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PCR 851



**Environmental Security
and Conflict Resolution**
Module 2

PCR 851 Environmental Security and Conflict Resolution

Module 2

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Unit I International Relations Theories Applied To Environment

1.0 Introduction

There are various international relations theories that can be applied to the issue of environment. Though many of these theories only deal with the environment indirectly and peripherally, it is important to review them as they relate to the environment.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the various international theories that applies to environment
- Distinguish the theories that best apply to the environment.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Various International Relations Theories Applied to Environment

1. **Realism:** The two main concepts of Realist theory are power and the national interest. Realism assumes that states and their populations need natural resources to survive. But there is competition between states for these scarce resources, so war is often the result of such competition and conflict. It leads to "the struggle for power and peace," as Hans Morgenthau noted. Extreme versions of Realism, such as the geopolitical theories of Major-General Karl Haushofer, look at the security implications of strategic raw materials. For example, the German and Japanese expansion in the 1930s was partly a search for raw materials. Even President George Bush's intervention in Iraq is seen as an attempt to secure the oil resources of the Middle East.
2. **Malthusianism:** Thomas Malthus believed that because population grows in a geometric progression and food production in arithmetic progression, it would come a time when population growth would inevitably outstrip a country's food production and starvation would result. Although this did not happen because of technological progress, but the opposite is true today. Instead of a population explosion we are experiencing population implosion. There is a severe decline in the fecundity rate in the rich countries and also a decline in the rate of population growth in the developing world.
3. **Liberalism:** Liberalism focuses on cooperation and sees people and states competing for scarce environmental resources. A liberal philosophy tends to treat states as competitive participants (not unlike corporations) in markets they have established among themselves. For example, the Stockholm Declaration of 1972 forbids states from inflicting environmental damage on each other, because this would be a violation of the state's sovereignty.
4. **Neoliberal Institutionalism:** This also focuses on cooperation. In this approach, the states have a broader sense of self-interest and focus on the public good. This self-

interest includes norms, values, principles and expectations which are the ingredients of International Regimes. The states also seek mutually acceptable compromises through international negotiations. The building of International Regimes can benefit the global environment such as the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change.

5. **Eco-anarchism:** This philosophy which is humanistic and leftist is propounded by Murray Bookchin. Eco-anarchists believe that “the state and ‘big’ capital are inimical to the autonomy of humans and nature”. Therefore, to preserve nature, it is necessary to break society into “small, relatively self-sufficient units”. And to help nature, these units must practice altruism and mutual aid.
6. **Social Naturalism:** This, sees “culture and nature as bound together” in a kind of social community. This community in a broad sense includes people, animals, plants, ideas, language, history and the ecosystems. Cooperation between humans and nature is a given. The objective of social naturalism is stated as “the creation of a cooperative ecological society found to be rooted in the most basic levels of being”. This philosophy strongly resembles the worldview and beliefs of certain indigenous peoples. An example is the Navajo that sees the “world as being of an interconnected piece”.
7. **Sustainable Growth:** This approach states that the growth in incomes results in economic development. As buttressed by the 1990s World Bank President Barber Conable that “market forces and economic efficiency were the best way to achieve the kind of growth which is the best antidote to poverty”. The proponents of this theory believe that when the poor of the developing countries become richer, then it will reduce pressure on the environment. For example, they will be more able and willing to pay the costs of keeping air and water clean.
8. **Sustainable Development:** This first appeared in a report issued by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 1980 but was internationally recognised in a 1987 report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED:8) titled *Our Common Future*. This report noted that there was no inherent contradiction between environment and development. Yet there were limits to growth. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits – not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organisations on environmental resources, and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. This approach focuses on the “needs” of the world's poor and demands for sufficient transfer of wealth from the rich countries to the poor, so that the developing countries can deal with the problem of poverty and environmental damage.
9. **The Steady-State Economy:** This approach focuses not on more goods, but on the durability and longevity of goods as proposed by Herman Daly. He states that more goods are wasteful and cause environmental degradation and also calls for recycling and minimal exploitation of biological and physical resources. Daly's unit is the nation-state, and each country must seek to be self-sufficient and spend only its own natural resources.
10. **Radical Redistribution:** This theory believes that environmental degradation is the result of excessive wealth, the injustices of capitalism and the income inequality between the rich and the poor nations. It therefore states that: 1) the rich must drastically reduce their consumption so as not to burden the earth's resources and

environment and 2) the rich must transfer massive amounts of capital and technology so that the poor countries can grow economically and preserve the environment.

- 11. Eco-socialism and Eco-Marxism:** Eco-socialists and eco-Marxists blame capitalism for environmental degradation. Capitalism is seen as inherently anti-ecological and anti-nature because by always seeking cheaper raw materials and fatter profits, they impose wastes on nature. Hence, the mode of production matters for the environment. While eco-socialist programme relies heavily on revolutionary action and the demise of capitalism.
- 12. Eco-feminism:** Although many eco-feminists are not Marxists, they are all leftists or liberal in their philosophical orientation. For eco-feminists “the domination of women and nature are inextricably linked”. Some call for liberal reform while others espouse radical redistribution of resources to women, so that they can develop and protect the environment. According to Salleh (1997:14), “Feminine suffering is universal because wrong done to women and its ongoing denial fuel the psycho-sexual abuse of all others - races, children, animals, plants, rocks, water, and air”. Salleh therefore notes that, eco-feminism offers a comprehensive progressive approach to the ecological crisis.
- 13. Eco-centrism:** This theory believes that humans cannot survive without nature. It idealises nature and regards it as a source of eternal truth and beauty. Man's exploitation of nature could destroy both nature and themselves. The destruction of nature would result in both biological and spiritual impoverishment. So, many eco-centrists are advocates of wilderness or “wildness” as Thoreau (1862) stated that: “In wildness is the preservation of the world.”
- 14. Bio-politics:** Michel Foucault proposed the theory of bio-politics. According to Mitchell Dean, bio-politics “is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and with the processes that sustain or retard the optimisation of the life of a population”. Dean further stated that bio-politics “must also concern the social, cultural, environmental, economic and geographic conditions under which humans live, procreate, become ill, maintain health or become healthy, and die. It is concerned with the biosphere in which humans dwell”. All institutions and practices concerned with exploiting, managing, and protecting the environment are expressions of bio-politics.

Self-Assessment Exercise

From your judgment, discuss the best international theory that you think applies to the environment.

4.0 Conclusion

The above are some of the basic environmental philosophies that interpret the global environment and structure practices and policies. Many of these philosophies are in contrast and conflict with one another and result in very different interpretations of the reasons for environmental degradation. Some governments and countries may adhere to certain philosophies more than others.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the various international theories that apply to the environment. There is a sizeable literature that helps to broaden the understanding of security issues to include environmental concerns. It was really in the post-cold war era that the world saw a dramatic increase in international activities around environmental issues.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss five international relations theories from your judgment that best apply to the environment.

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Unit 2 A Theoretical Overview of Environmental Security

1.0 Introduction

Environmental security theory because of its own distinctive perspective provides an explanation to the ecological crisis facing humanity and says that focusing on the crisis is possibly the most important issue for human society to deal with and provide a normative basis for dealing with it.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the theoretical framework applied in environmental security
- explain the views from which environmental security was drawn from
- Explain the developments that led to the emergence of environmental security as an important concept.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 A Theoretical Overview of Environmental Security

Environmental Security draws its views from both Green Philosophy and Ecological Theory where systemic interdependence, complexity, flux, uncertainty, harmony and sustainability are key themes and emerged as an important concept in security studies due to some interrelated developments beginning in the 1960s. The first of these was the growth of environmental consciousness in developed countries. Notable among these was the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's widely read book *Silent Spring* which explained the impacts of pesticide DDT on animals and the food chain. The second major publication leading to the emergence of environmental security was from the 1970s by a number of scholars to critique orthodox security discourse and practices by highlighting their inability to manage environmental risks to national and international security. This is the origin of the critical component of environmental security (Barnett, 2007:188). Among the first scholars to do this were Richard Falk's *This Endangered Planet* and Harold and Margaret Sprout's *Towards a Politics of Planet Earth*.

Richard (1971) and Harold *et al.* (1971) argued that the international political systems needs to comprehend and collectively respond to common environmental problems as they pose threat to international stability and national well-being. In 1977, Lester Brown also contested the meaning and practice of national security with his *Worldwatch* paper titled "Redefining National Security." Brown highlighted the inability of exclusionary national security institutions and in particular, the military, to manage common environmental problems and suggested that disarmament and budgetary reallocations are important initiatives for resolving environmental degradation. Brown identified four biophysical

systems under stress namely fisheries, grasslands, forest, croplands and also discussed the problem of climate modification relating to food security. Like Falk and Sprouts, his paper did not seriously consider the potentials of environmental change to cause conflict. In 1983, Richard Ullman published an article titled “Redefining Security” in which the idea that environmental change might cause war was seriously proposed. Ullman (1983:129) defined a national security threat as anything which can quickly degrade the quality of life of the inhabitants of a state or which narrows the choices available to people and organisations with the state. He also suggested that environmental degradation is likely to make third world governments more militarily confrontational in relations with the advanced, industrialised nation and considered the possibility of illegal immigration by environmental refugees (now a popular concern). In 1986, Norman Myers considered food shortages, fisheries depletion, water scarcity, climate change, deforestation to be issues likely to induce conflict and environmental refugee also figured prominently. Like Brown’s, Myers (1986:251) also explored the costs of military security relative to the costs of environmental security.

Environmental security radically challenges security thinking in that, it demands a shift in the reason for action from individual and national interest, to a concern for the overall welfare of the entire socio-ecological system of the planet (Barnett, 2007:188). This radicalism explains why ecological security view is on the periphery of environmental security thinking. According to Barnett (2007), environmental security focuses on common security. The causes and impacts of some of the environmental problems are not confined to the borders of nation-states. Some problems such as ozone depletion and climate change are global in nature, in that, they are caused by cumulative emissions of gases from many countries which in turn affect many other countries. But it is not to say that all the countries are equally responsible for them, or that all the countries are equally at risk from these problems. This means that groups of countries with similar environmental problems cannot easily unilaterally achieve environmental security and their common national security interests require collective action. Even though, many environmental problems are to some degree ‘common’, no two countries have exactly the same interest and all have sovereign rights.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Briefly explain the developments that resulted in the emergence of environmental security as an important concept.

4.0 Conclusion

Environmental security is one of the new non-material security issues and is sometimes a critical security project which is used to raise the following questions – who and what is being secured and from what risks. For most proponents of environmental security, it is used to bridge the gap between security researchers and policymakers and those working in the environmental field, hence creating new fusion of theory and new opportunity for dialogue. It can only be dealt with in joint and multilateral procedures and mechanisms.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we discussed environmental security. Environmental security as noted is a comprehensive approach to international and national security and must transcend the traditional emphasis on military and armed competition.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain environmental security against the background of the early writings on environment and security.

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Unit 3 the Green Political Theory

1.0 Introduction

Green Political Theory (GPT) is perhaps the most recent theory even though the environmental issues around which a Green position emerged is not quite prominent in the public eye as they were in the early 1990s. It is from this that the theorisation of what global ecological crises portend for global politics matured. From mid-1970s, Green politics emerged as a significant political force in many countries. Most of the writings of Green philosophers (thinkers) and the practices of Green movements contain both the analyses of the dynamics of global politics and the normative visions concerning the restructuring of global politics. Greens regard the framework of the existing political, social, economic and normative structures as the main origin of environmental crisis and also contend that they are structures which need to be challenged and transcended.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the basis for the Green political theory
- discuss the distinctive arguments of the Green political theory
- Explain how global political structures can be reformed to prevent further destruction of the planet.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Green Political Theory

The base for Green ideas about international relation is the Green political theory. The three distinctive arguments of this theory include:

1. That the defining characteristics is ecocentrism (the rejection of an anthropocentric world-view which places moral value only on humans in favour of the one which places independent value on ecosystem and all living beings). This empirically view the world as ontologically composed of inter-relations rather than individual entities. Thus all beings are fundamentally embedded in ecological relationship and are not free to dominate the rest of nature. Ecocentrism is about emancipation writ large and has four central ethical features which collectively distinguish it from ethical position towards the environment. These features include: resource conservation, human welfare ecology, preservationism and animal liberation. Ecocentrism recognises the full range of human interests in the non-human world as opposed to narrow, instrumental, economic interests in resource use; the interests of the non-human community; the interest of future generations of humans and non-human and finally values populations, species, ecosystems and ecosphere as well as individual organisms.

2. That the exponential economic growth experienced during the last two centuries is the root cause of the current environmental crisis. The book by Meadows *et al*, 1972 titled “*The limits to growth*” is the impetus for this argument. This book argues that the exponential economic and population growth of human societies was producing a situation where the world was rapidly running out of resources to feed people or to provide raw material for continued industrial growth and thus exceeding the absorptive capacity of the environment to assimilate the waste products of industrial production. For Dobson (1990), three arguments are important – first, technological solutions may not work as they may postpone the crisis but cannot prevent it from occurring at some point; second, the dangers stored up over relatively long period of time can suddenly have catastrophic effect and finally, these problems associated with this growth are all inter-related. According to global ecology writers, development is inherently anti-ecological because it undermines sustainable practices and takes control over resources away from those living sustainably in order to recognise commodity production and increases inequality thereby producing social conflicts.
3. The argument about why the environment is being destroyed by humans. This is identified as decentralisation and it is important to the Green political theory. The argument here is that the nation-state is both too big and too small to deal effectively with sustainability and that the new regional and global structures (alongside decentralisation within the state) are needed to coordinate effective responses. The best arguments for decentralisation is by John Dryzek’s *Rational Ecology* (1987) which summaries the advantages of decentralisation as small-scale communities are more reliant on the environmental support services in their immediate locality and also more responsive to disruptions in that environment. They develop a social ontology which determines pure instrumental ways of dealing with the rest of nature identified as the cause of environmental problems. Hence, all political arrangements require some form of coordination of action between political units to respond to trans-boundary environmental problems. Greens therefore, are arguing for a system where power is decentralised as possible to make environmental management more practicable.

Self-Assessment Exercise

The Green political theory is a key explanation for environmental security. Discuss.

4.0 Conclusion

Greens argue primarily for decentralisation of political communities below the nation-state rather than new forms of global political authority and also economic and social organisation. For the Greens, the modern human societies are ecologically unsustainable and their focus is on the way in which the prevailing political structures and processes contribute to this destruction. Thus, the purpose of this theory is to understand how these global political structures can be reformed to prevent such destruction and provide for a sustainable human relationship to the planet and the rest of its inhabitants.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we discussed the Green political theory. The key strands of Green politics which provide explanation for the destruction of nature by human species and a normative foundation for resisting this destruction and create sustainable societies are – ecocentric ethics, limits to growth and decentralisation of power. Dobson (1990) stated that, the vital

distinction between Green politics and environmentalism is the fact that environmentalists recognise the present political, social, economic and normative structures of world politics and try to find ways to ameliorate environmental problems within these structures, but Greens regard these structures as the major cause of the environmental crisis. The assumption is that the states-system can respond effectively to these problems but Green politics is not convinced about the claim that the states-system and other structures of the world politics can provide such a response. Hence, Greens focuses on the need for global-scale political formation rather than institutional tinkering.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the distinctive arguments of the Green political theory.

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Unit 4 Environmental Security Versus Political Ecology

1.0 Introduction

The debate on environment security has been mainly about the relationships between environmental change and violent conflict particularly in the South. Homer-Dixon (1994:5) argues that there is a relation between environmental scarcity (eco-scarcity) and large scale conflict between and within countries. Political ecology does not view the environment just in terms of the destruction of nature or the social construction of the environment, but examines the ways that nature is “produced” by human and non-human actors. For political ecologists, it is important to examine the activities of government ministries, scientists, international NGOs, local communities, private business and international financial institutions as “producers of nature.”

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- provide a general overview of the environmental debate
- Discuss the perspective of political ecology on the environmental debate.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Environmental Security versus Political Ecology

The underlying principle behind environmental security is that with an increasing human population and increasing growth in the global economy, there will be increased pressure on the world's natural resources. This pressure will lead to more frequent and acute conflicts within and between countries, especially in the developing world since it is believed to be more vulnerable to environmental change and scarcity. The Swiss based Environmental Conflicts Project (ENCOP) and a research group led by Thomas Homer-Dixon, at the University of Toronto (informally known as the Toronto Group) observed that the world will face shortages of major natural resources such as land for growing food, fresh water, oil, forests and so on, and as a result of such eco-scarcities the world will experience more violence in the form of rebellions, ethnic clashes and unrest especially in the developing world (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Homer-Dixon, 1994; and Homer-Dixon 1991). Homer-Dixon's research group suggests that developing countries will be more vulnerable to environmental change than rich states, and will therefore be more likely to experience large scale violence and acute conflict. Homer-Dixon particularly argues that the developing world will experience four main pressures namely reduced agricultural production, economic decline, population displacement and disruption of regularised social relations as a result of atmospheric, terrestrial and aquatic environmental pressures; and as human populations grow, governments will have less opportunity to intervene through the use of market based mechanisms to alleviate the effects of environmental change (Homer-Dixon, 1991:76). Along with Kaplan, the environmental security argument is heavily influenced by Malthusian ideas about the relationships between population growth, eco-scarcity and violence. Kaplan (1994), argued that the environment was going to be the national security issue of the 21st

century and suggested that disease, overpopulation, crime, resource scarcity, refugees and the erosion of nation-states (amongst other things) will lead Africa into some kind of violent barbarism. Also, Matthew, *et al.* (2002:421) suggest that the environment can be regarded as a security issue because resource scarcity is an important cause of conflict which implies that better resource management practices might contribute to peace and stability. The environmental security argument has been criticised from a number of perspectives. For instance, Gleditsch (1998:381), questioned the methodology used and observed that the research of the Toronto Group failed to state clearly whether it is the issue of environmental degradation or environmental scarcity that causes conflict and noted that the group did not sufficiently acknowledge the role of human ingenuity in coping with environmental change and scarcities. Haas (2002:1) further argues that notions of environmental security are flawed and selectively brought into play by the policy community and by inattentive academics to justify pre-existing state-oriented goals. He contends that resource scarcity and environmental security remain important ideas in international relations and security studies precisely because they justify US foreign policy and the foreign policies of other states, especially in the form of intervention (Haas, 2002). Similarly, Litfin (1999:359) points to the vagueness in the phrase environmental security questioning who and what are to be secured, and if environmental security includes questions about over consumption, uneven development or even about the notion of nature itself?

Political ecologists have seriously engaged with the work on environmental security. Robbins (2004) suggests that political ecology can provide a means of moving away from viewing the environment just in terms of the destruction of nature or the social construction of environments. For Robbins (2004), political ecology allows us to examine the ways that nature is “produced” by human and non-human actors. Therefore, it is important to examine the activities of government ministries, scientists, international NGOs, local communities, private businesses and international financial institutions as “producers of nature”. For political ecologists, it is important to investigate the workings of complex networks of actors involved in managing the environment. This in turn reveals that ecological systems are power laden rather than politically inert because the multiple explanations and interpretations of how ecosystems work and what factors affects them are invested with the political, social and economic meanings (Robbins, 2004). But Peluso and Watts (2001:3) argue that political ecology provides the tools for thinking about the conflicts and struggles as created by the forms of access to and control over resources. Also observed is the fact that political ecology takes note of a multitude of actors and examines the impacts of their activities (Neumann, 1998, 2001). From the political ecology approach, it is obvious that the assumption that environmental scarcity produces conflict needs to be challenged. It is clear that abundance of resources and not just scarcity also creates new forms of conflict over who has access to and control over them (Peluso and Watts, 2001; Nordstrom, 2004).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Political Ecology is about how human and non-human actors ‘produce’ nature. Discuss

4.0 Conclusion

The environmental security debate is highly influential in terms of thinking about how environmental change might produce violence as a result of environmental scarcity. This in turn is related to the increasing fashion for thinking about underdevelopment as a source of danger for the North, which informs foreign policy making towards Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, while some environmental processes might well appear to conform to the environmental security model, it is important to more carefully examine the complex processes that produce particular forms of environmental stress, poverty, violence and resource extraction. But the political ecology critique also focuses on the resource itself (in terms of its abundance) as a cause of violence in the South.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we discussed the various critiques provided by both environmental security and political ecology on how environmental change could lead to conflict. However, the analyses provided by political ecology remain useful in terms of analysing the complex array of interest groups and stakeholders engaged in socially, politically and economically producing nature.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the critique provided by political ecology on how environmental change can lead to conflict.

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