

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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NEED OF ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

GHANSHYAM KUMAR PANDEY
RESEARCH FELLOW
AERC, DELHI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS CAMPUS
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
DELHI

SEEMA KUMARI
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD
ALLAHABAD

ABSTRACT

Will the world be able to sustain economic growth indefinitely without running into resources constraints or despoiling the environment beyond repairs? Climate changes is one of the most important global environment challenges, with implication of food production, water supply, health, energy, etc. This paper addresses these challenges. The issue of highest importance to developing countries is reducing the vulnerability of the natural and socio-economic system to the projected climate change.

KEYWORDS

Agriculture, climate change, challenge, Environment, livelihood, nature.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid economic growth achieved by most of the developing countries after globalization has adversely affected the quality of the environment, imposed considerable social costs and livelihood impacts, and has become a major threat to sustainable development. As a subject of inquiry the economic development of poor countries is only a half-century old. Classical economists were certainly much concerned to identify the social processes that create prosperity (smith); but it was not until the emergence of independent nations in Asia and Africa that economic development became a specialised field. In order to improve upon contemporary development processes economists studied the impact of economic decisions on human wellbeing not only in the present and near future, but in the distant future too. Unfortunately they also became attached to the idea that an increase in gross national product (GNP) is the key to economic development and to the elimination of poverty. To be sure, GNP growth was recognised to be a means only, but the means took on such a life of their own in policy discussions, that if someone were to ask, "growth in what?", the response would promptly be, "growth in GNP." (Gupta, 2002).

QUESTION OF SUSTAINABILITY

As a society, we must accommodate population growth which puts increased demand on natural resources. i.e., land for farming (food production, housing etc) water, minerals. We must also maintain natural resources in good condition for future generations. So as we develop (build houses/sky scrapers/dams/roads etc) we must do so in a manner that conserves the environment so it is in good conditions for future generations. This is where the term ecologically sustainable development comes in. In short, economic development is the growth and expansion of our modern civilisation, whereby it must take place in a manner that conserves the environment. If not it resources may run out (crude oil perhaps) or lose their purity (think air pollution in major cities or the damage coal seam gas fracking has on ground water quality or ozone layer depletion).

Climate change is one of the most important global environmental challenges facing humanity with implications for food production, natural ecosystems, freshwater supply, health, etc. According to the latest scientific assessment, the earth's climate system has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since the preindustrial near. Further evidence shows that most of the warming (of 0.1°C per decade) observed over the last 50 years, is attributable to human activities¹. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that the global mean temperature may increase between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees Celsius (C) by 2100. This unprecedented increase is expected to have severe impacts on the global hydrological system, ecosystems, sea level, crop production and related processes. The impact would be particularly severe in the tropical areas, which mainly consist of developing countries, including India (Sathaye et al., 2006).

ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOOD OPTION

In June 1992, Manmohan Singh, then finance minister in the Government of India, delivered the Foundation Day Address of the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD). He spoke on the topic 'Environment and the New Economic Policies'. In his talk, Singh urged "objective standards industry-wise for safeguarding the environment, asking industry to certify compliance with these standards, institution of an effective system of verification and industry audit and heavy penalties for non-compliance with approved environmental standards and norms." When speaking of environmental issues, it is important to recognise that in a densely populated country like India, these have both an ecological as well as human dimension. Programmes to clear-cut natural forests and replace them with exotic species deplete the soil even as they deprive peasants of access to fuel, fodder and artisanal raw material. Mining projects if not properly regulated or carried out with state-of-the-art technologies, ravage hillsides and pollute rivers used by villagers downstream. In this sense, in India, environmental protection or conservation is not a luxury – as it might be in rich, under-populated countries – but the very basis of human (and national) survival. The trends of unstable and inefficient growth are happening on a local, national and global scale. Sustainability is a term used to describe an efficient way of living to try and reverse some of the damage done and preserve our resources for future generations. Experience of the recent past has brought to us the realization of the deadly effects of development on ecosystem. The entire world is facing a serious problem of environmental degradation due to indiscriminate development. Industrialization, burning of fossil fuels and massive deforestation are leading to degradation of environment. Today the atmospheric level of carbon dioxide, the principal source of global warming, is 26% higher than pre-industrial concentration. While economic development should not be allowed to take place at the cost of ecology or by causing widespread environment destruction and violation; at the same time the necessity to preserve ecology and environment should not hamper economic and other developments. Both development and environment must go hand in hand, in other words, there should not be development at the cost of environment and vice versa, but there should be development while taking, due care and ensuring the protection of environment. In both the developmental and environmental camps, the concept of sustainable development was seen a means of achieving development without degradation. Two decades later, it has become a convenient slogan behind which countries like India can conceal "business as usual" growth policies. Despite India's rapid growth, over 33% of its households still have no access to electricity — and over 70% still use fuel-wood, twigs and animal dung for cooking. In 2011, non-commercial energy comprised 24% of India's primary energy pie, following coal at 42%. Additionally, India's rural communities rely on female

labour to collect and burn vast amounts of carbon-based fuels. This is possible because the opportunity cost of "female energy" remains negligible as long as the women are uneducated and unskilled. Environmental cost assessment by scholars varies from 4.5% to 5% of GDP due to air pollution, groundwater mining, and deteriorating quality of aquifers, land degradation and deforestation. Annual economic costs of air pollution, contaminated water, soil degradation, and deforestation were estimated to be 8% of GDP by Tata Energy Resource Institute (TERI).

Unfortunately, humanity's behaviour remains utterly inappropriate for dealing with the potentially lethal fallout from a combination of increasingly rapid technological evolution matched with very slow ethical-social evolution. The human ability to do has vastly outstripped the ability to understand. As a result civilization is faced with a perfect storm of problems driven by overpopulation, overconsumption by the rich, the use of environmentally malign technologies, and gross inequalities. They include loss of the biodiversity that runs human life-support systems, climate disruption, global toxification, alteration of critical biogeochemical cycles, increasing probability of vast epidemics, and the spectre of a civilization-destroying nuclear war. These biophysical problems are interacting tightly with human governance systems, institutions, and civil societies that are now inadequate to deal with them.

The rapidly deteriorating biophysical situation is more than bad enough, but it is barely recognized by a global society infected by the irrational belief that physical economies can grow forever and disregarding the facts that the rich in developed and developing countries get richer and the poor are left behind. And the perpetual growth myth is enthusiastically embraced by politicians and economists as an excuse to avoid tough decisions facing humanity. This myth promotes the impossible idea that indiscriminate economic growth is the cure for all the world's problems, while it is actually (as currently practiced) the disease that is at the root cause of our unsustainable global practices.

In the face of an absolutely unprecedented emergency, society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization. Either we will change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us.

India has potential to supply substantial mitigation at a relatively low price. Major opportunities exist both on the supply and demand side of energy, in case of carbon emissions. There are also low cost opportunities for mitigation of methane and nitrous oxide. As Table 2 shows, in the short-run, till the Kyoto Protocol period, substantial potential of mitigation of carbon, methane and nitrous oxides exist at costs below \$30 per tonne of carbon equivalent (or \$8 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent), which is below the prevailing price of traded carbon in European market.

TABLE 1: MITIGATION OPTIONS, POTENTIAL AND COSTS

S. No.	Green House Gas	Mitigation Options	Mitigation Potential 2002-12 (Million Tonnes)	Long term Marginal Cost (\$ tonnes of Carbon Equivalent)
1.	Carbon	Demand-side Energy Efficiency	45	0-15
		Supply-side Energy Efficiency	32	0-12
		Electricity T & D	12	5-30
		Renewable Electricity Technologies	23	3-15
		Fuel Switching-gas for Coal	8	5-20
2.	Methane	Forestry	18	5-10
		Enhanced Cattle Feed	0.66	5-30
		Anaerobic Manner Digesters	0.38	3-10
		Low Methane Rice Varieties	Marginal	5-20
		Cultivar Practices	Marginal	0-20
3.	Nitrous	Improved Fertilizers Application	Marginal	0-20
		Nitrification Inhibitors	Marginal	20-40

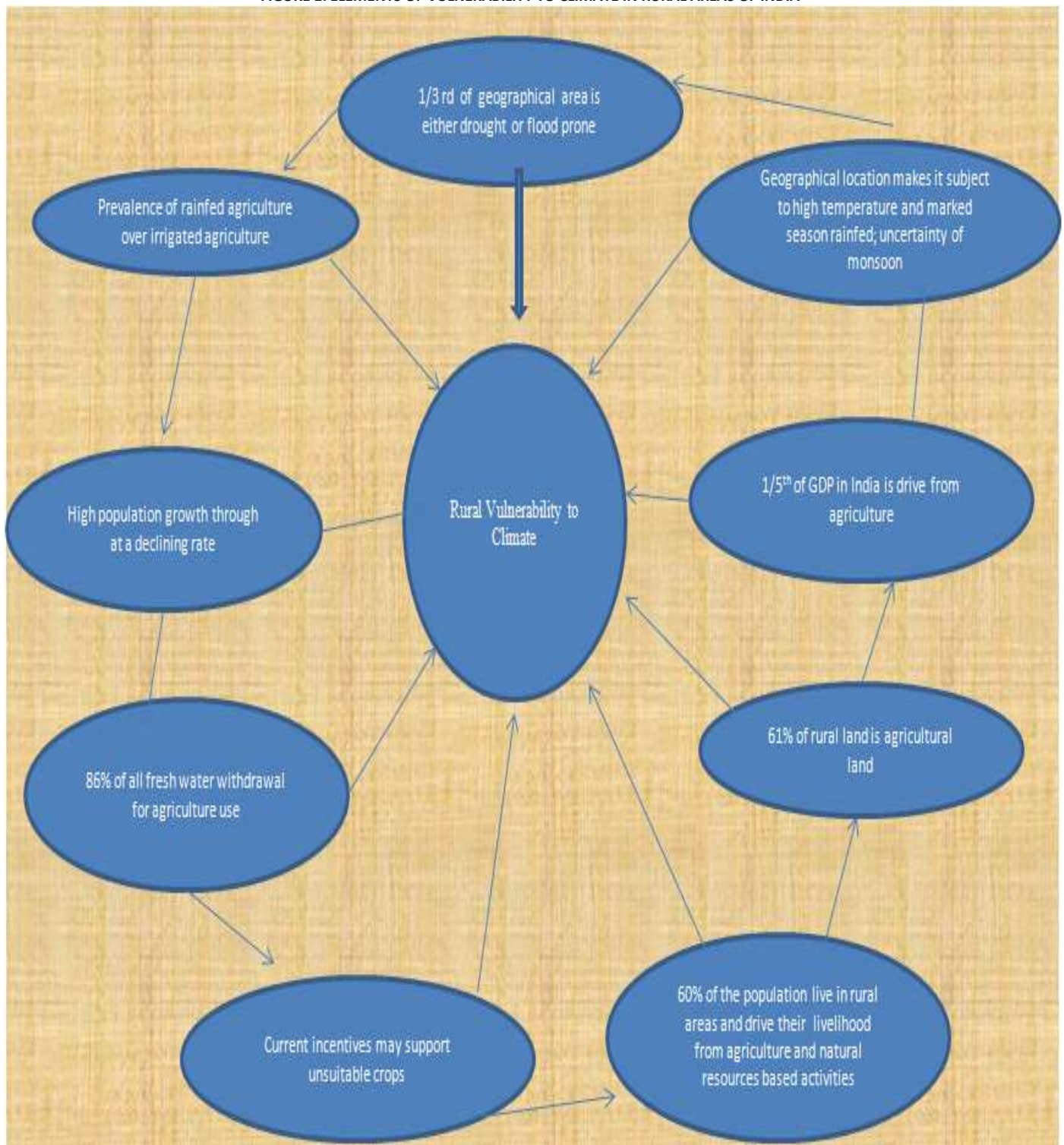
Source: Chandler, et. al., (2002).

AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Environment concerns are among the policy priorities in India, particularly degradation of land and water is alarming (Dev, 2006). Total food production has nearly trebled since 1960, per capita production has increased by 30%, and food prices and the percent of undernourished people have fallen, but the benefits have been uneven and more than one billion people still go to bed hungry each night. One of the major causes of environment degradation in India could be attributed by rapid growth in population, which is adversely affecting the natural resources and environment. Furthermore, intensive and extensive food production has caused significant environmental degradation (Nagdev, 2007).

One of the key challenges facing the world is to increase agricultural productivity, while reducing its environmental footprint through sustainable intensification, given that the demand for food will likely double in the next 25-50 years, primarily in developing countries. Unfortunately, climate change is projected to significantly decrease agricultural productivity throughout much of the tropics and sub-tropics where hunger and poverty are endemic today. The Right to Food should become a basic human right; a combination of political will, farmers' skill and scientists' commitment will be needed to achieve this goal.

FIGURE 1: ELEMENTS OF VULNERABILITY TO CLIMATE IN RURAL AREAS OF INDIA



Source: World Bank (2006)

THE UNDERLYING MAJOR CAUSES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Environmental degradation is a result of the dynamic inters play of socio-economic, institutional and technological activities. Environmental changes may be driven by many factors including economic growth, population growth, urbanization, intensification of agriculture, rising energy use and transportation. Poverty still remains a problem at the root of several environmental problems.

SOCIAL FACTOR

1. Population is an important source of development, yet it is a major source of environmental degradation when it exceeds the threshold limits of the support systems. Unless the relationship between the multiplying population and the life support system can be stabilized, development programmes, howsoever, innovative are not likely to yield desired results. Population impacts on the environment primarily through the use of natural resources and production of wastes and is associated with environmental stresses like loss of biodiversity, air and water pollution and increased pressure on arable land.
2. India supports 17 per cent of the world population on just 2.4 per cent of world land area. Its current rate of population growth at 1.85 per cent continues to pose a persistent population challenge. In view of the linkages between population and environment, a vigorous drive for population control need hardly be over emphasised.
3. Poverty is said to be both cause and effect of environmental degradation. The circular link between poverty and environment is an extremely complex phenomenon. Inequality may foster unsustainability because the poor, who rely on natural resources more than the rich, deplete natural resources faster as

they have no real prospects of gaining access to other types of resources. Moreover, degraded environment can accelerate the process of impoverishment, again because the poor depend directly on natural assets. Although there has been a significant drop in the poverty ratio in the country from 55 percent in 1973 to 36 percent in 1993-94, the absolute number of poor have, however, remained constant at around 320 million over the years. Acceleration in poverty alleviation is imperative to break this link between poverty and the environment.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

To a large extent, environmental degradation is the result of market failure, that is, the non-existent or poorly functioning markets for environmental goods and services. In this context, environmental degradation is a particular case of consumption or production externalities reflected by divergence between private and social costs (or benefits). Lack of well defined property rights may be one of the reasons for such market failure. On the other hand, Market distortions created by price controls and subsidies may aggravate the achievement of environmental objectives.

4. The level and pattern of economic development also affect the nature of environmental problems. India's development objectives have consistently emphasised the promotion of policies and programmes for economic growth and social welfare. Between 1994-95 and 1997-98, the Indian economy has grown a little over 7 per cent per annum: the growth of industrial production and manufacturing averaging higher at 8.4 per cent and 8.9 per cent respectively during these years. The manufacturing technology adopted by most of the industries has placed a heavy load on environment especially through intensive resource and energy use, as is evident in natural resource depletion (fossil fuel, minerals, and timber), water, air and land contamination, health hazards and degradation of natural eco-systems. With high proportion fossil fuel as the main source of industrial energy and major air polluting industries such as iron and steel, fertilizers and cement growing, industrial sources have contributed to a relatively high share in air pollution. A large quantity of industrial and hazardous wastes brought about by expansion of chemical based industry has compounded the wastes management problem with serious environmental health implications.

5. Transport activities have a wide variety of effects on the environment such as air pollution, noise from road traffic and oil spills from marine shipping. Transport infrastructure in India has expanded considerably in terms of network and services. Thus, road transport accounts for a major share of air pollution load in cities such as Delhi. Port and harbour projects mainly impact on sensitive coastal eco systems. Their construction affects hydrology, surface water quality, fisheries, coral reefs and mangroves to varying degrees.

6. Agriculture and land Degradation: Simulations using dynamic crop models indicate a decrease in yield of crops as temperature increases in different parts of India. However, this is offset by an increase in CO₂ at moderate rise in temperature and at higher warming; negative impact on crop productivity is projected due to reduced crop durations. Direct impacts of agricultural development on the environment arise from farming activities which contribute to soil erosion, land salivation and loss of nutrients. The spread of green revolution has been accompanied by over exploitation of land and water resources, and use of fertilizers and pesticides have increased many fold. Shifting cultivation has also been an important cause of land degradation. Leaching from extensive use of pesticides and fertilizers is an important source of contamination of water bodies. Intensive agriculture and irrigation contribute to land degradation particularly salivation, alkalization and water logging. It can be difficult to assess the actual extent and impact of land degradation. Farmers often mask the effects of degradation by converting their land to less demanding uses or increasing levels of compensating inputs (for example, applying more fertilizer just to maintain stable yields). There is rarely a one-tone relationship between the amount of degradation and the effect on yields. For example, on a relatively deep soil, erosion can be quite severe for long periods of time before there is any measurable effect on crop yields. There is limited empirical evidence of the critical thresholds at which degradation processes produce economic or environmental effects for different soil types, climates, and crops.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

7. The Ministry of Environment & Forests (MOEF) in the Government is responsible for protection, conservation and development of environment. The Ministry works in close collaboration with other Ministries, State Governments, Pollution Control Boards and a number of scientific and technical institutions, universities, non-Governmental organisations etc.

8. Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 is the key legislation governing environment management. Other important legislations in the area include the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The weakness of the existing system lies in the enforcement capabilities of environmental institutions, both at the centre and the state.

There is no effective coordination amongst various Ministries/Institutions regarding integration of environmental concerns at the inception/planning stage of the project. Current policies are also fragmented across several Government agencies with differing policy mandates. Lack of trained personnel and comprehensive database delay many projects. Most of the State Government institutions are relatively small suffering from inadequacy of technical staff and resources. Although overall quality of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies and the effective implementation of the EIA process have improved over the years, institutional strengthening measures such as training of key professionals and staffing with proper technical persons are needed to make the EIA procedure a more effective instrument for environment protection and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it has been concluded that the sustainable development requires the States to ensure that they develop and use their natural resources in a manner which is sustainable. The goal of the government should be to come out with some laws and ideas with a commitment to preserve natural resources for the benefit of today & tomorrow. The projected climate change under various scenarios is likely to have implications on food production, water supply, biodiversity and livelihoods. Thus, India has a significant stake in scientific advancement as well as an international understanding to promote mitigation and adaptation. This requires improved scientific understanding, capacity building, networking and broad consultation processes. The government should also bring out some appropriate principles for the utilization of natural resources based upon harvests or use which is "prudent," or "rational," yet other agreements require an "equitable" use of natural resources, suggesting that the use by any State must take account of the needs of other States and people and lastly it is also required that, environmental considerations should be integrated into economic and other development plans, programmes, and projects, and that the development needs are taken into account in applying environmental objectives. Then we will be able to achieve sustainable development.

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