

# Environmental Protection and Social Work Profession

*(Proceeding With Full Paper)*

## Editors

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**Environmental Protection and Social Work Profession**  
[Edited Book]

**ISBN:** 978-93-83634-45-3

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**First Edition:** March, 2019

**Price:** 350/-

**Published by:** Department of Social Work  
Jain Vishva Bharati Institute,  
Ladnun-341306 (Rajasthan)

**Printed by:**

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# Environmental Degradation and Social Work Competencies

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## Introduction

India has been facing with the challenges of environmental degradation through consumption of natural assets-air, water and soil, eradication of wild life, heavy deforestation, pollution affecting human well-being. There is a need to plan and implement policies for sustainable development in India since the relationship between physical environment and the well-being of individuals and societies is multi-fold and multi-faceted with qualitative and quantitative factors. The sustainable administration of the earth and natural resources is essential for financial development and human prosperity. At the point when overseen well, inexhaustible characteristic assets, watersheds, profitable scenes and seascapes can give the establishment to supported comprehensive development, sustenance security and poverty reduction. What is and what should be the relationship between man and nature? These questions play a very pivotal role in today's ecological references. Do we want the development and progress at the cost of destruction of the natural environment or we want the preservation of natural environment at the cost of underdevelopment? Often the terms nature, environment and ecology are understood to be same but actually each term has its different meaning e.g. environment refers to everything around that may affect our behavior and perception, nature is what existed before human came into existence and ecology is concerned with interactions or interrelationship between living organisms and their environment. Environmental ethics also consider that every destruction of the natural resources as un-ethical.

Environmental degradation aggravates the already vulnerable stance of communities that are losing adaptation resources, and it deprives them of the opportunity to survive, thus driving them out of the affected areas.

## Social Issues and Environment

The management of environment and sustainable development are the basis of our existence. The issue of environment and development has led to the concept of sustainable development which says: "the kind of development that meets the needs of present keeping in view that the coming generation is not deprived of it". In fact, the concept of sustainable development calls for new resource consumption strategies as per following:

1. More Use of renewable sources such as solar energy and tidal energy as compared to non-renewable sources e.g. oil and coal wherever possible.
2. Conservation or reduction in the excessive use resources.
3. Recycling and re-use of material wherever possible.

## **Policy changes in Environmental Issues**

There exists a need to formulate some policy changes to attain sustainable development goals- few of these are:

1. Usually the process of economic growth depends upon the availability of renewable and non-renewable resources but this is not true e.g. income from mining derives from the extraction of produce and timber and the cost of land reclamation is not taken into consideration.
2. Stabilized Population at par with productivity of ecosystem.
3. The earth's natural resources must be conserved. This can be achieved by restricting the use of oil and coal and opting new technologies for generation of energy i.e. solar and wind energy and recycling of wastes.
4. Technology requires must be made less risky, cleaner, energy efficient and eco-friendly.
5. The scarcity of safe drinking water is a challenge. It is necessary to conserve water by treatment of sewage water, water as industrial waste, rain water harvesting and economical use of water.
6. To meet the needs of industrialization and ever-growing development process, there is a need to make a large number of dams, mines and expressways for which a huge number of people are dislodged and evacuated from their original homes especially tribal people. It is the responsibility of the nation state find ways to restore their livelihood and shelter.
7. Environmental degradation is mostly caused by irrational consumption of naturally available resources especially by the people living in economically advanced states.
8. The earth's resources are being severely exploited which billions of animal species use for their survival. This has led to extinction of many animal and plant species; therefore, there is strong need of ethical basis for the rights of animals and plants to exist. All forms of life- humans, plants and animals- must be fairly treated.
9. Since the last century, human activities, mainly burning of fossil fuel and heat emitting machines, have raised the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases. There is general expectation that the earth's climate may be significantly modified in the next 50 years. This would, in turn, alter the earth's delicate ecological balance. A strong policy matter is required to be planned and implemented.

With the progress of civilization, humans began altering the natural environment to meet their own needs. This has resulted in slow depletion of natural resources and degradation of environment. Also, increase in human population industrialization, urbanization and numerous development projects have added the problem which is compounded by the pollution of the air, water and land.

## **Social Work Interventions**

Social Work is a field not only of direct practitioners but also of leaders, change agents, activists and community builders. Consequently, social workers are well positioned to advance environmental justice because of their expertise in collaboration, networking, advocacy, community development and capacity building. During their field work training, the social workers who chose the discipline, have larger exposure to the environmental issues- sustainability, social and environmental justice and are trained to meet the needs.

Social Work competency includes improving the social environment and well-being of **people by** facilitating and developing resources. Hence, environmental social work being an **approach to** social work practice that is founded on the principles of ecological justice has become the **need** of the hour.

Environmental degradation is not a powerful push factor by itself. It becomes such because of inadequate management of natural resources and poor administration observed in the agricultural sector as a whole. Therefore, the key tasks are the need to improve sustainable management of natural resources, sustainable agricultural development and promotion of agrarian reform, capacity building, expansion of authority and responsibility of local communities in rural areas, promotion of gender development, capacity building of agencies providing assistance in emergency situations of natural character, improving migration management, as well as counselling and awareness-raising activities.

### **Roles of Social Worker in the Environmental Development and Improvement**

The social workers can play a key role in the fight for environmental justice, helping to prevent and address the consequences of climate change through education, advocacy, community organizing, and research.

There are several other roles a social worker can play in terms of environment protection and development- a communicator, animator, guide, innovator, advocate, counsellor, model motivator, facilitator etc.

A social worker enables people to be better prepared and empowered with information by organizing street plays, audio-video shows, role play and skits, group meeting, individual contacts, group discussion, public meetings etc.

A social worker provides information necessary for decision making especially in case of natural calamities and guide the ways for coping with problems situation, assist the community in practicing new behavioral patterns and skills.

A social worker, instead of doing anything on his own, guides the people in the process of environment development and shows different routines while dealing with the social problems related to environment.

In the nutshell, it is believed that India has made one of the fastest progresses in the world, in addressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality. Ms. Sunita Narain in her book 'Why I Should be Tolerant' (ISBN:978-81-86906-94-1) writes "Sustainable development needs to be understood as a function of deepened democracy. It is not about the technology, but about a political framework, which will devolve power and give people- the victims of environmental degradation- rights over the natural resources. The involvement of local communities in environmental management is a prerequisite for sustainable development". Still, India has a long way to go to reach environmental quality similar to those enjoyed in the developed economies in the world.

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