

ENVIRONMENT AND THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Dr. Aparna Jadhav

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

M.M. College of Arts, N.M. Institute of Science & H.R.J. College of Commerce

Bhavan's College, Andheri (West) Mumbai – 400058

Email.: aparna73jadhav@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, resources and pollution are complex environmental issues which know no boundaries and are deeply interconnected to social needs, development and growth. The need therefore, arises to formulate global environmental policies to bridge the gap between the crisis faced and the requirements of the society. Global environmental policies thus aim to address the pressing environmental issues. However, these policies often impact the Developing countries right to development as they are striving to reduce poverty, improve living standards, and achieve economic growth. Financial, political and technological constraints are also faced by Developing countries to implement sustainable development goals.

As protecting the environment is the most important global requirement, achieving the goal of sustainable development and meeting the developmental needs especially of developing countries however, remains a major challenge today.

The research paper therefore focusses on the major concerns of the global environmental policies, how they impact the developmental priorities of developing countries and the major challenges faced by them while implementing these policies.

KEY WORDS:

Environment, Policies, Developed Countries, Developing Countries, Development, Challenges, Justice

INTRODUCTION:

The protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue which affects the well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the world; it is the urgent desire of the peoples of the whole world and the duty of all Governments.¹

Global environmental policies are agreements made by countries, governments, organisations to adopt and implement policies, rules and regulations to address the issues related to the environment. McCormick, John (2001), defined Environmental policy as “a commitment to the laws, regulations, and other policy mechanisms concerning environmental issues and sustainability.”² He further viewed that these policies direct and oversee human activities to prevent harmful effects on the environment

¹ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, p.3, <https://docs.un.org/>

² Ashraf Begum, Jannatul Islam, An overview of the environmental policies to ensure safe environment, European Journal of Business and Management, ISSN 2222-1905 (Paper) ISSN 2222-2839 (Online) Vol.6, No.31, 2014, p. 28, www.iiste.org

surrounding us which includes biophysical environment and natural resources as well as harmful effects on humans.³

According to the Oxford Reference, environmental policy is the statement by a supranational, national, or regional government of its approach to environmental protection.⁴

Environmental policies thus, focus on the problems arising from human impact on the environment on human life, and the entire ecosystem. The scope or the issues generally addressed by them are vast. It includes to control climate change, protecting the biodiversity, wildlife and endangered species, chemical and waste management, ecosystem management, and the preservation of these natural resources for future generations.

Considered to be the building blocks for achieving sustainable development, global environmental policies need to be implemented.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES:

The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) emphasized the principles that ‘man bears the solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.....therefore, through careful planning and management, nature conservation along with wildlife must be given importance while planning for economic development. It views that the just struggle of the peoples of all the countries against pollution should be supported.’⁵

According to the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, States have the sovereign right to use their own resources based on their respective environmental policies but with the responsibility that their activities do not damage the environment across their boundaries. In view of the above various policies have been made and agreed upon at the international level such as-

The Paris Agreement (2015) is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. Adopted by 195 parties it aims to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In recent years, world leaders have stressed the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C by the end of this century.⁶

The Kyoto Protocol (1997) focuses on the adoption of policies and measures related to mitigation, reduction and limitation of the GreenHouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual country’s targets. It also binds developed countries, and places a heavier burden on them under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities” with a view that the responsibility for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere is largely because of activities undertaken by the developed countries.⁷

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Mayhew Susan, A Dictionary of Geography, Oxford University Press, 2009

⁵ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Op. Cit., pp.71-72

⁶ United Nations Climate Change, Process and meetings, The Paris Agreement, <https://unfccc.int/>

⁷ United Nations Climate Change, Process and meetings, The Kyoto Protocol, <https://unfccc.int/>

The *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (GBF) supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.⁸

The *Montreal Protocol* (1987) on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer is also a global agreement to protect the earth's ozone layer by phasing out the chemicals that deplete it. This phase-out plan includes both the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances.

In Rio de Janeiro, *Earth Summit* (1992), urgent global issues of environmental protection and socioeconomic development were addressed. Further, the *Declaration on Global Climatic Change and Biological Diversity* aimed to achieve global sustainable development and promote cooperation at the global level to combat environmental damage, poverty and diseases.

The *Vienna Convention* (1988) highlighted the issue of ozone depletion. It aimed to promote cooperation among nations and exchanged information on the effects of human activities on the ozone layer with the hope that policymakers would adopt measures to combat those activities responsible for ozone depletion. Today, the countries involved meet once every three years to make decisions on important issues including on research and systematic observations as well as financial and administrative matters.⁹

CHALLENGES FACED BY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

In developing countries, development and environment many times contradict and conflict with each other as there is, not only an urgent need to reduce poverty, promote development and improve the overall welfare of the people but also the need to implement policies for protecting the environment to promote sustainable development. In this process, the effects of climate change create difficulties in developing and poor countries as they are fragile and on the path of development. According to the World Bank Report, more than 143 million people could become homeless due to conflict over food and water insecurity and natural disasters caused by climate change by 2050. Almost 20% of earth would also become inhabitable due to extreme heat by the year 2070.¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organisation data also highlights that in the world 124 million people facing crisis due to food insecurity, 76% had been affected by the effects of climate change.¹¹ Further, today poverty rates in low-income countries are higher than before the pandemic. 692 million people (8.5 percent of the global population in 2024) live in extreme poverty - on less than \$2.15 per day.¹²

According to the World Bank estimates by 2030 additional 100 million people can be pushed below the poverty line due to the effects of climate change. In addition, every year due to \$520 billion in annual consumption loss caused by extreme weather, 26 million people are pushed into poverty.¹³

⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, <https://www.cbd.int/>

⁹ UN Environment Programme, Vienna Convention, <https://ozone.unep.org/>

¹⁰ Climate Change and the Developing World: A Disproportionate Impact, March 2021, <https://www.usgic.org/>

¹¹ Climate Change and the Developing World: A Disproportionate Impact, Op. Cit.

¹² World Bank Group, Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024, Pathways Out of the Polycrisis, p.1 <https://www.worldbank.org/>

¹³ Climate Change and the Developing World: A Disproportionate Impact, Op. Cit.

Thus, it cannot be denied that in many developing countries, poverty and environmental degradation are inextricably linked. Regions of Africa and Asia are facing deforestation as trees are being cut down for fuelwood, agricultural expansion, and urbanization. Further, when these resources are depleted, the people who depend on them face even greater economic hardships, pushing them more into poverty. Thus, the relationship between poverty and environmental damage which is often referred to as the “*poverty-environment nexus*” highlights how environmental degradation can worsen economic inequality and hinder the development process. In some cases, the environmental consequences are so severe that it causes the displacement of entire communities, thereby leading to even greater social and economic instability.¹⁴

A large majority of the world’s hungry people also reside in the developing world with women and children being affected the most. Conflict, climate change and chronic inequality have also resulted in nearly one in 11 people around the world sleeping without food each night.¹⁵

Developing countries thus suffer the most by the impacts of climate change. Due to exposure to extreme weather events, they are more vulnerable to adverse impacts on health and agriculture. Their future growth and incomes are also affected as they are less resilient due to weaker infrastructure and institutions. Average welfare losses in the ‘Lower Income Countries’ are about five times larger than in developed countries.¹⁶ Hence, understanding the severity of the environmental crisis and its linkages to development, many developing countries are signatory to the global environment policies. However, they face many challenges while implementing these policies such as -

Financial constraints are among the most significant barriers. Developing countries have limited access to green finance, insufficient public funding, and are dependent on international aid. This creates certain constraints in large-scale environmental initiatives. The *Financing for Sustainable Development Report: Financing for Development at a Crossroads* (2024) highlights that the main reason for creating obstacles for the achievement of SDGs and climate action are the financial challenges.

The ‘Addis Ababa Action Agenda’ in 2015 was therefore adopted by countries for governments, international organizations, businesses and civil society to follow as trillions of dollars are required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The objective was to increase the financial resources and its flow to economic, social, and environmental immediate concerns. However, financing the SDGs has become more difficult due to weak global economy, increasing geopolitical tensions and the crisis faced due to climate change. Currently, around 40% of all the developing countries are facing issues related to debt which affects funding for SDGs.

Thus, the gaps for financing sustainable development are large and increasing. According to the estimates of the international organizations and others annually around \$4 trillion additional investment will be

¹⁴ Vandana Rani, *Environmental Crisis and Developing Economies: Challenges Strategies and Solutions*, Vol. XVI, No.1 Article No. 20, pp. 185-186

¹⁵ World Hunger Facts, <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/>

¹⁶ Jonathan Beynon and Edward Wickstead, October 17, 2024, *Climate Change and Development in Three Charts: An Update*, <https://www.cgdev.org/>

needed for developing countries which represents more than 50% increase prior to the pre-pandemic estimates.¹⁷

The *policies implemented by the international financial institutions* also create constraints for the developing countries. The development banks, who control and provide the resources desperately needed by the developing countries, are promoting the use of economic incentives and other market-based strategies for effective environmental protection. However, it is argued that the donors have been promoting these approaches without the knowledge if they can be successfully implemented in developing countries who possess limited resources and little experience with market-based policies.¹⁸ The concern is that the highly sophisticated instruments have been pushed too hard and too fast, without understanding or acknowledging the fact about the context and conditions for them to be successful.¹⁹ The fact cannot be ignored that many developing nations *lack the infrastructure and expertise* necessary to implement the market-based strategies being recommended by the international development banks.

The UNEP's Adaptation Gap Report (2025) estimated that the climate adaptation finance needs of developing countries range from US\$310 billion to US\$365 billion per year by 2035. Meanwhile, international public adaptation finance flows from developed to developing countries fell from US\$28 billion in 2022 to US\$26 billion in 2023. Hence, the Glasgow Climate Pact goal and the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) adopted to accelerate the goals of Paris Agreement will not be achieved, and many more people will suffer needlessly.²⁰

Developing countries as well as countries in the transition also face issues such as *corruption, favouritism, and poor implementation of environmental policies*. Further, challenges faced may differ from country to country such as lack of training, awareness, infrastructure, capabilities etc. which makes it more difficult to implement the environment policies. It is viewed that the implementation of the SDGs in developing countries is significantly low compared to the developed nations due to the lack of proper infrastructure.

Further, many developing nations face *political, economic, and social challenges* that hinder the achievement of the SDGs. For instance, the African Development Bank (AfDB) reported that economic recessions in African countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Chad, among others have affected the provision of counterpart funding needed for executing various SDG programmes. Additionally, West African countries such as Nigeria, Liberia, and Cameroon had to abandon numerous SDG projects due to widespread corruption and fund misappropriation.²¹

¹⁷ Financing for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/financing-for-development/>

¹⁸ Clifford Russell, Ruth Greenspan Bell, Environmental Policy for Developing Countries, Issues in Science & Technology, vol. XVIII, No.3, Spring 2002, <https://issues.org/greenspan-environmental-policy-developing-countries/>

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty, 29 October 2025 Report, p. ix, <https://www.unep.org>

²¹ Ogunbode Timothy Oyebamiji, Awolola Victor Olanrewaju, Examining awareness, implementation, and challenges of sustainable development goal 6 in rural Osun State, Nigeria, Scientific Reports, 2026 Jan 6, National Library of Medicine, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

Production and use of 'Green Technologies' is also a matter of concern. These are used to produce goods and services with smaller carbon footprints. According to the UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report (2023) the economic inequalities between the developed and developing countries may grow further as developed countries reap most of the benefits of green technologies.

Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan had viewed that 'technological revolution based on green technologies will have a formidable impact on the global economy and developing countries must use these technologies to grow their economies as not using them due to lack of policies or investments can have long-lasting negative implications.'²² Developed economies are seizing most of the opportunities, leaving developing economies further behind.

The UNCTAD's report includes a "frontier technology readiness index" that shows that very few developing countries have the capacities needed to take advantage of frontier technologies such as blockchain, drones, gene editing, nanotechnology and solar power. The index ranks 166 countries based on ICT, skills, research and development, industrial capacity and finance indicators. It's dominated by high-income economies, notably the United States, Sweden, Singapore, Switzerland and the Netherlands.²³

Exemptions from *intellectual property rights* (IPRs) protections are also demanded by the developing countries as they are not able to use it, reproduce or innovate on them. As IPR's gives a temporary monopoly on the inventions it prevents others from reproducing it or innovate using it. Few developing countries have therefore demanded that financial aid should be provided to them for the purchase or to build local green technologies. Further, it is also argued that though investments are done on the increasing installations on low-carbon technology by developed countries in developing countries but the knowledge related to its production is not shared.²⁴

Inger Andersen thus rightly viewed, "Every nation on this planet is facing climate impacts, be they heatwaves, wildfires, floods or desertification, and the associated costs. As action to cut greenhouse gas emissions continues to lag, these impacts are going to intensify, harming more people – particularly the poor and vulnerable – and causing huge economic damage. Developed nations know this. They also know they should be financially supporting developing countries, which are least responsible for the climate crisis."²⁵

CONCLUSION:

Global Environmental Policies play a vital role in dealing with environmental issues. It has encouraged countries to work in cooperation to protect the environment and to achieve the sustainable development goals. However, it can be understood that the implementation of these policies remains a challenge especially for the developing and lower income countries. The development needs, income inequalities

²² UN Trade & Development, Green technologies: Coherent policy action needed for developing countries to reap the benefits, 16 March 2023, <https://unctad.org/>

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Silvia Weko, Economic development — Global, Is clean technology transfer an empty promise? 10 July 2024, <https://sdg-action.org/>

²⁵ Inger Andersen Executive Director United Nations Environment Programme, Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty, 29 October 2025, <https://www.unep.org/>

lack of technology and know-how create constraints for the developing countries to implement them successfully. Therefore, for achieving the global environmental goals, more equitable and inclusive policies are required. The needs of the developing countries should be taken into consideration while making and implementing the policies. The 'one size fit for all' approach will not bring the required success. Developing countries will also need to be more proactive in overcoming their socio-economic and political challenges and in integrating sustainable practises in their development efforts.

Finally, it can be concluded that for the successful implementation of the global environmental policies and the challenges faced by the developing countries, both developed and developing countries will have to work in cooperation understanding the seriousness of increasing environmental concerns.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty, 29 October 2025, <https://www.unep.org>
2. Ashraful Begum, Jannatul Islam, An overview of the environmental policies to ensure safe environment, European Journal of Business and Management, ISSN 2222-1905 (Paper) ISSN 2222-2839 (Online) Vol.6, No.31, 2014, www.iiste.org
3. Clifford Russell, Ruth Greenspan Bell, Environmental Policy for Developing Countries, Issues in Science & Technology, vol. XVIII, No.3, Spring 2002, <https://issues.org/greenspan-environmental-policy-developing-countries/>
4. Climate Change and the Developing World: A Disproportionate Impact, March 2021, <https://www.usglc.org/>
5. Convention on Biological Diversity, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, <https://www.cbd.int/>
6. Financing for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/financing-for-development/>
7. Hempel Lamont C., Environmental Governance – The Global Challenge, Affiliated East-West Press Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1998
8. Inger Andersen Executive Director United Nations Environment Programme, Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty, 29 October 2025, <https://www.unep.org/>
9. Jonathan Beynon and Edward Wickstead, October 17, 2024, Climate Change and Development in Three Charts: An Update, <https://www.cgdev.org/>
10. Mayhew Susan, A Dictionary of Geography, Oxford University Press, 2009
11. Ogunbode Timothy Oyebamiji, Awolola Victor Olanrewaju, Examining awareness, implementation, and challenges of sustainable development goal 6 in rural Osun State, Nigeria, Scientific Reports, 2026 Jan 6, National Library of Medicine, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>
12. Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, <https://docs.un.org/>
13. Silvia Weko, Economic development — Global, Is clean technology transfer an empty promise? 10 July 2024, <https://sdg-action.org/>
14. UN Environment Programme, Vienna Convention, <https://ozone.unep.org/>
15. UN Trade & Development, Green technologies: Coherent policy action needed for developing countries to reap the benefits, 16 March 2023, <https://unctad.org/>
16. United Nations Climate Change, Process and meetings, The Kyoto Protocol, <https://unfccc.int/>
17. United Nations Climate Change, Process and meetings, The Paris Agreement, <https://unfccc.int/>

18. Vandana Rani, Environmental Crisis and Developing Economies: Challenges Strategies and Solutions, Vol. XVI, No.1 Article No. 20
19. World Bank Group, Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024, Pathways Out of the PolyCrisis, <https://www.worldbank.org/>
20. World Hunger Facts, <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/>