

Environmental Degradation in India: Sustainable Development and Human Well-being

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Abstract

Environmental problems are multidisciplinary in nature. Some problems related to the environment are global while some problems are in ground level. This research paper is an attempt to analyse the local environmental problems in India and establish their connections with environmental degradation and human well-being. The study also reveals with India's major environmental problems and suggests that some changes in policies for sustainable development in India. The research particularly focuses on water and water pollution related water-borne diseases which affect human well-being and other health aspects. Due to such hindrances, India is finding it hard to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Environmental degradation, Human well-being, Environmental sustainability, Sustainable Development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation plays an important role to increase environmental problems in India. These problems are multidisciplinary in nature and the scale of problems varies in many condition. Reportedly some of problems related to environment are global while few are local. These environmental problems such as- Acid raining, Climate change, Forest fires, Depletion of ozone layer, biodiversity problem, global warming and destruction of endangered species are global problems in nature. These problems required international co-operation for their solution. On the other hand, environmental problems such as land degradation, water pollution, Air pollution, domestic solid waste, industrial hazardous waste, soil degradation, deforestation and are local environmental problems and these problems require policies at national or regional level (MDG Reports, 2009 & 2010).

Environmental degradation mostly occurs due to the extra intellection of natural resources which are used for the so-called means for development. United Nations defines environmental degradation as "Environmental degradation is the worsening in environmental quality from ambient attentions of pollutants and activities or processes such as improper land use and natural disasters" (United Nations, 1997).

The seventh of the millennium development goals (MDG) talks about ensuring "environmental sustainability" and sets the following four targets:¹

- (a) Incorporate the principles of sustainable development into policies of countries and programmes and inverse the loss of environmental resources;
- (b) Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving by 2010, and a noteworthy reduction in the rate of loss of environmental resources;
- (c) The amount of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation services; and
- (d) Achieved a major improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum residents by 2020.

The objective of the seventh MDG agenda was to "assess the significance of the ecosystem and change for human well-being and the scientific action needed to increase the conservation and sustainable use of environmental resources and their involvement to human well-being" (First MDG Reports, 2004).

Before 1972, when an environmental conference held in Stockholm, environmental problems have been neglected from last few decades. After United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHD) held in Stockholm in 1972, environmental concerns were comes in effected. Later on, in 1987, World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) proposed the idea of sustainable development and

¹ These four aspects of MDG have been taken from millennium development reports 2010.

gives the definition of sustainable development as "meets the needs of the present without compromising the capability of future generations to meet their personal needs" (Brundtland Commission Report, 1987). Agenda 21 of the Rio statement gives additional improvement on the issues related to environmental concerns which were ignored for some time. Most of the values were completely on environmental degradation and sustainable development in the Agenda of the Rio declaration. Further, the Johannesburg declaration on sustainable development and strategy of implementation stated that "to reverse the existing trend in natural resource degradation as soon as possible, it is necessary to contrivance strategies which should comprise targets adopted at the national and, where suitable, regional levels to protect ecosystems and to achieve unified management of land, water, and living resources, while consolidation regional, national, and local capacities" (Johannesburg declaration on sustainable development, 2002).

This research paper tries to take is an attempt to study the local problems of environmental degradation which affects the human well-being and focuses mainly on local environmental problems predominant in India. The second section of this paper is on the causes of environmental degradation and elaborates the consequences which affects the environmental problems. This section also emphasises linkages of environmental degradation to human well-being and includes the drivers of changes for human well-being. The third section presents the dimensions and measurement of human well-being. The fourth section defines Indian environmental problems and mainly focuses on the local problem of water pollution and pollution.

Environmental Degradation: Causes and Consequences

Environmental degradation means when abandoned and unmaintainable extraction of natural resources takes place fast. The rapidly growing trend of industrialisation, population and economic development and uncontrolled growth in the urbanisation is a chief concern for environmental degradation. Environmental degradation happens sometimes naturally or can be caused by human beings. When natural resources depleted from biodiversity and habitats, it is main cause of environmental degradation. It can be local, regional and global. Local environmental problems like water pollution, air pollution, waste disposal, deforestation and soil degradation have a direct impact on human-being. Waste and water related diseases are increasing because in most of the city's waste management is very poor and it affect the livelihood and survival of the population.

In 1972, The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHD) held at Stockholm and later, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held at Rio de Janeiro repeated to government and protect the integrity of the environment at global level. Some of the principles which declares on environmental degradation and sustainable development at Rio declaration are as follows:

- In accordance with the charter of the United Nations and the values of international law, the sovereign right to deed their own resources, decide to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction do not cause of damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national authority (Principle 2 of UNCED, 1992);
- States should co-operate in a spirit of global partnership to preserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to the global environmental degradation, States have common but separated responsibilities. The developed countries recognise the responsibility that they stand in the international pursuit of sustainable development. In view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they grasp (Principle 7 of UNCED, 1992);
- States have authority to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better discourse the problems of environmental degradation. Environmental measures addressing global environmental problems should, as far as possible, be based on international harmony (Principle 12 of UNCED, 1992).
- States should effectively co-operate to prevent the relocation and transfer to other states of any activities and materials that causes severe environmental degradation or are found to be injurious to human health (Principle 14 of UNCED, 1992)); and
- In order to save the environment, the protective approach towards environment shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are intimidations of serious or permanent damage, lack of full scientific inevitability shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to avoid environmental degradation (Principle 15 of UNCED, 1992).

Under the benefaction of the United Nations, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) was conducted to assess the significances of ecosystem change for human development and also to establish the action needed to improve the conservation and bearable use of ecosystems and their contribution to the human well-being on the scientific basis. After the research MEA finds out four main conclusions which are given below:5

- (a) Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet quickly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely permanent loss in the variety of life on earth.
- (b) The changes that have been made to ecosystems have contributed to considerable net improvements in human well-being and economic development, but these gains have been achieved at rising costs in the form of

the degradation of many ecosystem services, increased risks of non-linear changes, and the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of persons.

(c) The dilapidation of ecosystem services could produce significantly inferior during the first half of this century and is a fence to achieving the Millennium development goals (MDG).

(d) The challenge of retreating the degradation of ecosystems while meeting increasing strains for their services can be partly met under some scenarios that the Millennium Valuation considered, but these contain important changes in policies, institutions, and practices that are not currently under way.

Linkages on environmental degradation to human well-being

Linkages and relationship of ecological system and the flow of services to the well-being are varied and multifaceted in individuals as well as groups of people and its changes over the period of time. The fundamental linkages which unite the link between bionetworks change and human well-being are not dependable.

The provisioning of ecosystems provisions goods and other services that endure a combination of aspect on human well-being. Adverse impacts on livelihoods are of specific importance. In both social and environmental contexts, livelihood sustainability has three aspects:

➤ A livelihood is defensible “when it can manage with and recover from strains and shocks and maintain its capabilities and resources both now and in the future” (DFID, 1999 and Ashley & Carney, 1999);

➤ A livelihood is sustainable in a social context when it enhances or does not diminish the livelihood of others; and

➤ A livelihood is sustainable when it does not deplete or disrupt ecosystems to the prejudice of the livelihoods and well-being of others now or in the future.

Regulating services of natural systems includes the purification of air, fresh water, reduced flooding or drought, stabilization of local and regional climate, and checks and balances that control the variety and spread of certain diseases, including some vector-borne diseases which deploy human well-being in numerous behaviours.

Organic systems can impact the human well-being through cultural services. Cultural services of ecosystem influence the artistic, recreational, educational, cultural, spiritual, beliefs and feastings of choices based on the human experience. Through the process of disturbance, pollution, depletion, and destruction cultural features changes ecosystems in many ways which have negative impact.

The fourth aspect of ecosystem services defined by MEA is indispensable for sustaining the other three. Secondary services includes soil development, nutrient cycling, and primary production. Therefore, supporting services act as linking between ecosystem services and human well-being in many ways. Human well-being and poverty decrease and indirect drivers of ecosystem change are related with each other in a contrary way. Direct drivers of changes of ecosystem services have impact on human well-being and poverty drop (for details see Figure 1).

Dimensions and Measurement of Human Well-being

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2003) defines five dimensions of human well-being and the sixth one “Aggregations” was added on MEA (2005). Five dimensions of well-being are:

(a) Basic material for a good life;

(b) Health;

(c) Good social relations;

(d) Freedom of choice and action;

(e) Security.

Basic material for a good life

Basic materials are important to leading a good and healthy life which includes suitable income, household possessions, food, water, and housing. More efforts have been put into capacities, but it did not offer enough pictures to sustenance inclusive understanding of the supply of well-being and its relation to ecosystem services. Due to the degree which well-being diverges across ecosystem which is not vague everywhere.

Health

Health issues related to human being have been frequently affected by environmental degradation. The uncertainty with nature and human health have linkages. Rich people damages environment in very huge amount for the name of development and the deprived people has to pay most for that (Human development report, 1998 and MEA, 2005). Human health is measured in different ways, concerning good health, Life expectancy, toddler mortality are measured in health parameter. The environmental degradation impact on health among deprived section of society and sometime it depends upon the level of poverty. According to WHO reports, poor countries are with high mortality rates, where unsafe water and indoor smoke from solid fuel use account for 9-10% (WHO, 2002).

Good social relations

According to Aristotle, human being is a social animal and they enjoy a state of good social relations (Aristotle, 1948 & Fred, 1995) when they are able to realize visual and light-hearted values, express cultural and spiritual values, progress official linkages that generate social capital, show mutual respect, have good gender and family relations, and have the capability to help others and a future provide for their children. Flagging ecosystem disturb social relations. Weakening in ecosystem can also provide an opportunity for social relations when communities join together to form community based institutions in reply to defiled ecosystem services (Hasan, Scholes & Ash, 2005 p.139).

Freedom of choice and actions

There is direct relationship between ecosystem, freedom of choice and proportions of well-being. Freedom can be defined as not only on the series of options a person has in deciding on and realizing the kind of life to lead and also on the variety of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead (Dreze & Sen, 1995). In developing and transition economies, decreasing provision of fuel wood and drinking water as the result of weakening ecosystem has been exposed to increase the amount of time needed to collect such elementary necessities which, in turn, reduces the amount of time available for education, employment, and care of family members. Further, it has been seen in the supreme cases that these impacts are excessively experienced by female members of the family.

Education can be improved well-being; it is a clear aspect of well-being which enhances life prospects. In the Human Development Index (HDI), literacy is one of the mechanisms; but literacy is difficult to measure exactly and comparably as it is only minor representation of education.

Security

Human being must be said to live in a state of security when they do not suffer unexpected threats for their wellness. Most muted threats on security are prearranged violence, economic crises, and natural disasters. Terrorism is seen as a big hazard on security in the last few decades. Civil war is among countries is the significant concerns among or for safety. The poor, sick and hungry are more likely to suffer harshly because they have rarer assets and coping strategies compared to their rich complements.

Accumulations

Human Development Index (HDI) is the most bulbous collective used for the multiple dimensions of human well-being under the guidance of United Nations General Assembly and widely used in policies initiated by government. Most of the developed and undeveloped countries estimate their own HDI at sub-national levels. Few number of Indian states also have their own HDI estimates. The HDI events of economic well-being is on three parameters namely, income (per capita), health (life expectation at the birth), and education. HDI do not take other facades of well-being. However, it still is a useful indicator of development consistent with the development as autonomy method (Sen, 1999).

Trends in distributions of human well-being

Human well-being is not distributed regularly among individuals, countries, or social groups. Variation is high, and the gaps between the privileged and the underprivileged people are increasing. For example, a newly born child in sub-Saharan Africa is 20 times more possible to die before age five than a child born in an developed country, and the ratio is higher than a decade ago (MDG Reports, 2010, and MEA, 2005).

In the last 50 years, the changes carried about humans have tarnished the ecosystems the most compared to any other point of time in human history. However, nevertheless of that, human well-being has improved markedly. Global trends have shown that incomes have increased, life expectancy has gone up, food supplies have mounted, culture has become improved, and political institutions have become more sharing. Distributional pattern exposed that well-being is not distributed regularly across individuals, social groups, or nations. However, overall well-being worldwide is going to increase. In altitudinal patterns, human wellbeing is not evenly distributed with admiration to global ecosystems. Internationally measurements of human well-being are incomplete. The GDP contribution, cultivated land and forest subsidise the most to the GDP of the economy trailed by dry lands, inland water and the coastal areas. Infant Death rates are highest at dry lands area followed by mountain, forest and inland water and lowest in Arctic. Dry lands contains highest area with 59.9 million square kilometres and coastal with 6 million square kilometres has the lowest. Population on cultivated zone is around 4.1 billion and in polar arctic it's very minute. Population concentration is highest in coastal area among the other five indicators of human well-being while lowest in polar arctic. Auxiliary details on the human well-being pointers can be seen in table.

Evidence from India

Over the some years, quickly growing population and economic growth are most important issues important to environmental degradation in India. Abandoned and untenable growth of urbanisation and industrialisation, growth and massive increase of agriculture, annihilation of forests and removal of natural resources are the important factors for environmental degradation. Environmental anxieties which affect ecosystems are multidisciplinary in nature and differ in the scale of problems.

India's environmental problems

In this segment, local problems like, air pollution, biodiversity, land and water pollution etc. Which move the Indian ecosystem and finally the human well-being and human fitness are debated in feature. Problems on land, forest, air and vehicular pollution, water, biodiversity and solid waste are the most shared environmental problems triumph in India.

Land and forest

India is the second largest country in the world with a population of around 1.2 billion and seventh major in the area wise with a whole land area of 3,287,263 square kilometre. It measures 3,214 kilometres from North to South and 2,993 kilometres from East to west, has a land border of 15,200 kilometres, coastline of 7,517 kilometres. Out of India's total geographical area of 328.73 million hectare, 306 million hectare includes the reporting area and 146.82 million hectare is tainted land. Land degradation fashionable due to the natural and human persuaded causes, similar to wind attrition and water logging, is one of the priority anxieties in India. The variable degrees and types of poverty stalk mainly from untenable use and unsuitable land management practices. Loss of flora occurs as a result of deforestation, unsustainable fuel-wood and silage removal, shifting cultivation, infringement into forest lands, forest fires and overgrazing, all of which subject the land to degradation forces. Other important factors accountable for large-scale degradation are; non-adoption of satisfactory soil conservation measures, improper harvest rotation, indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals such as manures and pesticides, indecorous planning and management of irrigation systems and removal of groundwater in excess of the recharge ability. Due to extra extraction of groundwater in irrigation and pesticides use groundwater pollution problems triumphs in states like Bihar, West Bengal, some parts of Uttar Pradesh and north eastern India (MOEF, 2009). Water adulterations are mainly from arsenic, fluoride, iron, and some other pollutant which causes Spartan health problems.

India has about 17 per cent of the worldwide population but only 2.5 per cent of the total global land and 1.8 per cent of the entire worldwide forest area. India is one of the 17 countries which are known as mammoth biodiversity countries in the world. As a average of the 33 per cent forest land attention, India's forest coverage of land area is 20.6 percent and requires additional coverage of 16 million hectare. About 41 per cent of forest cover has been tarnished, 70 per cent of forests have no natural regeneration and 55 per cent are prone to fire. Forest cover of India is 67.71 million hectare, which is 20.6 per cent of its geographical area, in which 5.46 million hectare (1.66 per cent) is very dense forest, 33.26 million hectare (10.12 per cent) is abstemiously dense and the rest 28.99 million hectare is open forestry area including 0.44 million hectare of mangroves (MOEF, 2009).

Air and vehicular pollution

Air pollution and the significant impacts in India could be frequently attributed to the releases from vehicular, manufacturing and domestic activities. Air quality has been, consequently, an issue of worry in the situation of various developmental activities (MOEF, 2009).

From the last 30 years, there has been a tremendous growth in the air pollution in the larger segment in urban and industrial areas. The fast industrialisation and exceeding removal of natural resources are primarily responsible for these pollutions. Primarily air pollutants were sulphur dioxide, black smoke and lead, which were mainly caused from the use of burnings of fossil fuels. In current year's nitrogen monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and ozone have also seemed in air pollution. In India, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) displays air quality of 95 cities and towns with respect to 3 main pollutants: SO₂, NO_x and RSPm. In the case of large and medium scale poisoning units, very few have pollution control strategies. In the case of unorganised sector and small units, the tricky is more serious. Due to upsurge in pollution level, breathing and other related diseases have impressively increased over the last 15 years. Vehicular pollution is also causes air pollution and it is increasing due to increasing number of motor- vehicles. The drastic increase in number of motor-vehicles has also resulted in a important increase in the production load of various pollutants. The significant of vehicular pollutants emitted is highest in capital of India, Delhi followed by Mumbai, Bangalore, Calcutta and Ahmadabad. Carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrocarbons (HC) account for 64 and 23 per cent individually, of the total production load owing to vehicles in all these cities measured together (CPCB, 2005).

Water

Water is one of the most important resources for human beings to live. It is gradually becoming a uncommon resource both in terms of amount as well as quality. Water arguments among diverse user groups, within the different states of the similar country are also increasing. Water-borne sicknesses are on droning path. 10 per cent of the people have no admittance to drinking water and admission to safe drinking water is smooth less. Chemical pollutions are increasing. Industrial water pollution leads to extreme nitrate leaked into groundwater and causes water borne disease. In the last two decades, it has been observed that there is a waning in water superiority in most of the sources.

Biodiversity

India is one of the 17 known mega diverse country in the world (MOEF, 2009, and Sankar, 2009). India have two hot spots of biodiversity: Eastern Himalaya and Western Ghats. India, with a various landscape, topography, geographic and climatic factors, can be divided into ten detectable bio-geographic zones. These zones cover a variation of ecosystems: mountains, plateaus, rivers, forests, deserts, wetlands, lakes, mangroves, coral reefs, coasts and islands. Human activities, both directly and ramblingly, responsible for existing high rates of biodiversity loss are - habitat loss; destruction and degradation due to agricultural activities; abstraction (including mining, fishing, logging and reaping); and development (human settlements, industry and related structure). Habitat loss and dissolution leads to the creation of isolated, small and dispersed populations.

Solid Waste The increasing drift in consumerism, progress in human civilisation, population growth, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation leads to extra waste generation. Creation of more non-biodegradable solid waste pushes water and land pollution. According to World Bank estimations, in the early nineties the economic value of reduction and degradation was found around 4.5 per cent of GDP where growth rate was nearly around 5 per cent. The problems usual in the area of solid waste in India are as follows 10:

- Households and other wastes in cities and towns: categorisation 11 and safe disposal;
- Removal of fly ash in thermal power stations;
- Handling of bio-medical wastes in hospitals; and
- Safe disposal of perilous wastes in chemical and other industries.

Concluding Remarks

From the last fifty years, environment have degraded more than ever in human history. These environmental degradation effects direct and indirect human well-being. Universally, the well-being of present and future human populations depends on ecologically bearable and socially reasonable ways of living. The six dimensions of human well-being are:

- a) Basic material for a good life;
- b) Health;
- c) Good social relations;
- d) Freedom of choice and action;
- e) Security; and
- f) Aggregations define by MEA has direct and indirect links.

Indian environmental problems occurs mainly from land, air and vehicular problems, water related problems and biodiversity. Air quality in Delhi in the period between 2000-2008 has seen a reduction in 72 per cent and 50 per cent of SO₂ and CO but increase in 33 per cent, 2 per cent and 21 per cent of NO₂, Deferred Particulate Matter (DPM) and RSPM irrespective of 57 per cent increase in number of vehicles in the same period. Due to extra air production human health as TB, Asthma, and other breathing are increasing. The pollutants in air, namely – SO₂, NO and SPM - damage the human respirational and cardio-respiratory systems in various ways. The rapidly growing population and economic development are leading to the „environmental degradation in India’ through the unrestrained growth of urbanisation and industrialisation, expansion and huge strengthening of agriculture, and the annihilation of forests. Therefore it is time to take conclusions which give sustainable growth without hurting our ecosystem and well-being.

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