



# Intersectionality: Gender, Environment And Socio-Economic Factors

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**Abstract:** Intersectionality is a critical and holistic tool for understanding the interactions of multiple social categories and how they produce different lived experiences. This paper explores the intersections of gender, environment, and socioeconomic factors, specifically in the Indian context, where social stratification, economic inequality and environmental degradation coexist. Environmental issues like climate change, water, pollution, and resource depletion do not affect populations equally; instead, they are shaped by gender, economic conditions, caste, and resource availability. Women living in poor and marginalized communities are more vulnerable to these issues because of their reliance on natural resources for their livelihood, lack of decision-making power, and lack of access to education, health, and support services.

With an interdisciplinary methodological framework that is grounded in feminist theory, environmental justice, and development studies, this paper seeks to emphasize the intersection of gender and socioeconomic factors in magnifying vulnerabilities to the environment. The paper relies on empirical data and case studies from rural and urban India, including but not limited to water availability, women's agricultural work, urban pollution, and climate change displacement. However, the paper also acknowledges the important role of women as agents of environmental sustainability, with invaluable indigenous knowledge and a pivotal role in community-managed resource use. The paper contends that mainstream environmental and development policies tend to have gender-neutral or socioeconomic perspectives that neglect the complexity of disadvantage. By using an intersectional perspective, the paper seeks to show that there is a need for more inclusive policy frameworks that incorporate gender sensitivity and socioeconomic equity.

**Index Terms** - Intersectionality, Gender Inequality, Environmental Justice, Socioeconomic Factors, Climate Change, Sustainable Development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the world has witnessed the rise of challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and the widening gap of socioeconomic inequalities. These challenges do not affect people in the same way; instead, they are influenced by their social identities such as gender, class, caste, and geography. The idea of Intersectionality, developed by Kimberle Crenshaw, provides a valuable tool to understand how different systems of oppression and privilege intersect.

Gender, the environment, and socioeconomic inequality are interlinked. Women, especially those belonging to the poorer sections of society, are disproportionately affected by environmental crises due

to their lack of access to resources, decision-making, and capacity to adapt. This paper aims to explore how these elements intersect and affect people's lives.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a substantial amount of scholarly work on intersectionality in the fields of gender studies, environmental studies, sociology, and development studies. The idea of intersectionality was first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to understand how different systems of oppression, like race and gender, intersect to create a unique experience of marginalization. Since then, the idea has been widely used to understand how different social identities intersect and influence people's access to resources, opportunities and power.

In the gender and development literature, feminist scholars have pointed out that the experiences of women in poverty and exclusion cannot be grasped by gender alone but need to be understood in relation to class, caste, and geography (Agarwal, 2010; Kabeer, 2016). Agarwal's research on gender and environment governance underlines that women's differential access to land, education, and support services constrains their capacity to cope with environmental issues, despite their key role in natural resource management.

The literature on environmental justice also shows that the effects of environmental degradation and climate change are not randomly distributed but fall disproportionately on certain social groups. Research by Bullard (2005) and Schlosberg (2007) shows that marginalized groups are most affected by pollution, resource depletion, and climate change disasters but derive least benefits from development practices. In developing countries such as India, this injustice is further exacerbated by the deeply ingrained inequalities of class and social hierarchy.

Research on gender and climate change has repeatedly found that women are more exposed to environmental stress as a result of their reliance on natural resources for livelihood and their role in care giving, which is socially ascribed (UN Women, 2022).

Research studies concentrating on South Asia show that climate variability leads to an increase in women's unpaid work, food insecurity, and poor health outcomes, especially in the case of the poor and rural population (World Bank, 2020). However, researchers such as Shiva (2005) emphasize the importance of women's indigenous knowledge of the environment and their potential as sustainability agents.

Current research trends are increasingly incorporating an intersectional perspective to combine gender, environment, and socioeconomic factors. The literature contends that gender-neutral policies for the environment are ineffective in dealing with the complexities of marginalized women's experiences and may even contribute to the perpetuation of existing inequalities (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). The literature, therefore, emphasizes the importance of intersectional approaches that combine social justice and environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, the current literature confirms that it is necessary to move beyond single-axis perspectives when dealing with environmental vulnerability. The intersectional approach is critical in dealing with the interplay between gender, the environment, and socioeconomic factors, especially in situations where deep social and economic inequalities exist.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this paper is qualitative, interdisciplinary, and analytical, and is based on the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Since the research is conceptual in nature, the methodology is mainly based on secondary data analysis and critical analysis of existing literature on the topics of gender, environment, and socioeconomic inequality. The data for this research is based on secondary sources, which include: Peer-reviewed journal articles on gender studies, environmental studies, sociology, and development studies, books and edited volumes written by feminist and environmental scholars, reports and policy documents of international organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank, and Government of India publications on climate change, gender, and sustainable development.

#### IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is the “interconnectedness of social categorizations that produce overlapping systems of disadvantage or subordination.” Instead of studying gender, environment, or socioeconomic factors in a vacuum, intersectionality highlights the interconnectedness of these factors.

Within the realm of environmental and social research, intersectionality acknowledges that:

- Gender roles shape the distribution of natural resources.
- Socioeconomic factors shape the distribution of environmental risk and the means to mitigate it.
- Environmental policies can maintain or disrupt existing social inequalities.

Through the lens of intersectionality, researchers and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of the realities of marginalized groups.

##### **Gender and Environmental Vulnerability**

Gender is a fundamental factor in shaping environmental experiences. In many societies, women are the primary individuals responsible for water gathering, collection of fuel wood, agriculture, and home management. This gender dynamic makes women highly susceptible to environmental changes such as drought, deforestation, and climate change-related disasters.

For instance:

- Lack of access to water sources exacerbates women’s unpaid work and reduces opportunities for education and employment.
- Climate change disasters mainly target women because of their care-giving roles and restricted mobility.
- Health effects from pollution and poor sanitation mainly target women, especially during pregnancy and childbirth.

However, women have rich indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation, agricultural sustainability, and resource management. Unfortunately, this knowledge is not taken into account in mainstream environmental decision-making.

##### **Socioeconomic Status and Environmental Inequality**

Socioeconomic status, which includes income, education, occupation, and social status, has a large impact on people’s relationship with the environment. Vulnerable and poor populations are more likely to reside in environmentally dangerous areas, such as flood-prone areas, polluted urban settlements, or ecologically sensitive areas.

People with low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to environmental risks because of:

- Inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, and health care.
- Low ability to cope with climate change or disaster situations.
- Dependence on natural resources for livelihood, making them more susceptible to environmental degradation.

Environmental injustice occurs when such populations are disproportionately exposed to environmental risks while deriving little benefit from development and environmental protection policies.

##### **Crossover Points of Gender and Socioeconomic Factors**

The relationship between gender and socioeconomic factors is complex and influences environmental outcomes. Poor women face a double disadvantage: poverty and gender discrimination.

For example:

- Women from poor families may not have equal opportunities to own land, gain credit, and use technology.
- Inequality in education hinders knowledge of environmental rights and participation in decision-making.
- Informal employment puts women in dangerous working environments and exposes them to environmental risks.

These overlapping disadvantages perpetuate poverty and vulnerability to the environment, making it imperative to address both gender and class issues concurrently.

## Environmental Justice and Intersectionality

Environmental justice movements focus on the just distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. The application of an intersectional framework enhances this by pointing out the structured nature of environmental injustices according to gender and class.

The main tenets of intersectional environmental justice are:

- Inclusive representation of marginalized groups in environmental decision-making.
- Acknowledgment of diverse knowledge systems and experiences.
- Equal access to resources, technology, and adaptation.

Policies not using an intersectional framework can perpetuate inequality despite their focus on sustainability.

## Policy Implications and Sustainable Development

The application of intersectionality in policy-making has far-reaching implications for sustainable development. Gender-blind and class-blind policies tend to neglect the needs of marginalized groups. To achieve sustainable development inclusively, policies should:

- Use gender-sensitive and class-sensitive frameworks.
- Empower women through education, resource, and leadership opportunities.
- Encourage community-led environmental management practices.
- Remediate structural inequalities hindering adaptive capacity.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially those concerning gender equality, poverty eradication, and climate action, are very much in line with an intersectional approach.

## V. CONCLUSION

The intersection of gender, environment, and socioeconomic issues demonstrates the complex nature of inequality in modern society. Environmental issues are not just environmental problems but are intricately linked to society. The use of an intersectional lens helps to gain a better understanding of vulnerability and resilience by focusing on the voices that are unheard.

This paper emphasizes the need to incorporate intersectionality in research, policy, and practice to ensure environmental justice and sustainable development. The need to address gender and socioeconomic inequalities is not only a social justice issue but also a prerequisite for effective environmental governance.

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