



Role of gender equality in sustainable environment and economic development: An approach towards women empowerment

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Abstract

Women worldwide are voicing the call of action in saving the environment around. In such calls, there are activists, innovators, authors, entrepreneurs, tribal, locals and scientists, who have paved the way to rethink and reconsider gender equality in bringing a suitable solution in the climatic change. Some of the leading examples are Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement (1977) in Kenya, the youngest Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, the Mexican diplomat Patricia Espinosa who was the leader of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) etc. The list is actually unlimited in this context. However, it is utter misfortune that despite of women's larger contribution, they always remain under rated in the process of making decisions in framing climatic actions or designing policies of climate change, in both global organizations or the private and public sector. According to UNFCCC, it is very crucial to involve women's voice in drafting policies of climate-related projects as women have recognized to be more effective. The ability of women in finding solutions to climatic changes have crossed political or ethnic lines, predominantly in those regions where people mostly depend on the resources of nature for their livelihoods such as farming, fishing and forestry, or areas where the complete ecosystems are under danger, just like tiny island states, or the Amazon and the Arctic. Investments, govt. policies and projects implementations without the meaningful contribution of women are certainly less effective and responsible for aggravating gender inequalities. Thus, in the process of conserving natural resources and promoting environmental safety certainly not possible to do at a full phase without an active involvement of women. In the present paper, efforts have been made to explore the role and contributions of women in environmental conservation, economic development, promoting education and transmitting culture in the society.

Keywords: *sustainable environment, women empowerment, economic development, gender equality, climatic change*

Introduction

The world is going through a pandemic situation. World is a grace of almighty that consists living and nonliving being. The survival of creature depends upon various co-ordination factor, availability of resources and the condition. The sum total of these factors are known as environment where biotic (animal and plant kingdom) interacts with abiotic (air, water, soil) and there is a mutual inter-relation and inter dependency condition among themselves. In the present scenario the role and importance of environment and the natural resources for the economic development is undeniable. Culture is considered as the master key of sustainable development and environmental protection. It is very unfortunate that different part of the world are facing challenges while human culture are connected with natural environment on view of its complexity, scale and range (Heidari and Heidari 2015) ^[1]. Improvements in environmental condition can be achieved, if human culture are connected with nature (Ajdari 2003) ^[2]. It is the duty of the government to develop culture of environmental and ecological protection. Awareness and participation are needed from all categories of society including children, youth and men, especially attention of women are needed. Women being the potential source of moral heritage can play the key role to transform and transmit the education,

culture and environmental knowledge in community as well as in society. The entire individual developed within the mother and started by mother, women are able to understand and have more interest and desire to retain it. If women are equipped with adequate knowledge and information on sustainability of environment, they will turn it into ethics and help to protect and conserve the environment (Ghanian *et al.* 2008) ^[3]. However, the problem is that in much society the participation of women and their role have not been properly addressed and not approved also. Nevertheless, the things to consider here is in many society physical labor plays a vital role. The contribution of women towards environmental sustainability has been significant over the years. However, negligence of the society towards women and their effectiveness in social networking has prohibited the evolution of favourable talents among various segments of the population. Women has direct influence on waste management and methods of waste minimization and segregation. Mother is the first teacher of a child, hence, upbringing of children through training and practical method to conserve natural resources and prevent the destruction and degradation of environment has a significant effect and influence on new generation (Agarwal 2000) ^[4]. Women as one of the most persuasive working groups in the field of environmental protection, has been an

internationally accepted fact. Certainly, this ability of women will be extremely useful in abating various social and environmental issues (Bayeh 2016, Schultz 2003) ^[5, 6]. Women have inner quality of nurture and the ability with managerial skill and talent in education and they know how to contribute these in the area of development and protection and promotion of environmental programs. In this study, attempt were made to recognize the contribution and role of women in the arena of management, expansion and campaign of environmental program and estimating their efficacy in such contributions. However, it is debatable that whether the activity and knowledge of women can develop a culture of ecological guardians and can be beneficial in this sector. Again, participation of women in leading and managing various environmental development programs and converting those into success must also be evaluated. Furthermore, contribution from women in soliciting public participation for developing a culture environment towards strengthening women empowerment is also an interesting area of investigation. While visualizing the above stated areas of research, the primary objectives of the present research have been set to investigate the role of gender quality, especially role of women, in the field of environmental sustainability, economic development as well as the progress in culture in order to address various social issues related to women empowerment.

Methodology

The present study is focused on the active participation and managerial role for the development and conservation of natural resources and culture. This was analyzed by a descriptive way through an exhaustive documentary analysis based on available literature. The present study followed published research papers available on international databases, online reports and articles, library and other sources relevant to this research. The information collected were qualitative from the viewpoint of the present research.

Role of Women in Collaboration and Management

Any environmental development process without planning, management and culture, natural figures are in confronting and challenging with extensive environmental pollution and destruction of environment. Management includes organizing, planning, guiding, monitoring, controlling and executing the same in the form action to pay focus to principles and human resource management in a combing form of art and science for a sustainable environment. According to the perspective of experts, partnership and collaboration is the main key factors to shape a process for the management of environment (Masoomi *et al.* 2020, Rahmani and Majidi 2009) ^[7, 8]. On the basis of fundamental belief that all human being have the rights which are pertinent to their accountability to think and to present their thoughts with freedom and to decide the implication that affect their life (Shafie and Arefnia 2021, Shafie 2007) ^[9, 10]. According to Lucas (2001) ^[11], empowerment is a process of contribution of women in decision making for the growth and development of the culture, which is a collective reflection to provide opportunities to increase the level of critical thinking ability, social ethics and justice and this is a combining effort to achieve the goal, which will benefit the society. He further continued that women could properly manage their free time

to adapt to the external factors and condition in a constructive way to outline their own lives and families. There are numerous instances of active involvement and management of environmental conservation along with protection of projects in regional, national and international organizations, such as The World Bank and The United Nations (UN). The UN reveals the major role of women in planning, decision-making and execution of process. Particularly, in developing countries, women are the target groups for the success of programs as they have the most direct contact with the environment. The UN has been emphasized in "Women and Environmental Policy" on the vital role of women in developing and promoting environmental principles to reduce and reuse the wastes and minimize the consumption of natural resources. Women have versatile role in the decision making for the use of sustainable materials. Again, active participation of women in management of environment is essential for environmental protection and sustainability at the regional and national stage. In such platforms, environmental happenings are extremely decentralized. These include providing clean water, wind and solar energy along with other renewable energy technologies by the government (Women UN 2006) ^[12].

There is a ray of hope to have a sustainable environment for our next generation through providing adequate knowledge and information to women on this environment; turn it into their behavior.

Akbari (2013) ^[13] in his research, based on a survey conducted across 50 countries around the world, has confirmed that more women are actively participating in environmental protection rather than men. Sabzian and Khosravi (2012) ^[14] studied that although rural area itself is vast and rich in natural resources have drawn little attention in small scale. However, there are so many examples of rural women who had participating on environmental protection Movement and environmental management and drawn a large scale of attention of planners and implementers (Koochi *et al.* 2016) ^[15].

Environment issues are very crucial and play an important role in social life, growth, development of industrialization and civilization. According to World Development Report (2006) ^[16], the role of women in fulfilling the food demand of family in need, the ability to work in the field of agriculture, education and health was found to be significant. Usually, women are locally and regionally ignored and their daily activities are considered without a particular functional and structural effect. Truly, women are treated as passive actors in the course of human evolution.

Environmental Movements Led by Women Around the World

According to reports based on studies, 425 organizations and over 555 registered environmental NGOs those work with management and empowerment of women through environment and agriculture. The leading examples of such global activists are Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement (1977) in Kenya, the youngest Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, the Mexican diplomat Patricia Espinosa who was the leader of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and many more.

The Green Belt Movement

The Green Belt Movement is considered as one of the biggest movement in the history of women and environment. This movement was led by Wangari Maathai (Nobel Prize Winner) in June 1977 on the eve of World environment day. According to a report on Green Belt Movement (2006) ^[17], around 80,000 rural women had participated in this plantation program to implant saplings. The movement focused on environmental preservation of Kenya's forest along with society's economic growth as well as empowerment of the rural women.

The Kenyan Land Takeover

In the mid 1980s, in Kenya women started to protest against big and elites foreign corporation who were controlling and occupying land to cultivate coffee (Nkonya *et al.* 2016) ^[18]. In the end, this protest enforced the shifting of Kenyan power through democratic national election and lands are redistributed.

Environmental Movements Led by Indian Women

The First Environmentalists of India: Bishnois

In 1731 A.D., with the direct concern and under the leadership of Indian woman activist Amrita Devi, a Movement began against the Royal order of Maharaja Abhay Singh to protect trees by embracing the tree as a new form of discord (Aryal 2016) ^[19]. Just before her assassination, Amrita Devi bravely declared that, "It is worth to save a tree even at the cost of one's head." In this nonviolence Movement for protection of trees, 363 number of Bishnois sacrificed their lives and it forced Maharaja to withdraw his order (Mishra 1978) ^[20]. They are following eco-friendly principles still to save water through traditional water harvesting system, homegrown agronomy method for local areas and not hunting any wild life. This laid the foundation of the environment protection Movement.

The Chipko Movement (1973)

Chipko Movement initiated in 1973 at Garwhal area of Uttar Pradesh in Chamoli district and was initially started by Chandi Prasad Bhatt by airing the theme slogan "Ecology is the basic of permanent economy". The Movement was led by Bachi Devi, Gouri Devi, Sunderlal Bahuguna and local women of the Garhwali areas to save the trees by embracing them. Adwani forest was saved in 1977 by a large number of rural women under headship of Bachchi Devi and the protest starts when the government refused to give ash tree to the worker's co-operative organisation named as Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mondal where the forest produces especially plough are processed in Chamoli District. Women understand the direct influence of forest on their economy as well as in their lives and formed Mahila Mondal to protect the forest from degradation. As it the question of their survival, they want to Reserve the status quo and preserve environment by protection of Garwhal forest division (Jain 1984) ^[21]. The method of embracing trees led by Gauri Devi and Bachi Devi got success against cutting down the trees. The main slogan of women was "forest is our mother and its protection was our right" which prove their eagerness to protect forest.

The Appiko Movement (1983)

Another Movement for the conservation and protection of Western Ghat forest in Karnataka in September 1983 is

known as Appiko Movement, which is against government policy. This protest was initiated by Panduranga Hegde and Adivasi women and members of Mahila Mandal joined in for the preservation of Kalase forest and conducted so many awareness programme like slideshows, foot march dramas, street plays and folk dance (Klassen 2013) ^[22]. The Government forced to withdraw the industrial policy on Ghats and stepped to protect the forest.

The Silent Valley Movement (1976)

An important biodiversity hotspot towards the Southern end of Western Ghats Western Ghats in Kerala is the Silent Valley. This Movement led by environmentalist and poet Sugatha Kumari, against the setup of a hydroelectric power Project decided by Kerala government, which was to be constructed in Silent Valley Forest. Women strongly opposed the project and denied with strong rejection the offer of development and employment opportunity in the area. Consequently, in 1980 by personal intervention of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the project was postponed. Silent Valley was declared as a National Park in 1984 (Ajayan 2009, Dattatri 2011) ^[23, 24].

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (1985)

This Movement led by Medha Patkar known as Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a protest against the construction of number of dams in Maharashtra. Gujrat and Madhya Pradesh along the Narmada River financed by World Bank because of construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam affects not only the settlement of people of these area but also the environment. This had turned into the International protest and in 1993 World Bank withdraw project, the case is continued in The Supreme Court of India (Nakhoda 2010) ^[25].

The Navdanya Movement (1984)

Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) initiated a largest organic Movement named as Navdanya in 1984. It aims to provide right direction and extend the support to environmental activist. India's food security was represented by "Navdanya" means collectively the nine crops (Preston-Pile 2007) ^[26]. The main objective of this Movement is to protect seeds from bio-piracy and for this purpose community seed banks were established in seventeen states in India. Mostly women farmers from different parts of country actively participate in biodiversity conservation and strongly air their voice against genetically modified seeds (www.navdanya.org) ^[27].

Role of Women in Development of Environmental Culture

Many researchers and scientists trust that in every community, promotion of environmental culture is a reality by means of developing consciousness, trust, confidence and women empowerment (Kusakabe and Veena 2008, Nightingale 2006, Tinodi 2000) ^[28-30]. Therefore, women play a responsible role for developing and upbringing the children starting from birth. The transmission of life, knowledge and culture from one generation to the next occurs by women. Mom can only teach the fundamental relationship between the children and environment and its importance. Hence, they need to understand the environmental issues and their impact on the globe and accordingly can spread the valuable legacy to their future.

Communication of appropriate environmental culture along with nature and instinct of women needs fitting tools for women. Women with sufficient facility are proficient of communicating an apposite culture and can be a valuable support towards environment sustainability (Mago and Gunwal 2019) ^[31].

Conclusion

The present study led to the following key findings on the role and contributions of women towards environmental sustainability, economic development and many other social sectors.

- Women have always played a critical managerial position to meet the household and community energy demand. Most people depend upon own physical labor, biomass energy to meet their requirements due to lack of sufficient resources and access to efficient technology. With proper environmental education and awareness, in comparison to men, women can conserve and preserve energy resources in a more efficient and regulated manner.
- Women provide a major contribution in the socio-economic development of a family, as they play a role to maintain the health and wealth of a family. Practically being close to the nature, women are always able to realize environmental issues in a more systematic manner. Since women are the prospective users of the facilities, it is necessary to consider their views in planning to save the environment and implementing projects for the same. During the ongoing pandemic, the role and contributions of women can be realized in a more broad sense.
- Women play a pivotal role in maintaining a hygienic practice in the household. This leads to improved health conditions and overall wellbeing of the family members. In addition, women can educate and train the family members on curbing the occurrence of many food, water and airborne diseases. Moreover, the role and contribution of women in controlling the population explosion through family planning is going to be significant in the coming time.

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