# UNIT 11: WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- know about the relationship between women and environment.
- know about the gender based approach to development.
- learn the concept and philosophy of ecofeminism.
- know about the meaning of sustainable development.
- know the concept of sustainable development in the context of India and various agendas taken in this regard.

## 11.2 INTRODUCTION

Trees, forests and deforestation; Water, drought and desertification; Food, production, poverty, and toxic wastes; Environmental destruction and women. And women? Though it seems that it is illogical to connect women with environment, but women has a connection with environment. Mother nature and women can be inextricably connected with each other. As a shared history of oppression exists between both of them by the patriarchal society. A gender-based approach to rights, relations and responsibilities of environmental management is more likely to benefit women. Women

particular needs can then be understood in the context of different environmental experiences and appropriate intervention strategies can be devised and implemented. For a gender- based approach to work, several critical interventions are required to draw women into the environmental planning and decision-making processes. Political and socioeconomic empowerment is essential as this would provide women with the time and financial space necessary to ensure involvement in participative planning processes. For those women marginalised through poverty and experiencing the full brunt of environmental degradation, consultative processes aimed at 'improving their lot' often pose the danger of simply becoming another source of disempowerment. It is simply not possible to collect wood to cook the evening meal and spend time with the electricity service providers discussing and debating the potential dangers of living under powerlines! At all levels of Government, there is a need for the institutionalisation of structures which will promote women's participation in the decision-making process around all environmental issues. This is vital in order to move us beyond the current and often ad hoc approach to consultation with its focus on male leadership structures. A possible way forward is provided by the recently initiated Consultative National Environmental Policy Process (CONNEPP) which opens up the possibility of creating environmental forums in which all sectors of society can have a say in planning and managing their local, regional and national issues

Infact during past decades the issues of gender and their relationships with environment have been internationally acknowledged, especially after the first U.N. conference on environment and human settlements in stock Home 1972. The issue of women place in relation to environment and natural resources got much notice during the U.N. conference on women in Nairobi in 1985 and then during Rio 1992, U.N. conference on environment and development. It was decided during the world summit for social development in Copen Hegen 1995 that women must be involved in decision making at all level to foster sustainable economic development and growth (Friedlander 1996). These are just to cite a few, infact in recent times also developments in this regard is going on.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** What history of oppression exists between women and environment?

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**Q2.** When can women's particular environmental needs be understood?

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**Q3.** What is the CONNEPP about?

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**Q4.** When and where was the first conference on environment and human settlement held?

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## 11.3 CONCEPT OF ECOFEMINISM

According to ecological feminists ("ecofeminists"), important connection exist between the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other.

Ecofeminism state that, a linkage between women and nature exists that arises out of their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society. Ecofeminism has roots in the wide variety of feminisms (e.g., liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radial and socialist feminisms, black and Third World feminisms). What makes eco-feminisms distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e. , the unjustified domination of nature) as a feminist issue. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critique of social issues of domination (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism) of nature (i.e., naturism). According to ecofeminists, nature is a feminist issue. Ecofeminism argues that the

oppression and subordination of women in families and society and the degradation of nature has a common basis for their existence. Both form of domination and exploitation are carried out through constructions of differences into conceptual binaries and ideological hierarchies which allows a systematic justification of domination by subjects classed into higher ranking categories over those in the lower ranking categories. In the Indian context Vandana Shiva plays a major role in the eco-feminist movement.

### 11.3.1 Environment based movements:

The ecofeminist philosophers take empirical data on women-nature connection very seriously to consider nature as a feminist issue. Till date various women led environment movements took place.Among them two are described below-

- **Chipko movement:** In 1974, twenty-seven women of Reni in northern India took simple but effective action to stop tree felling. They threatened to hug the trees if the lumberjacks attempted to fell them. The women's protest, known as the Chipko( Hindi for "to embrace" or "hug") movement, saved 12,000 square kilometers of sensitive watershed. This movement is not only ostensibly about saving trees, especially in indigenous forests. But it is also about important women-nature connections.
- **Green belt movement in Kenya:** The Green Belt movement is an indigeneous grass root non governmental organization based in Nairobi, Kenya that organizes women in rural Canada to plant trees, combat deforestation, restore their main source of fuel for cooking, generate income and stop soil erosion. Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement, grew up in rural community, called Ihithe, in Kenya. She later earned both a bachelor's and master's degree from universities in the United States. Maathai was the first Eastern African woman to receive a PhD from the University College of Nairobi, and was a leader in the ecofeminist movement.

A depth of activism can be seen from the Green Belt Movement when evaluated through the lens of Black feminism. Black feminism

addressed the realities of intersectionality related to identity and the multiple forms of oppression. By making women in Kenya the key stakeholder for this organization, agency is given back. Lived experiences impacting activism are central to effectively organizing a community. Organized seminars, which women from various rural Kenyan communities discussed their experiences of environmental degradation, were used to create solutions from subjugated knowledge to resist marginalization and cultural knowledge about their communities. Two relevant examples of ways women are prevented from obtaining equal capital are by the social and political restrictions in land ownership for women and being prevented from joining decision-making meetings. This organization functions to mitigate oppressive practices by ending land grabbing, deforestation and corruption. This network of 4,000 community groups in Kenya, who volunteer to protect their natural environment, practice day to day liberation, which is a key aspects of Black feminism work. In addition, the Green Belt Movement is able to fight against the normative ideology related to ability and education.



**CHECK YOUR PROGESS**

**Q 5.** What connection do the Ecofeminists try to establish?

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**Q 6.** What does ecofeminists philosophy talks about?

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**Q 7.** When and where did the Chipko movement take place?

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**Q 8.** Whose name is associated with the Green Belt movement?

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## 11.4 MEANING OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development refers to that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. It contains two key concepts:

- the concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given;
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

The term sustainable development began to gain wide acceptance in the late 1980s, after its appearance in *Our Common Future*, also known as *The Brundtland Report*. The result of a UN-convened commission created to propose "a global agenda for change" in the concept and practices of development. The Brundtland report signalled the urgency of re-thinking our ways of living and governing. To "responsibly meet humanity's goals and aspirations" would require new ways of considering old problems as well as international co-operation and co-ordination. Sustainable development is about integration: developing in a way that benefits the widest possible range of sectors, across borders and even between generations. In other words, our decisions should take into consideration potential impact on society, the environment and the economy, while keeping in mind that: our actions will have impacts elsewhere and our actions will have an impact on the future.

### 11.4.1 Three Pillars of Sustainable Development

Society, economy and the environment are the three pillars of sustainable development. No matter the context, the basic idea remains the same – people, habitats and economic systems are inter-related. We may be able to ignore that interdependence for a few years or decades, but history has shown that before long we are reminded of it by some type of alarm or crisis. The fact of the matter is that we depend on ecosystems and the services they provide in order to do what we do: run businesses, build

communities, feed our populations and much more. Whether we consider the more obvious, immediately vital examples – the need for soil that can grow food or for clean water to drink – or the less obvious but equally significant things like oxygen production during photosynthesis or waste processing by bacterial decomposers, we cannot avoid the conclusion that we depend on the environment for our existence. If we damage or destroy the capacity of the environment to provide these services we may face consequences for which we are completely unprepared. In the same way, the long-term stability and success of societies rely on a healthy and productive population. A society (or communities within a larger society) that faces unrest, poverty and disease will not develop in the long term: social well-being and economic well-being feed off each other, and the whole game depends on a healthy biosphere in which to exist. Understanding the complex connections and interdependence of the three pillars requires some effort, and the effort has to be constant.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 9.** What do you mean by sustainable development?

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**Q 10.** From when did sustainable development began to gain wide acceptance?.

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**Q 11.** What are the three pillars of sustainable development?

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## 11.5 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN.

Development affects people in different parts of the world in different ways. It also affects people differently, depending whether they are male or female. In this regard mention may be made of noted environmentalist of India Vandana Shiva. According to her 2004 article *Empowering Women,* Shiva suggests that a more sustainable and productive approach to agriculture can be achieved through reinstating the system of farming in India that is more centered on engaging women. She advocates against the prevalent "patriarchal logic of exclusion," claiming that a woman-focused system would change the current system in an extremely positive manner. She believes that ecological destruction and industrial catastrophes threaten daily life, and the maintenance of these problems have become the responsibility of women.

On 25th September, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the agreed framework for international development.The agenda also applies to all countries rather than just the developing countries. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is more ambitious envisaging the eradication of poverty, the system has a stand-alone Goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ("the 2030 Agenda") entails 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets which came into force on the 1st of January 2016. The specific targets of each SDG are to be achieved by 2030. The 2030 Agenda goes hand in hand with the so-called Addis Ababa Action Agenda, an agreement reached by the 193 UN Member States attending the UN Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 27 July 2015. Among the 17 SDG, the goal 5 in the list is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

SDG 5 includes the following targets:

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere;

- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation;
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation;
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women;
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

In the context of India, it is important to understand how SDGs are framed and what the mechanisms being developed are to deliver them. India has a long history of work and a vibrant women's movement on the ground, which has consistently raised concerns and engaged in advancing the status of women in the country. The movement is diverse and works with an intersectional lens at policy and field levels. Several initiatives have

been underway in India on women's equality. *Towards Equality* (GOI, 1974), the historic and path-breaking first report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, was led by the late feminist academics Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar. The report drew the country's attention to discriminatory socio-cultural practices and how economic and political processes disempowered women. It issued an alert to the problem of the declining sex ratio that in turn led to the development of gender-sensitive policy-making and an increased focus on the education of girls. Forty years later, the second report was prepared by a High Level Committee on the Status of Women (2015). This report highlighted key gender gaps, applying an intersectional lens, and covered the diversity and complexity of women's lives in the country. Along with several other reports—Shram Shakti (1988), Justice Verma Committee (2013), CEDAW (2014)—there has been an extensive and informed analysis of the pathways that can be traversed to enhance women's status. In India, there are about 120 million women who work informally. According to the India Census data (2011), there are 149.8 million women workers, of which 121.8 million and 28 million are in rural and urban areas, respectively. Of these 35.9 million work as cultivators, 61.5 as agricultural labourers, 8.5 in the household industry and 43.7 are classified as 'other workers' (GOI, n.d.). Even though India's economy grew at an average of 7 per cent between 2004 and 2011, its female workforce participation fell by seven percentage points, to 24 per cent from 31 per cent (Pande& Troyer, 2016). This then amounts to more than 25 million women missing from the labour force.

The Indian government in recent years has expressed its commitment to the SDGs and has catalysed several programmatic initiatives, which include Make in India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Skills India, aimed at boosting economic and skill development as well as manufacturing to help lift millions out of poverty (Indian Express, 2016). Other prominent schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Swachh Bharat were rolled out earlier in an effort to advance girls' and women's rights and dignity. Women's groups have suggested that such initiatives

need to be developed with a rights framework that would ensure elimination of structural barriers for girls and women.

Niti Aayog, the new planning body set up in 2014, has mapped the core central schemes of the government in line with SDG areas. In June 2016, Niti Aayog uploaded online a comprehensive list of targets and interventions by the respective ministries with regard to SDGs in India. It is believed that state governments are in the process of formulating their plans based on the SDGs, and these will culminate in a 15-year plan to be adopted by Niti Aayog (Mishra, 2016). Niti Aayog recently presented India's first Voluntary National Review on the implementation of SDGs to the 2017 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York on 19 July 2017. In the meanwhile, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) placed two draft policies, the Draft National Policy on Women (MWCD, 2016) and the Draft Trafficking in Persons Bill (MWCD, 2016), in the public domain for feedback. While some rounds of consultations with women's groups have been held by the National Commission for Women (NCW), and recommendations received online, the final documents are not yet in the public domain. The MWCD has been given a nodal role for Goal 5 of the SDGs. There is no information available to date about the setting up of any dedicated task force for the SDGs, nor one specifically for contributing to and monitoring the gender targets under Goal 5. Women's groups have suggested establishing consultative mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the policies and plans. In the meanwhile, some informal groups and coalitions of civil society have set up platforms to share and monitor developments in the context of the SDGs, such as a National Coalition—Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA), which also released a civil society report on SDGs: Agenda 2030 in July 2017. Many more such instances can be cited.

Despite all such commitments, a greater political will is needed to transform gender relations and inequalities. There is need for deeper commitment in enacting sustained institutional reforms and in changing patriarchal, feudal and misogynist mindset. The key challenge for India is to understand more deeply why, despite constitutional guarantees on

women's equality and rights and the adoption of several policies and programmatic directions over the years, patriarchal mindsets and misogyny continue to persist and limit women's freedom, voices and dignity.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 12** Who is Vandana Shiva?

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**Q 13** What is the 2030 agenda about and who adopted it?

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**Q 14** What is theSustainable Development Goal 5 about

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**Q 15** When was the NITI AAYOG set up?

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## 11.6 LET US SUM UP

- There is a deep connection between Mother nature and women. As a shared history of oppression exist between both of them by the patriarchal society..
- Ecofeminists were a group of feminists who started dwelling in this relation. According to them important connection exist between the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of non-human nature on the other.
- Society, economy and environment are the three pillars on which sustainable development is based. And women form an important component of both society and economy throught all the ages of history and even now. So the sustainable development has in its agenda to improve the condition of the women lot. And in this regard

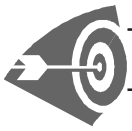
various agendas and policies are already implemented. In the context of India too these agendas are in full swing but still now much progress in regard to the condition of women has not happened in reality, this may be due to deep rooted patriarchal mindset of both men and women.



## 11.7 FURTHER READING

1) Datar, C.2011 : Ecofeminism Revisited: Introduction to the Discourse. Jaipur. Rawat Publication.

2) Quinby, Lee (1990), " Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance," in *Reweaving the World*, ed. Diamond and Orenstein.



## 11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q.1)** A shared history of oppression exist between women and environment.

**Ans to Q. 2)** Women's particular environment needs can be understood in the context of different environmental experiences only.

**Ans to Q.3)** CONNEPP is about opening up of the possibility of creating environmental forums in which all sectors of society can have a say in planning and managing their social, regional and national issues.

**Ans to Q.4)** The first conference on environment and human settlement eas held at Stock Holm in 1972.

**Ans to Q.5)** The Ecofeminists try to establish the connection between the treatment of women, people of color and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of non-human nature on the other.

**Ans to Q.6)** According to Ecofeminist philosophy nature is a feminist issue. Ecofeminism argues that the oppression and subordination of women in families and society and the degradation of nature has a common basis for their existence. Both form of domination and exploitation are carried out through constructions of differences into

conceptual binaries and ideological hierarchies which allows a systematic justification of domination by subjects classed into higher ranking categories over those in the lower ranking categories.

**Ans to Q.7)** The Chipko movement took place in Reni in Northern India in the year 1974.

**Ans to Q.8)** The name of Waangai Maathai is associated with the Green Belt Movement.

**Ans to Q.9)** Sustainable development is that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.

**Ans Q.10)** From the late 1980's sustainable development began to gain wide acceptance.

**Ans Q.11)** Society, Economy and Environment are the three pillars of sustainable development.

**Ans Q.12)** Vandana Shiva is a noted environmental activitist of India.

**Ans Q.13)** The 2030 agenda is about sustainable development as the agreed framework for international development and it was adopted by the U.N General Assembly.

**Ans Q.14)** The sustainable Goal 5 is about achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

**Ans Q.15)** The NITI AAYOG was set up in 2014.



## 11.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Short Questions** (Answer within 150 words)

(I) Where does Ecofeminism has its roots?

(II) What are the two key concepts in sustainable development?

**(B) Long Questions** ( Answer within 300-500 words)

(i) Describe in detail about the Green Belt movement.

(ii) Explain the impact of sustainable development on Women in the context of India.