

Women's Attitude Towards Environment Sustainability Through Natural Preservation

Postawy kobiet wobec zrównowżenia środowiskowego poprzez ochronę przyrody

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Abstract

Women could have played a significant part in the process of Sustainable Development, although they were not given an opportunity to directly involve in this process in different cultures. Their roles are mainly subjected to perform household works, such as caring for children and elderly members. However, these familial responsibilities of women develop a positive attitude and potential skills to maintain sustainable development by preserving natural resources. This paper induces a brief description of the term Sustainable Development. Furthermore, it would suggest an environmentally sound model for achieving the objectives of sustainable development by incorporating eco-feminist ideas as its fundamental elements. Eco-feminism highlights the inter-connectedness of women with the environment and it claims that women's active participation is globally required nowadays for achieving sustainability.

Key words: women, environment, sustainable development, natural resources, eco-feminism

Streszczenie

Kobiety mogłyby odegrać znaczącą rolę w procesie zrównoważonego rozwoju, chociaż w niektórych kulturach nie mają możliwości bezpośredniego zaangażowania się w ten proces. Ich role polegają głównie na wykonywaniu prac domowych, takich jak opieka nad dziećmi i osobami starszymi. Jednak te rodzinne obowiązki kobiet rozwijają pozytywne nastawienie i potencjalne umiejętności w celu utrzymania zrównoważonego rozwoju poprzez ochronę zasobów naturalnych. Niniejszy artykuł zawiera krótki opis pojęcia zrównoważonego rozwoju. Ponadto przedstawiono model przyjazny dla środowiska dla osiągnięcia celów zrównoważonego rozwoju poprzez włączenie ekofeministycznych idei jako jego podstawowych elementów. Eko-feminizm podkreśla wzajemne powiązanie kobiet z otoczeniem i sugeruje, że aktywny udział kobiet jest obecnie wymagany na całym świecie, aby osiągnąć zrównoważony rozwój.

Słowa kluczowe: kobiety, środowisko, zrównoważony rozwój, zasoby naturalne, eko-feminizm

Sustainable Development: An Overview

Sustainable Development, emerges with the changing perspective of human beings towards the question of what development is. Development enhances the welfare of human beings by increasing their life's standards through rising health, education and rendering them an equal chance for each necessary elements of economic development (Chattopadhaya & Gupta, 2007). During the 1950s and 1960s, it was

more centered on the productive capability and economic growth of the nation (Gunduz, 2004). However, this vision gradually shifted in the 1970s towards the equal income distribution and social development to bridge the gap between the poor and rich one (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010). Through acknowledging the effect of economic growth on nature, ecological preservation arises as one of the significant element of the development (Bayeh, 2015).

This illustrates that Sustainable Development is conceived extensively. Moreover, International developmental strategies during the 1980s resulted in various queries concerning the primary anticipation regarding society, economics, and nature. Traditionally, during the post-war period, the developmental policies were concerned about economic growth by alleviating poverty. The organizations of International development operated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank funded developing countries for their betterment through improving the economic condition, encompassing power plants, hydroelectric dams, and roads. Nevertheless, it was observed that despite bringing development in these countries, the natural and social results of this attitude, had brought the ecological crisis in these nations. *A global consensus formed that development had aggravated social disparities in developing nations and accelerated the loss of biodiversity* (Basiago, 1999). Subsequently, the UN's World Commission incorporates social development, economic development as well as an environmental concern as three interconnected pillars of Sustainable Development (UN, 2007; UN Women, 2014) in order to give protection to the natural resources by safeguarding it and alleviating poverty. It implies that one would be able to achieve sustainable development only if these three elements should be achieved and contended in a cumulative manner as each of them have interconnected value and the unavailability of any of them would obstruct others. It is well expressed that through the negligence of economical aspect of Sustainable Development, and by focusing only on its environmental and social features, there must be a financial crisis as financial capital are compulsory for the country's progress. Growing the social and economic principles of sustainable development and ignoring the environmental concern would deteriorate the natural capital that is essential for the growth. Relying on environmental protection and economic growth without paying care towards social development would cause green growth for many (Stevens, 2010). Thus, it is analysed that Sustainable Development indicates to achieve a balance among these three interconnected principles of sustainability (Murphy, 2012). The term *sustainability* came into existence in response to the recognition that the natural resources are limited in stock and there is a prime requirement of protecting it for the overall nation's advancement. Endeavour for achieving sustainable development would not be accomplished without the proper management of these natural resources or the environment as a *whole*. Consequently, Sustainable Development *contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs* (WCED, 1987). It re-

flects that notion of Sustainable Development is more concerned with fulfilling both the present and future requirements of the poor people by maintaining pollution, over-exploitation and ecological debasement.

Women's Role in Environment Sustainability

The term Sustainable Development is the outcome of the debate arose in the mid-1800s, by Thomas Malthus that whether the limited natural resources of the earth is going to support the life of humankind's growing population by fulfilling their requirements (Dixon and Fallon, 1989). Several natural resources are limited in supply and if these resources are indiscriminately used by the human being than those days are not far when it will be exhausted soon from the earth and it would constrain the growth of humanity. Immediately after this, concern for the non-renewability of the natural resources has been grown globally as a cause not only for the limited production but also for the threaten long-term economic growth which is the consequence of the pollution and the destabilization of the environment. The scarcity of water, deforestation, degradation of the land, hot and cold waves, the rise in the level of the sea, ferocious cyclones, floods, droughts, and atmospheric warming due to climate change has become a matter of concern.

Furthermore, Brown, the originator of the World-Watch Institute in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, vigorously supported the ideology of a *sustainable* society through his writings reflecting issues such as damage caused to ecological systems by industrial production, overpopulation, and non-renewable energy sources. Again, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and United Nations Environment Programme outlined the visualization of the concept Sustainable Development, in 1980 at the World Conservation Strategy. The term Sustainable Development should be proceeded through *conservation*, which is elucidated as the proper management of the biosphere resources in such a way that it would meet the requirements and aspirants of future without making any difference to the necessities of existing generation (Eblen and Eblen, 1994). However, in 1992, with the occurrence of Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, a worldwide discussion had been started regarding the sustainable utilization of natural resources. The officials of 120 countries had autographed five pacts for the formulation of the Sustainable Development, as one of the comprehensive scheme of the 21st century (Basiago, 1999) including environmental protection, economic growth and the welfare of the society. Meanwhile, the Rio Declaration's 20th principle advocates that *women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is, therefore, essential to achieve sustainable development* (Vinales, 2015). This illustrates that women's indispensable

function in managing the environment and the development processes are must require for attaining Sustainable Development. This very representation of women's participation for attaining natural safeguard cogitate an ideological connection between women's suppression and environmental exploitation thereby outlining the contention of Eco-feminism. It asserts that the perspectives of patriarchy and dualism subordinate both women and nature. Moreover, it is found that women performing different household chores such as cooking, washing, collecting water, fetching wood, and likewise directly associates them with nature and this enables them to possess distinctive epistemological advantage for preserving and protecting the natural resources and their proper management (Naganag, 2014).

Eco-feminism: Incorporating Women in Environmental Sustainability

Women's invisible administration of the natural resources was acknowledged in Latin America (Rico, 1998) and it resulted in emphasizing their roles as the educators and the preservers of nature. Their contribution was not valued because of the dominant patriarchal culture prevailing in society. *Saving nature became effectively linked with women in the pursuit of sustainable development, as both having been traditionally marginal issues in the development agenda* (Dankelman & Davidson, 1988). It reflects that both women and nature are marginalized in the development programme because the developmental processes that came forth were more concentrated on economic development by setting up industries, factories and this had negatively impacted the lives of women and brought the destruction of nature. Afterward, this brought for conceptualizing various methodological and theoretical ways to deal with women-nature interconnectedness which is identified as Eco-feminism. The word Eco-feminism arose in the 1970s by Francoise d'Eaubonne to analyze the connection of women with nature because she believes that both women and nature are exploited in patriarchy. Furthermore, Eco-feminism argues that in the absence of women's active participation, emerging environmental problems cannot be resolved. These environmental problems are the result of human needs for rapid development, industrialization, urbanization, etc. We can see certain examples of women's active participation in the grassroots struggle. One of them is the Chipko movement in India where women hugged trees to prevent cutting. In Kenya, the Green Belt Movement was founded in the 1970s to provide help to the rural women for the preservation of soil and wood. Besides, these two movements, there is also the Love Canal movement in the United States where people suffered from ecological harm because of the outflow of toxic decay. In spite of the fact that there are numerous more comparative instances, these grassroots movements

brought women into more comprehensive public attention.

Nevertheless, discussion on the subject of women and nature started in amid of the 1970s in both the countries of North and South. In the countries of the North, it was related to the participation of women in the Pacifist and environment movements with criticizing the viewpoints of feminists who had not yet come forward to pay concern for ecological problems. It is regarding the uncertainty of the oil price and its supplies due to the energy crisis. This brought a reduction of the wood's utilization as the sources of energy. Keeping this in mind, programmes were started where women were encouraged for reducing their daily use of fuels through some other substitute and taking an active role in the re-forestation programme. In the countries of the South, it was associated with agricultural and forestry difficulties. E. Boserup's (1989) analysis signified the roles of women performed by them in the economic development as they have an indispensable role in the agriculture processes and that is why *women are highly affected by environmental problems, and less emphasis is given to their participation in protecting the environment* (Bayeh, 2016). This clarifies that women's active participation is pertinent, otherwise, the endeavour to accomplish Sustainable Development through environmental protection cannot be achieved (Alvarez & Lopez, 2013). Thus, Women's involvement must be given utmost significance to address environmental issues for achieving sustainability.

Moreover, the conceptualization of women-nature interconnection is the distinctive characteristics of Eco-feminism as it highlights a strong linkage between the two and it upholds that there is need of returning on feminine principles as it includes *sustainability, diversity and harmony*. This affirms that there is a need to value the feminine principles as it inculcates in women for becoming caring, affectionate, lovable, sympathetic, benevolent and likewise. This makes them maintain harmony, diversity, and sustainability presently required in the worldwide context. Again, this unification of women with nature is mainly because of women's role as mothers and nurturers of life. Both women and nature are designated as *mother and nurturers* as they maintain the continuity of life. For instance, women give the birth of the off-springs and they care and nurture them. Similarly, nature too nurtures human beings by supplanting them various natural resources like soil, water, air, wildlife and so on which are solely responsible for their everyday livelihood. Besides this, it is maintained that because of the biological experiences like pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, menstruation that women share because of their female body and the cultural roles that they perform like caring for their children, family members and their surroundings in which they live enables them in keeping different *natural mindset* and this makes them care

and preserve the natural resources for the upcoming generation. Shiva (1998), uphold that this presentation of the linkage of women with nature purportedly render them a specific kind of epistemology for saving the planet *Earth*.

Additionally, women (specifically rural women) from their daily life activities are engaged in the practical administration of natural resources like water, soil, forests, and energy, because of their socially constructed roles (Jiggins, 1994). These socially assigned roles provide them opportunities to directly interact with the environment and spent more time with the natural surroundings. For example, In India, rural women spent 12 to 15 hours in a single day for water and firewood collection, food growth, fodder gathering, caring of domestic animals, cleaning, cooking and caring towards their kids, elderly member of their family and the sick one (Agarwal, 1992). This indicates that women get a comprehensive understanding of the different varieties of animals and plants such as their requirements of nutrition or habitat, reproductive roles as well as the cognition of different varieties of dry flammable material like wood, paper for fuel, food and medicinal herbs. Subsequently, this develops their epistemology to conserve the natural resources as they become acquainted with the ecological community, geographical characteristics, climatic conditions, habitats, life-cycle of resource species and many others. However, it is also discovered that women due to their distinctive social functions are more unprotected from the environmental change (Steady, 1998). As in the country of Africa, due to the scarcity of water women on an average spent 3 hours to fetch water. In 1985, CSE (Centre for Science and Environment), situated in New Delhi reported: *Probably no other group is more affected by environmental destruction than poor village women. Every dawn brings with it a long march in search of fuel, fodder and water. (...) As ecological conditions worsen, the long march becomes even longer and more tiresome* (CSE, 1985). This reflects that the destruction of natural resources and soil erosion severely impacted women's lives and their everyday functions. For instance, deforestation and the practice of monoculture form of agriculture brings scarcity of the natural resources, increasing work-burden on women as they had to spend more time on the collection of water, fuel, food, fodder, fibre, fertilizer, building material, and medical herbs (Braidotti, Charkiwick, Hausler, & Wieringa, 1995) which were previously available abundant to them from their natural surroundings. Similarly, soil erosion, crop failures and the scarcity of water are responsible for the reduction in harvesting production. The pesticides in air, water or earth, and the toxic chemicals brought various forms of health risks to women. The instance of this is noticed in the floriculture and horticulture sectors of Kenya where women working in these parts face the problems of abortion as they are exposed to chemical substances. Hence, women are remarked to play leading

actions in safeguarding the environment which should be illustrated through the example of Amrita Devi in the state of Rajasthan (India), where women under her leadership vigorously engaged for the ecological struggle (Shiva, 1998). Women through their different roles perform a major role in preserving the livelihoods of their communities and for their sustenance through properly managing and utilizing energy, water, soil, air, and biodiversity. Traditionally, women had been shown to be the *gatherer* for maintaining the food supply and not the men who designated as *hunter* (Boserup, 1989). It is too anticipated that the gathering works of women had not brought environmental destruction as they prefer to use dead wood, branches, and twigs, but it is the consequence of the extensive industrialization and commercialization adventures which encompasses urbanization, vigorous hydroelectric advancement, logging and extracting pulp for export activities, harvesting cash and so on. Argumentatively, women's leading participation is crucial for acquiring *Environmental Sustainable Development* because of their different role and their predominance in most of the work associated with nature (Agnimitra, 2014).

Conclusion

The paper discussed the concept of Sustainable Development, which comprehensibly specifies the changing notion of the term development, that had been evolved aiming only to achieve economic growth and it jeopardizes the planet earth. Humans for their materialistic need had totally ignored the environmental change. This shifted the attitude of development towards amalgamating the concept of sustainability and it resulted in the deliberate explanation of the term Sustainable Development, integrating not only economic advancement or social development but also ecological conservation. Moreover, it is observed that the Sustainable Development's objective could not be achieved without incorporating women's active participation in managing and preserving natural resources. Women's through fulfilling distinctive socially and culturally assigned roles directly associate them with the natural environment in this socioeconomic culture. This develops in them to uphold different attitude or experiences and they keep distinctive perception for caring, protecting, managing, and regenerating the resources of nature. Viewing this, it is argued that women's engagement and their leading roles for environment conservation should be acknowledged and supported in the twenty-first century.

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