

MULTIDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

- The word environment is derived from the French word 'environner' which means to 'encircle or surround'.
- Thus our environment can be defined as "the Social, Cultural and Physical conditions that surround, affect and influence the survival, growth and development of people, animals and plants"
- This broad definition includes the natural world and the technological environment as well as the cultural and social contexts that shape human lives.
- It includes all factors (living and nonliving) that affect an individual organism or population at any point in the life cycle; set of circumstances surrounding a particular occurrence and all the things that surrounds us.

SEGMENTS OF ENVIRONMENT

Environment consists of four segments.

1. Atmosphere- Blanket of gases surrounding the earth.
2. Hydrosphere- Various water bodies present on the earth.
3. Lithosphere- Contains various types of soils and rocks on the earth.
4. Biosphere- Composed of all living organisms and their interactions with the environment.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

- The Environment studies is a multi-disciplinary science because it comprises various branches of studies like chemistry, physics, medical science, life science, agriculture, public health, sanitary engineering etc.
- It is the science of physical phenomena in the environment. It studies about the sources, reactions, transport, effect and fate of physical and biological species in the air, water, soil and the effect of from human activity upon these.
- As the environment is complex and actually made up of many different environments like natural, constructed and cultural environments, environmental studies is inter disciplinary in nature including the study of biology, geology, politics, policy studies, law, religion engineering, chemistry and economics to understand the humanity's effects on the natural world.
- This subject educates the students to appreciate the complexity of environmental issues and citizens and experts in many fields.
- By studying environmental science, students may develop a breadth of the interdisciplinary and methodological knowledge in the environmental fields that enables them to facilitate the definition and solution of environmental problems.

SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Environmental studies as a subject has a wide scope. It includes a large number of areas and aspects, which may be summarized as follows:

- Natural resources- their conservation and management
- Ecology and Biodiversity
- Environmental pollution and control
- Human population and environment
- Social issues in relation to development and environment

These are the basic aspects of environmental studies which have a direct relevance to every section of society. Several career options have emerged in these fields that are broadly categorized as:

(i) Research and development in environment: Skilled environmental scientists have an important role to play in examining various environmental problems in a scientific manner and carry out R&D activities for developing cleaner technologies and promoting sustainable development.

(ii) Green advocacy: With increasing emphasis on implementing various Acts and Laws related to environment, need for environmental lawyers has emerged, who should be able to plead the cases related to water, air, forest, wildlife, pollution and control etc.

(iii) Green marketing: While ensuring the quality of products with ISO mark, now there is an increasing emphasis on marketing goods that are environment friendly. Such products have ecomark or ISO 14000 certification. Environmental auditors and environmental managers would be in great demand in the coming years.

(iv) Green media: Environmental awareness can be spread amongst masses through mass media like television, radio, newspaper, magazine, hoardings, advertisements etc., for which environmentally educated persons are required.

(v) Environmental consultancy: Many non-government organizations, industries and government bodies are engaging environmental consultants for systematically studying and tackling environment related problems.

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

- The importance of environmental studies is that, the current trend of environmental degradation can be reversed if people of educated communities are organized, empowered and experts are involved in sustainable development.
- Environmental factors greatly influence every organism and their activities.
- At present a great number of environmental issues, have grown in size and complexity day by day, threatening the survival of mankind on earth. These issues are studied besides giving effective suggestions in the environment studies.
- The environment studies enlighten us, about the importance of protection and conservation of our natural resources, indiscriminate release of pollution into the environment etc.

Environment studies have become significant for the following reasons:

1.Environment Issues being of International Importance: It has been well recognized that environment issues like global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, marine pollution and loss of biodiversity are not merely national issues but are global issues and hence must be tackled with international efforts and cooperation.

2. Problems Cropped in The Wake of Development: Development, in its wake gave birth to Urbanization, Industrial Growth, Transportation Systems, Agriculture and Housing etc. However, it has become phased out in the developed world. The North, to cleanse their own environment has, fact fully, managed to move 'dirty' factories to South. When the West developed, it did so perhaps in ignorance of the environmental impact of its activities. Evidently such a path is neither practicable nor desirable, even if developing world follows that.

3. Explosively Increase in Pollution: World census reflects that one in every seven persons in this planet lives in India. Evidently with 16 per cent of the world's population and only 2.4 per cent of its land area, there is a heavy pressure on the natural resources including land. Agricultural experts have recognized soils health problems like deficiency of micronutrients and organic matter, soil salinity and damage of soil structure.

4. Need for An Alternative Solution: It is essential, especially for developing countries to find alternative paths to an alternative goal. We need a goal as under:

(1) A goal, which ultimately is the true goal of development an environmentally sound and sustainable development.

(2) A goal common to all citizens of our earth.

(3) A goal distant from the developing world in the manner it is from the overconsuming wasteful societies of the "developed" world.

5. Need to Save Humanity from Extinction: It is incumbent upon us to save the humanity from extinction. Consequences to our activities cause destructing the environment and depleting the biosphere, in the name of development.

6. Need for Wise Planning of Development: Our survival and sustenance depend. Resources withdraw, processing and use of the product have all to be synchronized with the ecological cycles in any plan of development. Our actions should be planned ecologically for the sustenance of the environment and development.

NEED FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS

1. Growing Population: A population of over thousands of millions is growing at 2.11 per cent every year. Over 17 million people are added each year. It puts considerable pressure on its natural resources and reduces the gains of development. Hence, the greatest challenge before us is to limit the population growth. Although population control does automatically lead to development, yet the development leads to a decrease in population growth rates.

2. Poverty: India has often been described a rich land with poor people. The poverty and environmental degradation are mixed with one another. The vast majority of our people are directly dependent on the nature resources of the country for their basic needs of food, fuel shelter and fodder. About 40% of our people are still below the poverty line.

3. Environment degradation has adversely affected the poor who depend upon the resources of their immediate surroundings. Thus, the challenge of poverty and the challenge of environment degradation are two facets of the same challenge.

4. Agricultural Growth: The people must be made familiar with the methods to sustain and increase agricultural growth without damaging the environment. High yielding varieties have caused soil salinity and damage to physical structure of soil.

5. Need to Increase Ground water: It is essential of rationalizing the use of groundwater. Factors like community wastes, industrial effluents, chemical fertilizers and pesticides have polluted our surface water and affected quality of the groundwater. It is essential to restore the water quality of our rivers and other water bodies. Suitable strategies for conservation of water, provision of safe drinking water and keeping water bodies clean should be developed.

6. Development and Forests: Forests serve catchments for the rivers. With increasing demand of water, plan to harness the mighty river through large irrigation projects were made. Certainly, these would submerge forests; displace local people, damage flora and fauna. As such, the dams on the river Narmada, Bhagirathi and elsewhere have become areas of political and scientific debate. Forests in India have been shrinking for several centuries owing to pressures of agriculture and other uses. Vast areas that were once green stand today as waste lands. These areas are to be brought back under vegetative cover. The tribal communities inhabiting forests, respects the trees, birds and animals give them sustenance. We must recognize the role of these people in restoring and conserving forests. The modern knowledge and skills of the forest department should be integrated with the traditional knowledge and experience of the local communities. The strategies for the joint management of forests should be evolved in a well-planned way.

7. Degradation of Land: At present out of the total 329 mha of land, only 266 mha possess any potential for production. Of this, 143 mha is agricultural land nearly and 85 suffer from varying degrees of soil degradation. Of the remaining 123 mha, 40 are completely unproductive. The remaining 83 mha is classified as forest land, of which over half is denuded to various degrees. Nearly 406 million head of livestock have to be supported on 13 mha, or less than 4 per cent of the land classified as pasture land, most of which is overgrazed. Thus, out of 226 mha, about 175 mha or 66 per cent is degraded to varying degrees. Water and wind erosion causes further degradation of almost 150 mha this degradation is to be avoided.

8. Evil Consequences of Urbanization: Nearly 27% of Indians live in urban areas. Urbanization and industrialization has given birth to a great number of environmental problems. Over 30 percent of urban Indians live in slums. Out of India's 3,245 towns and cities, only 21 have partial or full sewerage and treatment facilities. Hence, coping with rapid urbanization is a major challenge.

9. Air and water Pollution: Majority of our industrial plants are using outdated and pollution causing technologies and makeshift facilities devoid of any provision of treating their wastes. A great number of cities and industrial areas have been identified as the worst in terms of air and water pollution. Acts are enforced in the country, but their implement is not so easy. The reason is their implementation needs great resources, technical expertise, political and social will. Again the people are to be made aware of these rules. Their support is indispensable to implement these rules.

INSTITUTIONS IN ENVIRONMENT

Managing natural resources require efficient institutions at all levels i.e. local, national, regional and global. Among the large number of institutions that deal with environmental protection and conservation, a few well-known organization include government organizations like the BSI and ZSI, and NGOs like the BNHS, WWF-1, etc.

- **The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Mumbai**

- **World Wide fund for nature- India (WWF-1), New Delhi**
- **Centre or science and environment (CSE), New Delhi**
- **C.P.R Environmental Education Centre, Madras**
- **Centre for Environment Education (CEE)**
- **Bharati Vidyapeeth University, Institute of Environment Education & Research, Pune**
- **The Salim Ali Center for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)**
- **Wild life Institute of India (WII), Dehradun**
- **Zoological survey of India (ZSI)**
- **The madras Crocodile Bank Trust (MCBT)**
- **Botanical Survey of India (BSI)**