

# Environment Degradation – A Threat to Human Rights

Dr. Archana Sawshilya\*

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi

**Abstract – Environmental protection and human rights are interconnected interrelated and interdependent responding for the sustainability of human lives. It goes without saying that a healthy environment is pre condition 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 violation of human rights. It adversely affects people, natural resources, eco system and also physical structure. Sudden onset events posing threat to human lives leads to environmental degradation, inaccessibility to clean water, food shortage, drought and flood. Human rights are universal legal guarantees of fundamental freedom 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 organisations 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 close relationship between Environment and Human rights. A Clean, healthy environment is integral to the enjoyment of Human rights. 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 balance between these two, life can be sustained else its imbalance will destroys 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 environment basically we protect the human rights and human lives. Climate change as resultant of environment 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 authority to respect, promote, protect and fulfil 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 environment and disturbing coexistence with the biodiversity create adverse situation which 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 Manmade 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
- Farmlands, forests, Aquifers, wetlands and transport are all crucial for existence and survival for a city's life.
- 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. There is no doubt that Climate change adversely affects effective enjoyment of our human rights. We cannot enjoy our basic human rights like the rights to life, food water and sanitation, health, and housing if there is environmental disturbances. Our culture, self-determination and development also get affected by climate change. Other effects of climate change can be seen as
- Rise in sea level
- Displacement
- Changes in precipitation patterns and water cycle increases problems of water supply and its quality
- Lack of sanitation and potable water - Contaminated water will results into diseases like cholera, typhoid, diarrhoea, hepatitis, and gastroenteritis
- Climate change increases environment-related diseases. Warmer or wetter period of breeding due to global warming will provide ideal conditions for 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 stroke affect the population (poor section). Climate change decreases immune system and people fall ill very fast and variety of diseases infects people. 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 defence systems, power and telecommunication infrastructures*, industrial units, plants. Generally informal and traditional houses are most prone to destruction.

- 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 population in cities grows, pressure on ecosystems is increasing as people need huge quantities of food, water and fuel and also huge amounts of garbage and sewage have to be moved out. A human waste which is nutrient-rich is an asset in a rural setting but it becomes an economic liability in an urban environment.
- Compromised life styles are the story of today. Modernisation/ urbanisation-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. Metropolitan cities create more pollution. 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, the slum dwellers, migrants, squatters, the vulnerable people and those living in informal settlements are generally situated in vulnerable areas like river beds, flood plains, hill slopes are directly affected

## CONCERNS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Setting of related goals and objectives for sustainable development should be the prime concern for all. There is 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.

Our critical concern is to have Disaster Response Team, Safety committee/Emergency Response plan/Employee trained in first aid/Institutionalised Warning system etc. For Risk reduction strategy 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,oorganizing 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 risk can ensure ability of human beings to enjoy their basic rights which are due to them .Potential technique to allow individuals to enjoy their human rights are changing their attitudes and slowing down environmental degradation, climate change and reducing disaster risks.

We should understand nature of hazards and devise ways to minimize them, replacing appliances with energy efficient models, making lifestyle G-reener. 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 (2014). Human Rights Approach to Environmental Protection, International journal of Sustainable Development, Vol-7, No-1 pp. 17-24,2014.
- P. Cullet (1995). Definition of environmental Rights in a Human rights Context, Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights, Vol-3.
- 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

---

### Corresponding Author

**Dr. Archana Sawshilya\***

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi