



POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

The study reviews research on effect of poverty of rural areas on environment. There is a strong relationship between poverty & environmental degradation. First report of Human Development mentions, "Poverty is one of the greatest threat to environment" (UNDP1990). This is because the factors like level of income, quality of goods and services affects the living standards of people living in rural areas & hence affect their activities towards environment. Poor people rely on natural resources for their livelihood & are very vulnerable to causing environmental problems. Government is taking steps to solve this problem. Rural India is witnessing a significant process in poverty reduction. Earlier 57% of rural India were below poverty line but now due to policy initiatives of government it has reduced to 45%.

Introduction

Poverty is a significant issue in India. According to 2011 census of India, approximately 68.84% of population live in rural areas. The level of poverty in rural areas is more as compared to urban areas. This is because the factors like level of income, quality of goods and services, affects the living standards of people living in rural areas. Poor people of rural areas are dependent on local natural resources for their sustenance. They depend on forest, pastures, water resources for their

livelihood, income & employment. This leads to overexploitation of these natural resources. This overexploitation of natural resources leads to changes in environment. Environmental degradation is the measure of change in environment. Environment degradation is a state of crisis arising out of the environmental pollution caused to the environment in various forms such as ecological damage, depletion of natural resources etc. One of the important reasons of environment degradation is the excessive exploitation of natural resources. It is the direct consequences of environmental pollution. Environment is degraded to large extent by human activities. Poor people living in rural areas cut forest for wood so that they can earn money by selling it in the market and also use wood for cooking & heating. Majority of rural population depends on agriculture for their living. The production of main crops like food grains which consists of cereals, pulses and oil seeds has increased over the years. Agricultural land is also increasing consistently due to this. Slash & Burn agriculture is one of the common practice of small farmers due to its low cost. It involves cutting and burning of forest to create lands for agriculture. This exposes the soil to destructive environmental forces. After doing agriculture on that land for some time they shift to other land leaving the land barren. This leads to infertility and weakening of soil. Environmental degradation leads to various calamities and many hazardous problems. Also bush burning, charcoal burning and fetching of firewood for cooking leads to deforestation which causes a lot of damage to the environment. Some animals are forced to flee and others extinguish. This also leads to



air and water pollution resulting in more environmental hazard. It will also further deepen the poverty situation because draught may occur and the nutrient of the soil is reduced since the soil is exposed to lot of degradation, which will lead to low productivity and therefore more poverty and the emergence of many kinds of diseases as a result of the contamination of the environment and malnutrition. Poverty is said to be the cause and effect of environmental degradation, population growth in poverty conditions increases the pressure on natural resources, in some cases to the point of destruction. Environmental degradation is usually understood in terms of high use of scarce non renewable resources, damage or destruction of key renewable resources (such as soils and forests) and the generation of wastes that are not easily assimilated or broken down by natural processes. Rural poverty is a major contributor to soil degradation, deforestation and over-use of freshwater worldwide. Rural people obtain their daily bread from environment in many ways that will eventually degrade the environment to an extent that they will venture into deeper exploitation. This trend will continue to an extent that the environment is no longer sustainable and would not be able to satisfy the livelihood of the community which will eventually lead to more poverty and environmental related problems such as droughts , famine , air and water pollution , deforestation ,encroachment of agricultural land , poor sanitation etc.

WAYS IN WHICH POVERTY LEAD TO ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

1. **Desertification:** Poverty leads to desertification because people are forced to venture into the forest to meet their basic needs. Desertification is the encroachment of the desert into area where erosion has been most severe. This will even consume the more productive land due to the cutting down of trees by the poor, the soil is exposed to all forms of erosion which later lead to further desertification.
2. **Rapid growing Population:** Since poverty can also lead to a rapid growing population, it means that there will be more people who will exploit the environment by any means for the sake of finding ways and means to survive. As the population increases, there will be need for more houses and more demand for agricultural land which will eventually lead to the factors listed above. Most environmental problems, including those arising from climate change, tend to be aggravated by population growth. Rapid population growth combines with poverty & lack of access to resources in a number of poor countries to exacerbate problems of local environmental degradation, resource depletion & inhibition to sustainable development. Population, environment degradation & poverty are linked in the search for fuel wood, food, water & other basic needs making impoverished people unwitting agent of environmental change.
3. **Dependence on biomass fuel:** The poor especially the rural poor exclusively depends on biomass fuel such as firewood, straw etc. This will have a heavy impact on environmental degradation. More than 67% of rural households in India still depend on firewood or wood chips for cooking. More than 93% of rural households in Chhattisgarh use firewood or wood chips to



cook followed by Rajasthan (89%) and Orissa (87%). A new data from National Sample Survey (NSS) Office shows that over two-thirds of households in rural India still rely on firewood for cooking. One study estimates the annual consumption of firewood around 325 million cubic meters which is above the carrying capacity of forest.

4. **The widespread of Garbage:** Poverty leads to the widespread of garbage because there is always a problem of sanitation. If these rotten, it will leach into ground water or it is wash away into the river there by causing water pollution and water borne disease will eventually be witnessed. This gave rise to the widespread of cholera, diarrhoea etc. in sanity towns and rural villages that lacks a proper drainage system and a hygienic water supply system.
5. Poorer people who cannot meet their subsistence needs through purchase are forced to use common property resources such as forest for food & fuel, pastures for fodder & ponds and river for water. Even distress rural out migration has been primarily because of push factors operative at the place of origin, for example, land degradation, water scarcity, deforestation etc. and also because of shrinkage of common property resources, which have natural tendency to be exploited.
6. Water is one of the most important elements of nature. Poor people living near the sea cost depend on fishing for their livelihood. Some fishing techniques cause habitat destruction. Blast fishing & cyanide fishing which are illegal in many places

harm surrounding habitat. Blast fishing refers to the use of explosives to capture fish & cyanide fishing refers to the practice of using cyanide to stun fish for collection. In this method, fishermen light sticks of dynamite and toss them into the water. The explosion stuns nearby fish and can make their swim bladders rupture, causing them to float to the surface for easy capture. These practices are destructive because they impact the habitat that the reef fish lives on after the fish have been removed. Trawling is one of the common method of fishing. But if fish stocks are continually trawled throughout the year, they can become significantly depleted. Bottom trawling the practice of pulling a fishing net along the sea bottom behind sea trawlers removes around 5% to 25% of an areas sea bed life on a single run. Since fishing is the only source of income for poors living near sea they often indulge in overfishing. This has lead to the breakdown of some sea ecosystems. Many sea species have extincted or are in the verge of extinction. Ecological disruption can also occur due to overfishing of critical fish species like tilefish & grouper fish who are known as ecological engineers. Overfishing has been identified as a primary cause of ecosystem collapse in many aquatic systems.

EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Level of exploitation of nature is directly proportional to the effect of environmental degradation on earth and its people. As the level of exploitation is increasing due the activities of people the effect of



environmental degradation is also increasing day by day. People overexploit nature for their means & greed without thinking of the consequences of their act.

1. Cutting of forests lead to the decreasing number of trees which further lead to decrease in level of oxygen in the environment hence resulting in the increasing level of air pollution. Due to air pollution the health of people are degrading day by day. Harmful air pollutants causes respiratory problems like asthma, pneumonia etc. Many people also die due to the indirect effects of air pollution.
2. Environmental degradation has lead to the depletion of Ozone layer. Ozone layer protects earth from the harmful ultraviolet rays of sun. The presence of chlorofluorocarbons, hydro chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere causes the ozone layer to deplete. As it will deplete, it will emit harmful radiations back to the earth. This radiation of sun causes harmful skin diseases like skin cancer etc.
3. Biodiversity is important for maintaining balance of the ecosystem in the form of combating pollution, restoring nutrients, protecting water sources and stabilizing climate. Deforestation, global warming, overpopulation and pollution are few of the major causes for loss of biodiversity.
4. The deterioration of environment can be a huge setback for tourism industry that rely on tourists for their daily livelihood. Environmental damage in the form of loss of green cover, loss of biodiversity, huge landfills, increased air and water pollution can be a big turn off for most of the tourists.
5. Environmental degradation also lead to the extinction of many species. Poor people cut or burn forest for wood or agriculture

purpose leading to the loss of habitat of wild animals, birds & different species. Even overfishing and different harmful ways of fishing leads to loss of habitat of aquatic animals. This all finally result in extinction of various species.

6. The huge cost that a country may have to borne due to environmental degradation can have big economic impact in terms of restoration of green cover, cleaning up of landfills and protection of endangered species. The economic impact can also be in terms of loss of tourism industry.

SOME LAWS RELATING TO ENVIRONMENT

Some of the laws to protect environment are:

The Environment Protection Act 1986-

According to this act Central government can make laws to protect and improve environmental quality and reduce or control pollution.

The Indian Forest Act 1972 and Amendment 1984-

It consolidated and reserved the areas having forest cover or wildlife, to regulate movement and transit of timber and other forest produce & duty leviable on them.

The Indian Fisheries Act 1897-

According to this act government can punish any person who uses explosive products to catch or kill fishes.

National Green Tribunal Act 2010-

According to this act National Green Tribunal was set up to deal with all the environment laws relating to air & water



pollution. The objective of government behind this was to provide a specialized forum for effective and speedy disposal of cases related to environmental protection, conservation of forest and for seeking compensation for damages caused to people or property due to violation of environmental laws.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006- It recognises the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over the forest areas inhabited by them and provides a framework for according the same.

Coastal Regulation Zone Notification- The Ministry of Environment and Forests had issued the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification with an objective to ensure livelihood security to the fishing communities and other local communities living in the coastal areas, to conserve and protect coastal stretches and to promote development in a sustainable manner based on scientific principles, taking into account the dangers of natural hazards in the coastal areas and sea level rise due to global warming.

CONCLUSION

More than half of the population of India live in rural areas and majority of them are poor. This is due to less income & poor quality of goods and services. Hence they use or completely depend on natural resources to improve their quality of life. In this process they don't realize or neglect the fact that they are overexploiting the environment. This results in the

degradation of environment. Environmental degradation means decline in the quantity and quality of natural resources. There are many harmful effects of environmental degradation on earth. It leads to various calamities and many harmful problems. It also affects the health of people. It will also further deepen the poverty situation and will also lead to emergence of many kinds of diseases as a result of the contamination of the environment and malnutrition. Government has taken many steps to improve the quality of life of rural people. It has also made laws for the protection of environment and wildlife. Government should provide job opportunities to the poor rural people and provide the basic items which are necessary for living at very low price and should ensure that the quality of goods and services provided to them are good. They should also try to spread more awareness among people regarding the impact of overexploitation of natural resources and the adverse effects of environmental degradation on earth. Hence if the poverty is controlled the problem of environmental degradation will improve to a large extent.

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