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ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM, COMPETITION AND CONFLICT: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *Scarcity of natural resources, determines the intensity of the competition and conflict among the community, while the victor of the conflict and access to the resources is decided by the social status and class. The paper attempts to form a triangular relationship between 'ecology', 'conflict' and 'access to resources' demonstrating their interplay in the light of environmental determinism and Marxist perspective. The research locale and sampling frame were the villages of 'Ghora Gali' and 'Arukas', from where 200 sampling units, 100 from each locale respectively, were selected through convenience sampling. The paper revealed that scarcity of environmental resources, preferential treatment in distribution assets are directly correlated with competition and conflicts. Moreover, access to resources was correlated to preference on the basis of status.*

Key Words: Environmental determinism, Conflict, Competition, Marxist perspective

INTRODUCTION

The human society and their activities have been established to be controlled, determined and affected significantly by their environment. The theory of Determinism "examines that one or more definable factors can completely explain and predict the characteristics of society or the individual" [1]. Moreover it is accepted as a doctrine which depicts that "occurrences in nature or social or psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events or natural laws" [2]. The concept of "environmentalist or determinist" of geography was introduced by Barrows" reversing the usual concept of "human ecology," which is the study of man's adjustments to natural environment [3].

The paper advocates the idea that human livelihood which is multifaceted is predominantly affected by their environments. The determinists perceive that "the most dominant effect of environment is on the livelihood of human being" [4]. The various spheres of livelihood affected by the environment's envelop include not only the nature of settlements but the overall survival strategies. It "greatly influences human lives such as behavior, culture, civilization, resources, anatomy, intellect, health, religion, economic and political activities" [5] Further it is added that "economic activities and livelihood strategies associated with the real life style" [4], the "race temperament" [6], "nature and type of settlements, engagement, trade, culture and dressing, agriculture etc" are all enclosed within the clutches of environment [4]. The environment thus determines the economic and social affairs, while Marxism reveals that these "Economic and social arrangements—the material conditions of people's lives—determine what they will know, believe, and value, and how they will behave" [7].

The environment and people thus are inevitably inseparable "the psycho-logical mind-set of individuals" [8], behaviors, competition and resulting conflicts are all influenced. Conflicts "the socially constructed cultural events" take rise when "two or more individuals or groups, think that they have incompatible goals" [9]. Marxist perspective affirms that "opposing goals are the major source of conflicts in a capitalist society" [7]. Within a social setting people thus form coalitions and segments at the same time. The "class struggle" among these segments is continuous "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another" [7]. The power play to access resources defines the form of social cohesion, competition and intensity of conflicts that will generate. The "coalition of people within a social setup is with the purpose to strengthen that group and magnify their access to resources" [10-12]. Since conflict is the race of achievement, it can be defined as the interplay between competition to access the resources and environment. Environment is the provider of opportunities, while "needs are inescapably defined by the locality" [13]. The argument of environmental determinism defining the conflicts and resulting access to resources is strengthened as "Members of a social system do not have completely free access to interact with one another. Status barriers, geographical location, and other variables affect diffusion patterns." [14] The course of actions and "decision- making are, based on various social, ecological, geographical and economic assets. [13]. This paper advocates the need to design projects which require adoption of technology, to assess the various environmental constraints, resource availability, and intensity of competition prevailing within the locale. It has been accepted that the likely reason for failure of major development interventions is "the difficulty to evaluate the factors associated with accelerating the rate of diffusion" [15].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the village of *Ghora Gali* under the Union council of *"Ghora Gali"*and *Arukas* which come under the union council of '*Tret'*, district Rawalpindi, Punjab. Both the villages are situated on the main road from Islamabad to Murree. The study focused the project "Management of Rawal Watershed under Changing Land Use" introduced by National Agricultural Research Council (NARC).

The project initiated the introduction of various modern water management and farming technologies, to bring about an agricultural intervention and change. The sampling frame

incorporated the '*gaon'* of *Ghora Gali*(*ward 1, 2)* and *Arukas,* from where a sample of 200 (100 sampling units from each village) were chosen using non-probability convenience sampling. The data regarding the effectiveness of the demonstration centers or "Model something" in disseminating and diffusing modern agricultural technologies was collected. The focus was to necessitate the importance of a pilot study, community participation and consultation to identify the environmental opportunities and constraints and their effect on the social competition and conflicts which will be shaping the diffusion process and access to resources. A mixed qualitative and quantitative frame of tool was used, including socio-economic census forms, structured questionnaire and in depth- interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSION

Table 1: "Pearson Correlation"

Triangular relationship between access to project resources, conflicts and status.

Independent	Dependent	Asymp. Sig.
Access to project resources, participation	Conflicts rose to access the natural resources.	.000
	Competition increased due to the project.	.000
	Conflicts rose due to project.	.000
	Eligibility to receive project assets was clear	.003
	Rejection of applications was discussed in group meetings	.000
	Preferential treatment observed	.000

The statistical analysis, using Pearson correlation test reveals a strong relationship between environment, conflicts and access to resources by participation in a project.

The "access to project resources and participation" was found to be significantly correlated with "conflicts rose to access the scare natural resources" as correlation value =.000 which means that Ho i.e. there is no association between the variables is rejected while H_1 i.e. there is association between the two variables is accepted. The access to project resources was hypothesized to be dependent upon the intensity of conflicts among the community members due to the scarce environmental resources. The environment since lacked resources, the competition was already severe, the addition of the external factors like projects distributing assets unequally made the competition cut-throat. The Marxian view comes handy to understand the end result, the role of power, and status to succeed in receiving the access to the resources. As "people and their environments are inseparable" the inhabitants of "areas with abundant water are gay and humorous while those inhabiting dry area are short tempered" [4].

The correlation value of "Access to project resources by participation" and "Competition increased due to the project" was, .000 which signifies a strong association between these variables. The project's goal was to diffuse modern agricultural innovations within the community, for which matter various enablers were introduced to the locale to support the diffusion process. The data collected reflected various project shortcomings and inadequacies which majorly included absence of pilot study assessing the environmental opportunities and constraints, lack of community consultation, advocacy sensitization of the community and weak mobilization. The locales of *Ghora Gali* and *Arukas*, both were hilly areas, low on resources like (water, agricultural land, collateral or capital) and high on competition and conflicts. The project introduction and the attraction of enablers or project assets, did increase the competition to access these resources however since there was no strong sensitization and mobilization team working efficiently in a participatory manner within the locale thus this competition could not be shaped into positive adoption. Instead the community merely competed for the resources, not focusing on the major goal and objective of the project that was agricultural intervention. "The projects introduced irrespective of resource availability devoid of complete assessment usually ended fruitless" [17].

The significant value of "Access to project resources and participation" and "conflicts rose due to project" was .000 reflecting a strong association. Interviews with the respondents affirmed that preferential treatment, exploitation and hijacking of assets through power play had taken place. The influential individuals with their attached groups had used their contacts to receive project assets. This inequality and discrimination had led to serious repercussions in the form of non- adoption of project techniques, sundered familial relations and disruption of social cohesion and rise of conflicts. "Exploitation, economic inequality and privileged profiting activate disruption and hinder effective working of a social organization" [18].

The correlation value of "Eligibility to receive project assets was clear" and "Access to project resources and participation" was .003. Thus H_0 was rejected while H_1 was accepted that the eligibility criterion was dependent, and the decisive force of access to resources. Since the eligibility standards were not clear to the general public, the lack of information created confusions and the competition turned into severe conflicts. The category to which people belong, the status and collateral decide what they will acquire, "property or lack of property, owners or non-owners' [19].

The value of correlation between "Preferential treatment observed" and "Access to project resources and participation" was .000 < .005 which leads to acceptance of H_1 thus affirming a strong correlation between the variables. As the community was unaware of the eligibility criterion, the project staff was not actively mobilizing the community, and communication or diffusion of project information was taking place only via face-to-face interaction between the community members serious damage was done to the

equivalent structure required to resolve conflicts. The community revealed that the project heads had interacted only with a few influential's of the community. They were made the representatives of the project within the community and thus had complete control over the project asset distribution. Such "individualistic approaches benefit mostly the better-off-people" [20]. These capitalistic limitations must be eradicated as 'economic equality is essential for political equality' and thus to provide all members of the society equal opportunities"[21]. Thus the involvements of the "local people" could have increased the "success rate of the projects" [22].

CONCLUSION

In the light of environmental determinism and Marxist perspective the paper affirmed that the ecological factors define the overall livelihood of the people living within a specific environment. The lack of resources lead to competition and differential distribution leads to conflicts.

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