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## Environmental Protection In The Era Of Globalisation “A Quest For Global Consensus”

**Tajamul Yousuf**

Former Lecturer, Kashmir Law College  
Relationship Executive Officer, J&K Bank. Srinagar , India

### **Abstract:**

*Environment is the gift of nature which nourishes the mankind. It is the medium in which the human beings are brought up. With the advancement of scientific and technological development over the centuries, the pace of Globalization has expedited like never before. Globalization has resulted in the consistent interaction between the countries, the countries have come closer to each other. The Globalization has transformed the countries all over the world into a “Global Village”. Globalization touches every aspect of the world community, be it social, political, economic, cultural and more importantly environmental aspect as well. Globalization is a necessary evil, involves various processes which are considered as hazardous for the environment. Since we all breathe the same air and we all inhabit same environment, our responsibilities to protect the environment should also be common. Globalization demands a global consensus to tackle environmental problems. The first decade of the 21st century has seen the dramatic change in terms of the efforts and steps taken by the global community in dealing with the environmental problem. Various international Summits and Conferences have been organised time and again all across the globe to protect and preserve the environment from the negative aspect of Globalization. A careful examination of these international Summits and Conferences held over the decades show that the outcome has been meaningless and it is very difficult for the countries to reach an agreement on tackling by far the most challenging problem that world faces today. Kyoto protocol (1997) is considered to be the landmark initiative so far as protecting of environment at global level is concerned. However in the year 2012, Kyoto protocol expired. The United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) in the year 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 saw a great divide between the developed countries and developing countries. The matter got escalated even to the extent of countries like New Zealand, Canada is withdrawing from the international commitment and obligation imposed by the Kyoto protocol. These unfortunate events have severely hit the process of protecting the environment in the era of Globalization. Whether the countries can manage to overcome their deep divisions and differences is a million dollar question. As of now, the approach and attitude of all countries over the world in relation to environment protection, is slow and painful. The principle obstacle between poor and rich countries need to be removed that too very swiftly and if the differences and issues are not resolved, what we may witness very soon is the disastrous impact of the environmental tsunami in the form of severe Global warming, ozone depletion, environmental pollution, desertification and degradation of ecosystem and biodiversity. All the countries over the world are in quest of “global consensus”, which is the long cherished dream so far as tackling environmental problems at the global level are concerned. In the light of this theme, the paper analyses and examines the various aspects of environmental protection in the era of Globalization.*

**Key words:** Globalization, Environment, Hazardous, Climate change, International Conference

### **1.Introduction**

Globalization has ushered in an era of contrasts – of fast-paced change and persistent problems. It implies a growing degree of interdependence among economies and societies through cross-country flows of information, ideas, technologies, goods, services, capital, finance, and people. It has challenged the traditional capacity of national governments to regulate and control. The rapid pace of economic integration – a central force behind and a manifestation of globalization – has led to interlinked world markets and economies demanding synchronization of national policies on a number of issues. One dimension of this coordination concerns the environment. From shared natural resources such as fisheries and biological diversity, to the potential for transboundary pollution spillovers across the land, over water, and through the air, we now understand that governance defined solely by the traditional notion

of national territorial sovereignty cannot protect us from global-scale environmental threats. An effective response to these challenges will require fresh thinking, refined strategies, and new mechanisms for international cooperation.

This paper explores the relationship between globalization and the environment and seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How does globalization affect the environment? (2) What is the motive of collective action at the global scale and what has been the role of international summits and conferences in combating environmental problems?

## **2. Globalization Effects On The Environment**

Globalization presents a mixed blessing for the environment. It creates new opportunities for cooperation but also gives rise to new issues and tensions. For example, liberalized trade may generate economic growth, which, in turn, may translate into increased pollution, including transboundary spillovers of harm and unsustainable consumption of natural resources. Likewise, economic integration strengthens competitive pressures across national borders that may help consumers by lowering prices, improving service, and increasing choice. But these same pressures constrain national government capacities to regulate and necessitate intergovernmental coordination of domestic policies as well as cooperation in the management of the global commons. Without effective international-scale governance, globalization may intensify environmental harms wherever regulatory structures are inadequate.<sup>1</sup> The paper examines six specific environmental issues—threats to wildlife, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem degradation, global warming, ozone depletion, and pollution—that display the same themes as those disputes, as well as others. These include international cooperation versus sovereign control, differing cultural evaluations of the need for environmental protection, the role of scientific evidence in policymaking, and, of course, environmental concerns versus economic development.

### *2.1. Wildlife*

The most visible and sympathetic victims of environmental problems caused by globalization are animals. Animals are faced with a host of threats from human economic activities, including the degradation of their ecosystems as a whole and the direct extinction of tens of thousands of species.

### *2.2. Loss Of Biodiversity*

The concept of “biodiversity” is the “big picture” view of the flora and fauna of the earth. Biodiversity is defined by the International Convention on Biological Diversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part”. In other words, biodiversity covers plants and animals themselves, the way they interact with each other, and the way they interact with the natural environment in which they live. The entire ecosystems in coastal and marine areas, inland watersheds, forests, and dry lands (i.e. Deserts, grasslands, and savannahs) are being destroyed by pollution, land conversion, and climate change.

### *2.3. Ecosystems*

Ecosystems are the whole web of relationships among a particular environmental habitat and the plants, animals, and human beings who depend on it. Some of these ecosystems, such as the oceans, are not under the control of any one or number of nations, however. Who, then, should be responsible for protecting those areas? At the same time, some ecosystems are under the control of one nation, but that one nation may have neither the resources nor the inclination to protect them. Should other countries care about environmental damage in another country that has no clear cross-border affects? If so, how can those other nations reverse that damage without impinging on the first country’s sovereignty?

### *2.4. Oceans*

The oceans are a prime example of these problems. They are used for economic activity, recreation, and sustenance by people in many nations of the world. At the same time, they are also damaged by people in those nations. Belonging to no one nation, however, oceans can be considered the “common heritage of mankind”. Yet, if no one nation owns them and is responsible for taking care of the oceans as a coherent ecosystem, how can they be protected? This is referred to as the “tragedy of the commons,” that is, a resource that is owned by no one but used by everyone will eventually become hopelessly damaged because no one will take responsibility for protecting it. Each user will assume that someone else will be responsible, and, thus, no one becomes responsible. This is a tragedy, too, because of the reliance of all human beings on the oceans. Covering about 70 percent of the earth’s surface, oceans play a vital role in the environment and economic activity throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, oceans are the basis for a wide variety of industrial, commercial, and recreational activities, such as fisheries, shipping, and sailing. Various kinds of pollution make their way into the oceans from many sources, including sewage, agricultural runoff, oil spills, chemical emissions, and non-biodegradable litter (that is, litter that will not degrade naturally). Unsustainable consumption of living marine resources (fishing) is another pressing problem. UNEP reports “an almost inexorable global trend towards increasingly intense exploitation and depletion of fisheries stocks, three-quarters of which are maximally exploited...”. Also, through dredging to create ports, waste dumps, construction, and

<sup>1</sup> Nordstrom and Vaughan Paper “ill effects of Globalization”. 1999.

<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations Atlas of the Oceans, “Oceans are a highly productive system which continuously recycles chemicals, nutrients and water through the ‘hydrological cycle,’ which powers climate and weather, and which regulates global temperature by acting as a giant heat reservoir from the sun.

recreation, coastal areas have been significantly disturbed and reshaped for human purposes. Recently, one of the largest environmental disasters took place, the 2010 BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This was the largest oil spill in the history of the U.S., with numerous negative impacts on marine ecosystems and coastal economies.

### 2.5. Desertification

Desertification is caused by a combination of climactic variations and human activities. Untouched dry lands suffer during periods of drought, but are generally able to recover on their own. However, when these areas are simultaneously exploited for human economic gain, the combined stress on the ecosystem can be too much. Thus, over-cultivation, over-grazing, deforestation, and poor irrigation by humans play a large role in the desertification problem.

The results of desertification can be disastrous. The key effect is the loss of the primary resources—fertile topsoil, vegetation, and crops—that sustain economic activity. In impoverished regions, such as sub Saharan Africa, the ramifications are serious. If desertification progresses enough, the already marginalized people who depend on this land will find that the land can no longer provide enough food and water for survival. The result is famine that starves many people and animals, forces large displacements of populations, and entails a massive economic disruption. Though the effects of desertification are most alarming in poor regions, the resultant loss of productivity is damaging for developed areas as well.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.6. Global Warming

Global warming also called climate change refers to the worldwide rise in temperatures that has been blamed for severe weather in many parts of the world. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a worldwide consortium of scientists set up in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the world's average temperature has risen by 1.1° F (0.6° C) over the past century. The Earth Policy Institute reported that 2010 was the hottest year on record with an average global temperature of 14.63 degrees Celsius (EPI, 2008). The IPCC also predicts an increase in average temperature between 2.5° F (1.4° C) and 10.4° F (5.8° C) over the next century, a rate of warming unprecedented in the last 10,000 years. The cause of global warming is human activity, including fossil fuel combustion associated with industrial development, the burning of forests by farmers in the developing world, and even biomass combustion—the burning of wood, coal, and dung for cooking and heat—by the poor. These activities have produced emissions of gases, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC's), which contains elements such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, chlorine, and fluorine, and bromide (together called halogens). CFCs and HCFCs are often described as “greenhouse gases” because they warm the atmosphere by trapping heat from the sun and cause the “greenhouse effect.”

To combat these problems, in 1992 the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established a commitment “to achieve... stabilization of atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, 1997). Since then, 192 countries have joined the UNFCCC, and (and 4 countries have joined as ‘observer countries’), and as of April 2012, 191 states and the EU have ratified the Kyoto protocol, the latest of which was Afghanistan on April 3, 2012. The Kyoto Protocol is a more stringent and detailed procedure for execution of the UNFCCC goals. Under the Protocol, developed, signatory nations are supposed to achieve a five to seven percent reduction from 1990 levels in CO2 emissions by 2008 to 2012. Developing nations do not have such specific targets, but are incentivised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through voluntary targets, technology transfer, and the income generated by the cap-and-trade market designated in the protocol. Nevertheless, the disputes over the balance between economic development and environmental protection and between the responsibilities of rich and poor countries will have to be settled before an internationally coordinated strategy for reducing greenhouse gases can gain the participation of the United States.

### 2.7. Ozone Depletion

Like global warming, depletion of the ozone layer raises complex problems of cause and effect that have led to international disagreements over coordinated efforts to reverse the problem. Unlike global warming, however, ozone depletion has actually been successfully controlled by international cooperation, perhaps providing a model for other efforts at global environmental protection. Ozone is an invisible, poisonous gas molecule (O<sub>3</sub>) that exists in trace (minimal) amounts in the stratosphere (6-30 miles above the earth). It makes life on earth possible by shielding the planet from 95-99 percent of the sun's harmful ultra-violet (UV) rays, which can cause skin cancer, degenerative eye damage, and suppressed immune response. Rodents subjected to UV irradiation are more likely to die from viruses such as malaria, influenza, and herpes.

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3 Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the United Nations, warned that, “Desertification... affects one-third of the earth's surface, putting at risk 1.2 billion people in more than 100 countries”. Recognizing the potentially catastrophic consequences of desertification, the international community created the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Agreed upon in 1994, the UNCCD went into force in 1996 and 193 countries had joined it as of June 2011. In 2007, the UNCCD released a 10 year strategy for the reduction of desertification, which will be effective from 2008 to 2018. Though the UNCCD addresses desertification in all parts of the world, the primary focus is on Africa, where it is a particularly pernicious problem. In 2013 the UNCCD established goals to end water scarcity through sustainable use of water resources, and awareness of drought.

### 2.8. Pollution

The balance between economic development and environmental damage is also evident in the problem of pollution and waste products. Increased economic activities, especially in industrial countries, yield pollution from trash and litter, sewage, oil spills, gas and chemical emissions, and nuclear radiation.<sup>4</sup> In the almost 40 years since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, dozens of international conferences, national laws, local initiatives, government programs and non-governmental campaigns have not resolved the fundamental tensions that underlie the relationship between globalization and the environment. Instead, all these efforts have challenged countries to manage those tensions in ways that are politically feasible within their domestic political context and their financial resources. The results of this process for the environment and for human development are still unfolding.

### 3. Globalisation Vs Environment

Many domestic regulations could act as non-tariff barriers to trade, trade agreements now routinely include market access rules and regulatory disciplines. Public health standards, food safety requirements, emissions limits, waste management and disposal rules, and labeling policies all may shape trade flows. The number of trade-environment flash points has continued to expand. Environmental proponents fear that liberalized trade might make it harder for high-standard countries to keep their stringent environmental requirements in the face of market access demands from trade partners.

The difficulty in the trade and environment debate lies in separating legitimate environmental standards from protectionist regulations advanced under the guise of environmental protection. The smooth functioning and efficiency of the international economic system cannot be maintained unless there are clear rules of engagement for international commerce, including environmental provisions. In the absence of a functioning global environmental management system capable of addressing trade and environment issues, responsibility for integrating these two policy realms has fallen to the WTO. Although the WTO has a Committee on Trade and Environment that has been meeting for a number of years, the Committee is dominated by trade experts, has demonstrated little understanding of the trade effects of environmental policy, and has almost nothing in the way of results to show for its efforts. A sense of frustration about this state of affairs now permeates both the environmental and trade communities. Both sides agree that trade rules must not condone free-riding on global environmental commitments. But how to implement this principle remains in dispute.

Environmental groups have focused much of their attention over the past decade on reform of the World Bank and other multilateral economic bodies, including the WTO. Leaders of the trade community have begun belatedly to respond to this pressure. But they have also started to argue that the WTO lacks the capacity to address environmental issues effectively and that the WTO's efficacy and legitimacy are undermined whenever the organization is forced to make decisions that go beyond the scope of its trade mandate and expertise. Thus, the push for a parallel environmental governance structure now seems to be gathering momentum.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. The Idea Of Global Collective Action

The essence of globalization is connectivity. The forces that connect people and places across the world and, in the words of Thomas Friedman, have shrunk it "from size medium to size small," are also profoundly affecting the global environment. Globalization is, in part, an ecological fact. A series of environmental challenges span multiple countries and even the world. Polluted waters, collapsing fisheries, invasive species, and the threat of climate change have all been brought about, at least in part, through the forces of globalization. Clearly, the primary responsibility for environmental protection rests with national governments and local communities. But some problems are inescapably global in scope and cannot be addressed without international cooperation. The management of a common resource inescapably requires the participation and cooperation of multiple jurisdictions. With regard to shared resources, which at once may be seen as belonging to everybody and nobody. It is rational for a fisherman, for example, to try to maximize his personal gain by catching as many fish as possible as quickly as possible. Collectively, however, such a strategy leads to overexploitation of the resource and a "tragedy of the commons." The fish stock will be depleted, leaving the entire fishing community worse off than if it had found a cooperative arrangement to manage the fishery on a sustainable basis. When extended to a global scale, the problem becomes even more acute and intractable in the absence of clear rules and institutions ensuring compliance.

### 5. Reforming Global Environmental Governance; Role Of International Summits And Conferences On Environmental Protection In The Era Of Globalisation

Collective action is necessary and urgent, yet in the environmental domain it has fallen short as a result of the deep-seated weakness of the institutional architecture and decision-making processes of the existing international environmental regime. Fragmentation, gaps in

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<sup>4</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), representing the world's 30 richest countries, estimates that from 1980-2005 there was a 35 percent increase per person in waste each year, from 946 lbs. to 1276 lbs, among its member-countries (OECD, 2008). OECD says that, "municipal waste generation continues to increase almost as rapidly GDP in member-countries." Overall, total waste generation in OECD countries exceeded four billion tons in the mid-1990s (OECD, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The recent WTO Director-General, Renato Ruggiero, and the current Director-General, Supachai Panitchpakdi, have both urged the creation of a World Environment Organization to help focus and coordinate worldwide environmental efforts, thereby relieving environmental pressures on the WTO. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, French President Jacques Chirac called for the creation of a World Environmental Organization that would bring greater balance to a multilateral system excessively focused on the economy.



issue coverage, and even contradictions among different treaties, organizations, and agencies with environmental responsibilities have undermined effective, results-oriented action.

Fundamentally, the focus and design of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) predate a full appreciation of the international scope of pollution issues. Hampered by a narrow mandate, a modest budget, and limited political support, UNEP competes with more than a dozen other UN bodies including the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC) on the international environmental scene. Adding to this fragmentation are the independent secretariats to numerous conventions including the Montreal Protocol (ozone layer protection) Kyoto protocol (climate change), the Basel Convention (hazardous waste trade), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and the Climate Change Convention, all contending for a limited governmental time, attention, and resources.

The existing international environmental system has failed to adequately deal with the priorities of both developed and developing countries. The proliferation of multilateral environmental agreements has placed an increasing burden on member states to meet their collective obligations and responsibilities. The toll on developing countries has been especially heavy as little assistance in the way of financing, technology, or policy guidance has been forthcoming. The inadequacy and dispersion of the existing financial mechanisms – scattered across the Global Environmental Facility, UN Development Programme, World Bank, and separate funds such as the Montreal Protocol Finance Mechanism – reinforces the perception of a lack of seriousness in the North about the plight of the South. Furthermore, fundamental principles of good governance such as fair representation, transparency, and accountability are still at issue in many of the institutions with environmental responsibilities. These procedural shortcomings undermine the legitimacy of the system as a whole. A multi-prong agenda of refinements and reform of UNEP and the other elements of the current international environmental system could be developed to address these many issues.

#### **6. Global Environmental Platform & Global Environmental Forum**

The Global environmental platform (GEP) mandate might then be expanded to include monitoring, rulemaking, and the development of a Global Bargaining Forum. Subsequently, the GEP might acquire a dispute settlement mechanism. In designing a new global environmental regime, form should follow function. A properly designed structure would provide a counterpart as well as a counterweight to the World Trade Organization and an alternative forum for addressing tensions over divergent environmental values and approaches.

At the center of proposal lies a global public policy network, which draws in expertise from around the world on an issue by issue basis. By utilizing the resources of national governments, NGOs, private sector enterprises, business and industry associations, think tanks, research centres, and academic institutions on “as needed” basis, the GEP would have a far broader issue expertise and analytic capacity than the existing environmental regime. Such a system for advancing international environmental agenda-setting, analysis, negotiation, policy formulation, implementation, and institutional learning would be more flexible, cost-effective, fleet-footed, and innovative. Successful responses to global-scale environmental problems depend on agreements on financial burden sharing. Developing countries need support, subsidies, and other incentives to encourage their efforts to internalize externalities. There would be great value in a forum for the facilitation of international deals on the environment that improve quality and result in positive cash flow to custodians of environmental assets. A global bargaining forum could act as a catalyst between countries or private entities negotiating over resource management. Thus, a government in one country might negotiate a deal to preserve a particular natural resource in another country – part of a rainforest, a set of species, etc. – in return for a sum of money or other policy benefits.

#### **7. Conclusion**

This paper in Depth has described the effect of globalization on the environment both as a result of the increasing integration of the world's economies through international trade and in the context of multilateral, international efforts to combat the most pressing global environmental problems. As analysed in this paper, the countries disagree over the nature and scope of the threats the environment faces and the way to deal with those threats, with scientific, political, cultural, and economic considerations all playing roles in these disagreements. A large number of international summits and conferences on environmental have ended without any conclusion. This is because of the continuous conflict and a rift between the developed and developing countries over the issue of “responsibility sharing” when it comes to environmental protection at the international level. Both economic and ecological interdependence demand coordinated national policies and international collective action. Our increasingly globalized world makes new thinking about international environmental cooperation essential. An extraordinary mix of political idealism and pragmatism will be required to coordinate pollution control and natural resource management policies on a worldwide basis across a diversity of countries and peoples, political perspectives and traditions, levels of wealth and development, beliefs and priorities. But the gains will go beyond the environmental domain. Indeed, coordinated pollution control strategies and natural resource management standards provide an important set of ground rules for international commerce, serve as an essential bulwark against market failure in the international economic system, and make it more likely that globalization will yield broad benefits. It is time to re-engineer the environmental regime, aiming for a new, forward-looking, sleeker, and more efficient architecture that will better serve environmental, governmental, public, and business needs. A globalizing world requires thoughtful and modern ways to manage interdependence. The world community would benefit from the presence of an authoritative environmental voice in the international arena, a recognized forum for national officials and other stakeholders to work cooperatively to address global-scale issues, and a legitimate mechanism to ensure that efforts to promote economic progress and environmental goals are mutually reinforcing in the era

of Globalization. To conclude with, it can be said that, “Since we all breathe the same air and we all inhabit same environment, our responsibilities to protect the environment should also be common. Globalization demands a global consensus to tackle environmental problems.” The countries all over the world should involve themselves actively in the quest of global consensus, which is the long cherished dream so far as tackling environmental problems at the global level are concerned.

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