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Global Environmental Governance: the Case for a New Paradigm

Introduction

Concurrent to the rapid increase in environmental problems, the politico-institutional framework conditions for environmental policy making and governance are experiencing a major transformation. When defining Global Environment Governance firstly, a few words concerning the phrase need clarification. Governance is about how decisions and policies are being made, who is responsible, how they carry out their mandates, and how they are accountable (El-Ashry, 2005). Environmental Governance in a global, regional or national context emphasizes the necessity of accumulating policy instruments, organizations, rules, procedures and norms to regulate the process of global environmental protection (Najam, Papa, & Taiyab, 2006). Within this context of the global environmental politics and policy, the end goal of global environmental governance is to improve the state of environment and to eventually lead to the broader goal of achieving a sustainable development. However, the global environmental trends continue to be negative and the resources and competency to address these issues have not properly been materialized. Hence, the challenge before us in the contemporary developments of environment protection is to resolve the paradox of achieving high development goals with low environmental degradation through proper environmental governance mechanism.

Rachel Carson through her seminal work in 1962, "A Silent Spring" launched environmentalism as a political ideology. Carson ushered in the environmental movement and presented a critical question for generations to come: How can be

the practices and needs of modern society managed in a manner that prevents damaging pollution, biodiversity loss, and other environmental harms? Or, in contemporary vernacular, how can global development proceed in a manner that is environmentally sustainable? (Benjamin & Fulton, 2011, p.1). Ever since her prescient work, particularly during the past few decades many states around the world have undertaken responsible measures to answer these questions and considerable progress has been made. Many nations have drafted, signed and/or ratified numerous multilateral environmental agreements (“MEAs”) to protect the air, water, land and biodiversity. Despite these efforts to confront environmental problems, the public concern over sufficient clean water resources, climate change, desertification, endangered species protection, ocean oil spills, ozone depletion and other similar matters seems to have increased rather than decreased (Malone & Pasternack, 2006).

A key reason for this result is the failure of many countries and their leaders to implement adequately and effectively the standards set- forth in these MEAs. Moreover, these defensive mechanisms are constantly threatened by the actions of economic and political actors and fueled by the growing inequalities of globalization. Hence, unceasing efforts by the stakeholders and parties interested are necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of new forms of environmental governance. This study will investigate three main aspects in recent debate of Environmental Governance; transformation of power relations; current developments; environmental threats to human security and the need for policy direction.

Transformation of Power Relations

The past decade has witnessed a change in the world order of environmental policy making. The traditional way to see policy making in general is a top-down system which draw from the international level to the local level, with nation-states as dominating actors has been considered outdated among many academics (Eckerberh & Joas, 2004). In several theoretical studies the centralized power structure of the nation state has been questioned. One such instance derives from an International Political Economy point of view, where Susan Strange argues that

some of the non-state authorities, from mafias to the Big Six accounting firms and international bureaucrats, whose power over who gets what in the world encroaches on that of national governments (Strange, 1996). Hence, it is vital to reconsider certain conventional assumptions of the state centric power structure when formulating policy mechanisms and institutional framework for environmental governance. Alternatively multi-level governance which implies a horizontal shift of responsibilities from governmental actors/authorities towards non-governmental actors and all other societal levels- local, regional, national and international could be taken as an effective approach in this regard (Eckerberh & Joas, 2004). This process clearly demonstrates a transformation of power relations among national entities and supra-national entities in the context of global environmental governance.

Environmental Threat to Human Security

Mostly, security is defined as " the integrity of the state and its national interests from the use of force by an adversity" (Parkin, 1997: p. 1). In this context, the concept of security has interpreted narrowly: simply as security of territory from external aggression or as a protection of national interests in foreign policy. As viewed by many scholars, this definition is inadequate to provide a broader picture of security as it required including non -military aspects of the security. Therefore, maintaining a predominantly military approach to security has become obsolete as it has to look at the other non-traditional dimensions of the security.

In this regard, human security can be considered as a new approach to look at the concept of security, replacing the traditional approach to security which is defined mostly in the military sense. Human security as a people-centered model of security looks at various dimensions where insecurity can be arisen with chronic threats and sudden hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life. On other hand, the concept of human security is another profound transition in the process of shifting from traditional security to non-traditional security. In this scenario, "Environmental security has been recognized as a key factor for social security, economic growth, and prosperity. On other hand, human security has a great

impact on the environmental preservation focusing on the major elements of the ecosystem. (Ganoukis, 2007).

Moreover, the co-relation between human security and the environment is close as well as it is complicated. (Journal of Human Development, 2003: p.1). More recently, it has become increasingly clear that, this relationship is closely associated with non- conventional notions of security. Therefore, environmental security is interconnected with the contemporary environmental changes. This increasing scope of the security includes environmental degradation, global warming and climate change and other considerable environmental issues which are directly seen as threats to human security.

On the other hand, Environment has become a source of conflict, creating numerous civil wars based on the environmental related issues. The past decades have witnessed that environment is the major player in the human security. Therefore, the Environmental security has created new room for policy making at the global level going beyond the national level focusing on numerous environmental issues. However, today's international community has realized that environment is an "issue- originated entity" (Ganoukis, 2007). Also it is correct to say that, international community has acknowledged the importance of the environment in achieving the human security. Therefore, many attempts have been made by the nation-states towards through various means of multi-national co-operation to address the environmental issues in order to secure human security. Moreover, a set of institutions have been created for this purpose, integrating many national units into supra national units. This proves that maintaining traditional political borders of nation-states are worthless when tackling environmental issues (Eckerberg & Joas, 2004, p. 409).

As most of the environmental problems are trans- boundary in character, the environmental security can be considered as the widest component of the human security that has been led to global-level Environmental Governance. Considering the given attention on the environmental impact on the human security by the states, it can be said that, environmental security is crucial to determine the human security as it originates various issues at national as well as international level. "As

pointed out by the World Bank Report, eighty countries, with 40% of the world's population, already suffer from shortage of fresh water"(Parkin,1997, p. 2). Not only that, changes in climate patterns brought global attention on possible threats to human security creating many issue areas. Further, global warming, green gas effect and deforestation are some of salient environmental issues that directly threaten the human security. The air pollution has become another considerable issue being common to developed and developing nations. Although character of environmental damage differs between industrial and developing countries, the effects are similar almost everywhere.

In general, many environmental threats are chronic and long-lasting while others take on a more sudden and violent character. For an example, Bhopal and Chernobyl incidents the most obvious sudden environmental catastrophes" (Human Development Report, 1994, p. 29). Many chronic natural disasters in recent years have also been provoked by human beings. Deforestation has led to more intense droughts and floods. And population growth has made people prone to natural disasters such as, cyclones, quakes or earth floods (Human Development Report, 1994, p. 29). During 1967-91, disasters hit three billion people: 80% of them in Asia. More than seven million people died, and two million were injured. Specifically, Sri Lanka also should be taken in to consideration as it is experiencing a large number of environmental issues. As viewed by the CIA World Fact Book, deforestation, soil erosion, air pollution in urban cities and industrial wastage are some of prominent environmental issues in the country (2012). Therefore, Sri Lanka is also placed in a vulnerable position regarding environmental issues. These are the some ground realities that prove environment as a threat to human security.

Current Developments

Since the past few decades, the response of the international community to the challenges of environment and sustainable development included four international summits, four ministerial conferences, three international conventions, two protocols and a new financial entity – the Global Environment Facility (GEF)

(Mohamed Al-Ashary,2005). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established in 1991 to address the need of funds for developing countries to achieve goals of sustainable development and to facilitate the environmental projects. GEF projects are principally carried out by UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank assisting to conserve and sustainable use of biological diversity. On other hand GEF helps to reverse the degradation of international waters, combat land degradation and drought.

Regarding more current developments in the Environmental Governance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the most significant land mark in the emergence of the global environmental governance and also the world leading environmental agency protecting the human security. The major objective of UNEP is to coordinate United Nations environmental activities, assisting developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices (UNEP, 1972). It was founded as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in June (1972). Further, the UNEP promotes the Environmental Science and it develops the international conventions with the collaboration of many state and non-state entities.

The next initiative can be identified as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which was held in Rio de Janeiro in the year 1992. It can be considered as a transformation of attitudes and the behavior of the participating nations to make the principle theme Environment and Sustainable Development a reality.

The significance of this summit is to draw the attention of the nation-states to rethink their economic development and find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and the pollution of the planet. Therefore, this summit can be considered as a major transformation of global environmental governance which made a considerable change of the thinking patterns of the nation-states. The next step was the "Earth Summit + 5", which was held by the General Assembly in 1997 to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. The major purpose of the summit was to make recommendations for its further fulfillment. Finally the session recommended the adoption of legally binding targets to reduce emission of greenhouse gases leading to climate change; moving more

forcefully towards sustainable patterns of energy production, distribution and use; and focusing on poverty eradication as a prerequisite for sustainable development (UN, 1997).

The Millennium Summit which was held in 2000 was another remarkable milestone of the global environmental governance which motivates nation-states to achieve certain goals towards sustainable development by 2015. The goal 7 seeks to ensure the environmental sustainability. And also the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg was another attempt to address the issues areas arising since the 1992 Earth Summit and it was in the character of implementation summit (Millennium Summit, 2000). It is obvious that many attempts have been made at various levels to address the environmental issues. On the face of it, these are remarkable achievements, but in spite of the high-powered gatherings, agreements and commitments, little progress has been made in improving the environment and in pursuing sustainable development.

Conclusions and Need for New Policy Direction

The study suggests that in an increasingly globalized, interconnected economy there can be no enduring development without environmental care. Hence, the development of strong environmental laws and policies to preserve the environment must better reflect a balance between underlying economic and social issues. Much of the current context of global environmental governance, for which policy advice is needed, is one of uncertainty. Under such circumstances, decision makers need information about the nature of threats, how each will be affected, as well as the types of arrangements that can be collectively developed to address trans boundary and global risks (UNU Report, 2002, p. 16). Accordingly, many attempts have been made to tackle the issues numerously with the aid of implementing environmental related meetings, conferences, agreements and forums in the past decades. Yet, this study points-out that still there is space lingering for further development and protection of the environment through well-coordinated global environmental mechanism.

To address these needs possibilities of a more coherent institutional framework need to be explored while seeking means to upgrade the existing international

institutional framework to respond effectively to the emerging threats of environmental degradation and complexities associated with it. Without confining the work load to a single global environmentally linked institution, mainstreaming the environment agenda to other international institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks, WHO, UNESCO and other non-environment related agencies and institutions would enhance the capacity to deliver the internationally agreed goals and commitments. Also the UNEP which is the UN's principal environmental organization should be strengthened with a new mandate to coordinate world-wide environmental activities and to manage global environmental governance efficiently. As stated in the UN Secretary-General's Hi-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence (A/61/583) "*To improve effectiveness and targeted environmental activities, the system of environmental governance should be strengthened and more coherent, featuring an upgraded UNEP with real authority as the United Nations environment policy pillar*".

Apart from the governing institutional bodies, multilateral environmental agreements should be implemented efficiently reducing the administrative inefficiencies connected to it. Furthermore, substantive coordination should be pursued by diverse treaty bodies to support effective implementation of major MEAs and such coordination is being pursued by the Basel Rotterdam and Stockholm convention secretariats (El-Ashry, 2005, p. 7). Deviating from the mainstream governance structure associated with institutions, agreements and high panel discussions, this paper suggests that the transformational stage of Global Environmental Governance requires a more people centered, simple and transparent approach to form a basis for effective environmental governance. In this sense environmental laws should be clear, equitable and shared with public. According to the recommendations made by the UNEP, preparatory meeting of the World Congress on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability (2011), affected stakeholders should be given the opportunity to participate in the environmental decision making and they should have access to fair and responsive dispute resolution procedures (Benjamin & Fulton, 2011, p.1). The collective efforts mentioned above aimed at the process of transforming Global Environmental Governance coupled with improved international coordination and systematic

collaboration will enable to create a path towards achieving global sustainable development.

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