

Environmental Degradation and Crisis of Human Rights

Dr. Archana Sawshilya*

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi

Abstract – Environmental protection and human rights are interconnected interrelated and interdependent responding to the sustainability of human lives. A healthy environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of human rights across the world, but unfortunately, this linkage has not been ignored by the Governments. Environmental destruction caused by people leads to the violation of human rights. It adversely affects people, natural resources, ecosystems and also physical structure. Sudden onset events posing threat to human lives lead to environmental degradation, inaccessibility to clean water, food shortage, drought, and flood. Human rights are universal legal guarantees of fundamental freedoms and entitlements based on the inherent dignity and equal worth of all the individuals, which cannot be waived off or taken away but by disturbing ecological balance, human beings themselves pose threat to biodiversity and create adverse conditions for them. Therefore it becomes obligatory for the governments and international organizations to respect, promote Human rights -including the rights to life, self-determination, development, food, health, water, and sanitation by protecting Environment and biodiversity.

Keywords – Biodiversity, Human Rights, Universal Legal Guarantee, Self Determination

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

There is a close relationship between Environment and Human rights. A Clean, healthy environment is integral to the enjoyment of Human rights. The right to life, health, food, and standard of living are dependent on biodiversity. Biodiversity is an intricate web-having essential infrastructure-flora & fauna along with human beings and their interdependency supports life on earth and human development. If there is a balance between these two, life can be sustained else its imbalance will destroy our ecosystem and life.

Biodiversity provides life essentials- air & water Purification, soil protection & flood, and drought mitigation and maintains Ecosystem. It is now beyond dispute that climate change caused by human activity has negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights. Climate change has profound impacts on a wide variety of human rights such as the rights to life, water, and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination. Mother Nature cannot expand to meet our needs but human beings keep exploiting and extracting its natural resources to meet the desires of development, industrialization, and globalization. But Mother Nature is miserably failing to balance the ecosystem because we keep polluting, extracting, and pushing it back destroying the balance and Co-existence. Human beings are shamelessly challenging the very foundation of our

human rights for livelihoods - air, water, soil, vegetation & animals. If we protect the environment we protect human rights and human lives. Climate change as a result of environmental degradation has adversely affected wildlife, natural resources, and ecological processes.

Human rights are universally legally guaranteed rights given to individuals, groups, and peoples to protect against actions and omissions that interfere with their fundamental freedoms and entitlements. Human rights law obliges governments and other people with the authority to respect, promote, protect, and Fulfill all human rights. These rights are universal and essentially based on the inherent dignity and equal worth of all human beings. But human beings by destroying the environment and disturbing coexistence with biodiversity create adverse situations that hamper them to enjoy their basic rights.

DISASTERS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LIFE

Disasters are dangerous phenomena, natural or human activity, or condition that may cause loss of life, injury adverse impacts on health and property damage. It can be Natural or Man-made but both

are disastrous. Disasters arise from-Physical, Social, Economic, and Environmental factors.

EVENTS OF DISASTERS

- Major roads and bridges are destroyed, widespread destruction of crops poultry livestock and agricultural produce
- Extreme rains, severe flooding, landslide, loss of livelihood and services, social and economic disruption or environmental damage Disasters
- Aquifers and wetlands, farmlands and forests are all as essential to a city's survival as much as transport networks
- Water, the most vital and most abused urban resource, best illustrates the precarious relationship that exists between cities and the natural system.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Human-made greenhouse gas emissions are the primary cause. of Climate change .Climate change directly and indirectly threaten the full and effective enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, water, and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture, and development. Adverse effects of climate change can be seen as
- Rise in sea level
- Displacement
- Changes in precipitation patterns and water cycle will increase problems of water supply and its quality
- Lack of sanitation and potable water. Contaminated water will result in diseases like cholera, typhoid, diarrhea, hepatitis, and gastroenteritis
- Climate change increases environment-related diseases. Warmer or wetter period of breeding due to global warming will provide ideal conditions for the expansion of mosquito-borne diseases. Warmer cities will also induce an increase in respiratory diseases due to pollution whose effects are reinforced by high temperatures.
- Heat waves kill hundreds of people every year across the globe. Health consequences of climate change especially heat waves and heat strokes affect the population (poor section). As the immune system weakens

due to heat stress, susceptibility to diseases would further increase. Three-quarters of the carbon dioxide in the world, the *biggest greenhouse gas* is emitted by cities.

- Global warming -“urban heat island effect” makes cities warmer than their surrounding from 2 to 6o C because of the modification of the land surface and waste heat produced by high-energy use. Infrastructures
- Hazards like Storms, floods, cyclones, coastal flooding put infrastructure at great risk. This *includes transportation* (roads, railways, bridges, ports, and airports) and *communication networks, water supply, sewage, gas pipelines, drainage, flood and coastal defense systems, power and telecommunication infrastructures*, industrial units, plants. As far as *buildings* are concerned, informal and traditional housing are the most vulnerable to storms and floods.
- Rights of Indigenous are vulnerable to the disruptive effects of climate change. Due to climate change, indigenous people have been threatened with their livelihood and cultural identities
- As the population in cities grows, pressure on ecosystems increases. Large quantities of food, water, and fuel need to be moved into the cities and huge amounts of garbage and sewage have to be moved out. Nutrient-rich human wastes – an asset in a rural setting can become an economic liability in an urban environment
- Compromised lifestyles are the story of today. Modernization/urbanization-move towards high-energy consuming buildings for middle and business-class. *These buildings are responsible for generating carbon dioxide*, which they need to heat or cool their interiors; the rest is generated by *motorized* transport, which is growing exponentially in our country. Mumbai itself is responsible for 40% of pollution in India. But these issues are *ignored and not taken seriously*
- Globalization and adoption of new technologies of construction for homogenized types of building that largely use cement and glass, air conditioning regardless of the environmental and climatic conditions
- Conflicts-climate change effects (including water scarcity, loss of arable land, extreme weather events, shortened growing seasons, and melting glaciers) may

interact with economic, social, and political forces to create "a high risk of violent conflict

- Migrations/Displacements – Climate change-related drought and floods are expected to *force rural to urban migration, increase overpopulation of cities*, and the proportion of poor and vulnerable people living in urban areas.
- The poor and the vulnerable people. The slum dwellers, squatters, migrants, people living in informal settlements which are generally situated in vulnerable areas (river beds, flood plains, hill slopes) will be directly affected

CONCERNS FOR TODAY AND FUTURE

The setting of related goals and objectives for sustainable development should be the prime concern for all. There is a Lack of adequate knowledge and information at every level, national, regional, and local. Attention is given more on mitigation but the focus needs to be also on adaptation, especially for the vulnerable communities. It, therefore, requires that climate change should be guided by relevant Human rights norms and principles such as- rights to participation and information, transparency, accountability, equity, and non-discrimination. Climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems.

Our critical concern is to have the Disaster Response Team, Safety committee/Emergency Response plan/Employee trained in first aid/Institutionalised Warning system, etc. For Risk reduction strategy_the systematic process of using administrative decisions, Organizational operational skills, and Capabilities to implement policies, strategies, and coping capacities of the society and communities are needed. Some other important measures are -Institutionalizing local disaster risk reduction and management office, establishing early warning system, formulating communicating protocol, evacuation procedures, organizing local DRRMC and defining their roles and responsibilities, hazard awareness through workshops and seminars, integrating hazard risk and vulnerability assessment into the development plan, cluster approach and recovery plan, accurate flow of information – before, during and after disasters. Determining the risk and ways to reduce those risks can ensure the ability of human beings to enjoy their basic rights which are due to them. The potential technique to allow individuals to enjoy their human rights is changing their attitudes and slowing down environmental degradation, climate change, and reducing disaster risks.

We should understand the nature of hazards and devise ways to minimize them, replacing appliances with energy-efficient models, making lifestyle

Greener. Taking our environmental habits to office, mobilizing maximum available resources for sustainable and human rights-based development, National and International cooperation to ensure *enjoyment and exercise of human rights*

REFERENCES

Environmental Protection and Human Rights; An overview of current trends, December 2010, SSRN Electronic journal

Need to Ensure a Healthy Environment for the Well-Being of Individuals, UNGA Resolution 45/94 (14 December 1990).

Lal, A. (1995). Right to live in Healthy Environment vis-à-vis Human Excretion. In B. P. Singh (Ed.) Human Rights in India (p. 370). New Delhi, Deep, and Deep Publication.

Puneet Pathak, Human Rights Approach to Environmental Protection, International Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol-7, No-1, pp. 17-24, 2014]

P Cullet, Definition of environmental Rights in a Human rights Context, Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights, Vol-3. 1995

Shelton, D.(2010) Developing Substantive Environmental Rights, Journal of Human Rights and the Environment, 1(1), p. 90.

UN Secretary-General (2005), Human rights and the environment as part of sustainable development – Report of the Secretary-General, E/CN.4/2005/96, 19 January 2005

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Rights_and_Climate_Change#cite_note14

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Rights_and_Climate_Change#cite_note-16

Corresponding Author

Dr. Archana Sawshilya*

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi