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ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**DR. ASHIM KUMAR NATHANIEL ,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ,
CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT ,
CHRIST CHURCH COLLEGE ,
KANPUR .**

ABSTRACT:

For century's women around the world have been the source of indigenous knowledge to preserve and protect natural resources however society has continued to neglect this productive role of women in the conservation of the environment. This chapter provides a preliminary map of the extent of Indian women's vulnerability to environmental degradation associated with resources such as water, agriculture, forest energy etc. It also attempts to record and discuss the contribution of women, Indian government, Non-governmental organization and other agents towards environmental protection as well as other issues linking women and the environment.

KEY WORDS: Environmental Degradation, Sustainable development. Watershed Management

INTRODUCTION

Environment can be defined as the sum total of all conditions and influences that affect the development and life of organisms. Environment interwoven in day to day life of human beings and man can play a great role in preserving and improving the environment for the sake of a better future. Different developmental activities throughout the world are accelerating the pace of environmental degradation. This accounts for scarcities of natural resources, which subsequently threaten the sustained productivity and development. Therefore, for a sustainable development, every country needs to follow a stringent environmental policy where people will be responsible for ensuring long-term development.

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT:

It was in the first World Conference on Women, 1975 (Mexico City), that the -women and environmental issue was brought into public consciousness and, it was only in the 1980s that development agencies became actively aware of the need to consider gender issues in their environmental and natural resource management programmes. It was also realized later that the active participation of women and the integration of gender issues in environmental policies and actions are critical determinants for the implementation of the commitments of the 'Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the World Summit on Sustainable Development, (2002) and the Millennium Development Goals.

Women form the vital part of Indian economy constituting one third of the national labour force. Women are also considered to be managing various agricultural activities, animal husbandry, livestock and in managing these things they are an important section of society, who serve a crucial role in environmental management and the implementation of its principles. Women view environment as the life support systems of humanity and the source of all life, that people are dependent on . Women play multiple roles in the family, community, and in the protection and management of the natural resources. Their multifaceted roles lead to their multiple burden. Further, women's roles are directly affected by the state of environment because women are the main users of resources like water, forest resources and other land resources. Involving women in protecting the environment would help societies develop the sense of responsibility which is required to maintain a balance between humans and the earth's resources, In general women have better 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.

EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON WOMEN:

The continuing environmental degradation that affects all human lives has often a more direct impact on women. Women's health and their livelihood are threatened by pollution and toxic wastes, large -scale deforestation, decertification, drought and depletion of the soil of coastal marine resources, with a rising incidence of environmentally related health problems and even death reported among women and girls. Those most affected are rural and indigenous women, whose livelihood and daily substance depends directly on sustainable ecosystems.

Global framework of the Beiiin2 Platform for Action

NATURAL RESOURCES

Both Women and men are consumers exploiters and managers of natural resources degradation of forest watersheds 4 shows an agricultural land have a severe effect on women as they have a high degree of dependence on the natural environment to perform the daily householders in most of the less developed countries women are the one who collect fuel for the and food from trees and other plants as in case of agriculture women see forest resources as multifunction and use them in various forms to meet basic family needs most household energy in the less developed country is still generated by burning wood and other

biomass most of it is collected by women and young girls besides fuel women, collect t. forest vegetables and wild fruits for their use. They collect forest products to make household item such as poles mats and baskets. Environmental destruction and degradation in the lower developed countries increases the labour of rural women for example because of deforestation it has become more difficult for women to collect fuel wood and other forest products.

WATER RESOURCES

In less developed countries women and girls spend many hours in a day to collect water from distant and frequently polluted sources of water Lack safe drinking water is one of the greatest health hazards faced by rural Women and their, families. This exposes them and their children to malaria,, dysentery, Cholera, diarrhea, hepatitis and typhoid. In many less developed countries women work as farm labourers and thus make effort to increase agriculture productivity. Pesticides which they use for crops for a long time, adversely affects their health during pregnancy. In small and medium industries that is food products, leather products, painting dye, polythene bags etc. which create health problems for them. The root cause of these problems is poverty caused due to the degradation of soil, water resources and the scarcity of biomass resources to meet the daily needs of the family. For the decline in the availability of the forest products, leads to cutting down the women's primary source of income, deprivation of basics social services such as education, particularly to young girl's nutrition, sanitation and health indirectly leads to severe poverty in the long run.

INDOOR AIR POLLUTION:

According to World Bank air pollution kills 3 million women every year associated with indoor air pollution which comes chiefly from burning fuel indoors for cooking and therefore, affects mostly women and children. Such burning is also closely associated with the incidence of respiratory infections, lung diseases and low birth weight babies.

SLUMS AND DISEASES

Women in urban areas also face significant environmental problems. They live in poor houses where cleanliness and sanitation is missing. Lack of clean water, sewage and garbage services affect the health of women and other family member. Women are faced with typhoid paratyphoid and gastroenteritis, due to dirty drinking water.

INDUSTRIALISATION

Industrialization leads to Economic development by increasing production, income, more job opportunities and higher standard of living However it has also led to environmental degradation in terms of Industrial pollution smoke, fumes and toxic gas emissions, as a result of highly polluting industries such as thermal power plants, coal mines , cement sponge iron steel etc. They are not only hazardous but also cause irreparable damage to our ecology and environment. Discharge of untreated industrial effluents from

industries such as tanneries, jute units and chemicals in rivers has led to water pollution. Which adversely affect human health.

Participation of Women in Environmental Management

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Watershed Management is a term used to describe the process of implementing land use practices and water management practices to protect. And improve the quality of water and other natural resources within a watershed by managing the use of those land and water resources in the comprehensive manner. Involving women in watershed management programs is also crucial because women are usually responsible for collecting and processing fuel wood for the food and water. Non-government organization acting as intermediate between forest departments and community, help to maximize participation by women. Further, women consciousness of ecological issues makes them better managers of natural resources. This association between women and natural resources exist because of the social and economic rules which require them to provide food, fuel fodder and income for the surrounding resource base. According to U.N.

Conference on environment and development (UNCED) gender dimension is important in implementing the resolution on women in environment and development, and the national and international emphasis on ecosystem management and control of environment degradation. Women as an active partner should participate in tackling the environmental degradation on energy water and waste UNCED emphasis the role of women consists thus ; a) conservation of energy starts in the household and women should perform this process; b) designers of all water supply and sanitation systems should be required to consult women who are primary users in the home ;c) women often found ways to deal with waste economically and safely whether by reuse or by responsible consumer behaviour.

WSSD (World Summit on Sustainable Development) has advocated to reduce adverse health impacts resulting from indoor pollution with particular attention to women and children in the following ways:

- 1) Strengthening and supporting efforts for the reduction of emission through the use of cleaner fuels.
- 2) Assisting developing countries in providing affordable energy to rural communities, particularly to reduce dependence on traditional fuel sources for cooking and heating which affect the health of women and children.
- 3) Active participation of women in environmental protection and development process.

CHALLENGES:

As India urbanizes it requires more environmental resources' and better governance: However much of the growth is expected to be in burgeoning rural areas and semi-urban areas. Which will be outside the structures of urban Government and urban infrastructure for water and sanitation and where involving women in planning and decision making will be very difficult. Paucity of data is a Challenge because it hinders realistic assessment of the problem. There are large gaps in the data itself. Several areas like waste management are not covered though hygiene and waste disposal are the responsibility of women and girls, data between agencies also varies. Addressing the crisis of environment services requires real time data, because multiple factors influence provision. As India urbanizes it requires more environmental resources and better governance of public services, in cities and towns. For instance residents range from daily migrants to high income group, each throwing up different challenges. While daily migrants especially women may not have any domicile documents with them to avail water connections or go connections, richer people drain groundwater by digging personal tube-wells in the backyard and pollute the air by using generator. To sum up there is a need to increase public investment in these environmental services many fold, explore, cross subsidies and calculate the environment costs to ensure sustainability of resource.

Several international agreements indicate that Women must be equal participants in all decisions related to their environment, demonstrating great capacity as leaders, experts, educators and innovators: Women and women movements have made great efforts. In preserving and protecting the resources around them women took the lead in the grass root Chipko movement of India in the 1970 where activists stopped the felling of trees by physically surrounding literally hugging the trees, They also protected water sources from corporate control. Women around the world continue to fight' against climate changes making sustainable consumption choices and improving access to control 'over the conservation of resources. Their voices must continue to be comprehensively integrated into policy and implementation efforts should be made at every stage for the wellbeing of future generations.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Most environment policies in India foresee women as either the survivors or as victims and as such, each of which has different policy implications. Donor agencies and government began to recognize women as managing their environment on daily basis. Social forestry schemes have been re-designed recognizing the diverse uses of tree products and different species preferences of men and women. Men need wood for construction and fencing, while women need for fuel and fodder. In water and sanitation activities women participation in water committees or in maintaining facilities is becoming the rule rather than the exception. Wasteland development projects in India such as Bankura project in West Bengal have successfully supported women groups effort to re generate forest and improve land productivity. Such understanding have resulted in policy on environment in India acknowledging the contribution of women and men the 73 and 74th amendment act in India has given women 33% reservation in decision making bodies in both rural and urban areas Panchayat water users associations all now see women members, the self-groups that are

spread all over the country provide another large platform for implementing policies on environment. In India the need for gender sensitive policy has been recognized. Most environmental policies encourage - Participation by local women as they recognize this helps proper implementations. Efforts, to include women in environmental policy in more engaging ways need to be conceptualized in the Indian context, keeping in mind the levels of social stratification that exist in our .society. The national environment policy 2006, National forest policy 1988, Joint forest management program of 1990 , Biodiversity act 2002, see important role for women as stakeholder and custodians of traditional knowledge for environmental protection. Not only has that India made rapid progress in ending open defecation across the country through Swachh Bharat Mission initiated by Shri Narendra Modi which has significantly impacted sanitation and hygiene. Similarly India has improved significantly in the past few year in access to safe drinking water to urban and rural population under the government flagship Jal Jeevan Mission, over 8.45 crore, rural households have been provided with piped water connections till November 2021.

CONCLUSION:

Role of women and community participation in environmental Management cannot be undermined. Involvement of people in planning and democratic development has long been practiced and in various development programmes success is visible. In the coming years with more development projects specific to environment like Swachh Bharat, Clean Ganga would be coming up it would involve more people in developmental process; It would be important and challenging for policy makers to create more grass root level workers with suitable honorarium and incentives. Similar to Anganwadis and Asha workers who are all women, can be trained at grass-root level workers with financial incentives so that the gains which has been actually achieved by participation is sustained. Only participation without any remuneration may not work, at broader level. Various grass root level development programme focusing on women empowerment, economic empowerment, sanitation, environmental programmes have taken women as a means of change agents. They have been planned and implemented through a gendered lens and involves decision, making and assigning proactive roles to women. The projects on women empowerment in various States have used the Self Help Group model for women empowerment in which various activities ranging from awareness building on social, legal, environmental issues have been undertaken successfully. Also the activities of women at the grass root level in creating transformation in society as well as bringing economic empowerment has been found. The formation of group, its building process, development brings a sense of integrity and sorority among its members where they feel collective to form particular tasks. Various SHGs across the country have been successful in combating some of the important environmental issues like watershed development programmes, Joint forest management, general environmental hygiene, tree plantation etc. Involvement of Anganwadis and ASHA as grass root worker has been very instrumental in implementing the programmes and making the women availing benefits and access to programmes.

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