
ROLE OF MAJOR SOCIAL GROUPS IN CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The conservation of natural resources is a paramount global concern, and the role of major social groups in this endeavor is pivotal. This abstract explores the diverse contributions of communities, corporations, and governmental bodies in preserving and sustaining our planet's resources. Indigenous communities exhibit profound ecological knowledge, practicing sustainable resource management rooted in traditional wisdom. Corporations, as influential stakeholders, are increasingly recognizing the importance of adopting eco-friendly practices and investing in green technologies. Governmental policies play a critical role in shaping conservation efforts, implementing regulations, and fostering a conducive environment for sustainable practices. Civil society, through advocacy and grassroots movements, exerts pressure on various actors to prioritize resource conservation. Collaboration among these social groups is essential for the development and implementation of comprehensive conservation strategies that address the intricate challenges posed by resource depletion and environmental degradation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Governments have decided to involve communities and community-based organizations to achieve true ecological sustainability and solve the current environmental crisis after realizing that they cannot solve environmental problems on their own. Agenda 21, an 800-page blueprint for a sustainable future was formed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, which had an objective to “move towards real social partnership in support of common efforts for sustainable development.” To help establish channels of cooperation between the different types of human communities, Agenda 21 identifies nine primary sectors of human society namely women, children and youth, indigenous people, NGOs, local administrators, workers and trade unions, business and industry, scientists and academics, farmers, fisherfolk and rural agriculturists. These constitute the major groups that play a vital role in conservation of natural resources. The commitment and genuine involvement of all these groups is necessary for the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed to by Governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21.

Women

The international community has endorsed several plans of action and conventions for the full, equal and beneficial integration of women in all development activities, in particular the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which emphasizes women's participation in national and international ecosystem management and control of environment degradation. Several conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex) and conventions of ILO and UNESCO have also been adopted to end gender-based discrimination and ensure women access to land and other resources, education and safe and equal employment. Effective implementation of these programmes will depend on the active involvement of women in economic and political decision-making.

2. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are proposed for National Governments:-

- (a) To implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, i.e. her participation in national ecosystem management and control of environment degradation.
- (b) To increase the proportion of women decision makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields;
- (c) To promote the dissemination to both men and women of gender-relevant knowledge and valuation of women's roles through formal and non-formal education, as well as through training institutions, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations;
- (d) To formulate and implement clear governmental policies and national guidelines, strategies and plans for the achievement of equality in all aspects of society, including the promotion of women's literacy, education, training, nutrition and health and their participation in key decision-making positions.

- (e) To consider adopting, strengthening and enforcing legislation prohibiting violence against women and to take all necessary administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate violence against women in all its forms.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to implement the following:-

- (a) Measures to increase the proportion of women involved as decision makers, planners, managers, scientists and technical advisers in the design, development and implementation of policies and programmes for sustainable development.
- (b) Measures to strengthen and empower women's bureaux, women's non-governmental organizations and women's groups in enhancing capacity building for sustainable development;
- (c) Measures to eliminate illiteracy among females and to expand the enrolment of women and girls in educational institutions to increase educational and training opportunities for women and girls in sciences and technology.
- (d) Programmes to promote the reduction of the heavy workload of women and girl children at home and to promote the provision of environmentally sound technologies, which have been designed, developed and improved in consultation with women, accessible and clean water, an efficient fuel supply and adequate sanitation facilities;
- (e) Programmes to support and strengthen equal employment opportunities and equitable remuneration for women in the formal and informal sectors with adequate economic, political and social support systems and services.
- (f) Programmes to establish rural banking systems with a view to facilitating and increasing rural women's access to credit and to agricultural inputs and implements;
- (g) Programmes to develop consumer awareness and the active participation of women, emphasizing their crucial role in achieving changes necessary to reduce or eliminate unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.
- (h) Programmes to eliminate persistent negative images, stereotypes, attitudes and prejudices against women through changes in socialization patterns, the media, advertising, and formal and non-formal education;

Countries should take urgent measures to avert the ongoing rapid environmental and economic degradation in developing countries that generally affects the lives of women and children in rural areas suffering drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsuitable agro-chemical products. Knowledge and experience on the part of women of the management and conservation of natural resources for incorporation in the databases and information systems for sustainable development is very important. Institutions like Division for the Advancement of Women (Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Office at Vienna), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) require special attention. The review should consider how the environment and development programmes of each body of the United Nations system could be strengthened to implement Agenda 21 and how to incorporate the role of women in programmes and decisions related to sustainable development. The number of women in senior policy-level and decision-making posts should be reviewed and programmes to increase that number should be adopted.

Youth and Children

Youth comprise nearly 30 per cent of the world's population. The involvement of today's youth in environment and development decision-making and in the implementation of programmes is critical in the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development.

It is imperative that youth from all parts of the world participate actively in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures.

In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Countries should, in consultation with its youth communities, establish a process to promote dialogue between the youth community and Government at all levels and to establish mechanisms that permit youth access to information and provide them with the opportunity to present their perspectives on government decisions.
- (b) It should be ensured that more than 50 per cent of its youth, gender balanced, are enrolled in or have access to appropriate secondary education or equivalent educational or vocational training programmes by increasing participation and access rates on an annual basis.
- (c) Initiatives aimed at reducing current levels of youth unemployment should be undertaken.
- (d) Countries should combat human rights abuses against young people, particularly young women and girls, and should consider providing all youth with legal protection, skills, opportunities and the support necessary for them to fulfill their personal, economic and social aspirations and potentials.

Activities- Governments, according to their strategies, should take measures to:

- (a) Establish procedures allowing for consultation and possible participation of youth of both genders in decision-making processes with regard to the environment.
- (b) Promote dialogue with youth organizations regarding the drafting and evaluation of environment plans and programmes or questions on development.
- (c) Consider for incorporation into relevant policies the recommendations of international, regional and local youth conferences and other forums that offer youth perspectives on social and economic development and resource management.
- (d) Ensure access for all youth to all types of education providing alternative learning structures and ensuring that education reflects the economic and social needs of youth and incorporates the concepts of environmental awareness and sustainable development throughout the curricula.
- (e) In cooperation with relevant ministries and organizations, including representatives of youth, develop and implement strategies for creating alternative employment opportunities and provide required training to young men and women;

Children not only will inherit the responsibility of looking after the Earth, but in many developing countries they comprise nearly half the population. Furthermore, they are highly vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation and also conscious supporters of environmental thinking. The specific interests of children need to be taken fully into account in the participatory process on environment and development in order to safeguard the future sustainability of any actions taken to improve the environment.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Ensure the survival, protection and development of children, in accordance with the goals endorsed by the 1990 World Summit for Children (A/45/625, annex);
- (b) Ensure that the interests of children are taken fully into account in the participatory process for sustainable development and environmental improvement.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Implement programmes for children designed to reach the child-related goals in the areas of environment and development, especially health, nutrition, education, literacy and poverty alleviation.
- (b) Promote improvement of the environment for children at the household and community level and encourage their participation towards the objective of integrated community management of resources.
- (c) Mobilize communities through schools and local health centers so that children and their parents become effective focal points for sensitization of communities to environmental issues.
- (d) Establish procedures to incorporate children's concerns into all relevant policies and strategies for environment.

Indigenous people

Indigenous people and their communities have an historical relationship with their lands and are generally descendants of the original inhabitants of such lands. They have developed over many generations a holistic traditional scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment. They should enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination. In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Establishment of a process to empower indigenous people and their communities through adoption of appropriate policies or legal instruments at the national level.
- (b) Ensure that the lands of indigenous people and their communities are protected from activities that are environmentally unsound.
- (c) Recognition of their values, traditional knowledge and resource management practices with a view to promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development;
- (d) Development and strengthening of national dispute-resolution arrangements in relation to settlement of land and resource-management concerns;
- (e) Support for alternative environmentally sound means of production to ensure a range of choices on how to improve their quality of life so that they effectively participate in sustainable development;
- (f) Establishment of arrangements to strengthen the active participation of indigenous people and their communities in the national formulation of policies laws and programmes relating to resource management.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Consider the ratification and application of existing international conventions relevant to indigenous people and their communities.
- (b) Adopt or strengthen appropriate policies or legal instruments that will protect indigenous intellectual and cultural property and the right to preserve customary and administrative systems and practices.

Countries should appoint a special focal point within each international organization, and organize annual inter-organizational coordination meetings in consultation with Governments and indigenous organizations, as appropriate, and develop a procedure within and between operational agencies for assisting Governments in ensuring the coherent and coordinated incorporation of the views of indigenous people in the design and implementation of policies. They should provide technical and financial assistance for capacity-building programmes to support the sustainable self-development of indigenous people and their communities. National arrangements should be developed to consult with indigenous people and their communities with a view to reflecting their needs and incorporating their values and traditional and other knowledge and practices in national policies and programmes in the field of natural resource management and conservation and other development programmes affecting them. Governments should incorporate, in collaboration with the indigenous people affected, the rights and responsibilities of indigenous people and their communities in the legislation of each country, suitable to the country's specific situation.

Non Government Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of participatory democracy. Their credibility lies in the responsible and constructive role they play in society. The nature of the independent role played by non-governmental organizations within a society calls for real participation.

Therefore, independence is a major attribute of non-governmental organizations and is the precondition of real participation. NGOs including non-profit organizations possess well-established and diverse experience, expertise and capacity in fields which will be of particular importance to the implementation and review of environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development, as envisaged throughout Agenda 21.

The community of NGOs, therefore, offers a global network that should be tapped, enabled and strengthened in support of efforts to achieve these common goals.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Develop mechanisms to allow NGOs to play their partnership role responsibly and effectively in the process of environmentally sound and sustainable development.
- (b) Promote and allow the participation of NGOs in the conception, establishment and evaluation of official mechanisms and formal procedures designed to review the implementation of Agenda 21 at all levels.
- (c) Ensure that the full potential contribution of NGOs is realized, the fullest possible communication and cooperation between international organizations, national and local governments and NGOs should be promoted in institutions mandated, and programmes designed to carry out Agenda 21.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Review and report on ways of enhancing existing procedures and mechanisms by which NGOs contribute to policy design, decision-making, implementation and evaluation at the individual agency level, in inter-agency discussions.
- (b) Establish mechanisms and procedures within each agency to draw on the expertise and views of NGOs in policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation.
- (c) Review levels of financial and administrative support for NGOs and the extent and effectiveness of their involvement in project and programme implementation, with a view to augmenting their role as social partners.
- (d) Promote and allow NGOs and their self-organized networks to contribute to the review and evaluation of policies and programmes designed to implement Agenda 21.
- (e) Provide access for NGOs to accurate and timely data and information to promote the effectiveness of their programmes and activities and their roles in support of sustainable development.

Countries should encourage and enable partnership and dialogue between local NGOs authorities in activities aimed at sustainable development.

They should involve NGOs in national mechanisms or procedures established to carry out Agenda 21, making the best use of their particular capacities, especially in the fields of education, poverty alleviation and environmental protection and rehabilitation. They should review government education systems to identify ways to include and expand the involvement of NGOs in the field of formal and informal education and of public awareness.

Local Authorities

Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed till date have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub national environmental policies.

As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Local authorities in each country should undertake a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on "a local Agenda 21" for the community.
- (b) All local authorities in each country should be encouraged to implement and monitor programmes which aim at ensuring that women and youth are represented in decision-making, planning and implementation processes.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Full information is to be collected about local authorities to strengthen strategies that need international support.
- (b) Periodic consultations involving both international partners and developing countries could review strategies and consider how such international support could best be mobilized.

Workers and Trade Unions

Efforts to implement sustainable development will involve adjustments and opportunities at the national and enterprise levels, with workers foremost among those concerned. As their representatives, trade unions are vital actors in facilitating the achievement of sustainable development in view of their experience in addressing industrial change, the extremely high priority they give to protection of the working environment and the related natural environment, and their promotion of socially responsible and economic development.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) To promote ratification of relevant conventions of ILO and the enactment of legislation in support of those conventions.
- (b) To establish bipartite and tripartite mechanisms on safety, health and sustainable development.
- (c) To increase the number of environmental collective agreements aimed at achieving sustainable development.
- (d) To reduce occupational accidents, injuries and diseases according to recognized statistical reporting procedures.
- (e) To increase the provision of workers' education, training and retraining, particularly in the area of occupational health and safety and environment.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Seek to ensure that workers are able to participate in environmental audits at the workplace and in environmental impact assessments.
- (b) Participate in environment and development activities within the local community and promote joint action on potential problems of common concern.
- (c) Play an active role in the sustainable development activities of international and regional organizations.

Business and Industry

Business and industry, including transnational corporations, play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a country. A stable policy regime enables and encourages business and industry to operate responsibly and efficiently and to implement longer-term policies. Increasing prosperity, a major goal of the development process, is contributed primarily by the activities of business and industry.

Business enterprises, large and small, formal and informal, provide major trading, employment and livelihood opportunities. Business opportunities available to women are contributing towards their professional development, strengthening their economic role and transforming social systems.

Business and industry, including transnational corporations, and their representative organizations should be full participants in the implementation and evaluation of activities related to Agenda 21.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:-

- (a) Aim to increase the efficiency of resource utilization, including increasing the reuse and recycling of residues.
- (b) Reduce the quantity of waste discharge per unit of economic output.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) To report annually on their environmental records, as well as on their use of energy and natural resources.

- (b) To adopt and report on the implementation of codes of conduct promoting the best environmental practice, such as the Business Charter on Sustainable Development of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the chemical industry's responsible care initiative.
- (c) Promote technological and know-how cooperation between enterprises, encompassing identification, assessment, research and development, management marketing and application of cleaner production.
- (d) Incorporate cleaner production policies in its operations and investments, taking also into account its influence on suppliers and consumers.
- (e) Cooperate with workers and trade unions to continuously improve the knowledge and skills for implementing sustainable development operations.

Scientific and Technological Community

Scientific and technological community includes engineers, architects, industrial designers, urban planners and other professionals and policy makers which play a crucial role to make a more open and effective contribution to the decision-making processes concerning environment and development. It is important that the role of science and technology in human affairs be more widely known and better understood, both by decision makers who help determine public policy and by the general public.

The cooperative relationship existing between the scientific and technological community and the general public should be extended and deepened into a full partnership. Improved communication and cooperation between the scientific and technological community and decision makers will facilitate greater use of scientific and technical information and knowledge in policies and programme implementation. Decision makers should create more favorable conditions for improving training and independent research in sustainable development. The adoption and implementation of ethical principles and codes of practice for the scientific and technological community that are internationally accepted could enhance professionalism and may improve and hasten recognition of the value of its contributions to environment and development, recognizing the continuing evolution and uncertainty of scientific knowledge.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:

- (a) To extend and open up the decision-making process and broaden the range of developmental and environmental issues where cooperation at all levels between the scientific and technological community and decision makers can take place.
- (b) To improve the exchange of knowledge and concerns between the scientific and technological community and the general public in order to enable policies and programmes to be better formulated, understood and supported.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:-

- (a) Review how national scientific and technological activities could be more responsive to sustainable development needs as part of an overall effort to strengthen national research and development systems.
- (b) Promote regional cooperative mechanisms to address regional needs for sustainable development.
- (c) Improve and expand scientific and technical inputs through appropriate mechanisms to intergovernmental consultative, cooperative and negotiating processes towards international and regional agreements.
- (d) Improve links between the official and independent research sectors and industry so that research may become an important element of industrial strategy.
- (e) Promote and strengthen the role of women as full partners in the science and technology disciplines.
- (f) Develop and implement information technologies to enhance the dissemination of information for sustainable development.

Farmers and Fisherfolk

Agriculture occupies one third of the land surface of the Earth, and is the central activity for much of the world's population. Rural activities take place in close contact with nature, adding value to it by producing renewable resources, while at the same time becoming vulnerable to overexploitation and improper management.

The rural household, indigenous people and their communities, and the family farmer, a substantial number of whom are women, have been the stewards of much of the Earth's resources. Farmers must conserve their physical environment as they depend on it for their sustenance. Over the past 20 years there has been impressive increase in aggregate agricultural production.

Yet, in some regions, this increase has been outstripped by population growth or international debt or falling commodity prices. Further, the natural resources that sustain farming activity need proper care, and there is a growing concern about the sustainability of agricultural production systems.

Objectives- The following objectives are proposed for national Governments:

- (a) To encourage a decentralized decision-making process through the creation and strengthening of local and village organizations that would delegate power and responsibility to primary users of natural resources.
- (b) To support and enhance the legal capacity of women and vulnerable groups with regard to access, use and tenure of land.
- (c) To promote and encourage sustainable farming practices and technologies.
- (d) To introduce or strengthen policies that would encourage self-sufficiency in low-input and low-energy technologies, including indigenous practices, and pricing mechanisms that internalize environmental costs.
- (e) To develop a policy framework that provides incentives and motivation among farmers for sustainable and efficient farming practices.
- (f) To enhance the participation of farmers, men and women, in the design and implementation of policies directed towards these ends, through their representative organizations.

Activities- Governments should take active steps to:

- (i) Ensure the implementation of the programmes on sustainable livelihoods, agriculture and rural development, managing fragile ecosystems, water use in agriculture, and integrated management of natural resources.
- (j) Promote pricing mechanisms, trade policies, fiscal incentives and other policy instruments that positively affect individual farmer's decisions about an efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, and take full account of the impact of these decisions on household food security, farm incomes, employment and the environment.
- (k) Involve farmers and their representative organizations in the formulation of policy.
- (l) Protect, recognize and formalize women's access to tenure and use of land, as well as rights to land, access to credit, technology, inputs and training
- (m) Support the formation of farmers' organizations by providing adequate legal and social conditions.

3. CONCLUSION

The effective implementation of all programmes aimed at sustainable development and environmental preservation will depend on the active involvement of these groups in economic and political decision-making processes. The different sectors of the community work with their governments to promote primary environmental care activities like improvement of the environment for youth and children at the household and community level to encourage their participation in achieving the objective of integrated community management of resources, especially in developing countries. Their participation and cooperation is an important component of all efforts to achieve environmental sustainability.

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