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Buddhism with Sustainable Development Objectives of Environment Protection

Most Ven. Thich Hue Thong (*)

Translated by Bhikkhuni Thich Huong Nhu

Sustainable development of environment is one of The Eight Millenium Development Goals of United Nations (MDGs) that was agreed to attempt themselves for fulfillment in 2015 by 189 UN member nations and was documented in Declaration at Millennium Summit Conference held from 6th to 8th September, 2000 in United Nation Assembly headquarters in New York. We may see that, once our world beings acknowledge and bring environmental problems into discussions for finding long term and urgent solutions then environment protection actually becomes an alarming issue for inevitable corrective actions because living cradle for human beings and all other beings in the universe have been being threatened Nature encloses, protects, grants human kinds and all beings with peace and contentment, happiness however, in course of finding ways to satisfy their basic living needs, people devastated ceaselessly nature and animals recklessly damaging seriously organs of nature body. Inevitable consequences are violent reactions from nature expressing intensively with catastrophes of calamities, floods, earthquakes, epidemic diseasesWorld of human beings has been suffering from various big or small catastrophes happening all over the earth. Most recently it tells us about catastrophic consequences that were caused by Haiyan super storm sweeping

(*) Standing Member of National Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Council
President of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha at Binh Duong Province

over Philippines. This catastrophe continued to ring an alarming bell for responsibilities of environment protection at United Nation Conference for Climate Changes. Deadline for achieving Millennium Goals of UN for environment is nearly reach, however, environment and climate change issues have been ever publicly concerned matters.

GREED – HATRED – DELUSION: ROOT CAUSE OF ALL CAUSES DAMAGING ENVIRONMENT

During course of development, people is proud continuously of research capabilities, invention of more and more equipment's servicing mostly or even exceeding necessary level of their living needs. Consumption lifestyle is not only an objective but also a motivation to promote development models of economy, because consumption makes "demand from which it promotes supply". In order to satisfy such consumption lifestyle, everyone eager to production for making profit and compete together for consumption even though those things are not critically in need for life. Objectives for "faster and faster, more and more, newer and newer" are worshipped making jumpy increase of demand of raw materials and fuel. Now nature that used to be a cradle protecting and fostering people became a land of over exploited, abused and robbed. Nature is also a place receiving freely all kinds of dirty trashes and toxic wastes. This half-hearted model of growth creates delusion to people that science and technologies may rule out and transform nature system to build a sustainable life. With bad and irreverent effects for environment that are hidden latently under halo of economic growth, people are only awakening once environmental catastrophes to be occurred depriving all success of developments.

Every day, we may see that alerts from results of scientific research for progressive process of climate, warming earth in associated with vision of melting ice at poles of earth leads to increase of sea level that may engulf many big and small islands around the world as well as parts of continents and lands over the world; these make us worried thinking of life for future generations. It is thought to be a very far vision, but actually people had been suffering from terrible harms of environment problems. Immediate occurrence of environment problems such as earthquake, forest fires, flooding ...visible things which are fearful but these may not be as fearful as long

lasting problems (occurring slowly but long lasting) of invisible appearance by normal eyes but those could be predicted by natural rules, by principles of “original independent” and “Cause and Effect” that are taught profoundly by Buddhism.

Observing progress in human beings social life we may see that by direct or indirect ways, people has been impacting in minute, in second, and damaging its environment shortsightedly and roughly. When people devastate natural environment they always think that natural environment may be silent, normal as if it would not object any impacts of people, however it would not be as such, natural environment always object to people’ harmful behaviors, until it could not do and powerful outburst from consequence of environment pollution will be a dismay for life of all beings. Today in the world, consequences from environment pollutants such as petroleum war at Gulf, Dioxin crisis at Seveco Italia in 1974 or at our Vietnam, nuclear power plant accident at Tschernoby Ukraine in 1986 and numerous sinking issues of oil tank ships over the oceans ... are still very hot topics in Conference tables discussing about humankind future. With current speed of forest devastation of 11 million hecta per year, till 2040 the world will lose from 17-35% species of plants amongst available 10 million species. Till 2040, there will be from 20-70 kinds of to be extinct every day¹.

According to 1998 statistics reports, there may be around 1.4 billion people around the world to be health threatened due to air pollution. Every year there may be around 17 million people dying of infectious diseases in close involvement with environment pollution problems such as malaria, dengue. Environment pollution has been increasing considerably population of patients of cancer, tuberculosis, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, hepatitis²

In order to improve living environment of mankind, in 1991 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) came up with immediate solutions to “save the earth”. However, regardless of specific reports,

1. Dr.Le Van Tam – Gottinggen University, Federal Republic of Germany, “Population doubling & The Original Independent” in Messenger Newspaper.

2. Nguyễn Đình Hòe, *The Environment and Development Sustainability*, 2007

grounded complete scientific illustrations that conflicts between protection of environment sustainability and ways and methods to solve for living need of people are always challenges, stresses and difficulties if there would not be any really drastic solutions arising from proper perception and realistic actions of people beings, whilst due to maximum profit objective, commodity and service producers always find ways to deny their responsibilities and additional costs for treating harmful wastes generating from their production process out to environment. Because of objective of un-ended property possession, some people are not regretful to exploit, devastate nature without perception and responsibility.

From this reality, it is said that, while environment organizations in the world have been exhorting, calling drastically for development with sustainability commitment of environment then in many places over the world models of unsustainable development are still happening. Unsustainable development model itself is a development disconcerting to environment, it promotes over consumption and over exploitation of natural resources. The kernel of unsustainable development model is a linkage of production and consumption. More producing, more consuming is for jumpy economic growth. Disinterest of both producers and consumers to environment has been increasing degradation, pollution of environment and depletion of resources. All of those roots, according to Buddhism viewpoint, devastation of living environment, environment pollution is highly extreme consequence of selfish thinking, pathways of thought and sensual indulgence of people come from Greed – Hatred – Delusion. Buddha said: “If all beings intentionally continue position themselves in 10 evildoings³ then consequence could be seen in environment, and must be in suffering⁴”. Talking about this Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang used to say: “It may affirm that, all things damaging ecological environment and devastating this earth are generated from greedy heart, self-interested heart, selfish heart, crazy heart of people. In reality many people or groups due to boundless greedy heart then they always collect everything for themselves or their groups making them become unquestioning and very

3. Ten unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. Three Wrong actions of body are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, Four wrong actions of mouth are lying, evil mouth, said two blades, harsh word, Three unwholesome actions of mind are greed, hatred, and ignorance.

4. The Suka Sutra

cruel lacking of human nature. They may be ready to kill others, to make wars, to make poverty, to transmit disease, to destroy human life, all beings and from which ecological environment is also more and more destructive. Or in order to gain huge profits, in parallel with uncontrolled resource exploitation, they also discharge harmful toxic substances into earth's womb, rivers, air polluting environment, impacting to health and causing disease to many people.”⁵ Tibetan has its statement: “It should not take so much whatever precious things from earth, because its quality will become downgraded and earth will be destructed.”

It may say that, development focusing on economic growth, may not concern properly to environment pushing human society into coil of vicious circle in which “economic growth – degradation of environment resource –deterioration of social culture – economic growth” will quickly move forwards crisis stage of human society. Operation of this coil will quickly bring development course to reach working threshold of ecologic system, then consequently ecological catastrophes will happen leading to social crisis with basic characteristics such as: exhausted resources, starvation, epidemic, diseases, environment pollution and problems, environment wars and conflicts. It is clear that greatest challenge for sustainable development may not be science, technology but for requiring changing people behavior of organization, policy planning and strategy on basis of Buddhism moral, merciful heart and intelligence spirit. Buddha teachings are solutions that help solve root causes for protection of sustainable development of environment.

THE BUDDHA'S ATTITUDE TO ENVIRONMENT

It is realistic that, not until now, nations around the world urgently discuss about sustainable development of environment but since 1980 in printed matter of World Preservation Strategy (publicized by International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – IUCN); this concept was referred and publicized widely in 1987 by Brundtland Report (so called as Our Common Future Report) of World Committee for Environment and Development – WCED (presently as Brundtland Committee). This report

5. Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, *Buddhism and the Ecological Environment*, Giac Ngo Newspaper.

clearly notes: Sustainable development is “one that meets present demands without impacting, damaging to possibilities meeting demand of future generation ...” Till 1992, at Summit Conference for Earth, under official name of United Nations Conference for Environment and Development organized at Rio De Janeiro, Brasil, representatives participating UN Conference for Environment and Development had reconfirmed this concept and sent out a clear message to all ranks of governments regarding to urgency in promoting economic harmony, social development and environment protection.

We may see that, protection of life and ecological environment is alarmed by world in recent decades, however with compassion and intelligence, 2557 years ago, our The Buddha gave out complete concepts, comments about ecological environment. His whole life was a lively witness of a person living in harmony with, always respect to, love to all beings to preserve and protect ecological balance. The Buddha is also first pioneering leader in the world who understands completely and properly close and inseparable relationship amongst beings. In original independent the Buddha clearly declares: “This exists then that exists. This does not, neither does that. This is created then that is created. This is destructed then that is destructed.” From these teachings that include complete concepts of incessant mobilization of universe of Buddha, it is not difficult for us to see this since we are also entities of universe which if we harm to other beings, other beings, ecological environment then we harm to ourselves. Here it should consider social situation at the Buddha age at which people’s perception was limited. People used to blame catastrophes of natural calamity for God’s punishment. Meanwhile, Buddha recognized early those calamities being caused by people themselves but not anyone else. He said: “Well young men, all hearted beings are his owner of karma, heir of karma, karma is visceral womb - Garbhàdhātu, karma is relatives, karma is basis, and karma divides hearted species of strengths and weaknesses”⁶.

Furthermore, understandings about environment, weather and climate of the Buddha are extremely profound. The Buddha often uses species of Bodhi tree, Sala tree, and species of Lotus. Carefree, together with natural landscapes such as lakes and pools, rivers and springs, forest to illustrate Buddhism teachings. For monks, there were some rules that recommend them not to harm

6.Majjhima- Nikaya, Sutra No 135.

trees and plants or to damage water sources. In original canons, Buddha gave much teaching that closely relate with protection of environment. He noted that: “Planting trees will give us shade, besides air purification, plants and trees may preserve earth and it is usefulness for all beings and for ourselves.”

In *Vinaya-matrka-sastra*, the Buddha noted: “A monk should cultivate three kinds of plant: plant for fruits, plant for flowers and plant for leaves to worship the Triple Gems then he will receive a favour of help – *Adhithàna - Resolution* and will not commit a sin.”⁷ Or such as “There are five kinds of tree that a people should not cut down that are bodhi tree, medicine herbal tree, tall trees growing along roads, trees in cold reginal forest and banian tree.” In *Suru of Fifty Encounters Canon*, Buddha also emphasized: “If a Bodhisava see a baren land without any tree or water well, he has to build well and cultivate trees for all beings benefit” ... It has to say that, at Buddha age, plants and trees, rivers and springs, flowers were still immense and well-off, but he did not forget to concern to developing tree forest, to make every effort to cultivate affinity for natural proliferation and development in order to protect cool and green cradle and safety for life of all beings⁸

In mankind history, Saints often love people and nature, but it could be quite rare in case of the Buddha who always love nature and live harmonically with nature. Those places where the Buddha came by and stop for residence or sermonizing, he always offers loving and respecting conduct. With such nature love, respect to living environment, the Buddha’s conduct is a bright example for our age whilst human has been pleading civilization to devastate forests, devastate nature irresponsibility. He noted numerous times that plants have its own life too. The Buddha express his attitude by respecting life of nature as in rules and principles developed for disciples, he prohibited strictly disciples to devastate plants and trees. Such cultural spirit of loving nature was expressed clearly at following actions: “Over here, well - Brahmin we are living near a village or a town. In the morning we dress up with clothes and get our bowls walking into that village, or that town for alms, after meal, on our alms way back, we come to end corner of a forest. Here we pick grass or leaf into bundle, then we sit in lotus position”⁹. It is only a picking action, very gentle

7. The Anguttara Sutra.

8. The Suru Sutra of Fifty Encouters

9. the Anguttara Nikaya

and kind, very respectful and courtesy; he treats with plants, trees and leaf as a real living. At life end whilst preparing for Nirvana, Buddha chose a resting place at a quiet jungle which was Sala forest of Malla tribe. In this event, Anan requested the Buddha: “The Honoured One should not enter into rest at this dependable town, this deserved town.”¹⁰ However, Buddha answered kindly: “Well, A Nan, you should not say like that, should not say this town is small or deserved”. In common trend of human, all people like and respect prosperous city center and disregard places of countryside villages. But choosing deserved Sala forest for leaving this life because Buddha always love and respect nature environment. He respected nature so nature did a favour with him on farewell him for last time. On such sacred point of time, Sala plants bloomed flowers unseasonally, leaning its branches and covering his sacred body with plentiful flowers, greeting respectfully such a great person of mankind in last minute.

B. THOROUGH SOLUTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT PROBLEMS

Environment crisis is not Buddhist crisis but in spirit of “Buddhism is not separable with Underworld”, Buddhism has its profound and realistic concepts with sustainable development of environment. Therefore we think that it would be necessary to propose effective solutions from Buddha teachings to contribute for “hot” problems of our age. As talked, Buddhism is a way of intelligence mercy, if we recognize incisively every problems in life associated with kind hearts from all of us then definitely we will not harm any things regardless of it could be a pin or grass instead of talking about forest devastation, river obturating, mountain cutting, all species massacre, each other destruction. This matter shows that although Buddhism does not directly allege environment protection but indeed Buddhism is a religion that is originated to solve out thoroughly most serious problems of environment.

+ *Solving properly demand of living*: Buddha offers solutions for economic life of human, teaching disciples to perform “Right livelihood – Samyakājiva”, meaning that people should make their livings honestly, properly, not to harm self, others and all beings. Such conduct with economic problems, if it could be practiced completely, then we will accomplish environment protection

10. Digha Nikaya I.

of people perfectly. Following living way of Right livelihood, we will not devastate forest and hunt and kill animals irresponsibly (if those animals are not extremely in need for people existence). In practicing Right livelihood of The Eightfold Path, the Buddha teaches the Fourfold disciple (Varga) should comply with rule of “no extermination” simultaneously often “beings liberation” and advises disciples to practice vegetarian depending on their living situation and ability to develop their love (metta) and charity hearts. It could say that this is a practical, silently and long-lasting action in protecting environment of people perfectly. If all people living in this world practice a true life, honest, love and care of all species like oneself then the earth will be last long in peace and happiness. And to get this, people must change their “attitude and behavior”, “changing their lifestyle”, “changing concepts of value that they used to understand since old time till now”. For this matter, David R Loy and John Stanley earnestly request: “If we continue to maltreat the earth as such, definitely our civilization will be destroyed. This mind change requires enlightenment and awakening. Buddha’s enlightenment has its personal characteristic. We need a collective enlightenment to slow down this destruction stream. The civilization will come to an end if we continue to compete in power, reputation and profits.

Simple living: The Buddha teaches monks: “Like bees collecting their nectar without harming flower’s flavor and color”. In our normal living, Buddha always keeps simple living ways to enhance happiness for all beings. For clothing, Buddha was not over-abusing of nature resource. For him, only with a cloth covering a dead people leaving at forest edge that was washed clean or only with a cloth made by robe of rags basically to keep body warm, clean and serious, that would be enough. The way to solve out Buddha dressage matter illustrates respect for beings life which is a beauty in culture of nature and environment protection “*Listening to right things, tender and humble / Knowing how enough in living is, enjoy simple life*”. Buddha teaches us to know how enough in life is in order to advise us to limit luxury and waste. That is noble minded way of living that is useful for ecological environment. Simple living does not mean that dis-enhanced life. Quality of Buddhism is “peace and happiness”, instead of greed; is bringing happiness to all species, instead of massacre and destruct survival condition of all beings; is cooperation for common interest instead of competing for own

benefits; is coming along with nature instead of separating or fighting with nature. If everyone practice completely living way of enough knowing then definitely present consumption need will not come to a level requiring “over exploitation” unnecessarily resources from natural environment.

Buddhism basic teachings requests Buddhist to make effort in normal living as well as in practice to minimize Greed – Hatred – Delusion then later to exterminate thoroughly Greed – Hatred – Delusion that are main reasons causing desolation of the circle of rebirths - Samsara. In Dhammapada, Buddha teaches that:

Those who have much greed
Will harm self, harm others
When fruits are not ripe
Fools think it sweet
When evil revenge comes
Self suffering from desolation¹¹

The crisis so called as “ecological crisis”, indeed it is a crisis of culture and spirit arising from Greed – Hatred – Delusion of people. Buddhism doctrine taught Buddhist to equip Threefold training: Discipline – Concentration – Wisdom and Compassion – Wisdom - Encourages to cope up with Greed – Hatred – Delusion in order to develop a life of peace and happiness, liberation for self, for others and for human beings. The Buddha has continuously been sowing good seeds in hearts and minds of Buddhist, continuously remind Buddhist of diligent efforts. If we would plant diligently good tree, definitely we will harvest only good fruits for ourselves, for our family and for others. To be like this, we need to establish, build world of people from unbalanced, polluted environment back to balanced, unpolluted environment. This is an urgent and necessary mission, daily, in minutes, in seconds from each individual of each generation, on each country, nation that agree altogether to build a world or globalize in every perspectives, so that environment would not be polluted by self or others conscience.

Respect, love and protect all beings: Aldo Leopold who is considered as Western father of environmental ethics affirmed that: “impossible to imagine

11. The Dhamapada.

that” people may form a “moral relation with land” or ecological system that does not have a love, respect, admiration with land and high concerns for its value.” It is true and Buddha taught that:

Swear to bring love to all beings
 Wish all for peace and happiness
 Share harmony without missing out ones
 Weak and strong people
 All kinds of beings that is tall, big, short or long
 That is medium, tiny, rough
 Regardless of visible or invisible shaping
 Regardless of near or far living
 Regardless of newly born or old born
 Wish also all for peace and happiness.¹²

In this section, Buddha mentioned all human beings, from species with big body shapes, tall or long, short or small, rough or subtle to species without any shape or appearance; from weak beings to strong species. Because that all of them, regardless of whatever species they are belongings to, are all beings in this world so that it requires respect of living and sharing love, protection and saving equally. This is also unworried, equal love offering widely to living beings and universe. Buddha taught this as: “Well monks, to go for happiness to all beings, for peace to all beings, for happiness and peace to Gods – Devakaya and human beings.”¹³ When generating rule of slaughtering prohibition, the Buddha had taught his disciples to practice compassion, also returning to nature laws, restricting interference to nature for self’s satisfaction; that is also an effective way to protect environment and our life.

C. Identifying conflicts and solving thoroughly out conflict problems in preserving ecological environment

As being analysed, serious development of environment was recognized by all countries around the world and they are determined to come along for prevention, improvement with much effort. However, it is a matter that there are many challenges, not only because of contradiction between consumption world with exhaustion of nature resource but also contradiction between

12. The Sutra of Compassion (The Metta Sutra)

13. The Anguttara Nikaya

economic growth need amongst nations, rich and poor countries, between ambition of economy growth to affirm political position of each country This made authorities who have to accomplish mandatory factors to preserve ecological environment not so drastically, even “closing eyes and loss of hearing” living along with conflicts and environment to solve out only their immanent conflicts. That is why, in order for world ecological environment problems may not stop at identification of harm and change of environment, climate; it requires United Nations to come up with more drastic solutions from enhancement of propaganda, popularizing environment situation widely to communities over the world from which it could call up, mobiles people to improve their awareness, participating in preserving environment and sustainable development. Besides that it should establish relationships and active participation of leaders, authorities who have power to transform policies, strategies of environment preservation of United Nations into concrete actions with actual effects. In addition to that there should be strict and clear punishment by a common law of the world for environment devastation every where in this globe, to avoid unequal treatment or unfair disciplines in various countries for violations of ecological environment. Only with this, global environment problems may come in common orbit with common action determination of everyone.

In summary, diversification of all beings always connect closely with diversification of situations and destinies. Only wisdom as Buddha’s wisdom is able to show us clearly each plight, each destiny of every beings on the world. And only with infinitive and boundless compassion as Buddha who may give out love profoundly and thoroughly to each situation and destiny. Environment problem is actually solved out completely, thoroughly whenever compassion of everyone are really risen up, together with profound realization for close relationship of all beings in universe then human beings may have a good sleep in a tender environment cradle that the nature took great pains to look after us from universe establishment till today.

Environment preservation will be never conflict or restrict its development but requiring a different development so that it grows economy but still preserve nature system and grow social welfare – human culture. Therefore, population control, absolute poverty alleviation, green economy promotion, awareness enhancement for environment, accomplishment and effective operation for

law basis in association with environment preservation are essential problems of sustainable development. 25 centuries ago, for matters of our contemporary age, truth from Buddha dogmas is more and more exposed with true value and ever effective. We think subjectively that it is about time for countries over the world to research and make use thoroughly of dogmas and suitable attitude of Buddha for environment in calling up, propagandizing, mobilizing, changing perceptions of everyone to solve thoroughly insolvable problem of environment preservation for sustainable development of human kind today and forever.