

A Sociological Study on the effects of poverty on the environment

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Letter to Editor

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Dear Chief in Editor

Today, poverty is the biggest pollution factor threatening political stability, social cohesion, and the health of the planet. Poverty may be observed in the domains of geographical, economic, social, political, cultural, and so on. One of the most obvious aspects of poverty is exhibited in the relationship between poverty and environmental deterioration. This interaction changes the shape of the environment, for example, as soil erosion, which turns an area into a desert, or as deforestation. Poverty has a specific cycle and it is a significant component of environmental deterioration. This is because the poor people have no choice to survive but forthright exploitation and over-utilization of the resources [1].

The poor people, either because of the imposed pressure on the government to meet their needs or because of the wide socioeconomic activities on the loose ground, are often the main problem for sustainable development [2].

The poor often do not have the ability to improve their local environment [1] and in most cases, due to the pressure on the environmental resources and operation of these resources in an unsystematic, unstable way [2], they destruct the environment, for example, through the use of local forest resources for building materials and combustion [1].

The relationship between poverty and the environment was first introduced as a controversial topic in the Stockholm conference of United Nations on the human environment in 1972. In the final report, it was asserted that population growth and lack of access to land can cause a

pressure on the poor people that put them into the over increasing operation of environmental resources in the suburbs and outskirts of the villages to meet their needs in short-term. This trend results in the destruction of resources and in a cycle process, re-creates poverty and jeopardizes the survival in long-term [3]. Sharifinia in a research, as a quotation from Cheri, stated that the pressure on natural resources imposed by poor people are often a result of population growth, limited access to land, access to low quality land, scarce resources for investment, and poor sustainable resource management [2].

Purasghar Sangachin in a study entitled "Population growth, poverty and environmental destruction in Iran," "the vulnerability of poor villagers against the state and national schemes" and also "the absence of non-governmental organizations and local grassroots"

are of intervening factors that affect strategies taken from rural people. The poor villagers are often too vulnerable in the face of national plans (such as protection of pastures and forests), because most of the mentioned projects limit their access to natural resources. In addition, the absence of non-governmental organizations rooted in local communities that can play the role of mediator in the relationship between government and the local community becomes a factor aggravating the conflict [3].

In our country, Iran, people are greatly dependent on their own environment. Environmental resources cannot be renewed in accordance with its utilization; this can result in the destruction of the environment. On the other hand, because living people, especially farmers and rural communities, are dependent on

the environment, when an environmental resource is destroyed, their financial resource is also reduced. Environmental degradation by people, especially by farmers and villagers can be discussed in the three domains of material, knowledge, and culture. One of the causes of environmental deterioration in terms of material is the use of natural resources as fuel. In terms of poor knowledge, it can be said that farmers are in indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers; they are unaware of the principles of plowing the field and sound scientific agriculture', and even they are not willing to earn new knowledge of cultivation and tend to work on their traditional, unscientific principles. They may cause soil erosion and destruction by performing false ways of plowing, or by using too much fertilizer that can cause fertile soils to be saline and destroyed.

Also, in most cases, the main cause of environmental destruction is the poor culture and lack of environmental ethics among the poor people that the release of , solid waste, and sewage into the recreational and residential lands are among the consequences. However, it should be noted that such behaviors may also be observed among people other than the poor. The poor culture important factors is the employment of individuals without minimum expertise in vital responsibilities and ignoring professionals and technicians who can be effective in teaching people [4].

Some experts believe that in order to reduce poverty, protecting the environment, the implementation of global strategies in all aspects of national policy is necessary. Strategies such as providing basic social services, land reform, social safety nets, economic growth, development of environmental ethics, rising of consciousness, and creative participation of all people are recommended to protect the environment [1]. The authorities not only by creation of microcredit and programs for environmental skills education, but also by starting fair, long-term economic participation with local communities can overcome the current problems.

There are other solutions that are suggested as follows: conducting comprehensive research in the context of poverty in rural areas and its impact on the environmental destruction as one of the major challenges for sustainable development in developing countries, involving the poor in promoting environmental management simultaneously,

promoting environmental ethics and encouraging the poor villagers and farmers by arranging meetings and lectures, showing films and slides to make them familiar with the negative consequences of environmental, public participation regarding environmental protection and recognition of native's right about the exploitation of environmental resources, encouraging the poor villagers to systematic, sustainable utilization of environmental resources through financial support in the form of facilities and services such lending, credit and subsidies, providing cheap fuel and fossil fuels, providing cost-effective, timely forage for dairy farmers in the seasons other than the season for permitted grazing, making the opportunities for hiring in the agriculture, mining, and industry sectors to reduce the pressure on natural resources especially for farmers who have a small number of livestock, making changes in traditional farming systems, and supporting the plans for rangeland management [2]. So, it must be recognized that poverty and its impact on the environment is not an indispensable issue with no cure, but by providing employment opportunities, equitable distribution of resources and income, and improving land quality it can be controlled. Finally, perhaps it is a fact that providing welfare for the poorest groups of the community has the most important role in the protecting the environment and keeping the life quality of other parts of the society.

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