
NAVIGATING THE NEXUS: EXPLORING THE PARADIGMIC DIVERGENCES IN CLIMATE JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

The ever-increasing disproportionate justice paradigm existing between the developed and developing nations has contributed immensely to topographical, climatic and atmospheric dilapidations of the Third World countries. The developed nations should be responsible for causing the deteriorating environmental conditions of the developing nations, contributing to extreme climate change, a rise in sea levels, damage to crops, leading towards poverty and migration and numerous other environmental degradations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enumerated by the developed nations, aimed towards globally protecting and preserving the environment for our future generations, have been proposed through a justice framework. Climate Justice (CJ) is another aspect that highlights the inefficient policies and power arrangements at the local level of governance. There exists a correlation between the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Justice that brings to light that environmental protection and preservation can be achieved by addressing the various dimensions of justice and inequality. It has been observed that the framework of SDGs has been formulated in such a way that justice has been encompassed within its broad structure. The adaptation policies framed by the developed states are detrimental to the values and human rights of the vulnerable. There is an utmost need to address the loopholes that stresses upon the need to deal with technology transfer from developed countries to developing countries, asymmetric power distribution and to have an economic growth that deals head on with poverty and its multi-dimensional aspects, which intervenes with the concept of freedom, liberty and justice of an individual. A close study of the various SDGs, understanding their interrelationships, and implementing them in a combined manner can eventually lead towards environmental justice.

Keywords: environment, justice, sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Climate Justice (CJ).

INTRODUCTION

“.....we are challenged, as mankind has never been challenged before, to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.”

Rachel Carson (Silent Spring)¹

The above observation is the underlying spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that man is a part of nature, but due to his activities and injudicious use of natural resources, he is at war against himself.

Man has acquired the power to alter and destroy nature with the advent of science and technology. The unavoidable consequences compelled him to think of intensified action at the individual, national, regional and global levels to limit the activities within the range of resilience of natural resources. The spirit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lies in policymaking, which aims to protect the needs of future generations. On the other hand, Climate Justice (CJ) is concerned with the present local policies that are equipped with the disproportionate power distribution that arises from grassroots levels. Our Prime Minister, Hon'ble late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, had specifically mentioned in the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, 1972, that poverty and environmental issues are closely related to one another. It has to be acknowledged that she was the spokesperson for the Third World countries, bringing before the international forum the consequences faced by these countries, for which they are not responsible. This also finds mention in the report of Brundtland Commission compiled in the form of a book named “Our Common Future”. This Commission changed the whole conversation on environmental development.

The anthropogenic outlook has plundered the reserves for future generations and now for disposal of waste generated thereof require an extra planet equal to the size of the earth by the year 2050.² The SDGs thus formulated serve as a common outlook and directives to the government, non-government actors and individuals to work together in partnership for realising the goals encapsulated in SDG 17.

¹ Rachel Carson, Silent Spring. The observation served as a cause of UNGA resolution 2398 (XXII) adopted on 3rd. December 1968.

² WWF, Living Planet Report, 2000 and IUCN Report on “Conserving the World’s Biological Diversity.”

As Agyeman and Evans (2004) acknowledge, justice and fairness are "largely implicit" in the Brundtland Report and the IUCN definition of sustainable development. The authors stressed the need for "fair sustainability", that is, "a balanced approach that includes a focus on justice, equity and the environment".³

The SDGs seek to promote sustainability in product designing, manufacturing, production, distribution, consumption, optimization, maintenance, redistribution, refurbishing, recycling and reuse from consumption with more focus on Zero Waste Cycles. These processes involve the participation of stakeholders – manufacturer, producer, supply and service chain and responsible consumers. The SDGs can be classified as having direct bearing and indirect bearing on Climate Justice.

Today, we are aware of the fact that, Maldives, a small nation comprising of several small islands taken together, is a major victim, facing an existential threat, due to global warming leading to a rise in sea levels. The Maldives has zero contribution to energy consumption, carbon emission variations in climatic conditions or global warming; however, the Maldives is bearing the brunt of the developed nations of the North. The developed countries have exponentially consumed and are still consuming energy, negligence in controlling carbon emissions, careless deployment attributed to unprocessed resources, are a few of the instances that provoke us to think whether "justice" is prevailing in the civilised world, or it is still a distant dream. This threat of the disappearance of countries is for all countries having more coastal regions which concerns South, Southeast Asia. Thus, increasing the conflicts amongst nations.

Understanding appertaining to justice is deficient to find in the sustainability goals whereas there is lack of formulation of goals, targets or indices concerning fairness in the notion of EJ. A scrutiny of the two brings forth the gap that environmental problems are, in reality, the issues relating to justice. It has to be accepted that human life cannot function when imposed with any pressured ideologies with which they habitually differ. Human life is a combination of various permutations and combinations put together, which cannot be measured with rigid statistical indices or positivistic policy frameworks. The diverse aspects of the identity about a

³ Agyeman J, Bullard RD, Evans B (2002) Exploring the nexus: bringing together sustainability, environmental justice and equity. *Space Polity* 6(1):77–90 A

single person create distinctive forms of injustices and discrimination.

I. Discourse on Climate Justice:

Climate Justice (CJ) was initiated in the USA towards the early part of 1980s, where the rural Afro-American communities rose to the unjustifiable dissemination of contaminating exercises that affected the lower-income strata, and colour discrimination became prominent. This struggle encapsulated an environment, anti-racism and violation of basic human rights.

With time, the horizon widened, bringing within its purview the measurements of equity and disparity over the globe, acknowledging the diverse socio-cultural and environmental contexts. The present frame of EJ follows the four measurements: (1) distributional equity, (2) recognitional equity, (3) procedural equity (e.g., support, decision-making), and (4) the capabilities approach.

The focal point of distributive justice lies in the context of impartial dispersion of natural resources and benefits, equitable dissemination of material goods, resources, wages, and riches, rather than with regard to the equal dispersal of strata in the society.

Recognitional justice concerns itself with the acceptability factor of the society that is an acknowledgement of, and regard for, differences prevailing in the society. It is through 'recognition', individuals are attributed with respect and personal dignity. To cultivate the spirit of acknowledging cumulative characters having distinct interests, inclinations, and employments in connection to natural surroundings and habitat.

Procedural equity articulates the reasonable and impartial acquaintance with out of line conveyance designs and the need of acknowledgment, but comprehension of that unjustifiable conveyance of natural benefits and burdens happen as the choices that change the natural habitat are made by individuals who appreciate the advantages instead of the predicaments.

Capabilities approach intertwines an individual's efficiency to prosper through a capability building approach, emphasising on multifaceted perspectives of welfare, centring on

the flexibilities that come from full utilisation of potentials in preference to solely focusing on the outcomes.

Pellow (2018) expressed that Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) arrangement has necessitated an amplification of Environmental Justice beyond the previously mentioned dimensions. Four foundations recommended by him are: first, interrelatedness, perceiving that all configurations of discrimination and tyranny intertwine. Secondly, CEJ points to taking measures in multiple aspects, recommending adequate measures to delve into the arenas where EJ has been trying hard to cope. Thirdly, the ineradicable societal disparities and profoundly embedded in society that are strengthened by state control and fourthly, CEJ surpasses the human-centric approach to incorporate equity for non-humans as well.⁴

II. Sustainable Development Goals and concept of “Justice”:

The United Nations in Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mentioned “The new Agenda recognises the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development) on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. Factors which give rise to violence, insecurity and injustice, such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows, are addressed in the Agenda.”

Amongst the goals set in the SDGs, except for SDG 16, with regard to the subsequent goals there is no direct addressing of justice. The word “justice” mentioned in SDG 16 is neither defined nor covers all multifaceted attributes of justice. It has reference to adhering to law, human rights and delivery of justice from the legal point of view. The concerns regarding the asymmetric assimilation of powers that poses threat to sustainable ecology and egalitarianism does not find any mention. Also, there is frequent use of certain terms like inclusivity, access, rights, equity and equality. Justice has been framed around two premises of universal basic inalienable rights justice encompassing the justice delivered within the legitimate jurisdiction through state based policy makings, with no mention of decentralisation of justice delivery system.

⁴ Pellow DN (2018) What is critical environmental justice?. Polity Press, Cambridge

III. The prevailing lacunae in securing “justice” in the Sustainable Development Goals:

The combined implementation of efforts taken by both SDGs and CJ can have affirmative and dissenting impacts on “justice”. Certain SDGs can be effective in ascertaining positive response for EJ, such as the connection between SDG 2, SDG 3 and SDG 6, hunger, health and water.

SDG 2 - Zero Hunger, SDG 3 – Good health and Well-being: Ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture is indispensable to address the sufferings of 800 million people worldwide. This results in promoting good health and well-being of the entire population on a global scale. The number of people going hungry has increased since 2014. The number of undernourished people has increased from 784 million in 2015 to 821 million in 2017 and has further increased substantially during COVID-19 times. 2/3rd. of the undernourished people worldwide live in two regions 237 million Sub-Saharan Africa, and 277 million in Southern Asia.

Climate Justice can be achieved by promoting circular agriculture, ensuring restoration and enhancing the quality of soil by using scientific techniques aiming at nutrient loops. By curbing food waste and loss, a proper and effective value chain supported by effective laws and policies. Implementation of sustainable food production systems and resilient agriculture to increase productivity and production adaptable to climate change. Replacing the use of non-renewable resources with renewable resources. Avoiding the use of biomass as a singular resource, as its singular use results in increased emissions of carbon dioxide.

SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation. About 3 billion people lack access to safe drinking water services, basic sanitation services. More than 80% of wastewater is generated from human activities. As per the WHO, 800 children die every day from diarrheal diseases linked to poor hygiene. Policy frameworks need a revisit to ensure small-scale water purification technologies, desalination, wastewater treatment to reduce wastewater discharge into drinking water sources, composite toilets, sustainable sanitation and biogas systems.

There are others where the gaps between the two might bring out constructive and eccentric outcomes, like, SDG 7 and SDG 13, climate and energy justice, SDG14 and SDG15 conservation of lives below water and on land, and SDG 1 and 10, poverty and inequality. SDG

8 points towards inclusion of economic growth which highlights the gaps present in the other SDGs. People worldwide suffer from the prevailing injustices disproportionately leading to racism, discrimination against minorities, women and children.

SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy. Only 17.5% of total energy consumption comes from renewable energy. The five major areas identified for ensuring the use of renewable energy are – cement, aluminium, steel, plastics, and food can reduce half of the carbon dioxide. The regulatory and policy framework requires a revisit to address the energy needs of manufacturing, industrial, agriculture, medicine, education, infrastructure, communication, and technology sectors through renewable resources.

The primary concern of justice in the sphere of Climate Justice relating to affordable, clean energy and climate is also found in SDG 7 and SDG 13. They are interrelated, being anthropogenic, caused by emissions from greenhouse gases. There is a requirement for building communities that are embracing and at the same time resilient for achieving the developmental goals, economic stability and social justice. Distributive justice has a narrow role to play, and much of it can be achieved through technology and nation states coming together, employing International Agreements like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to reduce the problems relating to energy and climate challenges.

It has to be considered that in SDG 13, which is Climate Change, there has been a significant contribution of anthropogenic factors leading to climate change by the developed nations, whose tremendous exodus is being faced by the developing nations. The flexible attitude of UNFCCC towards the polluters from the Global North, who are mainly responsible for Climate Change to the detriment of the vulnerable communities worldwide, is vehemently criticised. The focus is on the implementation of energy-efficient technologies, however, there is silence on the extraction of fossil fuel, thereby creating energy poverty and vulnerable social groups.

On conservation of rich bio-diversified areas, human activities are curbed or limited which in turn creates imbalance in mainstream conservation mostly undertaken by technologically efficient Global North causing environmental injustices for the local indigenous people forcing them to relocate, destructing their culture, uprooting traditional conservation systems for natural resources, all of these leading towards human rights violations

of the marginalised sections. The forced relocation made these people suffer discrimination of basic human rights to education (SDG 4), gender inequality (SDG 5), health (SDG 3), means of livelihood (SDG 8) and poverty (SDG 1).

There are contradictions found in SDG 8 – Decent work and Economic growth, which seeks to achieve sustainability and economic growth. The recycling, refurbishing and reuse sector can engage millions of the population and generate good employment if the loop is properly defined and supported by strong legal mechanisms. SDG 11, sustainable cities and communities, concerned with other goals, that the very object of sustainability is an impossibility to attain even if the growth is minuscule thereby reducing use of resources and reduction of carbon emissions of 2 degree Celsius warming limits to the threshold of 1.5 degree Celsius as prevalent during the pre-industrial times. Already, the Third World island countries are facing an existential threat due to global warming and its proportional effect of a rise in sea levels.

SDG 9 - industry, innovation and infrastructure, are the concern propositions where in which exponential utilisation of energy consumption and careless carbon emissions. It is the task of the policymakers at both national and international spheres to formulate measures to limit energy consumption, reduce carbon emissions and make these industrial giants liable and responsible for their negligence towards delivering justice to the small developing nations. SDG 9 and SDG 12, responsible consumption and production, are interrelated.

SDG10 – reduced inequalities, addresses inequality prevalent among the countries; however, hardly any procedure persists for formulating policy addressing the accumulation of resources by developed countries and distribution measures to the lower-middle income developing countries. This, in turn, creates poverty and excludes the countries from social development.

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, can be attained when there is responsible acknowledgement from the policymakers, keeping in view the Stern Committee Report of sacrifice, control and limit. Sustainability in production and consumption in textile, electronics, communication, food and automobile sectors through well-crafted economic policy and regulatory regime can address the use of hazardous chemicals and substances with long life cycles and a zero-waste approach.

SDG 14 and SDG 15, living entity beneath water and life on land, addresses contamination, overexploitation of species, and living space degradation and misfortune. One or the other SDGs provides no appropriate framework for procedures or recognition concerning the consumption of naturally available reserves and meeting human demands. There should be an inclusive procedure and recognition of equity, fairness and impartiality acknowledging the needs, indispensability of different living entities and marginalised people. Effective implementation of instruments like – Nagoya Protocol, as till recently only 60% of the member states of the UN have ratified it. To conserve biological resources and their utilisation in trade and commerce activities is certainly important in the realisation of SDGs.

SDG 17 - partnerships to achieve the goals, the threat to existence has rendered developing nations victims of the irresponsible attitude of the developed nations. This has created a disbalance in the power dynamics, displaying asymmetric power politics. This, in turn, makes it a difficult task to realise the SDGs by employing partnerships amongst the policymakers. The State, at the domestic level, accompanied by the inter-State institutions, has to eagerly address the crisis at both the individual level and the collective level.

All stakeholders – nation states, non-government actors, institutions, individuals, scientists, academia and industrialists need to be brought together by promoting multi-level partnership to accelerate change through the mobilisation of existing and additional technology-driven resources, financial resources and capacity building. It can help in optimum utilisation of knowledge and material resources.

V. Suggestions, Recommendations and Conclusion:

The prospective inferences leading to the accomplishment of justice can be ameliorated by engaging in responsible assimilation of the existing crisis. This can be addressed by acknowledging that every living being has a right to survive in an atmosphere of freedom and liberty. By interconnecting all the parameters of sustainability, understanding nature through an eco-centric approach can lead towards Climate Justice (CJ). Although the interconnectivity of all sustainability goals is entangled within their spheres, that can be either constructive or destructive for procuring environmental justice. The SDGs should bring an awareness movement aiming towards a society where sustainability and justice prevail, keeping in tune with traditional values, diversity, cohesion and co-operation. Another aspect that requires immediate attention is that justice should not only be for humans but must encompass diverse

species of non-humans and other living organisms. The shift has to be from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.

Implementation of a ten-year sustainable consumption and production framework. Preparation and implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) as a priority or a target in national policies by 2030. Sustainable management and use of natural resources. Achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources through material footprint and domestic material consumption per capita and per GDP by 2030.

Responsible management of chemical waste. To achieve environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, following agreed international frameworks by 2030. Hazardous waste generation. Achieving the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks by 2030.

By 2030, global per capita food waste is to be halved at the retail and consumer levels and food losses along the production and supply chain, including post-harvest losses. Substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse. Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and sustainable reporting as a mandatory practice by 2030.

By promoting sustainable public procurement practices at the national level. Promoting universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles. Ensuring that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Climate justice (CJ) should broaden its horizons from the four recognised pillars of distribution, procedure, recognition and capabilities, towards an interconnective approach to accomplish environmental justice in all its spheres. The SDGs must bring the governments to acknowledge that sustainability through a policy framework can only be achieved when they start directly taking measures for addressing the degradations, loss and damage caused to the economically weaker sections of the population, the marginalised people, non-human species and deterioration of the environment. The developed countries should accept the fact and be ready to pay the costs of action and inaction. The international agencies are aware, but there should be effective means to make the developed countries realise that they have to repay for

the catastrophe they have created from prehistoric times. Achieving economic growth with the advancement of technology, at the cost of the environment, will not lead us anywhere but will bring us closer towards our end at a fast-growing pace. It is not only those who are at the apex of the pyramid of power should address these issues but every citizen of the planet have an obligation to take it as a mission of their lives to recognize peace, justice, equality, awareness, good health, clean environment, quality education, affordable means of decent economic growth and sustainability are the metrics for existence in this planet. Thereby making the postulation of one earth, one family true in its very essence.

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