

# Empowering Women For Sustainable Development: A Path To A Brighter Future

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## Abstract

The article explores the intricate relationship between the empowerment of women and the ethical considerations surrounding the environment in the contemporary context of environmental challenges. This study examines the potential of women's empowerment in fostering a sustainable and environmentally conscious future. By integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical facts, it emphasizes the crucial contribution of women in establishing ethical perspectives towards the environment. This article examines the role of women's empowerment in promoting a more optimistic and sustainable future, with a specific emphasis on its impact on gender equality, socio-economic progress, and the protection of fundamental human rights. This statement underscores the worldwide dedication to this vital undertaking.

Keyword: Environmental ethics, Sustainable development, Empowerment, Human rights.

## Introduction

In our modern world, the trajectory of development, predominantly guided by men, has witnessed significant advancements across various sectors, propelling economic growth and technological progress. However, this progress has not been without its share of consequences, often resulting in extensive environmental pollution and degradation. The adverse repercussions of industrialization, deforestation, and the exploitation of resources have become increasingly apparent, leading to far-reaching outcomes like climate

change and the destruction of natural habitats. It is essential to recognize that women's empowerment transcends the realm of gender equality; it serves as a powerful catalyst for addressing the environmental challenges stemming from male-driven development processes. The empowerment of women encompasses a myriad of dimensions, including economic, social, and political empowerment, all of which can be leveraged to advocate for more sustainable and environmentally conscious approaches to development.

### **The role of environmental ethics in ensuring sustainable development**

In today's world, the quest for sustainable development is inseparable from the need for a healthy environment. The state of our environment is a reflection of our values, ethics, and choices as a society. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report *Our Common Future* in 1987 introduced the concept 'sustainable development'. Former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (1939 –Till date) served as the Commission's chairperson and defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, "Our Common Future": p.43.). Sustainable development hinges on balancing the biosphere's capacity and human activity's impacts. Progress should prioritize preserving nature's integrity across technological advancements and societal frameworks, ensuring each element thrives harmoniously. To ensure sustainable development and safeguard the well-being of future generations, it is essential to establish and maintain a healthy environment. Environmental ethics plays a pivotal role in this endeavour, guiding us towards responsible and ethical interactions with our natural surroundings.

Environmental ethics emphasizes the moral principles that should govern our relationship with the environment. It calls for a deep sense of respect, responsibility, and stewardship towards nature. By adhering to environmental ethics, we can make decisions and engage in practices that promote the health and well-being of our planet. This involves

sustainable resource management, reducing pollution, and protecting biodiversity. Environmental ethics, rooted in biocentrism and ecocentrism, offers two distinct but related approaches to considering the moral value of all living beings and non-living entities in the natural world.

### **Biocentrism**

Biocentrism is a perspective within environmental ethics that focuses on the intrinsic value of all living beings. The term 'Biocentrism' originates from the Greek words 'βίος' (bio), meaning 'life', and 'κέντρον' (kentron), meaning 'center'. It refers to the life centric natureview in the environmental world view. The evolutionary interpretation of biocentrism posits that all living organisms, including humans, possess equivalent moral value and well-being. All organisms possess an inherent worth in and of themselves, with no individual being superior or possessing greater value than other constituents within the biotic community. In this context, Paul W. Taylor's (1923 –2015) view is pertinent which states, "All living beings have goods. There are no grounds for thinking that the good of one being should count for more than the good of another. We must therefore consider all living beings to have equal moral significance" (Agar, "Biocentrism and the concept of life": p.149.). Here's how it morally considers living being:

**Intrinsic value of living beings:** In a biocentric framework, every living organism, from microorganisms to animals, is considered to possess intrinsic value. This means that these beings have worth in and of themselves, irrespective of their utility to humans or any other species. They are not to be treated as mere resources for human exploitation.

**Moral consideration for all living beings:** Biocentrism insists on moral consideration for all living beings. This means that our ethical responsibilities extend to all life forms, and we should act in ways that respect and protect the interests and well-being of these organisms.

**Equal moral standing:** Biocentrism promotes the idea of equal moral standing among species. It rejects

anthropocentrism, where humans are considered the sole moral agents, and instead argues for a more egalitarian approach that considers the interests of all species equally.

**Ecocentrism:**

Ecocentrism takes a broader perspective that expands the moral consideration to include ecosystems and the non-living elements within them. Here's how ecocentrism addresses the intrinsic worth of all living and non-living entities:

**Intrinsic worth of ecosystems:** Ecocentrism emphasizes the intrinsic worth of entire ecosystems. Ecosystems are seen as holistic entities with their own value, stability, and integrity. They have inherent worth beyond the sum of their individual components, including living beings and non-living elements.

**Interconnectedness and interdependence:** Ecocentrism acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements within an ecosystem. This includes the living beings, non-living components like air, water, and soil, and the ecological processes that sustain life. All these components play vital roles in maintaining the health and balance of the ecosystem. Arne Naess (1912 –2009), introduced the concept of Deep Ecology in his seminal work titled "The Shallow and the Deep Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary." In this essay, Naess expounded upon a set of ethical principles that aim to safeguard the inherent worth of the natural world. Naess conducted an examination of the historical development of the field of ecology, wherein he observed a notable correlation between the concepts of interconnectedness and reverence towards the natural world. Hence, he asserted that "ecology movements deserve our attention, and it is more philosophical rather than ecological" (Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep...": p.189.).

**Respect for non-living entities:** Ecocentrism extends moral consideration to non-living entities, such as geological features, landforms, and geological processes. These non-living elements are integral to the functioning of ecosystems and, therefore, deserve respect and protection as they contribute to the overall

well-being of the environment. Living and non-living entities alike deserve respect and ethical consideration, irrespective of their utility for human needs. Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), in his famous work *A Sand County Almanac*, mentioned “the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such” (Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*...: p.174.).

**Holistic approach:** Ecocentrism encourages a holistic approach to environmental ethics that transcends a purely biocentric perspective. It recognizes the importance of preserving the intricate relationships and balance within ecosystems, which are vital not only for living beings but for the environment as a whole. While biocentrism primarily focuses on the intrinsic value of living beings and their moral consideration, ecocentrism takes a more holistic approach by emphasizing the intrinsic worth of ecosystems and the interconnectedness of all living and non-living elements within them. Both perspectives challenge human-centric views and advocate for a more comprehensive ethical approach that respects and protects the entirety of the natural world.

### **Women’s empowerment is essential for society’s development**

The significance of women's involvement in environmental conservation and the preservation of natural resources cannot be overstated within an academic context. Women share an intrinsic connection with the natural world, an affinity that underscores the importance of women's empowerment in fostering a sustainable and thriving environment. Empowering women is imperative for the establishment of a robust environmental framework, which, in turn, assumes a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development objectives.

Empirical evidence supports the assertion that women possess a profound affinity with nature and exhibit a heightened awareness of environmental issues. This profound connection is rooted in historical roles as caregivers, nurturers, and primary providers of

households, which often involve resource management. The connection between women and nature is a profound and ancient one, often referred to as the "feminine principle" in ecological thought. This concept highlights several similarities between women and nature, which can enhance women's understanding of and empathy for the natural world, potentially motivating them to protect it.

**Life-Giving Role:** Women, like nature, have a life-giving and nurturing role. Women have the unique ability to give birth and nurture new life, just as nature provides the conditions and resources for all life on Earth. This shared capacity for nurturing fosters a deep connection between women and the natural world.

**Cyclicity:** Women's lives are often marked by cyclical changes, such as menstrual cycles and the stages of motherhood. Nature also operates in cycles, from the changing seasons to the life cycles of plants and animals. Recognizing these patterns can help women feel more attuned to the rhythms of the natural world.

**Resilience:** Women and nature both exhibit remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. Women have shown incredible strength and adaptability throughout history, just as nature can recover from disturbances, such as natural disasters or human impact. This resilience fosters a sense of shared strength.

**Interconnectedness:** Women and nature are deeply interconnected. Women rely on nature for sustenance and well-being, just as nature depends on responsible human stewardship. Recognizing this interdependence can encourage women to engage in environmental protection efforts.

**Intuition and Sensitivity:** Many women are known for their intuition and sensitivity, qualities that can be valuable in understanding and empathizing with the natural world. This sensitivity can lead to a greater appreciation of the beauty and fragility of the environment.

By recognizing and embracing these similarities, women can develop a more profound sense of kinship

with nature. This understanding can serve as a powerful motivator for women to become passionate advocates for environmental conservation, as they may feel a unique responsibility to protect the natural world that mirrors the nurturing and interconnected qualities they possess. Promoting the active participation of women in assuming leadership positions within the realm of environmental protection is imperative in order to guarantee the establishment of a secure and sustainable ecological framework. The recognition and prioritization of women's involvement in societal activities, particularly in the realm of natural resource management, serves to empower them by acknowledging their distinct perspectives and harnessing their influential capabilities.

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept, encompassing economic, social, and political dimensions. The word "Empowerment" appeared in the 17th century and contained connotations such as "authorise," "delegate," and "enable." Most dictionaries define empower as "to empower" or "to give power to" prior to the twentieth century. As a result, the idea of empowerment is complicated. It does, however, involve a dynamic shift of power over time. In reality, empowerment is an inseparable component of development, and women's empowerment is crucial for sustainable development, a worldwide issue. When women are empowered in society, they are better positioned to actively engage in environmental conservation efforts. By providing women with access to education, resources, and decision-making platforms, societies can harness their potential as stewards of the environment. Sushama Sahay states, "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life" (Sahay, *Women and Empowerment...*: p.21.). It refers to the decentralisation of authority and power among socially deprived individuals who were previously unable to participate in a government agency and social issue planning and implementation. Empowering women is crucially critical for a nation's development. Women's empowerment not only leads to more informed and responsible resource management but also enhances community resilience

and fosters sustainable practices. Women's empowerment is vital for sustainability for the nation and society. The theme of "women's empowerment" is now the central goal of the United Nations. Consequently, social scientists, legislators, bureaucrats, and scholars have also prioritised it.

The United Nations Global Compact and United Nations Women have endorsed seven principles for gender equality and women's empowerment, ranging from corporate leadership to fair treatment at work and health and safety assurances. Social empowerment emerges as a catalyst that not only strengthens women's social connections and standing but also combats prejudices related to impairment, racism, region, gender, or sexuality. Empowerment, in its broadest sense, is an intricate social process that bestows influence over one's life, enhancing the ability to address significant issues at personal, communal, and societal levels. Women's empowerment specifically involves ensuring access to the same freedoms, privileges, and positions as males.

A robust and healthy environment is an essential component of sustainable development. Environmental sustainability hinges on the responsible use of natural resources, conservation of biodiversity, and the mitigation of environmental degradation. Women's empowerment is inextricably linked to the preservation of a healthy environment and the judicious use of natural resources. As stewards of the environment and champions of sustainable development, women are indispensable agents for a more resilient and harmonious world. Consequently, the promotion of women's empowerment is a prerequisite for achieving enduring environmental sustainability and, by extension, sustainable development. Women can bring diverse perspectives and a heightened sense of social and environmental responsibility to the forefront. Women have historically been closely connected to the natural world and often play a central role in resource management, agriculture, and community well-being. When women are actively engaged in environmental initiatives, they can contribute significantly to the promotion of ethical practices, sustainable

development, and the establishment of a healthy environment. Their influence extends to the community, policymaking, and resource management, all of which are vital components of environmental ethics.

In practically every community and every area, women occupy unequal positions and hold unequal statuses; therefore, providing children with legal protections is crucial to fostering their independence. However, putting oneself in the driver's seat of one's own life is made possible by empowerment, a multifaceted social process. In addition, it is a method that helps people gain skills they may use to affect change in their own lives, neighbourhoods, and communities on matters they care about.

Empowerment is a crucial social process that enhances women's social standing and combats prejudice based on impairment, racism, region, gender, or sexuality. It is vital for women's development, as it allows them to access the same freedoms, privileges, and positions as men. Empowerment helps women gain insight into power dynamics and gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to exercise rational authority without violating others' rights. Women's empowerment is vital for their growth and the basis of a gender-equitable society, particularly in the political realm, where decentralizing power and authority is essential. Women are often backward due to patriarchal society, which prevents them from participating in the development process. Empowerment involves equalizing power and liberation from oppression, allowing women to act on their priorities in their lives, communities, and society. Psychological empowerment allows women to transgress traditional stigmas and reshape their identities and perspectives. Higher education is seen as a powerful tool for change in society, government, and the economy, but women's access to higher education in India is not great. Political leaders, policymakers, and administrators must provide women with free and mandatory education, legal help, and financial independence to fight poverty. United Nations states that to emphasise education for women, "Ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance

women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education" (United Nations, "Beijing Declaration...": p.4.). Economic empowerment liberates the poor, landless, impoverished, and victims from neglect and oppression, allowing them to enjoy market benefits, manage basic needs, and enjoy equal pay, benefits, treatment, and a supportive workplace. This approach encourages individuals to act on their behalf, promoting gender equality and economic development.

Women's empowerment is crucial for economic independence, employment, and eradicating poverty. Addressing structural causes of poverty and ensuring equal access to resources, opportunities, and public services is essential. Empowerment empowers individuals and communities, enabling them to advocate for their interests independently and adequately. It promotes civic engagement and is a key procedural issue in human rights and development. Douglas D. Perkins mentioned his article "Empowerment Theory, Research, and Application" as "an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (Perkins, "Empowerment Theory...": p.570.). The UN's Sustainable Development Goals emphasize women's empowerment to advance world development and promote gender equality as an essential human right. Empowerment is essential for overcoming poverty and advancing global development that, involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, allowing individuals to gain greater access to and control over resources.

Men and women should engage in mutual discussions to overcome obstacles and overcome gender inequality. However, issues may arise when the male is the culprit, or the other woman is unaware. Adopting national and international laws and regulations is essential to prevent harassment and empower women. Understanding the obstacles to empowerment helps create networks for guidance. Empowerment is not achieved through enacting laws, but through establishing independence and capacity.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasize the importance of equality in all spheres of society, including decision-making and access to power. Women's involvement in social development with men is essential for achieving equality, development, and peace. They establish relationships with the environment, foster social harmony, and make moral decisions that protect societal interests. They believe in interdependence and interconnectedness, preventing environmental contamination and promoting sustainable development. Their traits align with nature, ensuring a healthy environment for future generations.

### **Conclusion**

Empowerment encompasses a range of dimensions that extend beyond legal rights. It involves empowering individuals to question societal conventions, build self-confidence, and exercise autonomy in their lives. This transformative process not only encourages civic participation, human rights, and development but also plays a pivotal role in nurturing resilient communities. Their active involvement in decision-making processes, resource management, and community initiatives often leads to more responsible and sustainable outcomes. In this context, the empowerment of women holds significant importance as it contributes to sustainable development, fosters gender equality, and cultivates a more equitable and inclusive society. Recognized as a dynamic and multifaceted process, empowerment is vital for instigating positive social change and ensuring enduring progress towards sustainability.

So, a healthy environment is an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable development, and the path to achieving it lies in embracing environmental ethics. Women's empowerment offers an invaluable opportunity to infuse environmental ethics into our societal fabric, fostering a world where both sustainable development and a healthy environment coexist harmoniously. By recognizing the pivotal role of women in this endeavour, we can steer our society toward a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

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