

Environmental Concerns: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract: *Although India has a rich and long history of environmental laws dating back to the 1970s, it still ranks very low on air and water pollution levels compared to the rest of the World resulting in higher rates of infant mortality and lower life expectancy rates. Poor Sanitation conditions and sewage problems compound the problem affecting the health of Ordinary citizens in India. The reasons for this disconnect between enlightened environmental Laws and high levels of pollution could be traced to lax enforcement of existing environmental laws, discrepancies in the environmental guidelines for businesses to follow between the central government and at the state levels, and the existence of a large number of SMEs who neither have the resources nor the technical skills to adhere to the existing environmental laws. Using extensive secondary research, this paper suggests a series of steps to help the country achieve safe air and water pollution levels resulting in improved health conditions for its citizens. The cornerstone of the prescription for improvements in the environment is a Collaborative arrangement that brings together the various government agencies, the citizens, SMEs, large domestic companies, and NGOs to participate in a collaborative arrangement to Educate, streamline effective policies, develop the necessary institutional infrastructure, and provide adequate funding for improving the environment.*

Keywords: Environment, Degradation, Pollution, Global Issues, Populations, Regulations

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation is the disintegration of the earth or deterioration of the environment through consumption of assets, for example, air, water and soil; the destruction of environments and the eradication of wildlife. It is characterized as any change or aggravation to nature's turf seen to be pernicious or undesirable. Ecological effect or degradation is created by the consolidation of an effectively substantial and expanding human populace, constantly expanding monetary development or per capita fortune and the application of asset exhausting and polluting technology. It occurs when earth's natural resources are depleted and environment is compromised in the form of extinction of species, pollution in air, water and soil, and rapid growth in population.

Environmental degradation is one of the largest threats that are being looked at in the world today. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction characterizes environmental degradation as the lessening of the limit of the earth to meet social and environmental destinations, and needs. Environmental degradation can happen in a number of ways. At the point when environments are wrecked or common assets are exhausted, the environment is considered to be corrupted and harmed. There are a number of different techniques that are being used to prevent this, including environmental resource protection and general protection efforts.

Environmental issues can be seen by long term ecological effects, some of which can demolish whole environments. An environment is a unique unit and incorporates all the living and non-living components that live inside it. Plants and creatures are evident parts of the environment, but it also includes the things on which they depend on, for example, streams, lakes, and soils.

Environmental surroundings get to be divided when technological advancement splits up areas of land. Some examples of this can include streets which may slice through woods or even trails which wind through prairies. While it may not sound all terrible on the surface, there are bad results. The biggest of these results are felt by particular animal and plant groups, the vast majority of which are specific for their bio-region or need a large area in order to make sure that their genetic lines are kept intact.



II. MEANAING OF ENVIRONMENT

Let us begin the discussion on environmental degradation by understanding the term ‘environment’ itself. What does the word ‘environment’ mean? Commonly environment means the surroundings in which we live. You may have read or heard terms like social environment, political environment, literary environment and school environment. But the environment which we shall discuss has a different meaning

III. CLASSIFICATION OF ENVIRONMENT

When we consult different sources of information, we find that environments can be classified in many ways based on various factors. We have seen above that environment is referred to as social environment, political environment, literary environment and school environment. These references are based on the specific contexts, social, political, literary and school. But the environment which we are trying to understand is classified on the basis of the process of its creation or evolution. Based on this, environment falls into two main categories: natural environment and human-made environment.

3.1 Natural Environment

It includes all living and non-living things that occur naturally on Earth. It comprises the nature of the living space. The living space may be land or sea, that is, it may be soil or water. It also includes the chemical constituents and physical properties of the living space, the climate, and a variety of organisms. Natural environment includes both biotic and abiotic components as the some have been evolved through a natural process. The creation of these components has been done by nature, and not by any human intervention or support. It is truth at human being given in an environment where both biotic an dabiatic factors Inflounce them and they learn to adapt themselves to these in several ways. But humanbeingshaveroletoplayinthecreationandevolutionofnaturalenvironment.

3.2 Human-Made Environment

On the other hand, human-made environment includes all those things which are created by humans for their use. Human beings construct these surroundings, as these are needed for providing the required setting for human activity. These things range from the large-scale civic surroundings to personal places. For example, houses, roads, schools, hospitals, railway lines, bridges and parks are components of human-made environment another kind of environment which plays an important role in the living conditions of human beings. This is called the social environment. Social environment includes cultural norms and values, the culture that individuals live in, and social, political, economic and religious institutions with which they interact. By now we have been able to understand that normally, the environment at any place is a combination or sum total of the natural component and the human-made component. For example, in a town or city the people and animals living in it, the land, air, water and trees are the components of the natural environment, whereas the buildings, roads, other structures like schools, hospitals and establishments for water and electricity supplies are the components of the human-made environment. As you may observe, human beings use natural environment for creating human-made environment.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT

We always say that environment is Key to our welfare and survival. Have you ever thought why it is said so? The environment is our life support system. In fact, it affects and influences the growth, development, and survival of all organisms, including human beings. All kinds of our needs are met by the environment. It supplies the basic necessities for life and supports large number of life forms. We are dependent on the environment for our food, shelter, water, air, soil, energy, medicines, fibers, raw materials, and many other things. The environment maintains atmospheric composition and protects all kinds of life on earth from harmful effects of solar radiation. But in spite of all these benefits we find that the quality of environment is deteriorating and it is being degraded continuously. It is not only that the resources of the environment are being irrationally utilized, but also contributing dangerously to pollution. Environmental degradations one of the ten threats officially cautioned by the High Level Threat Panel of the United Nations. The World Resources Institute (WRI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank made public an important report on health and the environment worldwide on May 1, 1998. What is environmental degradation? Let us understand it. It is the process by which our environment i.e., air, water and land, is progressively contaminated, over-exploited and destroyed. When the environment becomes less valuable or damaged, environmental degradation is said to occur. In specific term, environmental degradations the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, soil and forest; the destruction of eco-systems and the extinction of wildlife. Let us recall our experiences in daily life. We are utilizing resources like water, soil, trees, coal, and petrol without caring for the future. We are carelessly interfering with the eco-system and deliberately killing wild animals. In fact, there are many forms of environmental degradation. Whenever habitats are destroyed, biodiversity is lost, or natural resources are depleted, the environment is hurt.

V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AS A GLOBAL ISSUE

India is not the only country facing environmental issues. Definitely air and water pollution and climate change are more global issues that require a concerted effort by all nations to solve. A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in "Climate Change Science Compendium 2009", suggests that the world will be experiencing more of ocean acidification, ice-sheet melting, sea-level rise, and so-called tipping points in climate effects much sooner than ever thought off (Parks, 2009). Although environmental issues are global in nature, each country is in control of its own environment with jurisdiction over its territory and, hence, should be controlling, monitoring, and enacting regulations in safeguarding its environment. This is true for India too. The Copenhagen Accord makes it clear that it is up to individual countries to devise and enforce the regulations necessary to achieve their national commitments to combat global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Because of the country specific role of controlling and monitoring the environment, it is difficult to enforce environmental standards on countries from a global perspective, each country should be willing to consider environmental issues as a probable contributor to the overall global degradation of the environment and participate in controlling it through its laws and participation by its

industrial sector. In addition, each country could be part of worldwide association/organization that uses the global network, technological know-how, and resources to be a contributing partner to this group in helping the environment (like the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and Copenhagen Accord of 2009 on climate change). When international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) try to help individual countries on environmental issues, in some instances it creates problems. In a research paper funded and supported by the World Bank, researchers found that in India, the role of international institutions and NGO's often have difficulty matching their interest with that of the state, especially, when it comes to human rights standards (Randeria, 2003).

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES FACING INDIA (CHALLENGES)

Some of the major environmental concerns confronting India include:

1. Air pollution from industrial effluents and vehicle emissions;
2. Energy-related environmental problems such as, chemical & oil pollution and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions (Greenstone and Hanna, 2014);
3. Water pollution from raw sewage, the lack of adequate sanitation, and no potable water throughout the country;
4. Municipal solid waste management (MSWM) remains a challenge for India due to the rising population and the resultant infrastructural needs (Dube, Nandan, and Dua, 2014);
5. Over-population and its strain on natural resources; and
6. Agricultural factors such as, runoff of agricultural pesticides, overgrazing, short cultivation cycles, slash and burn practices, destructive logging Practices, and deforestation of timber reserves for fuel, all contribute Conjointly to the decimation of the subcontinent's environmental system (Greenstone and Hanna, 2014). In particular, municipal solid waste (MSW) collection and disposal is a major urban environmental problem facing India. India is not the only country with this problem, it appears many of the developing countries and a few of the developed countries are also confronted with MSW as an environmental concern. But, in India the critical concern is in the way MSW is disposed. The waste that is collected by municipalities in India is simply dumped on the outskirts of the urban centers (Reddy, 2014). In addition, the MSW release methane and carbon dioxide that increase the effects of greenhouse gases. On environmental issues and concerns, India carries a heavier burden because it is generally accepted that pollutant concentrations are exceedingly high in many developing countries imposing substantial health costs and shortened lives (Chen, et. al., 2013). Since most of the growth in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is projected to occur in developing countries such as China and India, these two countries are probably responsible for the future of this world. In the most recent data available, ambient particulate matter concentrations in India are five times the level of concentrations in the United States and China's are seventies the U.S. level (Greenstone, 2014). Interestingly, in anticipation of the Paris Conference on climate change that is scheduled to start on November 30th, countries have been issuing pledges about how much emission they are willing to cut in coming decades. India and Brazil, probably the two of the most air polluting countries in the world have yet to make commitments to take to the Paris Conference (Gillis and Sengupta, 2015).

VII. CAUSES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Based on the discussion so far, we now know that healthy environment is essential for the very existence of human society and other living organisms. But environmental degradation is going on unabated. We are being cautioned every now and then about the deterioration in the environment and its consequences like global warming, changing climatic conditions, impending water crisis, decreasing fertility of agricultural land and increasing health problems. There is an urgent need to take all possible steps to check environmental degradation. In order to consider the required steps to be taken for doing so, it is necessary to understand the causes of environmental degradation. The important factors are the following:

Social Factors

7.1 Growing Population

Population is the greatest resource of any country and a major contributory factor for development, and yet it is a major cause of environmental degradation. As we find, the rapid pace of population growth has led to the excessive utilization of natural resources. Huge population also leads to huge production of wastes. The resultant outcomes are loss of biodiversity, pollution of air, water and soil and increased pressure on arable land. All these have been putting great stress on the environment. If you take the case of India, it supports 17 percent of world population on just 2.4 per cent of the world land area.

7.2 Poverty

Poverty is said to be both the cause and effect of environmental degradation. You may have seen that the poor people use natural resources more than the rich. They use these for building their huts, for cooking, for their food and for meeting many other needs. In this way they deplete these resources faster as they have no opportunity of gaining access to other types of resources that are primarily exploited by the rich. As we know, the more the resources are utilized, the more degraded the environment becomes. And the more the environment deteriorates, the more impoverished the poor will be.

7.3 Urbanization

You may have observed a large number of poor people from villages moving to towns, cities and mega cities to earn their livelihood. This has led to unplanned and rapid expansion of cities, creating enormous pressure on the infrastructural facilities. If you live in a city, you may be experiencing these pressures on housing, water and electric supply and sewage. You would be aware of the growing slums. Urban slums are major sources of pollution and suffer from the worst kind of unhygienic conditions. The fast pace of urbanization has also been responsible for the depletion of forests and irrational use of other resources.

7.4 Changing Life Style

There has been a remarkable change in the style of living of people. This change is visible not only among the people living in cities and towns but also among those who live in villages. The changing lifestyle of people has enormously increased their level of consumption. It has also resulted in the increase of human activities that are causing serious damage to environment in many ways. It has contributed to air, water, and sound, vehicular and industrial pollution. The fallout of the fast increasing use of modern gadgets like Refrigerators and air conditioners is the release of harmful gases in the atmosphere. This has been causing global warming which is very dangerous. In fact, due to overuse of modern gadgets, harmful gases like carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide are released which lead to global warming.

7.5 Economic Factors

Agricultural Development Agricultural development is so important for a country Like ours. But this has been affecting the environment adversely. Various kinds of Some important causes of environmental degradation have been discussed above. But there are some other causes also, such as deforestation, mining activities, automobiles, industrial effluents, generation of too much waste (Garbage), dumping of hazardous radio-active wastes, spilling of oil, construction of larger dams and reservoirs may collect information from different sources like books and magazines and prepare brief notes on each of the causes, explaining how these damage the environment.

VIII. ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS IN INDIA

Indian government has shown some foresight in the area of environmental concerns by enacting legislations meant to protect the environment. India has about two hundred laws Dealing with environmental protection (www.cpreec.org). India's environmental regulations date back to the 1970s. The first important regulation enacted was the Water Act of 1974 Followed by the Air Act of 1981. These acts created the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) responsible for data collection and policy enforcement. It also developed detailed procedures for environmental compliance at the central government level. Simultaneously, a second control board at the state level called State Pollution Control Board

(CPCB) was also established to collect data and for policy enforcement at the state level. These were followed by other regulations meant to protect the environment. India's key policies relating to environmental protection are governed by:

- The national forest policy, 1988;
- Policy statement for abatement of pollution, 1992; and
- National conservation strategy and policy statement on environment and development, 1992.

Hence, it is clear that the current environmental problems in India are not due to a lack of legislation, but there appears to be other factors that are contributing to the current situation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The degradation of environment is thus a very serious concern. And it is occurring primarily due to excessive and reckless exploitation and unscientific management of natural resources. In fact, it has emerged as a global challenge for all the countries of the world. As stated above, the pollution of air, water and soil caused by emission of harmful gases, release of industrial effluents, urban wastes and radio-active wastes and reckless use of fertilizers and pesticides is threatening the very survival of modern civilization. If you go through the facts stated in the following box, you may realize the seriousness of environmental degradation.

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