

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN W.R.T. CONTEMPORARY INDIA**Dr. Suman Kumar Kasturi⁶ Dr. P. Bobby Vardhan⁷****ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses the various relationship aspects of sustainability development and women in India economy. The paper concluded that at par with their male counterparts, women play a big role in contributing to development. They are equally responsible for meeting majority of their family and societal needs. Therefore, these efforts need to be recognized at all levels. It is important that attention be given to the substantial contribution in various fields by women for the enhancement of their family standards, apart from contributing for the growth of national economy. It is necessary to look into the need and problems of women in order to spigot their full potential and productivity.

KEYWORDS**Women, Sustainable Development, Environment, Community, Resources etc.**

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.” – Kofi Annan

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable development ways backs its roots in the fourth century B.C. It is evident by Chanakya's opinion - “Stability of an empire depends on the stability of its environment”¹. He has emphasized the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development is nothing but proper usage of the resources available naturally, for the continuous development to satisfy the human needs. Such an act should ensure no damage is caused to the environment; also the natural resources are not to be misused. Here it is to be understood that the term environment does not necessarily imply trees, animals and the ecosystem only. It is literally about all the entities on which the human life subsists. In other words, sustainable development may be defined as the ability of physical development and environmental impacts to sustain long-term habitation on the planet earth by human and other indigenous species while providing the following:²

- An opportunity for environmentally safe, ecologically appropriate physical development;
- Efficient use of natural resources;
- A framework which allows improvement of human condition and equal opportunity; for current and future generations;
- Manageable urban growth.

There are numerous definitions of the term sustainable development but the one adopted for this study is the one given by World Commission on Environment and Development i.e. The Brundtland Commission. “Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation”³ is the definition of Brundtland Commission for sustainable development, in its 1987 report published by the United Nations. With this definition, the concept of sustainable development was born. To embrace the idea of ensuring that the future generations inherit the Earth, which supports their livelihood in such a way that they are no worse off than generations today, is the main area that the sustainable intends for. In this paper, the concept of sustainable development is considered as an improvement of lifestyles and well-being of women at par with their male counterparts. In order to promote sustainable development there is the need for everyone to participate in all the areas like economy, policy and social development of the society, without any gender discrimination. According to “World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision” Women constitute 49.5%⁴ the world population and 48.26%⁵ of Indian population But unfortunately, the women are relegated to the background in every facet of life. In India, for instance, although the 2011 National population census reveals that women make up 48.26 % (about half i.e. 496,514,346 for 532,223,090 males⁶) of the total population, only a small number of exceptional women have achieved prominence on modern political and government spheres. Several reasons have been adduced for the present imbalance position of women in contemporary Indian society, today. The reasons those relegate women to the background, mainly include the gender disparity & inequality, division of labour policies, higher rates of illiteracy on the part of women (whereas the total literates in India stand at 79.9%, women contribute only 72.9%⁷).

Since most of the roles performed by women are domestic in nature, the gender disparity is affecting women's role in sustainable development. The nations, individuals, and groups of persons are made to think of strategies that enhance women's role in sustainable development by virtue of the global awareness of the role of women in sustainable development. The overall goal, in terms of women and sustainable development, is gender mainstreaming of all policies incorporating a gender perspective in all planning and decision making processes. The main purpose of this paper is to encourage better participation of women in their achievement of the goal of sustainable development, which includes lasting improvement on the quality of their lives.

⁶Senior Non Commissioned Officer, I.A.F., India, sumankasturi@gmail.com

⁷Professor & Head of Department, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Andhra University, Andhra Pradesh, India, bobbys1981@yahoo.com

Consequently, this study determined the roles of women in sustainable development, the factors affecting their roles in sustainable development and suitable strategies to improve women's full participation in sustainable development in contemporary Indian society. The questions that require to be addressed in the relevant context include: What roles do women play in sustainable development in contemporary Indian society? What factors challenge or restrict the role of women in sustainable development? What perceptions do women have on strategies given by individual agency for improving the role of women in sustainable development? When these questions are addressed effectively, they could become beneficial to policy makers and educators in their search of strategies for improving the role of women in sustainable development.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN

Women and sustainable development goes back to almost forty years in the international level. In April 1972, when United Nations proclaimed 1975 as the International Women's year (and later decade for women from 1975-1985), "Women Issues", or rather "Women's Problems" as they called them at United Nations, had been on the agenda of several conferences at local, national and international levels. The international community gave more emphasis to these issues.

In 1972, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi emphasized, at the UN Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm, that the removal of poverty is an integral part of the goal of an environmental strategy for the world. The concepts of interrelatedness, of a shared planet, of global citizenship, and of 'spaceship earth' cannot be restricted to environmental issues alone. They apply equally to the shared and inter-linked responsibilities of environmental protection and human development. Before declaration of the year 1972 as the International Women's year, to focus attention on the condition of women worldwide, efforts had been made by inter governmental, nongovernmental and women's organizations for almost four decades. In the 1950s and 1960s the issues concerning married women's rights, legitimacy of children and maternity protection were discussed progressively at the UN Commission on the Status of Women. To connect women's concerns with the rapidly changing scenarios of international events and being women's problems out of the "Social spheres" to economic and political levels were to take another two decades of continuing struggle in the 1970s and 1980s.

Another world conference on environment was held in Stockholm in June 1972, after the declaration of the International year of the women was adopted by the U.N. In this conference, the development debate between rich and poor countries, for the first time began to be linked to the ecological movement in earnest. The issues raised then by the developed and developing countries followed different concepts, which could be prominently referred to as "great divide". By this, they mean that, the impact of environment has serious consequences on the world economy, which was realized during the process of decision making and while drawing resolutions of that conference. From that time, decades of international research and government policies have not succeeded in achieving the convergence of the two separate streams: environment and development. As far as the ordinary people are concerned, the two issues were never separated, rather the two combine to form one for them, always.

Concerns of women did not weigh up or resolutions or decisions of the Stockholm conference, in spite of the propinquity of the two world conferences in the same year viz 1972. The unwritten convention of excluding women as agents of development change continued for a long time in international debates and was not carried a step forward until 1987. The global report of the world commission on environment and development did not examine or analyze how women, as half of humanity, are differently and seriously affected by environment degradation of the earth. In 1989, the United Nations called for a world conference that "would take steps to revise trends and establish the basis for a substantial way of environmental disasters had grown to enormous proportions, resulting in increased poverty of millions of people, the majority of whom are women. In the intervening period between 1972 and 1992, women's movements had become altered to the reality of international agendas, which had always left them on the sidelines.

The year 1974 could be considered a landmark in the history of international relations. A novel approach was then adopted in the proclamation of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) by the UN General Assembly, to challenge unequal and inequitable relations among nation states. The political aspect of this new deal was to bring about a fundamental change in existing relationships between developed and developing countries, particularly in terms of trade, transfer of technology and financial flows. It is very important to note here that the International Women's year 1975 was proclaimed only a few months after this historic decision in the United Nations. In this way, in the minds of men and women, who were representatives of governments and who design policies and purpose legislation, the women became interlinked to the process of development and forever connected through international decisions, resolutions and statements.

The main body of international decisions and resolutions on women and development were mostly separated in form and substance from the mainstream concerns of the international community for almost four decades i.e. from 1950s to 1990s. At another level of concepts, the UN history on international development strategies also shows remarkable lack of foresight on the part of the international community at large and policy makers in particular. The status of women particularly in economic structures was almost omitted; the voices of women's movements were never considered to the desired extent. Without touching gender analysis or considering gender sensitivity, other subjects such as disarmament or technology transfer or migration were discussed, researched upon and refined. When the preparatory committee of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) adopted a resolution entitled Women in Environment and Development on 23rd April 1991⁸, the gender imbalance was partially redeemed. By this resolution, the governments were requested by the UNCED to consider gender diversion, while submitting national reports to the 1992 Rio conference. The resolution also called for development of human

resources in order to protect and enhance the environment. Further, the UNCED had insisted that the Brazil conference should take into account the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS) adopted at the end of the UN decade for women's conference in 1985. It is evident that through this resolution, the so-called three themes of the decade namely peace, equality and development were connected by ecosystem management and control of environmental degradation. The resolution undeniably states that in the process of achieving sustainable development, women should be recognized as "active and equal participants".

In most of the international standards and decisions, considering the environment and development as interdependent and mutually reinforceable themes, "women and development" has been accorded a "separate best equal" status. In order to search for the inter linkages between women and environment through the development process, the UNCED resolution quoted said attempts. Through strengthening of the "human resources", the UNCED resolution addresses women's interests and needs in environment. Wherever "human resources" are defined, training women in skills has become a part of the programme parameters of international and intergovernmental organizations as a norm. On the other hand, in their action level demands, the meaning given to human resources expanded on NGOs and women's organizations. As an integral part of human resources, the NGOs and women's organizations have undertaken political campaigns and definite policy makers to bring centre stage to women sources. At the first instant, the importance of this act might have not been felt, until the time the skills and resources were examined in relation to the position of women. On the international agenda in this meandering way, interlink between women, development and environment have been established.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ISSUES IN INDIA

Within the contemporary Indian society, the gender discrimination continues to be a huge problem in the context of sustainable development. Within the household and workplace, the patriarchal norms, which have been followed traditionally, have relegated women to inferior status to that of men. Such relegation affects women's health, financial status, education, development and political involvement apart from various other prominent issues. Most of the women in contemporary Indian society are burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities as they marry at the tender ages and attain motherhood at relatively younger ages. The ratio of the women's malnourishment is more than men in contemporary Indian society. In addition to this, the work participation rate of Indian women is only 25.6 percent as compared to 51.7 percent of men⁹. It is also understood from the available literature that women suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws. These laws prevent women in contemporary Indian society from accumulating substantial financial assets, making it difficult for them to establish their own security and autonomy.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the Rio Declaration in 1992, various development goals have been formulated and embodied as International Development Goals by the United Nations. Subsequently, World Bank extended those international goals into its own set of goals. They are prominently known as Eight-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These MDGs setup by World Bank are appended below¹⁰:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve universal primary education for both girls & boys;
- Promote Gender equality and empower women;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Improve Maternal Health;
- Combat HIV/Aids, Malaria and other diseases;
- Ensure environmental sustainability; and
- Develop global partnerships.

It is evident from goal three of the above-mentioned MDGs that the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women are very important in giving effect to all eight goals. By developing specific targets, to ensure sustainable development, the role of women is seen against the gender imbalances that prevail in almost all developing countries.

By virtue of its definition, sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources for today and for the future. Such a thing cannot be achieved without achieving the gender equality first. In this regard, it becomes more important to achieve women's empowerment for achieving sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.

In the past, during a roundtable meeting organized by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) looked at some of the issues that must be addressed for empowering women and enhancing their capacity as active agents of change for sustainable development. On the availability and quality of gender statistics, it emerged that the major areas of concern where sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive information are lacking are the following¹¹: a) Participation in decision-making, b) Participation in elections, c) Entrepreneurship, d) Domestic violence, e) Poverty, f) Informal employment, g) Time-use, h) Gender attitudes, and i) School attendance.

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S ROLES IN DEVELOPMENT

Despite the benefits of education for girls and women, a mixture of social, cultural and economic barriers keeps a larger proportion of girls and women out of school. Many families cannot afford to send girls to school because their labour is needed in the home and in the fields. Nobody can deny the fact that that women's status is of great concern in our society and there is the problem of poverty.

In contemporary India, the major contributors of employment are the privately owned companies. They prefer to offer jobs to men rather than the women. It was revealed by the many of entrepreneurs that they prefer men to women for various reasons that prevail predominantly in men as compared to women. For sundry reasons, in contemporary India the chances of women employment are far behind that of men. Of course, as compared to yester years, the situation at present is quite improved but not up to the mark.

One of the key issues is unequal distribution of income in contemporary India. Women accrue less income than men do over their lifetime for a variety of reasons. They get paid less for the same work and are more likely to work less in order to reconcile their domestic needs like caring for children and elders at home front. Say for example, in our country the women casual labour are paid less than that of their male counterparts for the same amount of work rendered in a day. These gaps imposed by various reasons in women's employment issues, reduce the amount of social security women gain. The more the gap, the less is the social security that the women gain. Additionally, the gap also decreases the likelihood of receiving credit or loans for initiating the work under self-employment schemes being promoted by various state and central governments. All these facts increase women's susceptibility to poverty. Governments must introduce policies, programmes and quota systems, which correct this imbalance.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is a mandatory requirement in the contemporary Indian society that women's contribution to sustainable development is required to be recognized. Women have a strong role in education and socializing their children, including teaching them care and responsibility with regard to the use and protection of natural resources. More should be done to increase women's role in environmental decision-making and to enable women to take hold of opportunities in the green economy. More capacity building programmes and training tailored to the needs of women are needed. The following are various strategies that may be adopted for improving women's role in sustainable development:

- Ministries of Education should liaise with Ministry of Women and Child Development for developing specialized programmes that enhance girls' education. A free primary education should be imposed upon all the girls.
- The apex national level organization of India with the mandate of protecting and promoting the interests of women viz the National Commission for Women should develop various programmes for the promotion of Sustainable Development in respect of women at all levels.
- Apart from the Government institutions, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should also volunteer to take care of the problems being faced by girls and women. They should also promote various programmes on sustainable development.
- All the teaching programmes aimed at educating women should address the issues of liberating women from poverty. In addition, the programmes should ensure more women become motivated to involve in politics, social activities and economy of the nation.
- While sanctioning the establishment of privately owned firms / companies, the concerned governments should ensure that, the women in these firms/companies are equally employed at par with the men.
- It is required to take vast measures to eliminate illiteracy among females and to expand the enrolment of women and girls in educational institutions at all levels.
- It should be an endeavor of all the concerned departments of government to promote the goal of universal access to primary and secondary education for girl children and for women, while increasing educational and training opportunities for women and girls in sciences and technology, particularly at the post- secondary level.
- Government should play sustainable roles to remove the barriers militating against women's full participation in sustainable development.
- Existing women organizations in the rural and urban areas can easily be used as platforms to educate women to participate fully in sustainable development.
- More women should be encouraged to read science and vocational subjects at all levels of education to prepare them for technological changes without which they cannot meet up with their roles in sustainable development.

The government should undertake measures for the following:

- Motivating the women in participating in issues related to agricultural development;
- Formulation and promotion of policies for the same and to develop appropriate programs to this extent.
- Training of specially appointed staff on women's integration in development and to seek advice from these staff on development policies;
- Developing such a project and monitoring the effectiveness of such a project, continuously;
- Preparation of manuals to promote women's participation in development and to carryout surveys to find out the effectiveness;
- Teaching on population with special reference to women's role in development;
- Data collection, communications and public information for further necessary course of action;
- Imparting necessary training to selected women on sustainable development, management of natural resources and environment.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, it could be concluded that at par with their male counterparts, women play a big role in contributing to development. They are equally responsible for meeting majority of their family and societal needs. Therefore, these efforts need to be recognized at all levels. It is important that attention be given to the substantial contribution in various fields by women for the enhancement of their family standards, apart from contributing for the growth of national economy. It is necessary to look into the need and problems of women in order to spigot their full potential and productivity.

REFERENCES

1. Rao, V. V., Lakshmi, Vijaya, V., Krishna, Vamsi V., & Rao, Bhaskara D. (2004). *Education in India*. Discovery Publishing House, 82.
2. Roosa, & Stephen, A. (2008). *Sustainable Development* (Handbook). The Fairmont Press, Inc, 44.
3. Jeff, Gold, Richard, Thorpe, & Alan, Mumford. (2010). *Gower Handbook of Leadership and Management Development*. Gower Publishing Company, 476.
4. GeoHive. (2011, August 18). *Male/Female distribution*. Retrieved from http://www.geohive.com/earth/pop_gender.aspx
5. (2011, August 18). *Census of India – India at a Glance: Population*.
6. Ibid.
7. (2011, August 18). *Census of India – India at a Glance: Number of Literates & Literacy Rates*. Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/literates1.aspx.
8. Patel, Krishna Ahooja. (2004). *Women and Sustainable Development : An International Dimension*. Ashish Publishing House, 42.
9. (2011, August 18). *Census of India – India at a Glance: Work Participation Rates*. Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/workpart.aspx.
10. (2011, August 20). *The World Bank-Milleneum Development Golas*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs>
11. (2011, August 22). Retrieved from http://www.unecce.org/publications/oes/2006_MDG_Report_final_E.pdf.

FOR ANY CLARIFICATION OR SUGGESTION, WRITE US:

Editor-In-Chief

Pezzottaite Journals,

64/2, Trikuta Nagar, K. K. Gupta Lane, Jammu Tawi, Jammu & Kashmir - 180012, India.

(Mobile): +91-09419216270 – 71

editorinchief@pezzottaitejournals.net, contactus@pezzottaitejournals.net

©www.sumankasturi.com