

# Role of Women in Preserving Environment for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth



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*World Bank Report (1991)*

## Abstract

Women have very vital role in preserving wild-life and environment. Time to time women played a significant role in preserving nature. Planet earth is also known as mother earth, which means woman play a significant role in environment and nurturing nature. History has its own examples where women go hand in hand for environment conservation and structural growth. Sustainable development relies upon an impartial appropriation of assets for now and for what's to come. Women's strengthening is a vital factor for accomplishing sustainable financial development, social development, and ecological maintainability. Women play an imperative part in ecological administration and development.

**Keywords:** Environment, Sustainability, Growth, Women, Policies

## Introduction

Their full interest is thusly fundamental to accomplish sustainable development. There is a double reasoning for advancing sexual orientation correspondence. Initially, that correspondence among women and men, equivalent rights, openings, and obligations, involves common liberties and social equity. Besides that, more noteworthy uniformity among women and men is additionally a precondition for (and compelling marker of) sustainable individuals focused development. The insights, interests, requirements, and needs of all kinds of people should be thought about as an issue of social equity as well as on the grounds that they are important to enhance development measures Human life depends on nature therefore Environmental conservation is very essential. Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them.

Strategic Plan 2021-2024 for the implementation of Horizon Europe, which is expected to strengthen the R&I contribution to the SDGs (Directorate General for Research and Innovation, 2021). Since the elimination of gender inequality and the integration of the gender dimension are prioritized crosscutting issues of Horizon Europe, it is crucial that the objectives of sustainability and gender do not function as competing goals but on the contrary can create synergies for increased scientific quality and social impact. However, R&I policy documents such as the Strategic Plan do not elaborate on how gender equality and the integration of the gender dimension as a cross-cutting priority on sustainability on the other, should be able to relate to each other in ways that are mutually promoting. The following report, based on an international research review, has as its goal to enhance knowledge and understanding of gender and the 2030 Agenda/SDGs for poopment in European funds for R&I, strengthening the capacity of Horizon Europe to contribute to socially, economically and ecologically sustainable.

## Women in UN Sustainable Goals

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report, based on an international research review, has as its goal to enhance knowledge and understanding of gender and the 2030 Agenda/SDGs for empowerment of women in European funds for R&I, strengthening the capacity of Horizon Europe to contribute to socially, economically and ecologically sustainable.

### Environmental Movement in India

These initial movements saw a large number of women participating, but they were largely urban women. It was only from the 1970s that rural women spearheaded the environmental movements. In rural India, traditionally, women have been responsible for subsistence and survival for water, food, fuel, fodder and habitat. Women in different parts of the world are actively involved in saving the environment, but there is still limited recognition of their contribution. If sustainable development is a goal of the global community, the role of women in achieving this has to be underscored.

The Millennium Development Goals include both, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Involving women in protecting the environment would help societies develop the sense of responsibility needed to maintain a good balance between humans and the earth's resources. Social movements across the world have drawn attention to a wide range of issues facing society. The women's movement and the environmental movement share a close association as discussed earlier, in the concept of Eco-feminism. With growing evidence of the environmental crisis, the focus on women as agents of change has intensified. Global environmental agencies and institutions now increasingly admit to the key role women play in conservation and protection of environment. Women and Global Environmental Movements.

Environmental movements in India though of recent origin, have intensified in the last few decades and are raising a wide range of questions. Harsh Se thi (a leading scholar on environmental issues) divides the environmental struggles in India, into five categories:

(1) Forest based—forest policy, use of forest resources, etc.

(2) Land use— Industrialization and loss of agriculture and, indiscriminate popularisation of chemical inputs resulting in degradation of land and waterlogging, exploitation of mineral resources, against big dams involving the problem of involuntary displacement of tribals and non-tribals residing in the upstream of the river, environmental degradation including destruction of forests, against pollution created by industries, against overexploitation of marine resources. Movements in India are struggles of the poor – of the dispossessed, the marginalized, the victims of discrimination, Dalits, women, tribals and the small and landless farmers. Most movements are concerned with conserving natural resources to sustain livelihoods. One of the first such ecological movements was that from Champaran district of Bihar in 1917 where people protested against the indigo plantations that were encouraged by the British. Mahatma Gandhi took up the protests and finally the plantations were abolished. Another well-known Gandhian and political movement in the colonial period, was the Salt Satyagraha which fought for people's access to the common resources of salt pans that were being denied to them. Women began manufacturing and selling salt throughout India. Usha Mehta, an early Gandhian activist, remarked that "Even our old aunts and great-aunts and grandmothers used to bring pitchers of salt water to their houses and manufacture illegal salt. And then they would shout at the top of their voices.

### Chipko Movement

The emergence of the modern Indian environmental movement can perhaps be dated to 1972, the year the Chipko movement began. The Terai region of Uttarakhand in the Himalayan foothills was a dense forest area that caught the eyes of the timber merchants.

Large scale deforestation followed commercial forestry, that saw the hills denuded resulting in loss of top soil and occurrence of landslides and floods. Peasant women living in these areas saw their lives getting harder as it took them much longer to collect the daily needs of fuelwood, fodder and water. Over a period of time these women were able to connect the loss of the forests with the changes in their lives. Thus was Chipko born with Bachni Devi and Gauri Devi leading the protests. Most movements have realized the importance of women in environmental protection after the

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Chipko movement. Important movements that are largely driven by women are Deccan Development Society in Telangana started in the year 1983 that works in sustainable agriculture, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, a collective of over two million poor women, working to adopt small-scale clean technologies, such as clean cook stoves and solar lanterns, Navadanya which means 'nine seeds' focuses on biodiversity and traditional seed banks. All these are women centred movements for the protection of environment, livelihoods and for biological and cultural diversity. Women played a very crucial role in solving the environmental related matters.

### The Narmada Bachao Andolan

One of India's longest environmental struggles is the NBA, that started in the 1985 and continues to this day. The NBA is India's largest mass movement protesting against the construction of huge dams on the Narmada river, the largest river flowing into the Arabian Sea. The proposed Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada Sagar will displace more than 250,000 people, submerge over 25 villages and forests. While the anti-dam movement began by protests from small farmers and adivasis spread across Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, it got a momentum with the coming of Medha Patkar. She formed the NBA in 1989, and has been involved since in the struggles of the people to stall the dam. Under Medha Patkar, the NBA uses Gandhian means to protest, that are non-violent and raises larger questions of the ills of modern development..

### Environmental Policies and Women

The gendering of social processes and institutions, and the dominance of values, attitudes and behaviours culturally defined as masculine, influence significantly the conceptualization of environmental problems and the formulation of policies designed to address them. Understanding women's and men's relationships to the environment plays an important role in framing policies for more sustainable use of natural resources. We need to explore the complex linkages and intersections of gender with policy, politics, environmental exploitation and sustainable resource use globally. Gender sensitive policies are those that seek to achieve.

Environmental outcomes while explicitly taking into account both men's and women's opinions, needs, and interests. There is now available an Environment Gender Index (EGI) that ranks countries on how they are translating gender and environment mandates into national policy and planning. The Scandinavian countries perform very well with high scores of EGI, suggesting an integration of gender concerns into environment policies. Out of 72 countries that were ranked on EGI, India is ranked 46. In the 1980s, governments and development agencies became much more aware of the need to consider gender issues in their environmental and natural resource management programmes.

Policy makers first came to appreciate that women 'play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy...and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them'. (World Bank, 1991).

While global environmental policies and projects reflect this change, in India a gender perspective still does not inform policy in meaningful ways. Most environmental policies in India perceive women as either saviours, as victims and as the problem each of which has differing policy implications. Donor agencies and governments began to recognise women as managing their environment on a daily basis, with different needs of resources from men. Social forestry schemes have been redesigned, recognising the diverse uses of tree products and different species preferences of men and women: men typically want timber for construction and fencing, while women need fodder and fuelwood. In water and sanitation activities, women's participation on water committees or in maintaining facilities is becoming the rule rather than the exception.

### Policies at Ground level

Wasteland development projects in India (such as the Bankora projects in West Bengal) have successfully supported women's group efforts to regenerate forest and improve land productivity. They also build on women's greater use rights

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over common property than on privatised lands. Policies in community forestry, social forestry, water management and sustainable agriculture are specifically directed at women. Such understandings have resulted in policies on environment in India acknowledging the contribution of women.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Act in India has given women 33% reservation in decision making bodies in both rural and urban areas. Panchayats, Vana Samarakshana Samitis, Water Users Associations all now see women members. The Self Help Groups (SHGs) that are spread all over the country provide another large platform for implementing policies on environment. The empowerment of women that has been a critical part of development discourse in recent decades in India, has drawn attention to the need for an hour

**Some major policies and programs on environment and their implications for women are briefly outlined:**

### **The National Environment Policy (2006)**

It recognises that a diverse developing society such as ours provides numerous challenges in the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental arenas. All of these coalesce in the dominant imperative of alleviation of mass poverty, reckoned in the multiple dimensions of livelihood security, health care, education, empowerment of the disadvantaged, and elimination of gender disparities. National Forest Policy 1988 and Joint Forest Management (JFM) program of the 1990s mandated that women comprise 33% of the membership of the Vana Samarakshana Samitis. This inclusion of women to a large extent explains the success of the program in different states. The logic behind its creation was that the problem of deforestation could be better handled if the state Forest Departments worked to be joint management agreements with local communities to reforest degraded forest.

### **Biodiversity Act 2002**

It sees important role for women as stakeholders and custodians of traditional knowledge. Historically, women have been the seed keepers in farming communities. Water harvesting programs across India see more women participants working in partnership with the state and NGOs. Water has gender dimensions. Women and men derive different benefits from its availability, use and management. Women were active participants in the Sukhomajri village in Shivalik range of the Himalaya in Haryana that earned nation-wide acclaim for the way in which they had utilised their forests and water to their benefit. When women are involved in water management decisions the community benefits.

### **Gujarat Water Policy (2002)**

This too mentions that women are the most interested users of rural water supply, domestic urban water consumption, in health and sanitation issues as well as agricultural production and sees a crucial role for grassroots women in local water management.

### **Conclusion**

This module has discussed the role of women in environmental movements, particularly in India. It is evident that India has a long history of the involvement of women in environmental causes. In fact, the Chipko movement spearheaded many such movements by women to save the forests, like Green Belt in Kenya, Save the Rainforest in the Amazon and Appiko in the Western Ghats. Women have a stake in conserving environment as they depend on it not just for livelihood but also for daily needs of the household (water, fuelwood and fodder). Gender inequality exists quite sharply in India, as evident from the fact that ownership of land and property is largely with men. Women in movements are fighting to correct this imbalance. Women are not just victims, but also key agents of change in environmental issues.

The exclusion of women in policies is related to the gender politics that privilege men and make women invisible. This is now changing slowly with the mandatory representation of women in local government bodies that has seen a surge in membership of grassroots women. Women now collectively manage common resources, whether it is forests, grasslands, energy, seeds, water, soil or sustainable agriculture. Women can be key players in the move towards a more

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sustainable future and policy makers need to realise this. There needs to be shift from a mere focus on women as an object of policy, to a more nuanced engagement with gender in the framing of any policy.

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