



## Role of individuals, community, and government in environmental protection: Indian context

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### Abstract

Development is a major stress giving factor for the ecosystem. Man's cultural, material, industrial and economic growth reacts on the ecosystem more widely, more critically and more rapidly than that of any other organism. As a result the natural balance of his ecosystem is disturbed. Significant changes in the natural surroundings are taking place because of man's intervention and rapid progress in urbanisation, industrialisation, agriculture, mining, transportation and technology.

Human dependence on nature is as old as the existence of life on earth itself. From the very beginning human urge of survival, comfort and development have been fulfilled by various resources of nature. It is a very hard fact that despite our dependency on Mother Nature as much as of any other organism on planet earth, it is we who have always desired to extract more and more out of the abundance in nature. Modern societies around the world and modern ways of living have resulted in a rapid environmental degradation. The mass scale destruction of flora and fauna has disturbed the existing food chains, thereby, resulting in ecological imbalance. Against this background, the present paper makes a modest attempt to redefine the crisis of environmental degradation, understand the role of an individual and community in environmental protection, and highlight steps taken by the Government towards safeguarding environment.

**Keywords:** Community, environment impact assessment, environment protection, government, individuals

### Introduction

When human beings first evolved they had no knowledge about their natural surroundings and how they can use it to their own benefit. Over the centuries, the villages grew into cities, coal and oil replaced wood as the main fuel and oxen and horses were replaced by machines. People rejoiced in their progress. In spite of all this progress, man was, is and will remain depended on the environment to fulfil his basic needs.

The term environment refers to the surroundings provided by the natural world to living organisms. This environment comprises of physical or abiotic and biological or biotic components. All the things, living and non-living which constitute our environment are dependent upon each other. A change in any constituent of the environment may affect the normal life. So, any undesirable change in the environment is called environmental pollution. Industrialisation and population growth are among vital causes of environmental damage. We need to save People and Planet along with Prosperity.

Industrialisation is essential for the economic development of any country but at the same time, it affects the environment. Further, industrial wastes and pollutants cause health hazards. Industries affect the environment in the following ways:

- They lay pressure on land and other natural resources for raw materials.
- Desertification occurs as more and more land is cleared of greenery to make space for industrial infrastructure.
- Industrial waste causes water pollution and soil pollution. About 60,000-70,000 chemicals are commonly used in various industries. The wastes and chemicals get mixed with water and soil. Crops, fruits and vegetables get contaminated with the pesticide residue.
- Heavy machinery cause noise pollution.
- Smoke emitting factories contribute to severe air pollution.

The density of population within a country can give a rough idea of its effect on the environment. In general, sparsely populated countries are able to retain more of their original vegetation, wild life population and the environment than those countries which have dense human population. Thus, a country like Australia (4 people/sq.km) is not likely to face environmental damage like shortage of water, forests as much as a country like Bangladesh (1800 people/sq.km). The available resources are not enough to meet the demands of the growing population and hence scarcity of resources becomes an inevitable situation.

Some environment related issues due to population growth are:

- Unhygienic living conditions
- Inadequate fresh drinking water
- Depletion of natural resources, especially fossil fuels
- Increase in the levels of air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution and noise pollution
- Deforestation
- Extinction of many species of plants and animals due to the destruction of natural habitats which are being utilised to grow food for the growing population
- Imbalance in nature
- Loss of many ecosystems
- Over utilization of infrastructure, transportation, public health systems, etc.

### Environmental Damage

Human actions have caused a host of environmental problems. Today we are standing at the threshold of serious environmental issues that may soon become beyond correction.

Pollution, global warming and many other environmental crises are devouring us, and we need to cope with the changes that will bring rising sea levels and other erratic climate changes. We can neither solve these problems just with a magic wand nor by the push of a button. We have to

work individually as well as in groups to preserve the environment. We need to find ways to use less energy especially that from coal, oil, gas and water; to fulfil our needs leaving space for wildlife too.

To solve any problem we have to be fully aware of its causes, effects and our role in creating that problem. Let us begin by asking ourselves a few questions:

- What do I know about the place I live in?
- What is my role in maintaining the balance of nature?
- Where do the things I consume come from?
- What all resources am I using at stretch?
- Are there resources I am actually wasting?
- Do I really need certain resources or can I avoid using a few?
- Since nature has made life possible for me, what can I do to protect it?

### Role of Individuals

Our next step towards becoming environmental stewards would be to remind ourselves that our earth is a precious planet and it is only we who can protect it.

We all are proud to live here, and we have to maintain a healthy living. However, there are many pressures on our environment like population growth, urbanization which are a reflection of the often careless actions of millions of individuals. Fortunately, there are many individual actions that can help us to preserve earth:

- **Take a pledge:** We will make every effort to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- **Recycle:** It is essential to start the recycling process at our own homes. We must develop the habit of sorting out recyclable materials, which include everything from plastic bottles, newspapers to glass packaging paper.
- **Recharge batteries:** By using rechargeable batteries we can prevent potentially hazardous metals from spilling into landfills or the air.
- **About refrigerators:** Almost every household has one. Refrigerators use a tremendous amount of energy. Cut down on waste by cleaning the condenser coils annually and do not keep the temperature unnecessarily low.
- **Use reusable goods:** Everything that we throw away ends up in a landfill. Earth is running out of landfills too. We can buy less and waste less. Whenever possible we must use reusable goods in place of disposable goods. For example, in the kitchen, we can use rags instead of paper towels, choose products with minimum packaging and stop using disposable plates and glasses.
- **Manage garbage smartly:** Set up a compost pit at home. Throw vegetable peels, fruit peels and biodegradable waste in the pit. Use it as manure later. By buying products made from recyclable materials we can cut down on waste. Plastic bags that are used by some grocery stores are not fully biodegradable. Instead, go for paper bags, which can be reused and recycled. Avoid putting oil, grease, antifreeze, pesticides, fertilizers, paints, and cleaning agents down the gutters on sidewalks.
- **Take short showers:** Save water by not using showers, hose pipes, low-flush toilets and by other such careful acts.
- **Save electricity:** Fluorescent lights last at least ten times as long as other light bulbs. Moreover, they use only one-fourth energy as compared to bulbs. Practice

other habits that would save electricity at home like, finishing up your homework in day time; switching off lights and fans when not in use, etc.

- **Smart travelling:** Besides burning non-renewable fossil fuels, driving releases a huge number of toxic chemicals into the air and damages the environment. Carpool cuts down on the amount of pollution that is created as well as saves fuel. Walking short distances and using public transport are other ways of eco-friendly travelling. Also remember, when travelling long distances, railroads are by far the most environmentally friendly option.
- **Avoid products using CFCs:** They are very dangerous for the environment because they destroy the ozone layer.

### Role of Community

Only a few exceptional individuals work alone effectively to bring about changes; most of us find it more productive when we work with others in a group. The collective action multiplies and we get more encouragement and motivation.

- **Raise a voice:** In case of an environmental problem tell local officials that you are concerned about the destruction of the environment and find out what the authorities are doing to stop it. Also see how you can help. Roping in the media will help us to educate and alert a large audience.
- **Donate goods:** If you no longer need something that might be useful to someone else, try to donate the goods rather than throwing them away.
- **Word of mouth:** Organize debates and talk shows about environmental problems and steps that could be taken to save the environment. Special shows and programmes can be held in schools and colleges to involve children and youngsters the future environment-stewards. Roadside plays are a very effective tool for educating the mass. Earth Day is a good occasion to take the first step in this regard.
- **Student's participation:** Form environment groups or eco-clubs in school that would handle issues of the environment. Special days like earth day, environment day, recycle day and best out of waste day, etc. can be organized in schools so that children's concern for the environment gets encouragement.
- **Pick up garbage:** Many people litter or do not properly dispose of garbage. Carry out drives to remove such trash from streets, monuments, parks, beaches, markets and other places. You may start a community group that would guide people to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.
- **Sensitize yourself and others:** Respect all forms of life. Plant trees wherever possible, advocate Organic farming, know the biodiversity of your area and respect the natural and cultural assets.
- **Environmental organisations:** Many NGOs and International Organizations have come up. World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, Green Peace, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, (IUCN), South Asian Cooperation Environmental Protection and Conservation are to name a few. These organizations are working for the conservation and protection of the environment. Their mass membership, large professional staff and long history give them a degree of respectability in the society and world at large.

## Role of Government

In India the environmental conditions are deteriorating. The population is growing at a rather alarming rate, trees are being cut in thousands each day, the industrial development has polluted the air as well as water and many other hazards of modern day living are showing up. All these degenerating factors have a tremendous impact on the social and economic conditions of the country.

The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 was enacted by the Indian Government in addition to pre-existing environmental laws to provide for the further protection and improvement of environment. Today environmental law occupies a significant position on the national public agenda. There has been a growing recognition in commercial banks that environmental concerns should and must be part of bank's loan schemes.

The Constitution of India says: 'It is the duty of the state to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country'.

The Department of Environment was established in India in 1980 to ensure a healthy environment for the country. This later became the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1985.

The NCF (Natural Curriculum Framework) has introduced Environment Education as a compulsory subject in school, till secondary level. This is an important initiative that has been taken by the Government to spread awareness amongst the future citizens of our country.

Large numbers of programmes are telecasted on television channels that emphasize the need to have a cleaner, greener and better environment.

There are various legislations and rules to prevent the immense amount of air pollution that is caused from polluting cars and large factories. For instance, it is compulsory that every vehicle must undergo the "Pollution under Control" check after every three months.

Moreover, laws have been passed to prevent hunting and poaching of animals. The government also organizes seminars and conferences to spread environmental awareness.

The Indian government has come up with various acts to enforce the protection of the environment. Some of them are:

- The Indian Forest Act 1927,
- Prevention of Cruelty to animals Act 1960
- The Insecticides Act 1968,
- Water Prevention and Control of Pollution Act 1974
- Environment Protection Act 1986
- Handling and Management of Hazardous Waste, 1989
- The Wildlife Protection Act 1991
- The Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control), 2000
- The Biological Diversity Act, 2002

Though over the past few years efforts have been made for conserving natural environment better efforts are still expected. Merely the enactment of laws is not sufficient. They must be adequately enforced. The Governments of different countries must ensure proper implementation of these laws. Moreover, individuals must themselves take care in protecting the environment. Companies must set up plants and factories keeping with the maximum standards required for environmental protection and take care that no essentials are avoided. Let all individuals and companies realize the

importance of the environment and save the world from further damages.

## Global Agreements

**Stockholm Conference, 1972:** For the first time various nations came together for a global concern for the environment. The main stress was on conservation of natural resources and prevention of further environmental degradation.

**Earth Summit, 1992:** On the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm conference the Earth Summit was organized to reinforce previous goals and raise new issues like climate change. A new agenda referred to as Agenda 21 was created.

## Environmental Impact Assessment

- Industries need to get a clearance from the government authorities before they can start operating.
- They need to abide by certain laws and rules while functioning: The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981, and The Hazardous Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

This is carried out at the very onset of a project, when the planning is at the very initial stage. The procedure ensures that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the final decisions are made.

EIA is an important management tool for ensuring optimal use of natural resources for sustainable development without environmental pollution or degradation. It involves an analysis of the likely effects on the environment, undertaking a public consultation exercise on it, taking into account the result of the analysis when making the final decision and informing the public about that decision.

During the process if at any stage it is realized that there are chances of environmental problems, measures can be taken in advance to fight the problem. In case that is also not possible the project can even be cancelled.

## Environment-friendly Technologies

Industries are necessary for the economic growth of any nation. They are significant as they provide many products that make life comfortable and easy, make a country advanced technologically, make a work faster and efficient and provide employment to millions. However, industries are one of the main sources of environmental pollution too. Simple steps can be taken to minimize and control environmental pollution caused by industries.

- Instead of fossil fuels, non-conventional energy sources can be used such as wind, hydel, solar and biomass energy. All such sources are renewable and pollution free.
- Industries should try to conserve resources. They can think of ways of recycling and reusing. Some simple ways of doing that is rain water harvesting, recycling waste water and use of recycled paper for packaging.
- Industries can be equipped with high temperature incinerators and electrostatic precipitators that can greatly reduce the spreading of pollutants.
- Since water bodies are often worst affected by industrial waste disposal, water treatment plants should be mandatory.

## Conclusion

By now you must have been fully aware of the fact that human beings cannot survive without the biotic and abiotic environment. It should become our prime concern to protect and save our environment. As individuals, we must make sincere efforts to conserve it. Governments and private bodies of various countries are making conscious efforts towards the conservation of have be think nature. We must cooperate to make their efforts successful. We have to think upon some ways by which we can be preservers of our environment and its components. Given below are a few little steps by which we can start the journey for conservation:

- **Minimize trash:** Recycle and reuse resources - Observe your garbage bin for a day. Think what all you can recycle, e.g. Soft drink can (to make a pencil stand or plant a sapling).
- **Keep the planet clean:** Proper waste disposal - Throw garbage in proper bins provided by your society or local Municipal Corporation.
- **Preserve:** Nurture nature and natural resources such as plants, trees and water bodies.
- **Spread the word:** Create environmental awareness in your fellow friends /Beer groups by hosting plays, skits and story narrations.
- **Protect:** Conserve wild life and natural habitats. Keep water in bowls for the birds to drink. Feed stray animals.
- **Stop wastage:** Use old notebook /notepad/diary pages to do rough work. Old newspapers could be used to spread on almirah shelves or to cover note books or for making articles for paper mache.

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