

Role of Environment in promoting International peace

V SELVARAJAN

Green Circle, a Delhi Based voluntary organization for environment

1. Quality of life vis-à-vis environmental concerns

It is predicted that the 3rd world war might be fought on the context of water, a depleting natural resource of the world. Human conflicts often exacerbate when affluent nations tend to exploit natural resources of third world countries. Often least interest is exhibited for the environmental concerns of other nations. Perhaps, the international community comfortably forgets that the environmental concerns transcend borders. As the world is moving fast towards ruthless urbanization and rapid industrialization, the livelihood and health of the human race, especially the ordinary citizens and the activists defending them are put to untold miseries, intimidation and harassments. Mostly the global community is not cognizant of or not cognizant enough of the consequences of ecologically susceptible activities. Such activities not in consonance with the nature are causing deforestation, air, water and land pollution, and desertification, destructs the biodiversity and natural resources. It is imminent that environmental issues attain decisive role in determining quality of life in the entire world and the resultant world peace

2. Mapping Carbon foot prints

Environmental pollution is not a static phenomenon restricted to the originating country neither there is any synthetic solution to prevent its proliferation beyond borders. The post - Kyoto Protocol era witnessed spurt in the acceptance of reduction in carbon footprints and the emergence of *Polluter pay* principle that culminated in Carbon credit, a financial quantification of the Greenhouse gas emissions. Though the carbon credit accounting was conceptualized to compensate global nations that nurture environment, this, in reality, can only act as a deterrent but not a way to eliminate the

environment pollution *per se*. While mapping global carbon emission in a holistic way is not feasible, it is possible that carbon footprints could be estimated individually and organizationally, and a concerted effort to control the same will improve the quality of life which will lead to world peace and equality. 192 nations that signed the Kyoto protocol till now subscribe to this discernment. However while all measures taken to reduce emissions through innovative measures such as Carbon credits, Green Investment Scheme, Clean development mechanism and joint Implementation are endeavoring to reduce carbon footprints, the fact of the matter is that penalties or compensations act as a deterrent but cannot ensure bringing down the emission level in pre-1990 level, unless there is a strong tenacity to act now. It is perhaps due to the fact that state-of-the-art technology paves way to rapid industrialization and resultant change in lifestyle preferences of humans. Consequential Climate change impacts most sections of the global citizens, more so for those directly rely on natural resources for their livelihood and also those who are affected by the natural calamities such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, landslides and hurricanes. This is further fuelled by the man-made exploitations. While every human being is affected by the climate change, it also should not be forgotten that the poor, women in particular are subject to greater risks in situations of poverty induced by natural calamities on the one hand and deprived of natural resources on the other. Women are victims of inequalities in the decision making and gender bias in labour markets and consequently their contribution is less in the climate planning, policy making and implementation

3. Conflicts in tapping natural resources

When the developed nations meet their ends to lead prolific life, the poor becomes poorer. Most often the policy makers of nations make exhaustive efforts to tap the available natural resource such as oil wells, forests and water. In their anxiety to meet targets and gaps, environmental concerns and views of the citizens are either ignored or in certain cases, they are convinced.

For instance, in India, farmers of South India are continuously subject to untold miseries due to persistent drought, inadequate water supply, monsoon failures, and river water sharing disputes. Recent farmers' agitation demanding river mergers, stopping agricultural land acquisitions for hydrocarbon extraction projects, waiver of debts etc are archetypal examples of the depleting natural resources. This includes unmindful tapping of natural resources, changing patterns of land use, mining activities, and river water sharing disputes which may be mostly due to man-made climatic upheavals.

It is necessary to identify the status of natural resources in fueling conflicts in the affected country and suggest appropriate intervention. Integrating environmental issues and careful harnessing of the natural resources will contribute to economic revival, leading to world peace and prosperity. International community should assist nations to manage the planned extraction of natural resources which will mitigate avoidable controversies. International platforms such as UN should emerge as prominent factors in international cooperation in protecting forests, biodiversity and natural resources especially in underdeveloped countries.

4. Global consensus on environmental standards

The Earth Summit that took place on 3rd to 14th June 1992 at Rio de Janeiro was intended to reaffirm the declaration of the UN Conference on the Human Environment adopted at Stockholm on 16th June 1972 and seeking to build upon it. But the fact that the developed nations failed to adopt the tenets of the decisions, raised the brows of the global community. Kyoto protocol 1997 mandated the industrialized countries to reduce their collective emissions of greenhouse gases by about 5% of pre-1990 level. The aim was to reduce the overall emissions from six greenhouse gases - carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, sulfur hexafluoride, HFCs, and PFCs - calculated as an average over the five-year period of 2008-12. The second phase is now further extended till 2020. Most of the people in the third world are living under severe poverty due to drought, depleted natural resources, polluted environment, and monsoon

failures. Causes of global warming are obvious and the industrialized nations cannot deny the fact that they are the major contributors. Under the latest Paris agreement in 2015, the global participants arrived at a consensus to take action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity. Paris agreement acknowledges the need to address loss and damages due to climate changes, assess them through quick response mode, especially those which have immediate impacts such as extreme weather events, slow onset impact such as loss of land due to sea level rise for low lying islands. Paris agreement is in fact the first comprehensive climate agreement with scope to quantify environmental damages and envisages a shared responsibility by financial commitments by member nations for averting, minimizing and addressing environmental damages

5. Lethal nuclear weapons vis-à-vis world peace

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still fresh in our memory and the impact is seen for generations. More resource allocation by developed nations, for lethal chemical and nuclear weapons have enormous potential to release unimaginable amount of environmental pollutants and eliminate/debilitate life in a fraction of a second. Further the impact of war will not only be felt by the affected nations but affect neighbouring countries also. The need for war-time strategies and post-war reconstruction and resettlement result in economic downturn and is expected to affect the quality of life globally. According to *Professor Gareth Evans, Co-Chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament*, 'Nuclear weapons are, simply, the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever invented, and the only ones capable of destroying life on this planet as we know it. There is only one other global policy issue remotely comparable in terms of its impact on planetary survivability, and that is climate change: but nuclear bombs can kill us a lot faster than CO₂'. The very

comparison of the nuclear bombs to CO2 not only emphasizes the importance of environmental care for the world peace but also underlines the devastating impact that the nuclear weapons can create on the peaceful living environment on Earth, the only known live planet in the universe till now.

6. Dependence of world peace and human right to live on environment

The world peace squarely rests on ensuring equality, security and enhancing the living standards of the world community irrespective of caste, creed or colour. The essential prerequisite for this is to ensure the right to live which squarely depends on addressing the basic needs, namely food, shelter and health & hygiene. The accessibility of the basic needs depends on ensuring natural resources. The paucity of natural resources leads to avoidable conflicts, lack of mutual confidence, and stimulate unrest among the deprived community. Ensuring right to live with dignity for the deprived community will pave the way to world peace.

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has declared that integrating environment and natural resources into peace building is no longer an option, but a mandatory precondition. Since 1999, UNEP conducted surveys in 25 countries and made eighteen Environmental assessment reports. Based on these assessments, UNEP provides assistance to the UN peace building commission in determining the role of environment and natural resources on peace building. UNEP along with an Expert Advisory group submitted its report which discussed the key linkages between environment, conflicts and peace building and also provided recommendations on how these can be addressed by the International community.

The six recommendations of the group for priority actions are

1. UN needs to develop capacities for early warning and early actions in countries that are vulnerable to conflicts over natural resources and environmental issues

2. The International community needs to improve oversight of “high value” resources in International trade and develop new international legal instruments to act against violators
3. During peace mediation processes, environment and natural resources are generally the fundamental issues that can “make or break” a peace agreement. Environment and natural resources have to be made a part of the peace making and peace keeping efforts.
4. Integrated peace building strategies need to include environment and natural resources, to avoid relapse of conflict or complicate the task of fostering peace
5. Careful harnessing of the natural resources can help speedy revival in a post-war economy and the international community should help the affected nation’s economy towards sustainability
6. Identifying environmental hotspots where natural resources could create conflict is the first step to capitalize the potential for environmental cooperation to contribute to peace building

The above recommendations are worth considering for optimizing the peace building process between global nations, in order to prevent another world war. It is pertinent that the international community engages in transforming environmental challenges into opportunities in tune with the objectives of the UN Charter on peace and security and act as per the mandate of UN peace building commission in facilitating the transition from conflict to lasting peace and sustainable development

7. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above discussions and views analyzed in the paper

- a. Every nation in the world should recognize the fact that the environment plays an important role in the country’s well being. In the long run, and as time rolls on, every nation experiences demand and supply gap in its natural resources and becomes vulnerable to exploitation of the resources as well. It has become

mandatory for the leaders of all countries to assess, plan and execute the development projects, taking cognizance of the extent of natural resources that could be tapped and the sustainability of their actions. Unplanned and unmindful exploitation of the depleting natural resources results in deteriorating quality of life leading to never-ending conflicts and unrest.

- b. Proliferation of natural wealth and environmental conditions are neither static nor evenly distributed among the global nations. While one nation is rich with valuable goldmines, the other nation is bestowed with oil in abundance. Deserts and evergreen forests do exist simultaneously. Darwin's theory of 'survival of the fittest' holds good even in modern day context. In a way, this uneven distribution of natural resources brings the international community together and interdependent. Human race, by virtue of its persistent divergence realizes that the conflicts lead to chaos only, which otherwise could be amicably resolved by mutual negotiation, understandings and compromises
- c. As the UN study made in consultation with UNEP and Expert advisory group reveals, the Global community should appreciate that the major deterrent in ensuring world peace is the environmental degradation and enforce decisions of Kyoto protocol as further nurtured by Paris Accord for sustainable development along with the benchmarks set by the UNEP report.
- d. Measures to reduce emissions by augmenting Carbon trading, Green Investment Scheme, Clean development mechanism and joint Implementation endeavor to reduce carbon footprints, and act as a deterrent but bringing down the emission level in pre-1990 level, remains a challenge yet.
- e. More Financial allocation for funding ecologically vulnerable third world countries to rejuvenate the depleting natural resources needs to be explored and expedited. The funding of major and small environmental rejuvenation works should be quantified, augmented, evaluated and audited in more pragmatic and equitable way
- f. Nuclear wars, using Chemical and biological weapons will prove disastrous. The global citizens have experienced it during world wars and will not anticipate

another world war of sorts. With advancement of science and technology, the next war, if materializes, will witness global disaster and perhaps the end of human race itself. It also cannot be ruled out that the next world war might be fought on the pretext of unresolved conflicts due to natural resources.

References

- i. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>
- ii. Text of Kyoto Protocol - www.kyotoprotocol.com
- iii. UNEP document - From Conflict to Peace building - The Role of Natural resources and the Environment
- iv. The Rio declaration on environment and development (1992)
- v. Stockholm 1972 - Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
- vi. Nuclear weapons as threat to world peace - Professor Gareth Evans, Co-Chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament
- vii. Paris Agreement – United nations 2015
- viii. Human rights and environmental issues - United Nations University website