



GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

**School of Gender and Development Studies
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Course three titled Gender and Sustainable Development. It is four credits course, having four blocks and thirteen Units.

This course is designed and developed with the following objectives.

- To demonstrate the role of women in natural resource management and sustainable development.
- To appraise the impacts of climate change on women in agriculture and allied sectors; and
- To discuss the interrelationship between gender agriculture and food security.

Environmental problems and degradation of resources impact men and women differently. The research established the fact that women are close to nature and men are close to culture. The relationship with nature and culture makes women inferior to male members. Women are closely related to nature, and they use nature and natural resources sustainable manner to make resources regrow and provide various benefits to society the entire year. With the recognition of women's contribution to sustainable development and establishing the same, there was an emergence of the Women, Environment and Sustainable Development (WED) approach in the 1980s. After the emergence of WED approach, there was a shift in the perspective. In earlier, women were considered as victims of environmental degradation. Later, women are considered as managers for the sustainable use of natural resources. There are various movements like Chipko and Apiko movements to establish the close interrelations with women and nature. There are global and national level movements, conventions and conferences to protect and preserve natural resources. In this course, we are learning Ecofeminism, national and international movements, Sustainable Development Goals, the relationship between health, water and sanitation and food security.

“the link between women and the environment can be seen as structured by a given gender and class (caste/race) organisation of production, reproduction and distribution. Ideological constructions such as of Gender, of nature and of the relationship between the two, maybe seen as (interactively) a part of this structuring, but not the whole of it. This perspective I term feminist environmentalism” (Agarwal1991:8)

Block one discussed linkages between Gender and sustainable development. It has two Units. The titles of the Units are Discourse of eco-feminism and deep ecology and relevance of Gender in Sustainability. Block 2 is titled Gender and Natural Resource Management. The Units included in the second blocks are Gender and energy, Gender and water, Gender, land and soil, Gender and biodiversity. The third block is Gender and climate change. The experts designed and developed block three to make our learners examine the

impact of climate change on agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry. The Units in the Climate change block titled climate-smart agriculture, climate change and animal husbandry, climate change and fisheries, climate change and agroforestry. We have given further readings at the end of the Unit to assess the impacts of climate change on women's various sectors. The final block in this course talked about Gender, health, nutrition and food security.

Happy Learning

G.Uma and Mita Sinhamahapatra



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BLOCK 1

**LINKAGES BETWEEN GENDER AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Block

Block one in the Course Gender and Sustainable Development has two Units, titled Linkages Between Gender and Sustainable Development. These units build a strong theoretical foundation for our learners by discussing ecofeminism, national and international conventions and the interrelations among Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). You may have heard of the term 'ecofeminism' already. In Unit One, The Unit writer makes you achieve a greater understanding of the term within different contexts. The Unit writer further examines the definition of ecofeminism and then looks at some related theoretical debates. She explained both western and indigenous approaches to ecofeminism. With the help of this theoretical framework, the Unit writer makes you gain a critical perspective on how the subjugation of the environment is linked to that of women. You will also learn about the role of different women's movements and their struggle to preserve the dignity of our environment—unit one designed and developed with the following objectives.

- Critically analyse the notion of ecofeminism as theory and as a practical solution while approaching problems regarding gender and the environment;
- Describe the subjugation and oppression of the environment and women by a more extensive system or culture; and
- Explain how different cultures come to see the environment and the conflicts in these multiple perceptions.

Unit two titled "Relevance of gender in sustainability indicators". Sustainability and gender are prominent aspects of the development agenda since the 1980s. Gender shapes the motives, means, and opportunities for men and women to contribute to sustainability. Particular attention is given to evidence on closeness to nature, conservation, rights to resources, opportunities to exploit resources, and constraints to adopting sustainable practices. Definitions and concepts of sustainability vary, and one of the most often cited is that of the Brundtland Commission: "Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" Although the emphasis is generally on physical or environmental sustainability, many analysts also pay attention to social and economic sustainability. With this introduction, the Unit covers interrelation among Sustainable Development Goals, placing gender in SDGs, Theoretical Foundation, Focus on Sustainability and Neo-Liberalization of Sustainability discourse.

Happy Learning

G.Uma amd Mita Sinha mahapatra

UNIT 1 ECOFEMINISM (Discourse of Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology)

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Defining Ecofeminism
- 1.4 Theoretical Debates
 - 1.4.1 Nature-Culture: The Seeds of Eco feminism in the West
 - 1.4.2 Prakriti and Shakti: Towards a More Indigenous Approach inEco feminism
- 1.5 Alternative Ideas
- 1.6 Environmental Activism: Chipko and Beyond
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Unit End Questions
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise
- 1.10 References
- 1.11 Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

You may have heard of the term ‘ecofeminism’ already. In this unit, we will try to achieve a greater understanding of the term within different contexts. We will examine the definition of ecofeminism, and then look at some related theoretical debates. We will look at both western and indigenous approaches to ecofeminism. With the help of this theoretical framework, we will try to gain a critical perspective on some of the ways in which the subjugation of the environment is linked to that of women. You will also learn about the role of different women’s movements and their struggle to preserve the dignity of our environment.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Critically analyse the notion of ecofeminism as theory and as a practical solution while approaching problems regarding gender and the environment;
- Describe the subjugation and oppression of environment and women by a larger system or culture; and
- Explain how different cultures come to see the environment and the conflicts in these multiple perceptions.

1.3 DEFINING ECOFEMINISM

Before we begin to examine various aspects related to ecofeminism, let us first attempt to define it. It is important to understand that ecofeminism as a theory is a combination of ideas that support the fight for women's empowerment and that of a viable, sustainable environment. Braidotti (1994) defines ecofeminism as 'the feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation'. Thus in the most simple terms, ecofeminism comes to regard an association between women and nature as essential to the way both are treated. For both women and nature are mistreated and subjugated—and as Francoise d'Eaubonne, the French feminist credited with the emergence of the idea of ecofeminism, comes to note—this is because of the 'Male System'. She suggests that the only way to save the environment is through the destruction of male power by women. Yet, ecofeminism is much more than a mere disapproval and destruction of the male power. It is very much embedded in the way women are closely associated with the environment in the multiple ways in which they are perceived. And within feminism too there is no one way of looking at this relation, for as a theory ecofeminism is linked to diverse thoughts and practices.

1.4 THEORETICAL DEBATES

As a movement, ecofeminism has come to be influenced in different ways by different strands of the feminist movement. Thus, Jaggar notes that liberal feminism is least able to associate itself with ecology for its orientation remains centered on white, middle class concerns. And even though radical feminism uses the association between women and nature as a rallying point in its emancipator politics, their argument is seen as far too simplistic to carry forward a movement. However, Social Ecofeminism comes across as an interesting new movement that is influenced by Marxism and is based on the recognition that gender is socially constructed and recognizes the urgent need to develop conceptual tools that will look at ecological and social change vis-à-vis gender.

Bina Agarwal (2007) lays out certain key ideas within ecofeminism. First, there is an important connection between the domination and exploitation of nature. Second, in patriarchal thought women are seen to be closer to nature—and men as closer to culture. Nature in turn is seen to be inferior to culture, and therefore women are inferior to men. Third, the domination and oppression of nature and of women have occurred together. Women have an important stake in ending the domination of nature, thereby bringing together both human and non-human nature. Fourth, the feminist movement and the environment movement must stand together to create a more equitable and just society. Both the movements have a lot in common and are can create a common perspective, praxis and theory. In this sense, Agarwal notes that the eco-feminist movement has an ideological base that attributes the source of the subordination and domination of women in existing systems of beliefs and practices, and representations. And the supporters of this movement are calling out to all men and women to rethink and recreate their

relationship to nature. Ecofeminism emerged as a response to the large-scale destruction of the environment and the subsequent impact on women. Interestingly, the correlation between a tortured and exploited environment and a subjugated and oppressed sex was evolved in the West. But in order to create a workable theory of action the need to look at cross-cultural debates and issues led to the emergence of other strands of thought within ecofeminism. This was also in answer to large-scale ecological movements in developing countries where the ties between nature and women were seen to be of more relevance.

In the next section, we trace the links theoretical influences of the ecofeminist movement, with reference to the West—and later look at the other cultural understanding of the movement. In the latter case, the focus is especially on India as over the past two decades it has spawned many ecological movements lead primarily by women.

1.4.1 Nature-Culture: The Seeds of Ecofeminism in the West

Sherry Ortner's (1972) formulation linking nature to women and culture to men remains the definitive ideological influence of the ecofeminist movement. The nature-culture approach looks at the close relation that women share with nature and the resultant insubordination of both nature and women.

In trying to understand the reasons behind the insubordination of women in society, Ortner identifies three levels of the problem. The first level refers to the universal fact of the inferior position of women in society, which is however socially and culturally endorsed. Ortner wishes to examine the reasons behind it. Second, are the cultural symbolisms, ideologies and social structural arrangements that are related to women but differ from one culture to another. Third, what are the means by which women revolt or try to suppress these structures of oppression and insubordination. Ortner is categorical that in examining the inferior position of women she is looking at universals, or facts applicable across cultures that place women in a disadvantageous position.

Yet, before one begins to associate women with nature and men with culture it is important to understand that the categories of nature and culture themselves and are cultural categories—social constructions. According to Ortner, culture therefore implicitly recognizes and asserts the difference between nature and natural phenomena, and itself. Here the focus is on the difference in the operation of nature and the operation of culture—and a situation wherein culture sees itself as capable of controlling the operation of nature and nature itself. Thus, Ortner says, “This culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from, but superior in power to, nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform—to ‘socialize’ and ‘culturalize’ nature” (1972, p.11).

Having established the universal domination of nature by culture, Ortner creates the foundation of her examination of how women come to be

identified with or symbolically seen to be closer to nature, as opposed to men, who are associated with culture. Women are placed within the format of nature primarily because of their physiological, bodily make-up. Her body and its functions are thought to condition her social roles and psychic (emotional, mental) structure in such a way that removes her from cultural functions, by putting constraints on her.

Ortner draws from her understanding of **Simone de Beauvoir's** *Second Sex* to look at how women are perceived to be physiologically closer to nature and therefore inferior. For Beauvoir the role that women play in society is an extension of the physiological state. The physical make-up, development and functions of the human female are "...to a great extent than the male, a prey of the species" (1972, p.14). That is many major organs and processes within the female body are actually geared towards the reproduction of the human species rather than the personal needs of the woman herself. Take the example of the female breasts, which according to Beauvoir serve absolutely no purpose to a woman's personal health and can be done away with. Similarly menstruation and the ovarian cycles are geared towards creating conducive conditions for bearing children. For Beauvoir, it is almost as though the woman has to adapt to the needs of the egg, rather to her own requirements. Most of the above processes are a source of discomfort and may often in many cultures be the reason for segregation and isolation, as is the case with menstruation.

The above reasoning for women's inferior role leads to a larger point that Ortner wishes to make. Though descriptive, the above analysis points to how in reproducing the human species, women are handicapped, while men in being excluded—directly—from the task of reproduction are at an advantageous position. Men create more than life—they create 'meaning'. By meaning Ortner and Beauvoir are referring to things that exist beyond the level of mere existence and the survival of the species. For men are able to create inventions of novelty and value meant for the future—while women by virtue of their physiognomy are 'doomed' to repeat and recreate the human race. In creating technology and symbols, man is involved in the production of things and values that are eternal and everlasting, whereas women are creating only perishables or human beings.

Interestingly, in such a formulation men are seen to be associated with culture through the invention and participation in hunting and warfare. Acts that do not create—but destroy. Women are nature in that sense that they create what man destroys. Yet on the other hand women are very much part of the cultural enterprise. They are part of the socialization process that trains the young to join society. Though socialization as part of childrearing is an extension of childbearing (which in turn restricts her to the household and the domestic domain), yet it is a role that mediates between nature and culture. In this sense women come to be seen as *intermediaries*.

This intermediate status of women is read as the middle position in a hierarchy where culture is at the top and nature down below. Ortner sees that the role of being intermediates may stem from *mediating* between nature and culture. Women remain close to nature, but also important participants in the

social and cultural process through their role in socialization. Though relegated to the domestic milieu of childbearing and childrearing their importance as primary agents in the transmission of cultural values to the younger generation (boys' socialization is taken over by men once they reach puberty, while that of girls' continue with their mother) cannot be wished away. However this mediation with culture can be relegated to a lesser domain. So, Ortner notes that the participation of women in the domestic domain is seen as a form of lesser culture, in opposition to the higher culture that men belong to and cultivate, such as religion, law, arts, etc.

Take for instance cooking - Ortner notes that cooking as an act within the domestic domain is a job for women, primarily because of their natural association with the household. However, cuisine or cooking as an art remains the domain of men and therefore superior to and separate from everyday cooking. For Ortner, the universal devaluation of women comes from the separation of nature and culture—and within culture the difference between low and high culture. Either way, whether in their association with nature or with low culture, women remain inferior and subordinated. In all this, tellingly, women accept their subordinate role as intermediaries and reproducers of the natural order, just as nature accepts the domination of man and culture.

The above theoretical background forms the foundation of the Western ecofeminist movement. **Bina Agarwal** notes that the biological essentialism inherent within this formulation (for which Ortner too has been extensively criticized) does not take into account the way women are viewed in different cultures. It places woman as a unitary category (2007, p.319) ignoring cultural, class and ethnic differences. Second, with such an ideological framework the ecofeminist movement depends on a logic of subordination that ignores the ways in which domination is exercised—beyond the realms of ideology and at the level of economics, politics, etc. Third, the above approach does not look at the ways in which ideological constructs come about—both historically and culturally, and how they become predominant within society. That is, what institutions, social and economic relations make such ideas of subordination dominant. Finally, the association of women with nature does not take into account women's everyday association with nature. It pushes forth a kind of 'essentialism' that looks at female essence as static and unchanging. Agarwal finds such a stance deeply problematic as notions regarding nature, culture and gender have already been seen to be socially and historically constructed.

However proponents of this theory find support in ecofeminists such as **Ariel Salleh** who places women's reproductive functions within the domain of nature. She attempts to move forward by placing ecofeminism within a mode of praxis or movement. Salleh (1993) is very clear about the importance of a discourse that places women and nature as similarly represented, if not treated, especially symbolically. She endorses the linking together of the feminist and environmental movements to put forth an alternative world view. This is tellingly evident in her critique of another strand of environmental theory, called Deep Ecology, that Salleh sees as representing the requirements of white, middle class men who see nature as a means of

reconnecting with the human 'ego' and is removed from any activist concerns regarding the environment. Salleh wishes to stress on a theory that can also form the basis of an active movement wherein excluded and oppressed groups within society such as women are members and frontrunners.

In her attempts to create a theory that is tied to a praxis rooted in life needs and the survival of the habitat, Salleh recommends looking at the hands-on experiences of those women who are closest to their habitats, such as Third-World women. Ecofeminism according to her should be a strategy for social action that includes both men and women. In fact in answer to critics, such as the deep ecologists, who maintain that women are as much responsible for the destruction of the environment in their dependence upon labour-saving devices and technology—Salleh notes that women continue to be relegated to their 'natural' role as housekeepers even with the advent of such technology. She is categorical in noting that this view emerges from a biased, Western standpoint that does not take into account the lack of any such labour-saving technology at the disposal of poor Third-World women, who live and work with their own labour, close to nature. She also insists that the acknowledgement of the feminine role as 'carers' and backbones of families is an important aspect of the ecofeminist movement.

Vandana Shiva finds the Western ecofeminist movement as lacking in the way it presents the association between women and nature. Her formulation of a more inclusive and dynamic theory, draws on Indian cosmological and philosophical thinking to project a new relationship between gender and nature. Having examined the movement within the western context, let us now turn to India to examine indigenous approaches to ecofeminism.

1.4.2 **Prakriti and Shakti: Towards A More Indigenous Approach In Ecofeminism**

In ancient Indian philosophy the association of women with nature is even more deeply embedded than in Western thought. However, unlike in the West, the opposition between the male and the female, and in turn between nature and culture, does not exist in Indian philosophical thought. **Vandana Shiva** (1988) finds this to be the hallmark of a culture that looks at both the male and female as the expression of the same person—and not separate from each other.

In Indian cosmology the world is produced through the opposing play of destruction and creation, and cohesion and disintegration (Shiva, 1988). The dynamic force that comes out of this process is called *Shakti*—which is literally the source of everything and in turn pervades everything. And the manifestation of *Shakti*, or the feminine principle in the form of an energy or power is called *Prakriti*, or nature. "Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of *Shakti*, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos, in conjunction with the masculine principle (*Purusha*), *Prakriti* creates the world" (Shiva, 1988, p.38). Thus here person and nature or *Purusha-Prakriti* are a duality in unity. They are not opposing to each other, but rather they are "...inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man" (Shiva, 1988, p.40).

Shiva notes that the association of women exclusively with nature is not a revolutionary thought but is actually the source of the subjugation and exploitation of women and nature. She finds Beauvoir's formulation to be characteristic of Western feminist thought that accepts the duality and opposition of the male and female—further placing the woman as weak and therefore oppressed. In fact the answer to the woman problem, for Beauvoir, lies in masculinizing women. Liberation will come through in a world where women are free to assume masculine values. For Shiva such a formulation is problematic especially when the categories of masculine and feminine are themselves socially constructed. Western gender theory has placed them within biological essentialism. However Shiva supports another line of thinking that looks at a transgender ideology wherein the feminine principle is seen in both men and women. This feminine principle is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, “One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, *Purusha* from *Prakriti*” (Shiva, 1988, p.52). Nowhere else is this more evident than in ancient philosophies, especially those found in the Third World where, “Women and nature are associated *not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life*” (author's emphasis, 1988, p.47).

Despite there being a unified approach towards nature in terms of men and women, Shiva reiterates that women do share a special relationship with nature. This is seen in the following ways. First, in the ways in which women's interaction with nature was reciprocal—for they found themselves to be close to nature in the way both produced and replenished the earth and society. Second, women are in partnership with nature by not only using its resources, but also giving it back. They do not own nature like property, but insist on participating in the process of ‘to let grow and to make grow’. Last, with nature women are producers who help sustain society and relations. There are proponents of a subsistence economy and the inventors of the first productive economy (Shiva, 1988, p. 43).

In such a situation any kind of division and oppression of nature and of women is a result of colonialism. Shiva finds colonialism to be a source of the destruction of nature and of women's work. The coming in of science and technology has broken the synthesis between nature, masculine and feminine principles—and this has been replaced by an unequal and hierarchical relationship. Development is seen as maldevelopment for women and nature by perpetuating domination and centralization through patriarchal control.

Take for instance the colonial destruction of forests in India. Shiva notes that the forest in India is a symbol of life and fertility. Known as Aranyani or the Goddess of the Forest, she is worshipped in different regions by different names. The forest has always been the highest expression of harmony and communal habitat—honoured and protected as sacred groves. This is symbolic of the community's sense of deep ecological understanding. Colonial rule was established with the destruction of the natural resources of India, such as forests. The colonial practice of commercial forestry and the scientific management of forests, involving the marking out of forest area as ‘reserved’ and protected, was the beginning of the displacement of traditional indigenous knowledge and women's subsistence economy. The above

practice involved the erosion of forests and the rights of the local people on its produce.

Shiva insists that the role of marginalized women and communities becomes especially important for they are living proof of the harmful effects of progress, as also they have the holistic and ecological knowledge of what the protection and production of life involves. Women of the Third World are the best representatives of such a category.

Bina Agarwal finds Shiva's theory different from the Western feminist perspective in the sense that it explores aspects that the latter have left out in their formulation, especially the links between development and developmental change and their impact on the environment, as well as the aspect of people's dependence on the environment for their livelihood.

Yet, the theory is not without some drawbacks. One, Shiva's theory places all Third-World women under one category. This kind of generalization that collapses cultural, economic and social differences is also a kind of essentialism, according to Agarwal. It sees all Third-World women as close to nature, especially in terms of their knowledge base and dependence.

Two, within India itself the theory does not take into account other historical, cultural and social processes and ideas that may have impacted the relationship with nature. The dependence on Hindu philosophical thought does not apply to other systems of thought and practices in India. Besides within Hinduism itself there are very many different strands of understanding that may not support what Shiva lays out in her theory.

Three, Agarwal contends that Shiva does not include the impact of pre-colonial structures and practices upon the environment and on women. Inequality in the form of caste, and class have long existed within the Indian social framework, which Shiva ignores, giving precedence to colonial oppression and the coming in of modern scientific thought as the primary reasons for the destruction of the environment and the suppression of women. The above criticisms point to the fact that within ecofeminism there is still space for change and reformulation. As Salleh notes, the movement's dynamism lies in its theoretical stance that adapts to changes occurring across the world as well as giving due importance to alternative theories that combine a more holistic approach to environment and gender issues.

In the following section, you will learn about some alternative approaches to ecofeminism which will help you to think critically about ways in which these debates may be resolved.

1.5 ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

The need of the hour remains the formulation of a theory that is an inspiration for a movement uniting the fight for the protection of the environment, and women's rights. Such a theory should also unite rather than alienate women and men across the world. ecofeminism has tried to do so in many ways, but of late the need to encapsulate aspects that point to the diversity in women and their ties to the environment has led to the formulation of alternative

theories that aim to be more inclusive.

Bina Agarwal formulates the idea of *feminist environmentalism* wherein the link between women and environment is seen through the dynamics of gender, class, caste and race, and through the organization of production, reproduction and distribution. In terms of being a theory for action, “such a perspective would call for struggles over both resources and meanings” (Agarwal, 2007, p.324).

This approach involves the inclusion of ideas such as the appropriation of resources by dominant groups in society through control over property, and power. The ways in which this control is exercised, both ideological and institutional, is a sign of privilege and therefore needs to be examined further.

In terms of feminist ideology, Agarwal talks of notions regarding gender and the actual division of work especially in relation to the environment. On the environmental front there is a need to look at the relationship between people and nature in terms of exploitation and appropriation by a few.

Agarwal goes on to discuss the importance of feminist environmentalism in relation to the Indian experience. Here she analyses the different reasons behind the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. Needless to say the dynamics behind this oppression goes beyond the simplistic understanding of nature as similar to women—and therefore subject to similar treatment by those in power. It includes issues such as class and caste control and other social, economic and political problems.

Forms of environmental degradation such as water and wind erosion, falling surface or ground water, indiscriminate sinking of tubewells, amongst many others are connected to exploitation at various levels of power and governance. The *process of statization* or the state’s increasing control over forest commons has been noted since colonial rule. This has led to large scale degradation and deforestation. Post-independence the government has actively pursued the policy of alienating the people from their rights in common forest land. Locals do not have access to forests from which they drew their sustenance and livelihood. The process of privatization of common resources has meant that forests are now being increasingly commercially exploited. The erosion of community resource management systems; exclusion of local people, especially women from control over these resources; excessive population growth, and its pressures on natural resources; and the negative impact of technology such as that used in the Green Revolution have only made the environmental issue more serious.

These processes are happening at the macro level wherein the state is becoming oblivious of how its policies are impacting the micro-local populace—especially women and children. Agarwal lays out certain aspects of how this process of statization, increasing technology and privatization is affecting the marginalized population of women and children. First, the preexisting division of labour based on gender places women in poor peasant and tribal households as the chief source of sustenance. They are hugely dependent upon the environment, taking fuel from firewood found in the forest—environmental degradation and the state control of forest land is

pushing women and young girls to travel further for fuel or firewood. The stress on getting food and basic necessities that were earlier available close to hand, is creating an unequal division of labour where women have to labour harder. Second, the systematic differences in allocation of resources in terms of gender—is evident in the huge mortality and morbidity rates amongst women and children, especially girls. Third, inequalities in men's and women's resources also include a disadvantaged position in the labour market. Fluctuations in weather patterns mean more uncertainty in agricultural work—leading to availability of primarily seasonal work. It is these reasons amongst others that create the need for a movement that looks at the processes by which the degradation of the environment is often connected to the marginalization of communities and groups such as women.

1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: CHIPKO AND BEYOND

Interestingly, the cause that ecofeminism wishes to fight for around the world has been women-led environmental activism. In India as way back as the 1970s a wave of environmental movements spread thanks to the dedicated involvement of women fighting to safeguard their environment and resources. The most famous of these was the *Chipko* movement that gathered steam in the hills of India affecting village after village.

Radha Kumar (1993) lays out a dateline of the movement to show how much the involvement of women affected the way the government framed its policies around environmental policy. The movement began in 1973 in Gopeshwar in Chamoli District in northern India. It began with the women of the village hugging (*chipko* in Hindi) the ash trees of the nearby forest that a sports goods contractor from Allahabad had come to cut. This was followed by one of the movement founders, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, influencing the villagers of Reni, to take action against the auctioning off of the forest neighbouring the village. The men of the village decided to approach the government, even after which the indiscriminate cutting of trees began. Seeing this the women led by a 60 year old widow Gaura Devi went ahead and hugged the trees, foiling the attempts of the contractors to cut them.

Again in June 1975 women stopped the felling of trees in a forest near Gopeshwar village by clinging to them. The *Chipko* movement spread in many areas of Uttaranchal—especially in the districts of Chamoli and Terhi-Garhwal.

The movement began to organize itself and called itself the *Dasauli Gram Swarajya Mandal* that helped form women's organizations such as the *Mahila Mangal Dals*. This helped women in becoming a part of the way in which they could claim their rights to decide what was done to the forests and fields. The characteristic of the environmental movement is seen especially in terms of how it has been led by women at the local level, with the men often not supporting their activism. In most cases the movement has involved a face-off between the male-dominated village panchayats and the *Mahila Mangal Dals* (women's groups). The struggle for the protection of the environment has

often taken on an anti-men stance. Conflict over grazing and rights over resources has been reflected in the way men have tried to coerce women into toeing their line—through threats and beatings. Often in support of the contractors the men and the panchayats have tried to dissuade environmental activists from fighting for their cause. Interestingly, as Kumar notes, the *Chipko* movement takes on different issues for the purposes of activism. Anti-mining, timber contracting and anti-alcohol movements trace their original source to the movement for environmental rights. The anti-alcohol movement for instance is in response to the ill-effects of alcohol addiction in rural areas. Not only does the addiction lead to violence against women, it also impacts the men's health and most importantly leads to a squandering of household income. This affects women directly—especially in rural and tribal areas. In the latter, many tribes have willed forest land to contractors under the influence of local, country-made liquor. The movement for prohibition therefore is seen to be necessary to protect both the environment and women.

Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini was formed in 1977 in support of prohibition. In 1983, in a mass meeting held by the organization alcoholism was seen to be a major problem. From 1965-71, anti-alcohol activism gained momentum leading to prohibition in many areas. In February 1984, villagers in a district in Almora successfully managed to bring to book an agent in illicit liquor, as well as the government official who was involved in smuggling the liquor. The movement then spread to different villages where the Vahini activists went about destroying liquor, liquor shops—and made liquor vendors apologize in public.

In order to analyse the impact of the environmental movement in India, three examples are presented here. Each of the three movements are over the span of at least three decades—and show the struggle that women have to undertake to fight for their rights and those of the environment. Interestingly, the rights of women and the environment seem to compliment each other in each of the instances discussed here. The examples are all from India.

Madhu Sarin (2001) looks at the politics of the forest and the role of women in environmental activism in the Kumaon-Garhwal region. In Uttarakhand, even though women have been closest to the environment in terms of livelihood and cultivation, yet the forests have been under the control of the men. Under colonial rule, the British rulers took over most of the forest land and made it inaccessible to the local population under this elaborate system of scientific management of forests that placed them under the category of reserved areas. Denotified or preserved forest land was an attempt by the government to have access to areas rich in natural resources. Post-independence, the government introduced the notion of *Van Panchayats* which would be involved in joint forest management (JFM). The idea of JFM came about through the *Chipko* struggle that fought for involvement of the local population with their natural resources. However, the panchayats in this area had been traditionally male-dominated while the movement had been overwhelmingly led by women. Therefore, the unofficial, informal community forest management (CFM) was formed by women in favour of their role in safeguarding natural resources and the forests in the area. The

CFMs in the area where opposed to the male-dominated *Van Panchayats* and the government-controlled JFMs. The first point of conflict began with the formation of village forest joint management (VFJMs) which were funded by the World Bank in association with the Uttaranchal Government. The till now autonomous *Van Panchayats* came under the control of the VFJMs. This was because women had begun to take over the reins of the *Van Panchayats*, and with the help of government programmes such as *Mahila Samakhya*, which aims to empower women, they were doing an outstanding job of protecting the forests and safeguard the community's resources. The VFJMs represented opposition from the village men and the forest department.

In Khirakot, a village in the Someshwar valley in Uttaranchal, the women found their access to the forest blocked by a miner who was building a soapstone mine in the area. When the mine dust began to settle on their land making it difficult for them to plant their crops and plough the field, the women launched a protest against the miner. In retaliation the miner filed criminal cases against the village men, each of those who had protested against the setting up of the mine. The women in turn were not intimidated (even though the men were) and collected money from each village household to fight the case. The contractor further tried intimidation in the form of destruction of property, and stoning of the villagers' houses. The activists in return blocked the route to the quarry and did not let labourers to work in the mine. Finally, on a visit to the area the district magistrate was moved by the struggle of the village women and immediately recommended cancelling the case. This was further followed by the closing of the mine in 1982—a true victory for the women's movement (Kumar, 1993).

Another very significant instance of women's involvement in the fight against human and environmental injustice is the infamous Bhopal gas tragedy, with which you would be already familiar, as it has been under media glare for several years since it occurred in 1984.

Box 3.1: Case Analysis of the Bhopal Gas

The Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984 saw a mass movement of women gas victims in response to the indiscriminate and avoidable death of around 4000 people to gas poisoning from the Union Carbide factory. The tragedy that recorded 500,000 as potential victims—in terms of long-term signs of gas pollution—was a result of gross negligence. After the Government of India decided to take sole control of the disaster in terms of relief, and pursuing the case against the American firm for compensation to the victims—a lot of information was closeted under the Officials Secrets Act. To unearth the information and fight for adequate medical care, the women of Bhopal came out in large numbers.

Women's' continuous protest against the Bhopal gas disaster is exemplifying the aspect of existence of ecofeminism in the contemporary context of nature/culture debate. Over the years the ratio of women to men in protests and demonstrations increased to 90:10. The women went on fighting for relief and employment even after the government settled for much less with Union Carbide in 1989. Finally with the election of a new government, the activists

were able to win Rs. 360 lakh as a three-year relief grant, as well as government access to medical information. Most importantly they secured the government's support to reopen the case against Carbide that had been infamously settled in 1989 by the Supreme Court (Kumar, 1993). It is these stories of courage and activism that have inspired feminists and environmental activists around the world. And it is these very movements that inspire ecofeminists to fight for the rights of women and the environment.

Check Your Progress Exercise I

- Note:
- i. Use the space given below to answer the questions
 - ii. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. Write short notes on Joint Forest Management.

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit looks at the importance of an ideology that aims to bring together the shared causes of women and the environment. In particular, the unit focuses on the following aspects of the eco-feminist movement:

- Showing how women are intrinsically linked to the environment and nature, through their physical make-up and the social roles that they fulfil due to their physiological structure;
- Linking women in the Third-World to the environment through their dependence upon it for their survival and livelihood; and
- Tracing how institutional mechanisms and social structures such as caste, class and gender suppress both the environment and women, as part of the larger structures of dominance and insubordination.

The unit also discusses the environmental movement, spearheaded primarily by women to show how they have located themselves as the best supporters of protection of the environment and sustainable development till date. When the world is facing a global crisis vis-à-vis the environment, it is essential for us to understand the ways in which the environment has come to figure in our everyday lives. It is in this sense that we must also strive to protect it. It is no wonder then that an important part of this course tries to look at how this linkage can be established at the level of human relationships, especially that with gender, and more specifically, women.

1.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) How are women related to nature and men related to culture? Explain it in relation to ecofeminism.
- 2) Do you agree with the idea that women are closer to nature and therefore inferior? How does Vandana Shiva formulate this idea? Substantiate.
- 3) What is feminists' environmentalism? Explain it from different theoretical perspectives.
- 4) Discuss the salient features of environmental movements in India.

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Post-independence, the government introduced the notion of *Van Panchayats* which would be involved in joint forest management (JFM). The idea of JFM came about through the *Chipko* struggle that fought for involvement of the local population with their natural resources. However, the panchayats in this area had been traditionally male-dominated while the movement had been overwhelmingly led by women. Therefore, the unofficial, informal community forest management (CFM) was formed by women in favour of their role in safeguarding natural resources and the forests in the area. The CFMs in the area where opposed to the male-dominated *Van Panchayats* and the government-controlled JFMs. The first point of conflict began with the formation of village forest joint management (VFJMs) which were funded by the World Bank in association with the Uttaranchal Government. The till now autonomous *Van Panchayats* came under the control of the VFJMs. This was because women had begun to take over the reins of the *Van Panchayats*, and with the help of government programmes such as *Mahila Samakhya*, which aims to empower women, they were doing an outstanding job of protecting the forests and safeguard the community's resources. The VFJMs represented opposition from the village men and the forest department.

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UNIT 2 RELEVANCE OF GENDER IN SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Context
- 2.4 Interrelation among SDGs
- 2.5 Placing Gender in SDGs
- 2.6 Theoretical Foundation
- 2.7 Focus on Sustainability
- 2.8 Neo-Liberalization of Sustainability discourse
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Unit End Questions
- 2.11 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercise
- 2.12 References
- 2.13 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability and gender are prominent aspects of the development agenda since the 1980s. Gender shapes the motives, means, and opportunities for men and women to contribute to sustainability. Particular attention is given to evidence on closeness to nature, focus on conservation, rights to resources, opportunities to exploit resources, and constraints to adopting sustainable practices. Definitions and concepts of sustainability vary, and one of the most often cited is that of the Brundtland Commission: "Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" Although the emphasis is generally on physical or environmental sustainability, many analysts also pay attention to social and economic sustainability.

With the debate on sustainability becoming pronounced since the 1980s, theories about women's inherent connection to nature became popular in discussing the Environment and Development. Ecofeminist scholars posited that women are more closely linked to nature under their biological relationship to reproduction and are more likely to be harmed by its degradation and more likely to be responsible for its conservation. To understand the origin of Women, Environment and Development (WED), we need to trace the Southern country's economic Development, the history of three decades of UN development and WID, WAD and social movements like Chipko, Greenbelt movements.

The WID (Women in Development) movement in the 1970s criticized mainstream development thinking by arguing that women were being excluded from accessing resources, and development policies and theories considered women as mere receiver of the welfare benefits. Women possess the capacity and capability to contribute to growth. It is significant to involve women in the development process. However, the WID argument ignored the complexities of gender relations.

After studying the policies and programmes implemented based on the WID approach, feminists concluded that it is not about women's economic activities. Women do contribute to economic activities. But women's contributions are not recognized and valued. Based on the critiquing WID approach, feminists proposed and developed the Women and Development (WAD) approach.

The Women and Environment (WED) theme evolved in the developed countries within the feminists' movement in the mid-1970s after the emergence of ecofeminism. The theme WED emerged after questioning the existing development process and the significance of including the sustainability part in the existing development process. Developed nations wanted to assist the southern countries and their development process by addressing the sustainability part. The earlier WID and WAD were replaced in the early 1980s by the WED (women, environment, and development) argument heavily propagated by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It portrayed women as having a strong affinity for the Environment. We need to note that WED encompasses many professional fields, including forestry, agriculture, irrigation, and water systems. It also talks about women's interrelations with the Environment and Development and the impact of environmental degradation on women's lives. The existing patriarchal relations in developing nations like India expect women to take of the household activities. Women do contribute productive, reproductive and socio, political activities. The reproductive activities include childbearing, child-rearing, elders' care, and all household activities like cooking, cleaning, etc. Environmental degradation increases women's workload to provide household necessities like fuel, water fodder for animals in the rural areas, and degradation of air and water affects women's health in urban areas.

Nevertheless, realities of unsustainable patterns of development intensifying gender inequalities demonstrates a disproportionate effect on women in the form of economic, social and environmental stresses. Modern forms of development and under-regulated market-led growth, including industrial production, agriculture, energy services, have often contributed to unsustainability and gender inequality. As complex social, economic, and environmental challenges cut horizontally across sectors and vertically across government levels, gender, however, remains a common factor to strike a linkage between different goals and policy fields. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) established as a catalyst and coordinator for environmental issues within the United Nations (UN) after the Stockholm conference. UNEP established the Senior Women's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development to enhance women's environmental management participation. In the Nairobi International Women's Conference, 1985, ELCI

organized a parallel conference, Women and Environmental crisis. Feminists and women activists like Vandana Shiva, Wangari Mathai actively participated. In the Nairobi conference, the Asian and Pacific Women's Resource Network published many case studies of local communities' environmental action. In the Mid-1980s, popular media captured women's struggle from developing countries due to environmental degradation. They showed the image of women with the heavy load of wood logs water pots against barren landscapes. UN secretariat appointed UNEP as the leading agency on women and Environment in 1976. The publication of Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" in 1987 addressed the long term strategies for sustainable Development. The publication of 'Women and Environment in the Third world' by Irene Dankelman and Joan Davidson in 1987 with case studies of the world women's environmental activism's contribution is a significant moment. UNCED organized an international symposium in 1991 titled "Women and Children First" and explored the impact of poverty and environmental degradation on women and children with the view that they are the potential actors for sustainable Development. The declaration of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and its relevance in addressing environmental sustainability (7th Goal) further brought international community commitments to address sustainability issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by United Nations in 2015 became the core of the development agenda till 2030. The 17 SDGs with Goal five as a stand-alone on gender equality and more than half of the 17 other goals have integrated gender dimensions with measurable indicators. The integration is well articulated in the Preamble of the 2030 Agenda, which signals an effort to integrate human development goals, economic growth, and equality. It is argued that greater well-being requires more economic diversification and thus result in equal participation of women in Development. There is a grand compromise at the core of sustainable Development between those who prioritize the Environment, prioritize social Development, and prioritize economic Development.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you would be able to

- Contextualise environmental Sustainability with economic development and Gender;
- Trace the inter-linkages among SDG Goals;
- Place the significance of Gender in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
- Examine the neoliberal economic policies with sustainable development and Gender.

2.3 CONTEXT

The challenge of maintaining environmental sustainability in the context of economic growth and material well-being entered global discussions in the

UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. The report of the Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, placed the concept of sustainable development into the global environmental and development agenda. It defined *sustainable development* as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Since that time, sustainable development has been the overarching theme and guiding principle of global development.

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, reaffirmed this commitment and included a reference to the three pillars of sustainable development by assuming ‘a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – at the local, national, regional and global levels.

In 2000, the UN Millennium Summit adopted the Millennium Declaration with eight time-bound targets, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a deadline of 2015. It committed all countries to reduce extreme poverty and set a road map towards the implementation of the MDGs, which focused on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

The MDGs became widely accepted goals but were primarily relevant for developing countries. The developing countries achieved remarkable progress towards these goals, especially in eradicating poverty and improving primary education access; progress has been uneven within and across countries.

The MDG implementation approach has also been criticised for addressing complex development challenges with only eight concrete goals and reducing the development agenda to meeting basic material needs. The resulting narrow focus on selected indicators has accordingly been criticised for ignoring issues that are not captured with specific, quantifiable indicators, thus potentially leading to shifting priorities when implementing the MDGs.

While the SDGs build on the MDGs, there are significant differences between them and the processes leading to their adoption. The SDGs broadened the focus from that of the MDGs towards a wider development policy agenda addressing many aspects of economic, social and environmental sustainability. While the MDGs were mainly relevant for developing countries, the SDGs apply to all countries. They also address issues that were not included in the MDGs and ones that the MDGs were criticised for only partially, including inequality, gender, political and human rights, economic development, and climate change.

Agenda 2030 is a universal plan of action that aims at guiding development efforts and national development policies until 2030. It recognises that the

SDGs are 'integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Universal development and ending poverty in the spirit of 'no one will be left behind are the central principles of Agenda 2030. 'Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty' is considered the 'greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

2.4 INTER-RELATION AMONG SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPEMNT GOALS(SDGs)

SDGs stated to form a complex, integrated system of goals and interrelated targets that cut across traditional administrative sectors. Many of the goals have an overall sectoral focus. There is great variation in the SDGs' nature and scope, and the related targets have different functions. Some targets are ends in themselves, while others are means to reach other targets by supporting the development of an enabling environment or providing resources that support other targets' achievement. The relationship among the more intermediate targets can be synergistic, and a lack of progress in one may often hinder progress within another. While synergies among the targets can increase the effectiveness of implementation, incompatible targets lead to trade-offs. Besides, the interactions among the SDGs are non-linear. Deficient performance in one crucial goal or target can potentially undermine progress in the overall agenda. Similarly, the implementation of one target at the expense of a non-compatible one can reinforce the trade-offs.

The interlinkages and interactions among the SDGs and related targets are receiving increasing attention. Le Blanc (2015) conducted a network analysis of the links among SDGs and targets (except those related to implementation) based on their wording. The results show that the SDGs are unequally connected. Some goals are connected through multiple targets, while others have weak connections to other goals. Sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), reducing inequality (SDG 10), eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and promoting economic growth and employment (SDG 8) are directly or indirectly linked to at least ten other goals. Life on land (SDG 15) is linked to six other goals. The network analysis results were compared to previous studies that had used a nexus approach to analyse the interconnections among climate, land, energy, and water targets. SDG interactions have also been analysed by classifying and clustering the goals and their interactions. The potential interactions among SDGs are closely related to their position in the framework. The authors argue that there is potential for synergies among the goals at the inner level as they focus on different aspects of human well-being. Similarly, the outer-level environmental goals are interrelated and potentially synergistic. The middle infrastructure goals contribute to achieving the well-being goals but compete for limited ecological resources such as land for agriculture, forestry, or energy.

The SDGs and related targets form a complex, interconnected set of different kinds of goals. However, these interconnections are neither systematically

recognised nor addressed in the SDG agenda: 'A tendency to ignore interlinkages among sectors and across national borders has meant that success in one area or location has all too often come at the expense of increasing problems elsewhere'. Understanding the interactions among the targets is thus fundamental for making comprehensive progress towards the targets and ensuring that progress towards a specific target is not impeding other targets' achievement.

2.5 PLACING GENDER IN SDGS

UN's role in advancing gender equality stems from the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women - the leading global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Through the existing Commission, the UN could adopt various landmark agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and organized International Conventions to address the issues of gender.

United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON highlighted in his Report "We the Peoples", the crucial role of gender equality as a driver of development progress, recognizing that women's potential had not been fully realized owing to, inter alia, persistent social, economic and political inequalities. The vital role of women has been reaffirmed through UN conventions and declarations, with a focus on their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development, to accelerate the implementation of our respective commitments in this regard as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

It is recognized that although progress on gender equality has been made in some areas, the potential of women to engage in, contribute to and benefit from sustainable development as leaders, participants and agents of change have not been fully realized, owing to inter alia, persistent social, economic and political inequalities. Prioritization of measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of our societies, including the removal of barriers to their full and equal participation in decision-making and management at all levels, and emphasis on the impact of setting specific targets and implementing temporary measures, as appropriate, for substantially increasing the number of women in leadership positions, with the aim of achieving gender parity is being advanced through governmental actions.

UN stands committed to unlocking the potential of women as drivers of sustainable development, including through the repeal of discriminatory laws and the removal of formal barriers, ensuring equal access to justice and legal support, the reform of institutions to ensure competence and capacity for gender mainstreaming and the development and adoption of innovative and

special approaches to address informal, harmful practices that act as barriers to gender equality.

SDGs' holistic approach breaks down the siloed approaches to development in the past – with separate pursuits of social, economic and environmental agendas – which led to policy cherry-picking instead of prioritising competing goals. It is argued that attempting to progress social, economic and environmental goals together through appropriate institutional and policy interventions ends the false dichotomy of conflict between goals and gender empowerment. The dominant and cross-cutting goal gets ascendance due to such actions.

2.6 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Since the 1980s, the body of research on gender and sustainability has expanded to include men, the relationships between men and women, and more nuanced views of women across different cultural, social, and environmental contexts. In the context of “feminist environmentalism,” a term coined by Bina Agarwal emphasized the need to understand women’s and men’s relationship with nature as rooted in their material reality and how gender- and class-based interactions with nature structure knowledge about nature, the effects of environmental change, and responses to it. The “feminist political ecology” school of thought focused on three key themes:

- Gendered knowledge of the environment
- Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, including access to resources
- Gendered politics and grassroots activism

It also showed how culturally defined gender roles structure access to different knowledge, space, resources, and social-political processes.

Feminists, too, coined the term ‘Feminist Political Ecology’ and developed it as an interdisciplinary academic field to study the existing uneven power relations in the everyday ecologies. Based on the theoretical understanding of feminist political ecology, studies carried out on intersectionality and interrelational of gender, ecology with social structures.

2.7 FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

As Nightingale points out, love and respect for nature do not automatically result in nature's sustainable treatment. How people conceptualize, the boundary between themselves and nature affects how they understand and treat the environment.

Although caring for the environment has been interpreted to ensure natural resources for future generations, it may provide old-age support in communities where women do not control resources. In India, women are motivated to protect the environment owing to material realities and not to some close connection to nature. In dire poverty and scarcity, women may be

less prone than men to conserve because they are in charge of the family's immediate survival.

Women have also been viewed as those primarily affected by environmental change in the developing world, giving them further incentive to use resources sustainably. A recent empirical analysis of 141 countries from 1981 to 2002 found that natural disasters lower women's life expectancy more than that of men. In Kenya, the environmental change resulted in a more equitable sharing of labour by men and women for traditionally female tasks such as gathering water. However, this was viewed as temporary assistance and not a long-term change.

Several studies show that when women are involved in Natural Resource Management (NRM), they undertake actions that benefit the environment. The Chipko Movement in India and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya provide famous examples of women-led conservation efforts. Sultana & Thompson's work on floodplain and fisheries management in Bangladesh finds that when both men and women are involved in management groups, compliance with rules is higher, and conflict is lower. Agarwal's studies in Nepal and India find that controlling for other factors, the inclusion of women in forest management executive committees contributes to improved forest governance and resource sustainability.

In the Philippines, attempts to have women monitor lake water to determine if soil conservation technologies (SCTs) were reducing silting were unsuccessful until project staff realized that women were more interested in health issues than in soil loss. When the project began to raise awareness about how water quality affected families' health and the program then expanded to include monitoring for *Escherichia coli*, women's participation increased significantly. Thus, men and women may prioritize different aspects of sustainability.

The above examples demonstrate that men and women can show a wide range of interests and sustainability motivations. These are conditioned by their situations and lived realities. Factors such as immediate necessities, labour constraints, information sources, social roles, livelihood options, and external interventions affect the choices men and women make. Thus it is hard to say whether men or women are more naturally inclined to care for the environment.

The ability to use natural resources is often highly gendered, with men and women enjoying differential levels of rights to different kinds of resources, which are embedded in customary and statutory legal institutions. Resources can be private, common, or public goods and can be accessed individually or via family, user groups, or the state. Rather than pure ownership, rights are better understood as overlapping bundles of rights. Using International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) data from 290 forest user groups in Kenya, Uganda, Bolivia, and Mexico, Sun et al. find that female-dominated groups tend to have more property rights to trees and bushes than do male-dominated or gender-balanced groups—perhaps because women collect non-timber minor forest produce or firewood for domestic use,

whereas men are more interested in timber harvesting, which is more commercially oriented and less sustainable.

In common-pool resources, control rights may rest with the government or with user groups. In the latter case, the extent of men's and women's effective voice in the user groups and the groups' overall effectiveness will determine their control rights. Work in Uzbekistan also finds that because women are not viewed as land managers—even though they perform most of the work due to high male out-migration in the area—their participation in water users' associations to manage irrigation technologies is limited. In Madhya Pradesh, India, when committee leaders report that women belong to forest protection committees, participate in committee meetings and patrol the forest, then control of illegal grazing and tree felling increases by 24% and 28%, respectively, and the regeneration of allotted forest also increases by 28%. The proportion of women on committees and their class background also matters. Based on data from 135 community forestry groups in Nepal and Gujarat, India, Agarwal finds that having more women on executive committees is associated with stricter rules, except when more landless women have no alternatives to the forest for firewood and fodder needs. The study shows how party to decision-making is more likely to follow and enforce the rules.

Women's limited formal education and lack of confidence in public may limit their participation in Natural Resource Management (NRM) user groups, especially formal meetings. But these limits can be overcome. A randomized evaluation of water infrastructure maintenance in rural Kenya found that speeches made by Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) facilitators about the importance of women's participation in the user committees increased women's participation, along with encouraging women to attend the community meetings at which committee members were selected and holding the meetings at a convenient time for women.

Knowledge about biodiversity constitutes an essential aspect of NRM. Ecofeminists have stressed women's role as primary "selectors and custodians of seed," thus making them more knowledgeable about seed varieties than men are. In Jharkhand, India, Jewitt finds that many of the women moved to the village upon marriage and thus were not as familiar with the local species and varieties as the men in the village who had grown up in the area much of their childhood in the forests.

Many sustainable practices require additional labour inputs. Therefore, control over labour—own, family, or hired—is necessary for adoption. Quisumbing & Kumar find that although male- and female-headed households are equally likely to adopt SCTs in Ethiopia because SCTs are labour intensive, adoption tends to be higher in larger households with more labour resources and lower in households with higher opportunity costs of labour (better-educated households, more livestock). However, because men often have the means to hire labour or have greater bargaining power within the household, they can often mobilize more labour resources.

Women's inability to harness labour resources contributes to their time

burden, and male out-migration in some areas may exacerbate labour shortages for women. However, although it is common to assume that women in the developing world are more time-constrained, owing to their double involvement in productive and reproductive work, recent results from the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index in 13 countries (152) show that both men and women report being highly time-constrained across most countries, though the levels of time poverty are higher for women.

Environmental degradation, particularly the depletion of water, wood, and soils, is assumed to affect women more heavily than men, lengthening a woman's workday as these resources become more scarce and she needs to travel farther to gather the same amount. Research by Kumar & Hotchkiss in Nepal's hill areas shows that as deforestation increases, so too does women's time burden; increased deforestation also reduces household income, food consumption, and nutrition. However, men's time can also be affected by environmental degradation. Research in the Volta Region of Ghana reveals that women's workload increased more than men's during periods of drought. However, men were also affected, often having to move to cities in search of work.

Sustainable resource practices often require financial investments or preceding immediate income to allow the resources to regenerate. Gender differences in cash or credit constraints and the ability to save or remittances would affect the adoption of those practices. In many developing countries, women have less information than men about financial products and services because of lower literacy rates and lower access to essential factors like transportation. Besides, they may face biases from bank tellers or lending institutions or lack the collateral (such as land) needed to take out a loan. However, men may not always have more access to credit. This is especially the case with microfinance, which in recent years has targeted primarily women and women's groups for receipt of loans, partly because of higher repayment rates among women.

Most programs to promote sustainability have been gender blind and thus ended up working primarily with men, who are more likely to occupy public spaces and are often more readily recognized by outsiders as the foresters, irrigators, fishers, and even farmers. Ecofeminism can be seen as a valid response to that tendency to overlook the importance of natural resources for women and the crucial roles women play in managing natural resources. But perpetuating an ecofeminist myth by considering only one side of the evidence on the extent of—and reasons for—gender differences in appropriation and provision of natural resources is also misleading.

Gender roles and dependence on livelihoods resources are particularly salient in shaping both pieces of knowledge of resources and their conservation preferences. Property rights to natural resources influence the motives and means that men and women have to exploit or conserve resources, but to understand these, we need to look beyond ownership to examine the bundles of rights to use and control resources and tenure security men and women enjoy. Decision-making and bargaining power within the household and community affect the extent to which men and women can exploit (or invest

in) resources. But whatever the motivations and decision-making power that men or women have, unless they also have the knowledge, labour, and financial resources necessary to adopt practices that either limit extraction or enhance the resource base, sustainability will not be achieved. Thus, understanding the specific constraints to adoption and how these may differ for men and women is fundamental to ensuring sustainability.

2.8 NEO- LIBERALIZATION OF SUSTAINABILITY DISCOURSE

The present discourse on sustainability and environmental is based on the ongoing discussion on international climate change conventions and conferences, various social movements, academic engagements, politics, business and other interactions (Huber, 2000, p. 270). Academicians and development professions documented the ecological damage caused by human beings between the 1950s till 1970s. As we already mentioned in this Unit, environmental activism has a different lineage in the north and south. There are varying degrees and criticisms in the north and south, but all agreed upon the damage caused on natural ecosystems for human survival. John Dryzek (2005) has called this discourse ‘survivalism’.

The Stockholm Summit foreshadowed the sustainability agenda integral to the Rio process on the Human Environment in 1972. This conference was the first in a series of four global UN conferences on sustainability. The World Commission followed it on Environment and Development in 1992 (which produced the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21), and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (Rio+10). The final conference was the UN Summit on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), held in 2012 (Rio+20). Sustainable development was initially launched as a global economic development trajectory in 1987 through the Brundtland Report, officially known as Our Common Future, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). The Brundtland Report is considered by Huber (2000) to be part of the Rio process, “which is regarded as spanning several decades and being central to the construction of sustainable development as a dominant discourse. Using the Rio United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) of 1992 as a platform, the Rio process refers to the interaction among key social groups and movements to pursue the goal of sustainable development”.

According to Lynley Tulloch and David Neilson “Sustainable development discourse is always concerned with the organically dependent relation between humanity and nature. Changing the way this relationship is constructed and presented is central to explaining sustainability discourse’s in neoliberalism. Thus, there are several strategic steps involved in the process of the re-articulation of sustainability with neoliberalism. In this section, we outline these steps as follows:

1. The depoliticised economy presentation is established, which is regarded as of equal importance with ecology for human survival.

2. The construction of sustainable development in terms of ‘neutral’ market economics is achieved.
3. Human-nature relations are reframed in terms of a depoliticised construction of humans as nature’s managers and nature as private property”.

They further stated that “The economy is not just about the production of wealth, and ecology is not just about protecting nature; they are both equally relevant for improving a lot of humankind. (WCED, 1987) Thus, the first step in the neo-liberalisation process was achieved in the Brundtland Report, which essentially put economic growth, eradication of poverty, and ecological integrity on an equal footing and as mutually interdependent. This report also signalled the viability of ‘markets’ and the importance of a globalising project in sustainable development. However, this is smuggled in as part of a neutral and non-partisan perspective. The reports states: ‘[t]hus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries – developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned’ (WCED, 1987)”.

A rising tide of economic growth now replaces the sustainability discourse emerging from environmental concerns as an uplifter of all discourse. The prevailing discourse of sustainable development has arisen from a step-by-step reversal of the causal relationship between capitalism and sustainability. Sustainability is spearheaded as the discursive repositioning of ecology and environment and as equivalent priority based on the fuller and more explicit process of neoliberalisation where global expansion, economic growth, corporatisation, ecological adaptation to industrial growth, and the commodification of the non-human world (both biotic and abiotic) is the norm.

Sustainable development discourse is always concerned with the organically dependent relation between humanity and nature. However, neoliberalism has changed the way this relationship is constructed and presented. There are several strategic steps involved in the process of the re-articulation of sustainability with neoliberalism. Firstly, it is established with the presentation of a depoliticised economy, which regards ecology as vital for human survival. Secondly, it constructs sustainable development in terms of ‘neutral’ market economics, and thirdly human-nature relations are reframed in terms of a depoliticised construction of humans as nature’s managers and nature as private property.

The emphasis on ‘needs’ and ‘development’ in the same breath is significant as it positions economic development as the critical issue for meeting people’s needs – both now and in the future – while ecological sustainability is only implicitly and indirectly identified and subtly cast as a problem of the future. This signifies the importance of people’s material needs and appears to champion the concerns raised by the earlier radical sustainability position around global poverty.

As the Brundtland Report stresses, “economics and ecology must be completely integrated with decision making and law-making processes not

just to protect the environment, but also to protect and promote development. The economy is not just about the production of wealth, and ecology is not just about the protection of nature; they are both equally relevant for improving a lot of humankind. (WCED, 1987).

Agenda 21 of the Report signifies the privileging of market principles in sustainable development.

“The development process will not gather momentum if the global economy lacks dynamism and stability and is beset with uncertainties. Neither will it gather momentum if the developing countries are weighted down by external indebtedness, if development finance is inadequate, if barriers restrict access to markets and if commodity prices and the terms of trade of developing countries remain depressed. (UNCED, 1992a)”

There is recognition that the environment is not the ‘free’ good that has previously been assumed but rather seen as coming at a cost, both between and within countries and across generations. The reference to scarcity of resources used at the cost of future generations is seen to protect environmental interests and promote conservation and wise use of natural resources. It is premised as an essential aspect of sustainable development but argues that market society is the best way to achieve this.

Equitable distribution of resources is promoted as being best achieved by using market principles, which makes nature commodified and tradeable. Allocation of nature’s benefits and the burden is seen to be optimally achieved through market instruments. Sustainable development goals subsequently become subsumed ‘within a globalised eco-economic management project (McAfee, 2012). This capitalist centric vision of sustainable development inflects the social and environmental agenda with a neoliberal flavour (Jessop, 2012).

However, sustainable development has shed its capitalist character and has emerged triumphant in reframing this relationship between economy and ecology as equivalent and mutually interdependent dimensions. Furthermore, through depoliticising the capitalist economic formation and normalising the purely individualistic logic, sustainable development discourse effectively gives capitalism a clean slate. As a result, the destructive underpinnings of capitalism’s economic rendering of nature and people positions free-market capitalism as central to protecting nature and eradicating poverty.

Check Your Progress Exercise I

- Note: i. Use the space given below to answer the questions
ii. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. Write short notes about your understanding about neo-liberalism

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2.9 LET US SUM UP

This Unit discusses the significance of gender in sustainability indicators by establishing inter-linkages between gender, ecology and sustainability. In Particular, the Unit focuses on the following aspects in the relevance of gender in sustainability indicators.

1. Contribution of the feminists for the establishment of alternative theories like WID, WAD, WED and GAD
2. Contextualising the economic growth in sustainability by looking at the wellbeing of all human beings, especially women and marginalised
3. Trace the history of feminists activism to establish the women's contribution in using the existing resources in a sustainable manner
4. Studies the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and their interlinkages with gender

Lastly, the Unit talked about neoliberal economic development and sustainability with an emphasis on gender.

2.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Define Sustainability. Discuss the significance of SDGs in addressing sustainability in neoliberal economic development.
2. How to contextualise economic growth in the context of sustainable development? Discuss
3. Write a short essay on interrelations among Sustainable Development Goals?

2.11 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Capitalism is essentially a set of social practices whose aim is the accumulation of capital. Unlike capitalism, 'Neoliberalism' is a political philosophy with beliefs and political programmes that try to maximise the existing means to flourish human beings. One of those beliefs is that the only natural way to maximise human flourishing is to maximise capitalists' profits. Neoliberalism favours a set of mechanisms that aim to privatise public utilities and deregulation of financial markets.

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