions of poor people and make the planet a better and safer place for our children and grand children through environmental protection, economic wellbeing and special equity.

The role of women in confronting and adapting to climate change should be increased in order to draw on a wider range of mitigation actions and better targeting of adaptation strategies. The present lack of women's participation in most policy-making signals a gap in the resources devoted to the climate challenge. More balanced and effective approaches could be developed if international climate change negotiation processes as well as national climate policies considered gender aspects.

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