

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO LIVELIHOOD SECURITY AMONG THE POOR IN INDIA

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Abstract: Our environment is largely affected by poverty in various forms. Deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, climate change etc. are the environmental hazards caused due to poverty specially in a developing country like India. Due to environmental degradation, there is a climate change and global warming is increasing due to lack of capital to invest in environment friendly technologies. Environmental damage is seldom caused by the people living below poverty line but they bear the brunt of environmental damage and caught off in a downward spiral. On an average every Indian contributes 0.56 tonne per year of carbon- 0.19 tonne per capita among the poor and 1.32 tonne among the rich. India's position in the carbon emission is third which is 6.8% of the total global emissions. Poverty alleviation and environmental degradation are the most serious global issues that are closely interlinked but are often treated separately. The human activities and the issues of the environment are inter-related as the human interact with his surroundings. Deforestation is the biggest harm done to the environment by poverty in India. Another way of environmental degradation due to poverty is air and water pollution in the country. The growth of population puts more pressure on the environment. The limited resources of the environment find it difficult to fulfil all the needs of the people and more births from the poor communities puts further pressure on the environment. Rethinking regarding the approaches to environmental issues is required. The need is to have a sustainable use of the environmental resources and there must be a recognizable interconnectedness between human beings and the environment if true environmental and social justice is to be obtained. In India, public authorities and various government and non-government organizations can play an important role in creating awareness among the poor people to save and sustain our environment.

Keywords: Livelihood, Environmental degradation, Deforestation, Poor communities

INTRODUCTION

The natural resources are not only life sustaining (clean air, clean water, fertile soils, trees which turn carbon dioxide into oxygen, etc) but they also constitute the basic economic assets of hundreds of millions of people on the earth. The degradation of the soil through erosion, excessive use of chemical products, overgrazing, or salinisation resulting from inadequate water management entail loss of income base for small farmers and doom them to poverty. Our environment is largely affected by poverty in various forms. Deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, climate change etc. are the environmental hazards caused due to poverty especially in a developing country like India. This deprives the vulnerable group from essential commodities and accelerates the downfall of poverty and environmental degradation. Due to environmental degradation, there is a climate change and global warming is increasing due to lack of capital to invest in environment friendly technologies. Environmental damage is seldom caused by the people living below poverty line but they bear the brunt of environmental damage and caught off in a downward spiral. Due to this poor people deplete the resources in order to survive which further impoverish the people. According to the recent study by Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, the top 20% of high-expenditure households in India are responsible for seven times

the carbon emissions by the poor who spend less than Rs. 140 a day. On an average every Indian contributes 0.56 tonne per year of carbon- 0.19 tonne per capita among the poor and 1.32 tonne among the rich. India's position in the carbon emission is third which is 6.8% of the total global emissions.

Link between environment and poverty

Poverty alleviation and environmental degradation are the most serious global issues that are closely interlinked but are often treated separately (Nagdev 2006). Some of them are as follows:

- Due to various human activities, the mass species are getting extinct at a very higher rate. The current rate is approaching 1000 times the normal rate.
- There is a threatening climate change induced by human activities.
- Inequality among the human society is going towards its extreme level:
 - The Human Development Report reveals that, in the highest-income countries, the 20% of the world's people account for 86% of the total private consumption expenditure.
 - Approximately 1 billion people suffer from hunger around the world and around 2 to 3.5 billion people suffered from the deficiency of vitamins and minerals and 1.2 billion suffer from obesity.

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- According to the official measures of poverty of the world, billion people live on less than a dollar a day.
- Only few million people of the world own the wealth as the world's poorest 2.5 billion people.
- In India, the top 10% of the population owned around 57% of the total national income in the year 2021. The country's total wealth is controlled by 54% of the millionaires.

However, problem occurs in front of the under-developed or poor countries that environmental issues are sacrificed in the race of development and in alleviating poverty or it is considered a luxury for them.

Impact of poverty on the environment

Deforestation is the biggest harm done to the environment by poverty in India. Forests provide clean air and maintain ecological balance but due to increasing deforestation, the environment is having a big blow and getting finding it hard to recover. Impoverished communities and unaware people use natural resources in harmful which spiral the environment further downward. (Gogoi, 2013).

Another way of environmental degradation due to poverty is air pollution in the country. Due to lack of proper knowledge, the poor people use outdated production techniques which causes harm to the fresh air in the environment.

Environmental degradation is the disintegration of the earth or deterioration of the environment through consumption of assets, like, air, water and soil. Destruction of environments and the eradication of wildlife, air pollution, water pollution, garbage, and pollution of the natural environment are all challenges for India. Pollution remains a major challenge and opportunity for India. Environmental degradation is one of the primary causes of diseases, health issues and long-term livelihood impact for India. The relationship between physical environment and the well-being of individuals and societies is multi-fold and multi-faceted with a qualitative as well as a quantitative aspect to it. The availability and use of natural resources have a bearing on the outcome and the pace of development process. A large part of environment is man-made for an urbanized society. But, even then the artificial environments (building, roads) and implements (clothes, automobiles) are based on an input of both labour and natural resources. The term 'Environment' is commonly restricted to ambient environment (Chopra, 2016). Poverty also creates water pollution on large scale in India. Unawareness among the poor community affects the quality of water badly. Orthodox methods of the poor community aggravate the situation of water in the environment. Water pollution lacks the nourishing nutrients necessary for the soil, kills of fish and other

water animals and proves extremely harmful to human health.

Poverty often confines poor people in rural areas to marginal lands, thus contributing to an acceleration of erosion, increased ecological vulnerability, landslides, etc. Inadequate waste collection and waste management leads to subsequent health problems. Improper use of energy resources leads to waste and higher energy costs that end up being unaffordable for the poor.

Poverty deprives the women to attain resources required to control the birth rate. As a result, women continue to give birth to the children even after having no need and wish of more children. Rise in the poor population causes deterioration in the environment. Due to lower productivity in the poor households the poor families expect more children to earn their livelihood and it led to higher demand of resources which causes downward spiral of the environment (Dasgupta, 1995).

Recently with the objective of providing secured livelihood to rural poor, the government has introduced a self-employment type poverty alleviation programme (for the promotion of livelihood) namely National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). The programme is introduced by restructuring the previous *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (SGSY) programme. NRLM is a centrally sponsored scheme with a three-tier structure-national, state, and district level. At the national level, Ministry of Rural Development takes the responsibility (Mishra and Debata, 2021). The growth of population puts more pressure on the environment. The limited resources of the environment find it difficult to fulfill all the needs of the people and more births from the poor communities puts further pressure on the environment.

Remedies to save the environment

In order to save the environment, we must first help the state of the poor and education is the key towards it. In India, lack of information and difficult access to environmental education proves difficult for the poor people to make efficient use of the available natural resources in a sustainable and sound manner. This led to the loss of livelihood opportunities and of biological diversity. Universal access to basic education, vocational training and community information can help people to overcome their unawareness towards safe and secure environment. There is a need to know the proper and the harmless methods to dispose of their waste, agricultural system should be designed with sound agricultural methods without degrading the soil. There is a need of water management and protecting water resources as water is the main source of livelihood for wide population. Reforestation is an important activity to

recover the loss done to the environment due to deforestation. Awareness among the people should be created to curtail deforestation in order to begin to nourish the environment back to good health. Local low-cost production of fuel-efficient stoves and heating devices can go a long way in reducing the energy bill of low-income households while protecting the environment (Saarangapani and Sripathi, 2015). The need of the hour is to employ such a system which can reduce the poverty and effects of poverty on the environment.

No country is self-sufficient in keeping environment untouched from degradation. There is a need of international cooperation to replace environmentally damaging production technologies with environment friendly technologies. These technologies can create jobs and reduce the pressure on the environment. Therefore, rethinking regarding the approaches to environmental issues is required. The need is to have a sustainable use of the environmental resources and there must be a recognizable interconnectedness between human beings and the environment if true environmental and social justice is to be obtained. According to a study by a Delhi-based environment organization, the Centre for Science and Environment, if the poor world were to develop and consume in the same manner as the West to achieve the same living standards, we would need two additional planet Earths to produce resources.

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