

Forum: Environmental Committee

Issue: Measures to mitigate the effects of mining and exploitation of natural resources in LEDCs on the environment

Introduction

Since the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, the exploitation of natural resources has been a major source of conflict in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). As capitalism, consolidated by industrialization and nationalism disseminated through Europe, countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal have created dominions in certain regions as they have been more industrially developed and had more factories. The increasing need of resources and raw material to enhance national economy and production caused the aforementioned colonizers to occupy the lands of other countries. Such occupations in African countries, Southeast Asia and the Americas have often been coerced through invasions and violations of national sovereignty, defining the colony on the colonizers' terms. The political and economic domination of European countries allowed them to easily utilize the natural resources and augment their economy in an expansive manner.

The dispersion of countries around the world, amalgamating an abundant amount of resources, perpetuated capitalist and imperialist policies, leaving behind lasting effects. However, it should be kept in mind that the consequential influence of imperialist states is not without opposition. There have been numerous wars and conflicts between indigenous people and imperialist states. These conflicts carry significance for the imperialist governments, given that obtaining raw material and mining materials directly affects both their national economy and their position in the global economy. Nevertheless, utilizing natural resources such as gold mines and forests have had detrimental effects on the native people and the natural habitat of the region.

In addition to these historical endeavors, demographic changes are causing teeming demands for natural resources. Former colonies have been struggling with these issues for the last couple of centuries. The political, environmental, social and economic effects of their pasts are quite evident compared to countries like the UK, which have retained their sovereignty for the last millennium. For instance, the first country on the African continent to gain its independence was Ghana in 1957, formerly named the Gold Coast. Furthermore, looking over the last five decades, the world today is evolving toward different economic approaches and more equal legal representation. Debate continues on the issues of neo-imperialism and implicit exploitation of certain lands. With new technologies, social constructs and legislative implementations continuing to emerge in 2019, such debates are more viable and the effects can be seen more explicitly. This report will be focusing on the environmental aspects of the issue and how it evolved to our present day, alongside how it may be solved.

Definition of Key Terms

Environmental Damage: The deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife; and pollution.

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs): Countries which are claimed as less developed are classified with multiple criteria such as their literacy rate, life expectancy, GDP, per capita income. These countries have a severe hindrance in their structural and economic development when compared to MEDC's.

More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs): Countries that are relatively more developed in terms of economic and social well-being, with less vulnerability to economic changes and expropriations.

Minimization: Degrading or decreasing the damage to minimal or none.

Exploitation: The exploitation of natural resources is the use of natural resources for economic growth, sometimes with a negative connotation of accompanying environmental degradation.

Environmental Pollution: The introduction of contaminants into the natural environment that causes adverse change. Pollution can take the form of chemical substances or energy, such as noise, heat or light.

Natural Resource: Natural resources are components that exist in the world without the input of humans. These natural resources are diverse, ranging from renewable resources to non-renewable resources, living to non-living resources, tangible to intangible resources.

Sustainability: The rates of renewable resource harvest, pollution creation, and non-renewable resource depletion that can be continued indefinitely.

General Overview

We live in a time of rapid changes in world population and technological innovations. Technological changes are occurring at unprecedented rates and are projected to increase in the years ahead. These forces, combined with the desire of hundreds of millions of people in developing countries to raise their standard of living, are resulting in increasing demands for food, minerals, construction materials, and energy. At the same time, there is increased recognition of human influence on the global environment and increased concerns about the long-term consequences of resource exploitation on nature and the ultimate habitability of the world. Considering the changes in the last decades and taking a more comprehensive look at today's environmental struggles, especially in LEDCs, requires a historical background as well as an overview of the current conflicts.

The exploitation of natural resources in Less Economically Developed Countries is an emerging problem, both concerning international relations and national sovereignty. Conflicts related to natural resources occur due to dissensions about their management, usage and protection. These disagreements may not necessarily be detrimental to the state and such non-violent conflicts could lead to competition and resulting growth in certain cases.

Indeed, an important point of departure is the recognition that conflict is common to all societies, and that non-violent conflict can be an essential component of social change and development and is a necessary component of human interaction. Non-violent resolution of conflict is possible when individuals and groups have trust in their governing structures, society and institutions to manage incompatible interests. Conflict becomes problematic when societal mechanisms and institutions for managing and resolving conflict break down, giving way to violence.

LEDCs are qualified as “highly disadvantaged in their development process, for structural, historical and geographical reasons” by the United Nations. Hence, environmental conflicts and the extraction of the environmental resources have been prominent issues in LEDCs throughout their history. The permanence of such issues becomes more complex at different stages, due to the involvement of numerous actors such as private corporations, non-governmental organizations, rebel armies, local communities, and national governments. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) determined that the number of interstate (between countries) and intrastate (within the boundaries of a country) conflicts are caused by environmental reasons. Statistics show that in the past year this rate was 60% and 40% historically. These numbers are connected to natural resources, which makes the mitigation and protection of the land more complicated with UN involvement.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) suggests that in the past 60 years, at least 40 per cent of all intrastate conflicts have been linked to natural resources, doubling the risk of relapse within the first five years. Since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts have been fueled by the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources like timber, diamonds, gold, minerals and oil, or scarce ones like fertile land and water.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Democratic Republic of Congo: Exploitation of natural resources in Democratic Republic of Congo (both mineral and forest) has been ongoing at an alarming rate. The delegation of the Democratic Republic of Congo has previously requested the United Nations Security Council to take precautions against this situation, and continues to fight in order to stop the exploitation of its natural resources.

United Kingdom: British forces have been interfering with Africa’s internal relations since the Industrial Revolution. Much of the exploitation on the African continent has been carried out by

the United Kingdom, in countries such as South Sudan and Morocco. Many UN Member States expect the United Kingdom to stop its illegal actions and start passing laws that are more respectful towards the principles of the United Nations.

Nigeria: Nigeria is engaged in a process of increased urbanization despite its large population and poor economic foundation. The traditional mode of resource consumption, development and the currently inefficient economy are severely threatening the sustainable utilization of natural resources. The rate at which forests are destroyed in the name of furniture production, pulp, paper production, and energy is alarming. Some problems resulting from the exploitation of natural resources include; species extinctions, oil spillage, gas flaring, deforestation, soil erosion, coastal degradation, ozone depletion, groundwater contamination among other things

New Zealand: New Zealand inhibits seriously contaminated mine sites with huge environmental impacts. Starting in 2007, New Zealand started cleaning up the contaminated places with immense costs. This cleaning process can be a guide to environmentally safe mining.

Timeline of Events

1953	The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was founded by the United Nations to encourage partnership among African countries and empower them to prevent the exploitation of their natural resources.
14 December 1962	The United Nations resolution titled "Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources" was published.
1993	GREEN Action Task Force was founded.
5 November 2001	The United Nations General Assembly decided to celebrate the 6th of November each year as the "International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict"
2008	The European Union and the United Nations agreed on a partnership to take action against the exploitation of natural resources worldwide.
2013	The United Nations Development Group's report named "Natural Resource Management in Transition Settings" was published.

UN Involvement

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP): UNEP is an agency of the United

Nations, which focuses on solving international conflicts based on environmental issues and aims to create the sustainable use of environmental resources. Since 1990, 18 conflicts based on the exploitation of resources have been noted worldwide and UNEP has taken an action to prevent further damage.

European Union (EU) - United Nations (UN) Partnership: In order to prevent the damage of non-renewable natural resources, such as but not limited to diamonds, oil, gas, minerals and timber, in developing countries, the EU and UN has agreed on a partnership. The partners have collaborated on various projects so far and they are continuing on working on sustainable solutions.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): Currently, Africa holds a huge proportion of the world's non-renewable natural resources. However, its resources are being exploited by more developed countries, causing internal economic and social conflicts in the region. ECA aims to work on regulatory frameworks to prevent the exploitation of natural resources in the area and create a sustainable management system.

Relevant UN Documents

"From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment" - Report by UNEP - 2008: This document consists information about the field work that analyzed the possible risks of a possible projects to create the sustainability of natural resources.

Natural Resource Management in Transition Settings - Report by UNDG - 2013: This document focuses on creating peace in areas where exploitation of natural resources have caused conflict in the previous years and is adapted by the UN Development Group (UNDG).

"Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources" - General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XVII) - 14 December 1962: This resolution focuses on empowering developing countries, in order to enable them to use their natural resources in the most effective way, without the intervention of other countries.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The European Conference on Sustainability, Energy & the Environment: The conference aims to inform and discover modern ways and techniques for environmental sustainability. The conference, which the 7th will happen in 2019, calls all possible solutions from all around the world and works as a great hub, but it is ineffective in terms of implementation.

GREEN Action Task Force by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: The published paper plays as a great source and action-caller for economic sustainability. Aiming the EECCA countries, the action task force presents a great action schedule for implementation of sustainable management projects.

Annual General Meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development: The Meeting focuses on the Mining Policy Framework (MPF), an assessment methodology and capacity building. The conference aims to inform countries about possibilities that could help countries to better explore their mining resources, attract stable investments, and add value to local communities.

Possible Solutions

For the case of natural resource mining and exploitation, there are possible short and long-term solutions. First of all, there must be a regulating committee of risk assessment. A UN-based environmental risk assessment group would be beneficial in terms of regulating and minimizing the environmental results of the actions taken. The group should be responsible for setting guidelines for mandatory precaution and evaluating the environmental consequences of resource exploitation, as well as producing a report that advises companies on steps on remedies or compensation for damage.

Furthermore, there should be an information management system in collaboration with Member States and academic professionals, such as research institutes and social groups. This information system would allow for extensive and correct utilization of resources, thus enabling development that is respectful to the environment. This will also be helpful for the UN in terms of collecting the data. There also needs to be a regulation system specifically for the toxic output from mines. It has been known and observed that even most sustainable mines play with the rates of toxic output.

Notes from the Chair

While working on their resolutions, delegates should keep in mind that the use of natural resources is a key factor in supporting the advance use of mechanics in various industries. Many of the technologies and international firms operating in developed countries need natural resources to continue to provide the world with their services. On the other hand, most of these firms and countries acquire non-renewable natural resources from less developed countries through intrusive means. This exploitation causes internal and social conflicts within and out of less developed countries, which are dealing with several problems and striving to grow their economies. The delegates should try to maintain a balance between providing the developed countries with their needs and preventing the exploitation in the less developed countries.

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