

Impact of Resource Depletion in India

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Abstract

We all know that the beautiful resources are the gifts of nature. These resources form one of the primary assets to the nation's economy. They play a very important role in the development of the national economy. Along with the increase in population, there is going to be an increase in the use and misuse of resources thus disturbing its potential productive capacity. This would very well be reflected in the economic progress of a country or a region. We also know that the exploitation of resources for development has engaged the effects of man through the ages. These activities eventually have proliferated with a multitude of forms, each with its own objectives, schemes, failures, surprises, and repercussions. The significance of the multi-dimensional nature of the development phenomenon was not adequately recognized by geographers until rather recently.

This paper is an important fact which has drawn the attention of geographers is the ecological approach towards the study of resources. It has been observed in many parts of the world that man has been allowing soils to be miserably depleted, forests to be indiscriminately cut, and seas, lakes, and ponds to be used as sinks for his waste. The unprecedented growth rates of population, swiftly rising income and per capita demand, and the scientific and technological advances in recent decades – all have created a situation where the heavy demands on natural systems may exceed their capacity to respond and reach a breakdown stage. As a consequence of this, a new awareness about the man environment relationship came into existence, well reflected in the UN Declaration on the Human Environment 1972. "The natural resources of the earth including air, water, land, flora and fauna must be safeguarded for the benefit of the present and future generations".

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Introduction

Etymologically, the word ‘resource’ is related to the source. The prefix “re” meaning again suggests dependability through time, as indicated in the word ‘relies’ used in the first dictionary definition. Resources are thus means on which human societies depend for a long period of time.

Resources as those aspects of man’s environment which facilitate the satisfaction of human wants and the attainment of social objectives. Natural resources may be defined as those resources which are provided by nature and which are useful to man.

The resources are those means which satisfy man’s need, wholly or partially, and lead to human welfare. Thus, man and resources are inter-dependent. Though thousands of natural elements occur in the environment, not all of them are resources in the true sense of the term. Those objects or elements attain meaning only when they combine with human characteristics, knowledge, social and political organization, and his ability to use them. Any material which can be transformed in a way that becomes more valuable and useful can be termed as a resource.

Resources have both tangible and intangible aspects of coal, iron, petroleum, copper, wood, etc. are tangible things which play an important role as resources. At the same time, intangible things such as knowledge, health, social organization, political stability, freedom, wise policies, etc. are also resources because these elements play a major role in satisfying human needs in fulfilling human aspirations and in the ultimate development of man. Zimmerman while defining resources laid emphasis on three aspects viz. (i) on which man is dependent, (ii) which satisfies man’s needs, and (iii) man’s physical and mental abilities to make use of the opportunity.

Depletion of Natural Resources

With the dawn of the industrial revolution, humans twined their attention to other needs beyond those associated with survival. Automobiles, household appliances, processed foods, and beverages, etc. have now become so popular as to become necessities, and meeting these acquired needs had become a major thrust of modern industrial society. These acquired needs have increased the demands on our natural resources, resulting in the depletion of the natural resources. Further, the over-exploitation (excessive use) of natural resources has also disturbed the natural balance in the relationship between organisms and their physical environment.

Presently, the natural resources are depleting very fast. Various causes identified for the depletion of resources are :

- Over-use/irrational use,

- Non-equitable distribution,
- Technological and industrial development,
- Population growth.

(i) Over-use of Natural Resources

Over-exploitation of natural resources, to meet the ever-increasing demand for economic and industrial growth, is the major cause for the depletion of natural resources. The forest resources are depleting very fast due to overgrazing, commercial logging, shifting cultivation, fuelwood gathering, mining, quarrying, and other forms of over-exploitation, both for commercial and household needs. The unlimited exploitation of timber for commercial/ industrial use leads to deforestation.

Economic forces can encourage people to over-exploit their land for short-term gains. Over-cultivation, over-grazing, wrong cultivation practices (like cutting fields along the direction of hill slopes), excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, etc. are common practices that lead to land degradation (i.e. loss of fertility or productivity of the soil).

The per-capita daily consumption of minerals (including fossil fuels) is also increasing day by day to meet the demands of industrial, transport, power, and other sectors. This over-use may lead to the depletion of fossil fuels and other important minerals in the near future.

(ii) Non-equitable distribution of resources

Natural resources are not equally distributed over the world. This uneven distribution of natural resources is one of the major causes of their depletion. For instance, on a global scale, total water abundance is not the problem, the problem is of fresh water's availability in the right place at the right time in the right form. Global water is unequally distributed. Precipitation is seasonal and, therefore, the amount of water in inland bodies is variable. Arid regions suffer perennially from water shortage.

(iii) Technological and Industrial Development

The technological and industrial development is another major cause of depletion of natural resources. The ever increasing demands from the industry, transport, agriculture, and defense preparation are a cause of concern. Depletion of almost all the known and easily accessible mineral deposits is anticipated in the very near future. There may be a shortage of some crucial minerals such as mercury, tin, copper, gold, silver, and platinum. The limited resource of phosphorus, which is an essential component of chemical fertilizers, is another concern.

(iv) Population Growth

The rapid growth of population is perhaps the most obvious, large areas of forests are cleared to reclaim land for agriculture, housing (settlements), industries, roads, and rail tracks, hydropower projects, mining, and quarrying. Increased demand for fuelwood and timber has also contributed to large scale deforestation.

Freshwater is the biggest crisis facing the world today. Human water use has been increasing about twice as fast as population growth over the past century. If the present population growth rate continues, it is expected that by 2025 the per capita water use will come down to about 5000 cubic meters from 9000 cubic meters available in the year 2005.

Impact of Resource Depletion

Over-exploitation and irrational use of natural resources in this age of technological and industrial development and inequitable distribution of resources, coupled with population growth, is causing the depletion of natural resources, coupled with population growth, is causing the depletion of natural resources at a very rapid rate. Since the survival of human beings depends on the natural resources; therefore, their depletion will definitely have far-reaching impacts. The major impact of resource depletion can be grouped into four categories:

- Imbalance in nature.
- Shortage of materials.
- Struggle for existence.
- Slackening of economic growth.

(i) Imbalance in nature

A balance exists in nature through a relationship between living organisms and their physical environment. The excessive use of natural resources by humans has disturbed this natural balance. This has not only caused an ecological crisis, but has also threatened his existence.

Deforestation is adversely affecting and damaging the environment. The clearing of forests is causing soil erosion, expansions of deserts, loss of fertile land, lowering of the water table, loss of fauna and flora, and environmental changes such as decrease in rainfall, increased frequency of floods and droughts and increased concentration of carbon-dioxide (leading to global warming).

(ii) Shortage of Materials

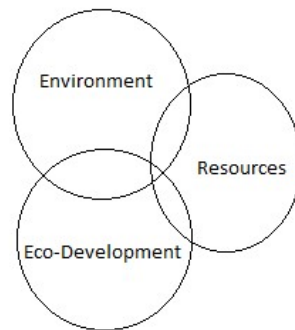
It is quite obvious that the depletion of natural resources results in a shortage of materials. History abounds with examples of societies that have flourished because of abundance of wood and societies that have collapsed after exhaustion.

(iii) Struggle for existence

The shortage of natural resources due to their rapid depletion all over the world has initiated the struggle for existence. It is no longer the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the richest in natural resources. For instance, the shortage of the fuelwood due to deforestation is causing serious misery among rural and forest-dwelling people, particularly among the womenfolk.

(iv) Slackening of Economic Growth

There is a close link between the availability of natural resources and the economic growth of a nation. They are crucial to economic development because all the major sectors of the economy depend upon the availability of natural resources. The countries or regions which are rich in natural resources are the most developed ones.

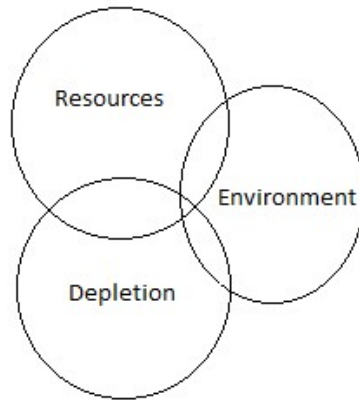


Resources and Environment

Conclusion/Suggestion

At present, we are losing forests at a rate of 1.7 crore hectares annually worldwide. But we forget that the economic gains are short-lived, while the long term damaging effects of deforestation are disastrous and irreversible. According to an estimate, about 22 million hectares have already been destroyed in India. Besides other adverse impacts deforestation leads to a shortage of timber, fuelwood, and other minor forest produce such as medicinal plants, herbs, honey, etc.

Impact of Resource depletion of fossil fuels (oil, petroleum, and natural gas) due to the over-exploitation is causing, their shortage to such an extent that several nations are forced to find out alternative sources of energy. Many international conflicts have precipitated solely for petroleum, for example, the 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Gulf War of 1991.



Depletion of Resources

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