



Biological Resources Management and Women: With Special Reference to Human Rights

Dr. C. Anita Fabiyola*

* Assistant Professor, Chennai Dr. Ambedkar Govt Law College, Thiruvallur

Abstract:

Biodiversity conservation and the role of women in protecting ecosystems have increasingly been recognized as deeply interconnected. Historically, women have played vital roles in managing natural resources, safeguarding ecosystems, and contributing to sustainable development. However, their contributions have often been underacknowledged. The dynamic relationship between biodiversity conservation and recognizing the vitality of women for biodiversity protection is crucial for achieving sustainable environmental outcomes, especially in the context of climate change and growing ecological degradation. This article explores how gender equality, women's empowerment, and biodiversity conservation are interlinked and why integrating women into biodiversity protection efforts is essential for fostering resilience and sustainability in ecosystems.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Resources, Management, Women, Human Rights.

Introduction

Public participation is key factor for sustainable management of biodiversity. International policies and agreements acknowledge the key role that women play, especially in the globalized era, in the utilization and conservation of biological resources. In terms of the Biodiversity, women around the world perform a unique role, in managing plants and animals in forests, dry lands, wetlands and agriculture; in collecting water, fuel and fodder for domestic use and income

* Assistant professor, Chennai Dr. Ambedkar Govt Law College. Thiruvallur.



generation; and in overseeing land and water resources. Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, former member of the planning Commission stated, "If men had to fetch drinking water the 230,000 villages would not have remained without provision of drinking water after several years of planned development".¹ By so doing, they contribute time, energy, skills and personal visions to family and community development. Women's widespread know-how makes them a precious source of knowledge and proficiency on utilization, conservation of biological resources and appropriate actions. Women's acquaintance, intervention and collective action has huge prospective to improve resource productivity, develop ecosystem conservation and sustainable use of biological resources, and to create more sustainable, energy, water and health systems. Miscarriage to benefit from this would be a missed opportunity. Realizing the human rights, self-worth and proficiencies of diverse groups of women is a vital prerequisite of a just and sustainable world. Women should not be viewed as sufferers, but as central actors for sustainability through sustainable utilization of biological resources which is one of the key factors for conservation of biodiversity. The fact that women's key roles, responsibilities and management practices for the conservation and improvement of animal and plant genetic resources and their intimate knowledge of plants and animals remain invisible to the agricultural, forestry, and environmental technicians as well as the planners and policy makers. It is precarious to redress the inconsistent effect of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses on women, which emasculate the enjoyment of their human rights and their dynamic roles in sustaining their families and communities. This paper aims to enhance the understanding of the dynamic relationship between biodiversity conservation and recognizing the vitality of women for biodiversity protection.

¹ Renu Sharma, Dr. Baljit Kaushik, *Role of Women in Environmental Conservation*, EXCEL International Journal of Multidisciplinary Management Studies, Vol.1 Issue 2, 162-167, November 2011.



The lack of recognition at technical and institutional levels means that their interests and demands are given inadequate attention. Further women involvements in formalized efforts to conserve bio-diversity remain low because of women's poor representation at policy and decision making levels².

Recognition of women role in the international realm

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 becomes the first international bill of women's rights. It obliges signatory Governments to take action to promote and protect the rights of women. All countries that have ratified CEDAW (171 as of March 2003) must report on specific measures they have taken to advance the status of women. The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, created in 1999, enables women victims of gender discrimination to submit complaints for review³. The United Nations Third World Conference on Women and associated NGO Forum in Nairobi reviews and appraises the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. It produces the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which recognize women's role in environmental conservation and management⁴. In 1991 The WorldWIED (World Women in Environment and Development) Global Assembly on Women and the Environment: Partners in Life meets in Miami, Florida, United States of America and presents 218 success stories⁵. Organized by WEDO, the First Women's World Congress for a Healthy Planet, also in Miami, develops the Women's Action Agenda 21⁶. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted in 1992, reads: "Women have a vital role

² Available at www.fao.org/documents/en/detail/21828/, last visited on 28/01/2016

³ Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, last visited 27/01/2016

⁴ Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/nfls.htm>, last visited 14/01/2016

⁵ Available at <http://www.womenenvironment.org/pub151.asp>, last visited 21/01/2016

⁶ Available at www.wedo.org/sus_dev/section1.htm and www.iisd.org/women/about3.htm, last visited 15/01/2016



in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential in achieving sustainable development”⁷. In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, affirmed, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, that the “human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights”⁸. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,² adopted in 1995, set a landmark global agenda for women’s human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Declaration provides that “the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and ... are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society”⁹. The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action¹⁰ adopted in 1996, urged governments to “ensure an enabling political, social, and economic environment designed to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on full and equal participation of women and men, which is most conducive to achieving sustainable food security for all”¹⁰. The centrality of gender equality has also been articulated in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, adopted in 2012, which included recognition of the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment across the three pillars of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental, and resolve to promote gender equality and women’s full participation in

⁷ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1,

⁸ Available at <http://www.un-documents.net/ac157-23.htm>, last visited 14/01/2023

⁹ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and I

¹⁰ Report of the World Food Summit, 13-17 November 1996 (WFS 96/REP), Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3548e/w3548e00.htm>, last visited 25/01/2023



sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels¹¹. The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes that the integration of women's rights and gender equality in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use is not only intrinsically important, but can also improve the efficacy of interventions, programmes and resources.

The women being the axis for conservation of biological resources

Because of women's greater obligation for securing water, food, seeds, medicinal plants, wild edibles, fuel wood, forage, and fodder, they have a greater concern and role in safeguarding the biodiversity. Their knowledge, science, and skills are precarious for the sustainable supply of biodiversity products. As land, forest and water resources once held in common are increasingly enclosed, privatized or "grabbed" for commercial investment, local communities and indigenous peoples, particularly women, whose livelihoods depend on them, are marginalized and displaced. As stated by S.K. Pande, a former Director General of Forests: "Rural India has a women centric agriculture system. Nothing can happen without them. Women are a great repository of biodiversity knowledge, as they intimately understand it. If animals are sick, they know what medicinal plants have to be administered. Women have the greatest concern as far as protecting biodiversity is concerned and they have to be brought in if we are serious about conservation." Women are dependent on forests for food, fuel, fodder, medicines, fibers and so on. By going in and out of forests, women have down the years accrued the multitude of knowledge in the sustainable use of biological resources as well as numerous insights of the value of biodiversity. Though women can play a significant role in conserving biological resources, it has not been recognized. Their role in conservation has been unheeded. The loss of habitats and biodiversity

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 66/288,



mostly affects the underprivileged and many of them are women. In community conservation efforts, women perform a significant role particularly in areas of seed selection and preservation. At a temple in Along, Arunachal Pradesh, women are respected for domesticating rice. P.V. Satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, says: "Women are the final caretakers of genetic and species diversity in agriculture. The knowledge about the seed and the way it should be stored and sown is in the head of the women and not the man." The knowledge of the necessary growing conditions and nutritional characters of various species gives women a unique, crucial repository of experiences in seed selection and plant breeding. It is this knowledge that helps women to maintain the genetic diversity required to adapt to fluctuating weather patterns to ensure the survival of traditional crops. Such a role assumes great importance in an era of increasing hybridisation and monoculture¹².

As Stated by Hama Arba Diallo Executive Secretary of UNCCD, "Women play a pivotal role in the pastoralist way of life, assuming diverse responsibilities with regard to the livestock, the land and the household. In the course of their daily tasks, they have developed an intimate knowledge of natural resource management, which they put into practice for the benefit of both their communities and the environment. However, their knowledge and capabilities have not been fully recognized, and they are often excluded from the decision-making process"¹³.

The Raika are the proverbial pastoralists of Rajasthan, which is famous for livestock breeds that are an important tool for utilizing the Thar Desert in a sustainable manner. These include the Nari cattle, the Boti or Marwari sheep and Sirohi goats, Raika women play a key role

¹² Available at <http://indiatogether.org/biodiv-women>, last visited 16/01/2023

¹³ Available at <http://www.unccd.int/Lists/SiteDocumentLibrary/Publications/Pastoralist%20Women%20eng.pdf>, last visited 17/01/2023



in terms of food production, maintaining agro-biodiversity and providing labour there by contributing to the sustainable utilization of biological resources¹⁴.

Women of Dharmapuri village of Tamil Nadu formed an organization Rural Education and Development Services (REDS) which took up the task of conserving plant diversity of their area. The role of ex situ conservation took shape and now 35 medicinal gardens have been established which conserve and cultivate 158 medicinal plants. The approach of these women soon started paying dividend and apart from conservation of the medicinal plants the attempt led to socio-economic growth of the area¹⁵.

The Women plays a vital role in maintaining the rituals of a particular area which contributes to the conservation of biodiversity. Bachchni Devi of Garhwal Himalayas successfully exploited this for the conservation of trees. She organised a group of women of her locality and encouraged them to tie sacred thread to trees. In this way Raksha Bandhan of tree was done. This event became popular in Garhwal and helped in the conservation of trees¹⁶.

The National Biodiversity Authority in one of its access and benefit sharing case of PepsiCo Ltd, which exported 2000 MT seaweed to Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. The seaweed is grown by fisherman community in Tamil Nadu. The collection, cleaning and baling was done by women self-help groups. The women were given training by the company. The NBA was paid royalty @ 5% of FoB amounting to Rs. 3.9 million by the exporter. Efforts are being made by the SBB to form BMCs of the 754 benefit claimers spread across four districts.

¹⁴ Available at https://www.bfn.de/fileadmin/ABS/documents/2009_Raika%20Community%20Protocol%20final.pdf, last visited 22/01/2023

¹⁵ Available at <http://nipccd.nic.in/dwc/dir/vrd.pdf>, last visited 24/01/2023

¹⁶ Available at <http://www.himalayatrust.in/projects3.htm> last visited 17/01/2023



Thus the woman's position in the family and community, and her political participation, determine to a large extent her control over environment-related decisions such as harvesting and cropping methods, allocation of benefits including income, and conservation and environmental regeneration operations. Hence it follows that this also influences the inclusion, or lack thereof, of women's visions, perceptions and priorities in decisions, processes and institutions¹⁷.

Conclusion

To view women as “sustainability saviours” draw upon and reinforce stereotypes regarding women's roles in relation to the family, the community and the environment. Such responses often add to women's already heavy unpaid work burdens without conferring rights, resources and benefits. As a core yardstick, policies, programmes and investments in the name of sustainable development should be assessed against conformity with human rights standards and their ability to develop the capabilities of women. No progress can be considered sustainable if it reduces women's capabilities and denies their human rights. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in sustainable development, as actors, leaders and decision-makers in the processes that shape their lives as well as the future of their households, communities, nations and the world. Thus in the area of biodiversity conservation, for instance, policy efforts aimed at national and local, which are desirable objectives from the perspective of ecological sustainability, need to consult smallholder farmers and indigenous community, particularly women, about their priorities and constraints rather than assume that their interests are already aligned with preconceived policy aims and visions. Women's participation can only be effective and meaningful when underlying

¹⁷ **Koos Neefjes**, Environments and Livelihoods, Strategies for Sustainability, Oxfam Professional, 2000.



gender power relations are transformed and when attention and support are given to women's specific knowledge and capacities in other words their rights are fully recognized.