

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: A STUDY IN GREATER GUWAHATI AREA

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Abstract: Traditionally, women have been responsible for subsistence and survival for water, food, fuel, fodder and habitat, though they rarely get the credit for nurturing these life support systems. Added to these environmental destruction, exacerbates women's problems in a way very difficult from that of men. The issues associated with re-establishing the symbiosis between communities, women and natural resources is of utmost importance as this can to a large extent reverse the trend of the negative impact of existing developmental paradigms. United Nations Chronicle journal researchers found an association between breast cancer and the pesticide DDT and its derivative DDE and the study by the World Health Organization found that women who are exposed to pesticides face a higher risk of abortion. These kinds of health problems cause women to feel more responsible regarding environmental issues. In terms of climate change and natural disasters with regard to mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and financing there remains gaps and challenges faced by women the global environmental crisis far outweigh any achievements that may have been made. The present study is carried out to study role of women in sustainable development and environmental issues using Reusable Booklet of Environmental Behaviour Scale (EBS-svs) of National Psychological Association developed by Archana Singhal, Dr. Urmila Verma and Dr. P.K. Singhal. Attention is given on daily life activities of women to study their attitude and behaviour towards environmental conservation, environmental pollution and concern for sustainable development.

Keywords: Environmental issues, Participation of Women, Sustainable Development.

Introduction: Considering that the concept of sustainable development is now enshrined on the masthead of Environment magazine, featured on 8,720,000 Web pages and enmeshed in the aspirations of countless programs, places, and institutions, it should be easy to define sustainable development from different angles. But the most widely accepted definition is creatively ambiguous: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The World Commission on Environment and Development was initiated by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1982, and its report, Our Common Future, was published in 1987.⁷ It was chaired by then-Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland, thus earning the name the "Brundtland Commission. According to this commission,

The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs, and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word "environment" a connotation of naivety in some political circles. The word "development" has also been narrowed by some into a very limited focus, along the lines of "what poor nations should do to become richer," and thus again is automatically dismissed by many in the international arena as being a concern of specialists, of those involved in questions of "development assistance." But the "environment" is where we live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to

improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable." This clearly reflects importance of a participatory approach for sustainable development. Moreover, human development and welfare are impossible without protection of natural resource and natural environment. In this regard, women have traditionally been responsible for subsistence and survival tasks like providing food and water, fuel and fodder collection. It has been proved that women have a special relationship with the environment in many other ways as they are often the custodians of indigenous knowledge and promoters of bio-diversity and environment friendly management. Women and the environment are bound by an inseparable relationship; hence their role in sustainable development is worth mentioning.

Objectives:

- To assess awareness of women on the issues related with sustainable development.
- To study the views of the women on their participation in sustainable development.
- To analysis women's behaviour in their environmental setting.

Methodology and Area of the Study: The present work, which was designed to study the role of women in sustainable development and environmental issues falls under descriptive research method. The primary data has been collected from field through personal observation and manual of Reusable Booklet of Environmental Behaviour Scale (EBS-svs) of National Psychological Association developed by Archana Singhal, Dr. Urmila Verma and Dr. P.K. Singhal. Non-

probability sampling method was employed in the present study and total 40 women were selected from areas of greater Guwahati, namely Gitanagar and Zoo-Road area of Kamrup District, Assam.

Significance of the study: Gender is considered to be a social construct that ascribes different qualities and rights to women and men regardless of individual competence or desires. This often means that women globally perform the bulk of work without pay in the home while men receive these services yet are regarded both as family providers and as family heads – with all this entails in terms of obligations, rights and power. Gender and gender power are reflected at all levels of society, where women are often responsible for health and social care provision – both at home and at the workplace. Environmental issues and Sustainable development is very much dependant on effective participation of women as it depends on four principal questions of universal interest, i.e.

- Meeting basic needs: how well do we live? Indicators of which are: mental health, income development, violence, unemployment figures.
- Justice: how are resources distributed? Poverty, foreign aid, gender pay gaps etc. are indicators here.
- Resource conservation: What are we passing down to our children? Teenage literacy, national debt, investments, science and development activities, habitat diversity, land use indicates this aspect.
- Decoupling: how efficiently are resources being used? Indicators of it are: how transport is increasing faster than GDP, private transport vs. public, fossil fuel consumption per capita, material consumption.

All the indicators of sustainable development are incomplete without participation of women. Therefore, it is significant to make a study how women are realizing their roles for the cause of sustainable development.

Delimitation of the Study: The present study is delimited in the following aspect-

- It is restricted only Gitanagar and Zoo-Road area of Greater Guwahati.
- The number of sample size is 40.

Tool Used for Data Collection: Following tools have been prepared to collect data for this study:

- i. Personal observation.
- ii. Reusable Booklet of Environmental Behaviour Scale (EBS-svs) of National Psychological.

Result of the Study: The obtained data are arranged systematically and on the basis of filled up questionnaires, the statistical analysis and interpretation has been made as follows-

• Views on Air Pollution- Question No. 1 to 5

It was found that regarding air pollution women were found to be very positive and aware on the issues like using smokeless stoves, pollution causing vehicles,

initiatives for global warming and green house gases. But only 5% women accepted that they burn garbage.

Table-I

	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	1	100%	0%
Air Pollution	2	95%	5%
	3	95%	5%
	4	80%	20%
	5	5%	95%

• Views on Water Pollution- Question No. 6 to 10

On water pollution related aspects though women hold view that they were against disposing garbage on ponds, using soap while taking bath on river, polluting water resources and majority of them has proper drainage system in house, only 25% women encourages others to prevent water pollution.

Table-II

	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	6	95%	0%
Water Pollution	7	80%	5%
	8	25%	75%
	9	90%	20%
	10	95%	95%

• Views on Noise Pollution- Question No. 11 to 15

Majority of women were found to be playing negative role in noise pollution as they support listening music/TV at high volume and using loud speakers, though 95% of them uses horn only when it is necessary.

Table-III

	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	11	5%	95%
Noise Pollution	12	30%	70%
	13	40%	60%
	14	80%	20%
	15	95%	5%

• Views on Land Pollution- Question No. 16 to 20

Regarding factors of land pollution more than half percentage of women accepted that they disposes garbage on road and uses plastic bags for shopping purpose. Only positive thing they do for protecting land from pollution is that using paper plate and tissues instead of plastic.

Table-IV

	Question No.	Positive	Negative
	16	25%	75%
Land Pollution	17	10%	90%
	18	50%	50%
	19	100%	0%
	20	5%	95%

• Views on Water Conservation- Question No. 21 to 25

85% to 95% women showed negative Water Conservative behaviour by accepting that they misuse water in one or other way. Only positive action they adopt to save water is repairing faulty taps of home immediately and closing water tap while not in use.

Table-V

Water Conservation	Question No.	Positive	Negative
	21	10%	90%
22		15%	85%
23		5%	95%
24		95%	5%
25		95%	5%

• Views on Forest Conservation- Question No. 26 to 30

For forest conservation majority of women do not take initiatives for tree plantation though they are contributing for forest conservation by writing on both sides of single paper and using individual greetings through message or email instead of paper greetings card.

Table-VI

Forest Conservation	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	26	10%	90%
27		20%	80%
28		75%	25%
29		95%	5%
30		95%	5%

• Views on Biodiversity Conservation- Question No. 31 to 35

For Biodiversity conservation 90% women do not use products made from animal skin and do not destroy natural habitat of animals and birds. All of them consider conservation of flora and fauna a pious job. But more than 80% women do not try others to take steps for biodiversity conservation.

Table-VII

Biodiversity Conservation	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	31	90%	10%
32		95%	5%
33		100%	0%
34		5%	95%
35		20%	80%

• Views on Human Health Management- Question No. 36 to 40

Most of the women were found to be conscious about human health management problems and its protective measures which are observed from their habit of using handkerchief while sneezing,

forbidding others to smoke, using mosquito nets and filtering water before consumption.

Table-VIII

Human Health Management	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	36	90%	10%
37		70%	30%
38		60%	40%
39		100%	0%
40		80%	20%

• Views on Energy Conservation and Management- Question No. 41 to 50

For energy conservation it was found that though most of the women do not use electricity unnecessarily and uses vehicle only when in need, percentage of negative response were higher for lack of usage of solar energy, do not turn off car engine during red signal and apathy to use public transport or bi-cycle instead of fuel run vehicles. Moreover, they neither take steps for encouraging people to get vehicles checked regularly nor share vehicles with friends.

Table-IX

Energy Conservation and Management	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	41	5%	95%
42		95%	5%
43		0%	100%
44		15%	85%
45		50%	50%
46		25%	75%
47		35%	65%
48		35%	65%
49		60%	30%
50		95%	5%

• Views on Environmental Conservation and Management- Question No. 51 to 60

Women's behaviour for environmental conservation and management were found to be negative in the areas like celebrating festivals considering environmental conservation, motivating others for conservation, collecting rain water etc. while their behaviour were found to be positive regarding spreading their thought of population increase as a cause of pollution, misuse of natural resources, reckless use of chemicals like DDT etc.

Table-X

Energy Conservation and Management	Q. No.	Positive	Negative
	51	90%	10%
52		90%	10%
53		100%	0%
54		30%	70%
55		30%	70%
56		40%	60%
57		40%	60%

	58	0%	100%
	59	95%	5%
	60	100%	0%

Interpretation: When the overall data collected were analyzed according to EBS-SVS scoring norms, it was found that it majority of individual response sheets of sample group scores below 31 and some of them scores ranging from 32 to 36. Therefore, Z-scores were found to be,

For scores ranging from 32 to 36 = -1.26 to -2.00 = Very Negative Behaviour,

And,

For scores 31 and below = 2.01 and below = Extremely Negative Behaviour.

Suggestions: An increasing number of studies indicate that gender inequalities are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world. Women should play a relevant role in the development of a new sustainable approach to the environment, as they are naturally more interested in relations than in material profit. Women, for their specific nature and the roles they play in the human society, could have a more holistic approach to the environmental issues. A men-centred reductionism and mechanistic paradigm regulated the exploitation of natural resources since the scientific and technological revolutions, the fact reached from varied studies. The theoretical recognition of the power of man on the nature leads to technological progress but also to exceed the limits of sustainability of development. The economic, scientific and technological progress was based on the perspective of a passive environment, which could be regulated and exploited at request. On the other hand, balanced relationships between human populations and their environment, aiming at the conservation of the links for the conservation of both and disregarding economic profit, still exists (more or less conscious) in traditional cultures. Hence, Gender equality and the strengthening of women's rights and participation in decision-making are key areas in pursuit of sustainable development. Women can

form organisations and groups to addressed gender equality in relation to sustainable development, energy and environment etc. It can boost women's participation in decision-making forums, women's right to own and inherit land, education, capacity-building and the like.

Future Trends: The study supplements other work on sustainable development indicators and hopefully will provide both a clearer picture of what is required in working with climate issues and the socioeconomic dimension of sustainable development, and better tools for under-taking such work.

Conclusion: It is known to all throughout the world that the growth of technology and the processes of commercialization, industrialization globalization affect men and women differently. The world realizes, clearly today that real development cannot take roots if it by-passes women, who not only represent half of the humanity. Therefore, as India embarks on bold and sweeping economic reforms, concern for women and efforts to main stream them occupy the centre stage.

Today, in the light of climate change, the question of how we can create sustainable welfare is being fiercely debated – but usually without any References to gender. Present study revealed that, women of the study area are aware about environmental issues but their action for protection of environment is limited to a large extent limited. They provided mix type responses when questioned about air, water, land pollution, conservation of biodiversity and energy and on environmental conservation and management, for some points positive and for others negative. Clear picture was derived from analysis and interpretation of data when done with EBS-SVS score norms. It showed that women are showing negative environmental behaviour.

We, male or female need to examine who the polluters are, *inter alia* from a gender perspective, and we need to devote ourselves to 'our common but diversified responsibility' for dealing with the environmental problems with a view of sustainable development.

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