In order to address the problem of environmental pollution, it is imperative to make some deliberations on the various dimensions of the pollution problem. Usually, pollution of the environment has strong positive linkage with poverty and it is negatively correlated with social equity, gender, human right etc.

We cannot take the environment for granted. Humanity has a responsibility not only to each other, but to the environment as well, as the environment has long sustained us and can only continue to do so if we do not destroy it. Technological solutions, such as more environmentally friendly technologies, while extremely important, do not address underlying political, social and economic causes. Just as doctors highlight the need to prevent illnesses in the first place, and resort to cures when needed, so too do we need to understand these deeper issues in a more holistic manner. The interconnectedness needs more recognition if environmental degradation, poverty and other global problems can begin to be addressed.

Concentrating on one dimension without others is similar to the blind men looking at just a part of the elephant. A form of environmentalism that ignores humanity as an integral part of the solution, of economic dogma that forgets about our basic needs, and of forms of development that ignore
environmental concerns all add up to numerous problems for the world’s people and fragile ecosystems. Some of these problems are so big; we do not even see them even when we think our eyes are open.

4.1 ISSUES RELATING TO POLLUTION

Former Soviet president and chairman of Green Cross International, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote the forward to the State of the World 2005. He begins: “Five years ago, all 191 United Nations member states pledged to meet eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015.” The Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting of gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development.

The MDGs were originally adopted to address global inequalities. But in the post-9/11 world, Gorbachev and the World watch Institute say achieving the MDGs—and a matching set of environment-oriented targets outlined at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa—would help break the cycle of poverty, infectious disease, and environmental degradation that threatens global security.

4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

The dominant environmental protection paradigm manages, regulates, and distributes risks. It also institutionalizes unequal enforcement,
trades human health for profit, places the burden of proof on the “victims” and not the polluting industry, legitimates human exposure to harmful chemicals, pesticides, and hazardous substances, promotes “risky” technologies, exploits the vulnerability of economically and politically disenfranchised communities, subsidizes ecological destruction, creates an industry around risk assessment and risk management, delays cleanup actions, and fails to develop pollution prevention as the over-arching and dominant strategy.

The environmental justice framework rests on developing tools, strategies, and policies to eliminate unfair, unjust, and inequitable conditions and decisions. The framework attempts to uncover the underlying assumptions that may contribute to and produce differential exposure and unequal protection. It brings to the surface the ethical and political questions of “who gets what, when, why, and how much.”

4.3 ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Natural resources are scarce. Conscious choices have to be made as to their allocation and use. Are they to be put to the reckless use of the rich and powerful in the name of technological and scientific advancement, or are they to be made available to the disadvantaged, many of whom depend on nature for survival? Very often, for the setting up of large and heavy industries, forests are cut down and the land cleared. The long term consequences for the short term gain have not been considered.
The point in question is not whether we should conserve environment at the cost of development, but to evolve a strategy of sustainable development, one that will enhance the quality of life in a framework of ecological balance and social justice. It is with this perspective that we see environmental and ecological rights as human rights. Every developmental project, be it the construction of a dam, laying of a railway track, or starting a large chemical factory, must have human face. That is;

1. People must not be denied their very right to existence and livelihood nor be uprooted and displaced without taking responsibility to adequately compensate and rehabilitate them.

2. The health of the people cannot be compromised in the name of development as seen by Bhopal gas tragedy.

4.3.1 The right to a wholesome environment

All over the world, people are experiencing the effects of ecosystem decline, from water shortages to fish kills to landslides on deforested slopes. The victims of environmental degradation tend to belong to more vulnerable sectors of society—racial and ethnic minorities and the poor—who regularly carry a disproportionate burden of such abuse. Increasingly, many basic human rights are being placed at risk, as the right to health affected by contamination of resources, or the right to property and culture compromised by commercial intrusion into indigenous lands. Despite the evident relationship between environmental degradation and human suffering, human rights
violations and environmental degradation have been treated by most organizations and governments as unrelated issues. Just as human rights advocates have tended to place only civil and political rights onto their agendas, environmentalists have tended to focus primarily on natural resource preservation without addressing human impacts of environmental abuse. As a result, victims of environmental degradation are unprotected by the laws and mechanisms established to address human rights abuses. Human rights activism presents a significant opportunity to address the human consequences of environmental degradation and can serve as a catalyst for inspiring ideas and action in the real world.

Principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration established a foundation for linking human rights and environmental protection, declaring that man has a fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and wellbeing. It also announced the responsibility of each person to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. Almost twenty years later, in resolution 45/94 the UN General Assembly recalled the language of Stockholm, stating that all individuals are entitled to live in an environment adequate for their health and wellbeing. The resolution called for enhanced efforts towards ensuring a better and healthier environment.

In contrast to the earlier documents, the 1992 Conference of Rio de Janeiro on Environment and Development formulated the link between
human rights and environmental protection largely in procedural terms. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development proclaims as follows: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided. Rights to information, participation and remedies in respect to environmental conditions thus formed the focus of the Rio Declaration. In addition to Principle 10, the Declaration includes provisions on the participation of different components of the population: women (Principle 20), youth (Principle 21), and indigenous peoples and local communities (Principle 22). Public participation also is emphasized in Agenda 21.

Human rights treaties of the past decade are fewer in number than the total of environmental agreements adopted during the same period and most of those that have been concluded have been at the regional level. In general, global treaties have not included specific reference to the environment or to environmental rights. In contrast, even prior to the Rio Conference, regional instruments contained provisions on environmental rights. Although they predate the conference they are included below, as
are the relevant provisions of the global Convention on the Rights of the Child and I.L.O Convention No. 169.

Resolution 1819 of the General Assembly of the OAS of June 2001 asserts, among other things, that the effective enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to education and the rights of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as full enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, could foster better environmental protection by creating conditions conducive to modification of behaviour patterns that lead to environmental degradation, reduction of the environmental impact of poverty and of patterns of unsustainable development, more effective dissemination of information on this issue, and more active participation in political processes by groups affected by the problem.

4.3.2 The Right to Life

Environmental deterioration could eventually endanger life of present and future generations. Therefore, the right to life has been used in a diversified manner in India. It includes the right to survive as a species, quality of life, the right to live with dignity and the right to livelihood. In India, this has been expressly recognised as a constitutional right. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution states: ‘No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedures established by law.’ The Supreme Court expanded this negative right in two ways. Firstly, any law affecting personal liberty should be reasonable, fair and just. Secondly, the Court recognised several unarticulated liberties that were implied by article
21. It is by this second method that the Supreme Court interpreted the right to life and personal liberty to include the right to a clean environment.

In addition, the Constitution (Forty Second Amendment) Act 1976 explicitly incorporated environmental protection and improvement as a part of state policy. Article 48 A, a Directive Principle of State Policy, provides that: 'The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.' Moreover, article 51 A imposes a similar responsibility on every citizen 'to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures, Therefore, protection of natural environment and compassion for living creatures were made the positive fundamental duty of every citizen. Both the provisions substantially send the same message. Together, they highlight the national consensus on the importance of the protection and improvement of the environment. The wordings of the articles show that the nature of such obligation under the state policy is non self-executing.

The court recognised the right to a wholesome environment as part of the fundamental right to life. It also indicated that the municipalities and a large number of other concerned governmental agencies could no longer rest content with un-implemented measures for the abatement and prevention of pollution. They may be compelled to take positive measures to improve the environment. Another expansion of the right to life is the right to livelihood (article 41), which is a directive principle of state policy. This
extension can check government actions in relation to an environmental impact that has threatened to dislocate the poor and disrupt their lifestyles. A strong connection between article 41 and article 21 was established in the 1980s. The court opined that the expression ‘life’ assured in article 21 has a much wider meaning which includes a right to livelihood, better standard of living, hygienic conditions in the workplace and leisure facilities and opportunities to eliminate sickness and physical disability of the workmen.

The third aspect of the right to life is the application of public trust doctrine to protect and preserve public land. This doctrine serves two purposes: it mandates affirmative state action for effective management of resources and empowers the citizens to question ineffective management of natural resources. Public trust is being increasingly related to sustainable development, the precautionary principle and bio-diversity protection. Moreover, not only can it be used to protect the public from poor application of planning law or environmental impact assessment, it also has an inter-generational dimension. India is one of the ten most industrialised countries in the world. The past years of economic liberalisation have seen the country move towards a market economy and greater global integration. The industrial licensing system has been largely dismantled, foreign companies can now invest liberally, import tariffs on capital goods have been substantially lowered and macro economic indicators have improved.

However India’s rapid economic, industrial growth and population are causing severe environmental degradation and pollution problems with local, regional and global impacts. With the success of economic growth,
India has simultaneously witnessed a significant deterioration in the quality of its air, water and soil. Encouraged by an atmosphere of freedom and articulation in the aftermath of the emergency, the Supreme Court strengthened Article 21 in two ways: First, it required laws affecting personal liberty also to pass the tests of article 14 and article 19 of the Constitution, thereby ensuring that the procedure depriving a person of his or her personal liberty be reasonable, fair, and just. Second, the court recognized several unarticulated liberties that were implied by article 21. By this second method, the Supreme Court interpreted the right to life and personal liberty to include the right to a wholesome environment.

Article 21 protects the right to life as a fundamental right. Enjoyment of life including the right to live with human dignity encompasses within its ambit, the protection and preservation of environment, ecological balance free from pollution of air and water, sanitation without which life cannot be enjoyed. Any contra acts or actions would cause environmental pollution. Environmental, ecological, air, water pollution etc., should be regarded as accounting to violation of article 21.

4.4 ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

The phrases environmental justice and environmental equity may be interpreted broadly to describe the perceived fairness in the distribution of environmental quality across groups of people with different characteristics. In this sense, the environmental impact of any human activity might be evaluated to determine the distribution of environmental amenities and risks
among people categorized according to any population characteristic, including gender, age, race, and place of residence, occupation, income class, or language. In the current political context, however, the phrases refer more specifically to the distribution of health risks resulting from exposure to toxic substances in the residential or occupational environments of different racial, ethnic, or socio-economic groups. Environmental justices are most actively advocated today.

Environmental equity advocates generally believe that racial and ethnic minorities bear a disproportionately large share of environmental risk due at least in part to racial discrimination. Although the level of exposure to toxic substances also is related to income level, they point out that income alone cannot account for the uneven distribution of some environmental hazards. For example, in families with annual incomes of less than $6,000, 68% of African-American children suffer high blood-lead levels, but only 36% of white children are similarly afflicted. Within the group of equity advocates, opinions differ. Some believe that discrimination is intentional and results in significant health effects. Others believe it is “de facto”, resulting from Government neglect or indifference, unreined market forces, historical patterns of housing, choice of occupation, lack of political and economic power and differences in education or acculturation, and more an issue of civil rights than one of public health significance. (Linda Schierow, 1992)²

Others deny, or at least doubt, the existence of discernable racial patterns in the distribution of environmental risks. They attribute higher
disease rates among minorities to other factors, such as problems in health care delivery or lifestyle. People reside in the vicinity of waste treatment facilities and other potential pollution sources, these people believe, because they are attracted by employment opportunities, favourable prices for real estate, and the relatively high standard of living (compared to other affordable areas) provided by a facility’s contribution to the tax base of the area.

There is a third view that overlaps with the first two. Its proponents may be characterized as open-minded or skeptical, depending on one’s sympathy for their position. These individuals, who are often academically trained scientists, neither believe nor disbelieve that, inequities occur, arguing that carefully controlled research is needed to investigate the issue because evidence accumulated to date is inconclusive. All groups agree that any effects of racial discrimination are likely to be intertwined with the effects of poverty, but the third group is more likely to argue that the complexity of the problem defies solution. Assuming that inequities exist, whether racial or socio-economic, there is the critical question: What should be done about it, and who should do it? Equity advocates have argued that all levels of government are responsible for allowing discrimination to occur. Some stress the importance of community empowerment to influence public policy.

4.5 THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Poverty and third world debt has been shown to result in resource stripping just to survive or pay off debts. For example, Nepal and Bangladesh have suffered from various environmental problems such as increasingly
devastating floods, often believed to be resulting from large-scale deforestation. Forests around the world face increased pressures from timber companies, agricultural businesses, and local populations that use forest resources. Some environmentalists, from rich nations especially, also raise concerns about increasing populations placing excessive burdens on the world's resources as the current major source of environmental problems.

This makes for a worrying situation for third world development and poverty alleviation. However, an environment-only approach risks “blaming the victims.” While humans are largely responsible for many problems of the planet today, not all humans have the same impact on the environment. It is important to consider, for example, that the consumption of just the world's wealthiest fifth of humanity is so much more than the rest of the world, as highlighted at the beginning.

Poverty and inequality are major factors in environmental damage. The World watch Institute says “nothing in cites people to deplete forests, soils or water supplies faster than fear that they will soon lose access to them” (2002). Studies have shown that squatters who have long-term rights treat their land much more carefully than those with no rights, but still not as well as people who own their land outright. (Tom Mc Kegney, 1994)

The reality in many countries is that fertile farm land is often controlled by corporate elites and used to grow products for export. Poor people are forced onto marginal land to grow food or harvest fuel-wood. The result is usually erosion and loss of fertility that leaves the land lifeless.
Lack of community organizations or effective democracy also reduces the chance that countries will impose or enforce environmental protection. This is why agencies like OXFAM-Canada place greatest emphasis on “developing” communities where people have a say in decisions that affect their lives and environment. Canadians have always been generous in meeting the emergency needs of individuals in crisis. OXFAM-Canada’s philosophy is that it is just as important to build democratic community structures so that people can identify needs and mobilize local resources to meet them. This community-based approach is increasingly being adopted by other development agencies.

Over 850 million people live in regions that are in various stages of turning into deserts. The UN estimates it would cost $4.5 billion per year to stop this desertification process. That’s the equivalent of two days of global military spending. We have had a government that was prepared to spend $100 million each on...There is considerable evidence that NGOs working at the community level provide the most cost-effective way of providing aid and ensuring it actually improves conditions for the poor. But less than 10 percent of Canada’s aid budget is used to support NGO projects and to match private donations to development agencies.

This is not a futile exercise. Environmental pressure groups have contributed to a change in public attitudes toward waste and pollution. Non-governmental development agencies could similarly force governments to reconsider their definitions of “development” and “security.” As the UN
Development Program report said “The voices of NGOs have prompted many actors to reassess their policies, as with the impact of structural adjustment (externally imposed debt-repayment schemes) on the poor. They have also enforced changes in the behaviour of multinational corporations, as in the marketing of infant formula and the use of fertilizer and pharmaceutical drugs in developing countries.”

4.6 DEVELOPMENT FACTS

• 250,000 children die each week from malnutrition and disease.

• 7,000,000 children in the developing world die each year of common childhood diseases.

• 80 per cent of the world’s population lives in the “south”.

• 93 of every 100 babies are born in the “south”.

• 1.3 billion people lack access to clean water.

• The estimated income disparity between the world’s richest and poorest people is 150 to 1. Only one-quarter of Canada’s international aid goes to the 10 countries with three quarters of the world’s poor. 800,000 people in Bangladesh—mostly women—have started businesses or farms with loans of less than $75 from the Grameen Bank. The program fights environmental degradation and malnutrition by selling tree seedlings and vegetable seeds to borrowers.
• Industrial nations have one fifth the world’s population but use 10 times more energy than the rest of the countries combined. Industrial nations produce 71 per cent of the world’s carbon monoxide (Tom Mc Kegney, 1994)

4.7 ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS AND GENDER INEQUITY

The fact that men and women often do not experience the effects of pollution in the same way can be attributed to three factors: economics, biology, and gender roles. The effects of environmental degradation are pushed down the socio-economic ladder and felt more acutely by those who cannot afford the means to buffer themselves from environmental deterioration. Everywhere in the world, women are disproportionately clustered at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Biological differences between women and men, including important differences in hormonal structure, mean that women and men are susceptible to different health effects from exposure to toxins and other pollutants. For example, the globally escalating rate of incidence of breast cancer in women is possibly due to exposure to industrial pollutants, especially to the synthetic organo-chlorines which are ubiquitous in industrialized countries. Everywhere in the world, women do different work, in different places, and they fill different social roles, than do men. Women everywhere have primary responsibility for meeting the daily needs of their families. This often means that, literally, women are in the front lines of exposure to toxins in the environment. Because of their social location, (which also often has a real location
correlate), women are much more likely than their male counterparts to have early and prolonged exposure to water-borne pollutants, pollutants in the food chain, and household pollutants including indoor air pollution.

Sims and Butter (2000, 2002) have sketched a comprehensive framework to address the gender dimension in the field of health and environment. There are many processes affecting access to and quality of resources differently for both sexes, resulting in different hazards and exposures. Although complex and interconnected, there are three broad categories to consider when addressing gender, health and environment: biological differences, the gender division of labour, differences in power, status and visibility. (Maureen E Butter, 2006)

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. This led to changes in project design and implementation. 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). The exclusion of women from environmental projects - through outright neglect or belief in the gender neutrality of projects - would be a recipe for project failure. Subsequently, donor agencies came to see women as especially vulnerable, their responsibilities as day-to-day environmental managers make women both victims of and contributors to
the natural environment’s degradation and pollution. The new style of environmental project accordingly asks whether natural resource users are male or female and is concerned to ‘reach the right people’ in the delivery of services. For example, 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 wood fuel. And, in water and sanitation activities, women’s participation on water committees or in maintaining facilities is becoming the rule rather than the exception. Women’s participation is increasingly seen as crucial to the success of water supply and sanitation activities Men may initially resist women taking on new roles but once aware of the benefits, their attitudes can change. Not only are services more effective as a result, but perceptions about gender roles may alter. Setting up informal women’s organisations alongside formal institutions can be more effective. But the location, timing and structure of meetings have to be planned to suit women, if they are to participate. Key decisions on which to consult women include: the silting of water facilities; choice of technology; the selection of pump caretakers, water committee members and other personnel; and the choice and management of the financing system. If women are well represented at higher levels, grassroots participation will be more effective. Special care must be taken that women’s participation does not become just a source of cheap labour. To date, women’s involvement has been largely in voluntary construction work or as water committee members, in stereotyped roles: fund-raising, collecting fees, health and hygiene education, or cleaning. With appropriate training,
women can also be involved in technical and managerial aspects of water supply and sanitation. There is scope, for example, to involve women in the management of credit schemes and revolving funds. Pollution is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide array of assaults on the environment. Broadly defined, it is best understood as the introduction of substances into the natural environment which cannot readily be assimilated or rendered harmless by normal biological processes (Crump, 1991; Rodda, 1991).\(^5\)

Pollution is usually categorized into one of three types, although there is considerable crossover and transfer among the three: air pollution (gas, chemical, and particulate emissions), maritime and freshwater pollution (runoff and dumping of chemical, industrial, biological, and waste effluents), and land pollution (dumping and disposal of wastes of all kinds). Because the planetary ecosystem is maintained by large-scale circulatory processes such as the hydrological cycle, air circulation systems, and ocean currents, pollution released in one place is seldom contained: typically, pollutants are circulated over wide areas (even globally) and throughout large ecosystems.\(^6\)

Feminist perspectives and the work of women have made significant contributions to our understanding of environmental issues and of pollution. Feminists have been particularly active in re-framing the ways in which environmental relations in general, and pollution in particular, is understood. Women’s Studies scholars, especially in the sciences, have produced trenchant critiques of the extent to which the ideological underpinnings of modern Western science are environmentally destructive (Harding, 1986).\(^7\)
Indeed, feminists argue, the conduct of Western “industrialized” science, and the widespread reliance on scientific rationality, is responsible for much of the egregious environmental damage we now face. (Shiva 1989)\textsuperscript{8}.

Recent feminist scholarship further challenges the prevailing paradigm of environmental understanding which frames environmental problems as disruptions in physical systems. If environmental problems are framed as physical phenomena, then feminist, humanistic and cultural analysis is marginalized. It is clear to feminists that the environmental crisis is not just a crisis of physical ecosystems; it is, rather, a crisis of culture. Feminist environmental analysis re-focuses attention on “agency” - the institutions, behaviours, and norms that produce our dominant “culture of pollution” (Seager 1993)\textsuperscript{9}.

4.7.1 Genderised Institutions

Since these institutions, behaviours and norms are gendered, it is clear that a feminist analysis of gender, power, and agency is crucial to understanding the current environmental crisis. Everywhere, militaries and multinational corporations rank at the top of the list of agents of environmental destruction; militaries are especially powerful agents of destruction and are responsible for a disproportionate share of global pollution of all kinds. At the same time, many women activists and scholars have forged a vision of recasting human relations to the environment with an “eco-feminist” sensibility. Although there is a considerable range of eco-feminist thought, most eco-feminists share a core understanding that the earth is a living
entity, that the web of life is interconnected, that all life is dependent on the health and integrity of the whole, and that degradation of the environment is the product of a cultural imbalance (Caldecott & Leland 1983, Diamond & Orenstein 1990). Women activists and scholars have been instrumental in focusing attention on the differential impacts of pollution. The effects of exposure to pollution cannot be generalized across a population; they will vary considerably with age, class, race, nationality, gender, geographic location and social location. Feminists are particularly active in exploring the ways in which the health impacts of pollution is different for men and for women. Women, whether in Vietnam, India, or Canada, often experience distinctive - or singular - health problems from exposure to environmental pollutants. The timing, prevalence, and rate of particular cancers (especially breast cancer), reproductive disorders, and chronic health impairments are typically very different in women than in their male counterparts. Until women started organizing around these issues, the impacts of pollution on women’s health were ignored by mainstream environmental organizations, by official health monitoring organizations, and by the biomedical research establishment. Questions about women’s health and pollution, until recently, were not examined, not taken seriously, and not followed up. In consequence, women’s health has suffered and the opportunity for early detection of pernicious environmental degradation was, in many cases, forfeited. Women community activists and researchers in the medical and environmental fields are increasingly effective in raising these issues and insisting that women’s experiences of pollution be disaggregated from the more typically generalized studies of pollution impacts.
Changes in thinking regarding women’s health in relation to the environment over the last decade have been radical and profound. These changes reflect the revolution in thought regarding the environment itself—the “green” process and its culminating expression in the Earth Summit of 1992 and the parallel acceptance of women’s and gender issues as an essential and integral part of the development process. For women, the recognition and acknowledgement of their close connection which has both positive and negative connotations for their health and well being. While the local environment has traditionally provided women with food, plant and medicine resources, diminishing resources and environmental degradation in the last decades has created additional pressures and increased their work loads. Women are less represented in the “official” channels of environmental assessment, organizing, and policy-making. They are grievously under-represented in the environmental sciences, in government agencies with environmental responsibility, and in the large international environmentalist organizations. However, a number of women who have been able to speak from positions of legitimated authority have made significant contributions to our understanding of pollution. Dr. Rosalie Bertell, an American now living in Canada, and Dr. Alice Stewart, of England, have both challenged the nuclear establishment and have conducted research into the health effects of exposure to radioactive materials. Both researchers have compiled compelling evidence to support their conclusions that exposure to low levels of nuclear radiation, even officially-designated ‘acceptable risk’ levels, is extremely dangerous. The late Rachel Carson, in 1962, alerted the world to the dangers of pesticide pollution; in her book,
Silent Spring, she wrote, “What we have to face is not an occasional dose of poison which has accidentally got into some article of food, but a consistent and continuous poisoning of the whole human environment.” The clarity of her argument and the strength of her evidence eventually led to the banning of DDT and dozens of other pesticides in the US and in many other industrialized nations. (Joni Seager, 2006).¹¹

Rapid urbanization exposes women to certain hazards such as inadequate housing, exploitative and insecure employment in the informal sector and physical violence. Exposure of women to pesticides and other toxins, either through employment in agri-business or from domestic use has not yet been addressed in depth. Large proportion of chronic often undiagnosed and untreated health problems accrue to women performing the supposedly “safe” jobs ascribed to them as women’s work.

4.8 ENVIRONMENTAL ENTITLEMENTS

UNDP explains the concept of “environmental entitlements”, which is particularly relevant in terms of fostering participatory rights and introducing a more “social” approach to addressing poverty issues:

Many donors and policy-makers – especially since UNCED – have begun to embrace more localized, community-based approaches to natural resource management and sustainable development. This approach is informed by an understanding that the various groups in a society often experience environmental problems in very different ways. Others are
advocating an alternative, ‘environmental entitlements’ approach to understanding poverty-environment linkages, which shifts the emphasis from questions of resource availability to those of access, control and management and highlights the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping people’s resource endowments and entitlements. At the root of this entitlements approach is an understanding that poor people’s livelihoods are more likely to depend upon a mix of skills, assets, access to natural resources, social capital, and income-generating activities than on any single income source. Thus, improving their lot will require holistic rather than scrotal interventions. Most IOs (International Organisations) and UN agencies with a mandate to address development-related issues, and multilateral financial institutions in particular, have placed the issue of poverty high up on their agendas and programmes of action, particularly prepared for the Rio+10 processes. Most of them establish an explicit link between poverty and the environment, explaining how the poor suffer more harshly the consequences of environmental problems and frequently adopting approaches similar to those introduced in the 1987 report from the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland report, Our Common Future). This is the case of, for example, the World Bank, the IMF and the regional development banks in Asia and Africa.

Certain specialized agencies and IOs complement this approach by establishing, when appropriate, a third linkage with their particular field of competence, be it for example health in the case of the World Health Organization (WHO) or food in the case of the Food and Agricultural
Organization (FAO). Activities of organizations such as the latter, whose objectives include the protection of a certain good or value that is also protected as a human right, will be examined separately below in relation to the specific right under consideration.

When addressing the issue of poverty, human rights language is rarely used. However, this does not preclude some clear-cut links being made between the alleviation of poverty and the attainment of sustainable development, taking into consideration the human rights implications of such a connection. In addition to reports and general policy documents prepared by the above mentioned organizations, there are some interesting developments regarding the – direct or indirect – guarantee of the right to an adequate standard of living in relation to the protection of the environment.

Both environmental degradation and poverty alleviation are urgent global issues that have a lot in common, but are often treated separately. Human activities are resulting in mass species extinction rates higher than ever before, currently approaching 1000 times the normal rate. Human-induced climate change is threatening an even bleaker future; at the same time, the inequality of human societies is extreme.

The United Nations 1998 Human Development Report reveals that, “Globally, the 20% of the world’s people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures—the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%” To highlight this inequality further, consider that approximately 1 billion people suffer from hunger and some 2 to 3.5 billion
people have a deficiency of vitamins and minerals. Yet, some 1.2 billion
suffer from obesity. One billion people live on less than a dollar a day, the
official measure of poverty. However, half the world — nearly three billion
people — lives on less than two dollars a day. Yet, just a few hundred
millionaires now own as much wealth as the world’s poorest 2.5 billion
people. Issues about environment, economics, and politics are inter-related
through the way humans interact with their environment.
CHAPTER REFERENCE


