

The Role of UNEP in Solving Iran's Environmental Problems

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, environment has become one of the most important global issues. Having good knowledge about environmental problems and studying climate changes have received much attention over recent years. Environmental pollution is considered one of the most important worldwide challenges. The present research aimed to study the role of United Nations Environment Program (hereinafter said UNEP) to solve Iran's environmental problems. This was a descriptive-analytical study. The results showed the starring role of UNEP in protecting the country's environmental rights. Accordingly, there has been an increasing attention to the environment and the necessity of protecting the environment has been emphasized in the country's development policy.

Keywords: International associations; UNEP; Environment; Iran.

Introduction

A course on the development of communication technologies over recent decades has changed attitudes and attention to some issues to the extent that, today, they are in the focus of interest of politicians, researchers, and even the public. Environmental issue is a case in point. Due to economic growth and industrial revolution in the west, protection of the environment is considered a public duty and the basic element of the sustainable development which has been discussed in developed countries from the past decades has also received much attention from the responsible bodies of developing countries over recent years (Qalandarian et al., 2016).

Changes in the climate pattern and the severity of damages to the environment because of population density and human activities are especially considerable in coastal regions. Environment of Iran has also badly affected by the economic development over the last decades, so that its protection has gained much attention (Azmi & Motiei Langroudi, 2011). Irrevocable damages to the environment in many parts of the world could seriously jeopardize human development (Qalandarian et al., 2016).

Indeed, the 1980's was the turning point in dealing with environmental issues in the media. In the same way, a number of laws regarding the protection of environment have been passed in Iran over recent decades (Qorbani & Kousha, 2015).

Environment as one the basic element of the life and development plays a key role to keep the balance in the nature. However, the lack of rules and regulations to recognize it has caused unlimitedly exploitation of the natural resources which damage and pollute it (John Peru et al., 2016). In the past, protection of the environment considered as a domestic issue, while today the conception of the environment has changed

over the last decades due to some political, economic, technological, scientific, and environmental developments (Koulai & Goudarzi, 2009).

Today, environment has become a major concern for all governments, because environmental problems not only deprive human being of security and calmness, but also threatens the human life. The attitude of the civilized society and a rise in the technological developments could be crucial factors. In civilized societies, human imagine themselves as the crown of creation who is allowed to use the nature without having any responsibility to protect it. On the other hand, although technological development have brought the societies great achievements, they has also caused many damages (Adhami & Akbarzade, 2011).

Accordingly, protection of the environment and dealing with environmental pollution is too broad that individual governments would not be able to incur all expenses. There has been a rise concern over managing waste in recent decades. The reason why the waste management is important is that inappropriate disposal of it would negatively affect the environment. Unlimited and uncontrollable greenhouse gas emission rate, extinction of marine and non-marine lives, higher rate of cancer incidence in urban areas, especially big cities, all are negative effects of wastes (Tallaei & Heidari, 2015). Harmful consequences of environment destruction, especially in developed countries, on the one hand, and developments in environmental sciences on the other hand, have received attention of international assemblies and governments to the risk of environmental pollution and the necessity to combat it. Therefore, international assemblies showed great determination to help governments to solve environmental problems. In addition, governments reached to the conclusion that protection of the environment would not be a realizable goal unless through international cooperation. Development of such institutions have been welcomed to the extent that their number in the 20th century exceeded that of their primary advocates that is governments (Seihani, 2011). As with other branches of the international law, it is legal sanction and an effective mechanism for enforcing rules that are necessary for the protection of environment. Although the international community has made attempts to respond to environmental challenges, namely the disposal of waste, through the cooperation with international organizations and governments, it seems that a court designated for environmental issues along with the international Court of Justice and international Court of Seas will make sure decision passed by international institutions enhance impact of their measures and, as a whole, efficient management of waste (Talaie & Heidari, 2015).

It is UNEP which only has a global authority for policy making, coordination, and stimulation of different environmental issues among governments and subordinated institutions to the United Nations and other international private and state organizations.

By attending Stockholm conference on the United Nation's Environment Program, Iran took its first steps in the inauguration and activity of this institution.

It emphasizes the role of this leading institution for developing countries, including Iran which has been grappling with environmental issues. The Stockholm Conference was held to pass laws regarding the prohibition of using 41 harmful and poisonous substances threatening the human life and the environment. Therefore, the present research aimed to study the role of UNEP to solve Iran's environmental problems.

Theoretical framework

There has been two pessimistic and optimistic views towards the nature and content of international relations since the establishment of national governments and consequently modern international relations. In the same way, two ideologies, including the idealism and realism, have developed in the literature of international relations which in turn has led to shape contrary opinions.

Strong opposition between these two counter approaches appeared in the form of the First Debate Regarding International Relations in the course of First and Second World Wars, which finally realism conquered idealism.

Notwithstanding supremacy of all forms of realism, including Morgenthau classic realism and Kenneth Waltz neo-realism, over international relations, there was a great deal of opposition to them. Most of these challenges have resulted from varied opinions in the scope of idealism, or what has been called Liberalism after the Second World Wide. Regional convergence opinions cover functionalism, neo-functionalism, and federalism involved in realism. However, this theoretical challenge reached a new stage in the middle of

the 80's. The international relations have witnessed the emergence of a new theory known as neo-liberalism from then on. Unlike realism, this ideology holds that international relations are not violent and controversial in essence, but war is an exception. Therefore, it is possible to promote global cooperation with the assistance of international institutions even when there is anarchy due to the lack of a government. Neo-liberal institutionalism embraces two ranges of regime theory. Indeed, regime theory has been moderated and corrected by neo-liberalism. While early theorists emphasized on the mutual dependence and the role of non-state players, contemporary neo-liberalists consider countries as united, intelligent players. Therefore, these are nature, role, and the function of international institutions which neo-liberalism tries to combine.

First of all, it recognized the leading role of countries in the international relations and as a result their interests and authority. Second, it seeks to find powerful and big incentives which must be developed through mutual dependence for cooperation. Next, it examines how international institutions affect interests and preferences of nations based on advantages and disadvantages of varied options (Dehqani Firouzabadi, 2015).

However, unlike neo-realism, it holds an efficient and independent role for international institutions.

To put it simply, international institutions are not secondary phenomenon with a little impact on international collective consequences; in addition they are not fake reflection of international power distribution among nations in the international system which has been subject to changes due to alterations in the authority and national interest of countries. However, being dependent of countries' authority and power, it acts as a leading factor which determines international results and approaches of countries with an extent of liberty and independence (Keohane, 1989; Stein, 1993).

As a result, it considers a rising trend for cooperation and convergence in regional and international levels, through which governments are tend to develop mutual cooperation. Indeed, the theory confirms different governments are seeking to find further interest by means of interaction. On the other hand, unlike neo-realists, neo-liberalists see absolute interests more important than relative ones.

Environment

By the term environment is meant earth, water, and air where humans, plants, and animals live in. It affects the life and growth of all creatures. To put it simply, the environment includes renewable and non-renewable sources, all creatures and man-made areas, such as roads, residential places, industrial regions, and landscapes. Improving knowledge about granting permissions for the development of industries in geographical areas is the most significant measure to protect the environment. There is a fact that the more knowledge is, the less destruction of the environment would be (Niakan Lahiji & Khezri, 2011)

Protection of environment in Iran

Being a specialized issue, protection of environment In Iran differs from other public areas. Although all people need to be provided with public education and security as human rights, the legislator considers the protection of environment a public duty.

In this case, studying Iran's legal system shows that despite some effective legal affairs to publicize the protection of environment, it faces many challenges such as failure to cover all of its aspects completely and inability of responsible organizations related to the protection of environment to cooperate effectively (Faryadi, 2013).

Domestic policy and environmental issues

According to the history of economic development in Iran, the role of the government in production and investment is broad, so that it plays a decisive role in economic activities. The government has not observed environmental standards in the production process to meet the needs of society (Nazari et al., 2015)

Culture is the engine of sustainable development which promotes the protection of environment. The close relation between the environment and culture of human societies is of the most importance.

To this end, it is necessary to develop environmental ethics in all classes of the society.

By the word environmental ethics is meant the ideal behavior of human beings towards natural, social and cultural environments.

This systematic behaviors along with culture will organize different dimensions of the human life. In other words, culture is thought of as the root of the holistic development. As a result, good culture guarantees the development and dynamism of a society (Adhami and Akbarzadeh, 2011).

A conference on the environment was held in Stockholm and the Environment Protection Law with 21 articles was passed. Since then the organization has acquired new legal authority to the extent that the quality of its machineries is compatible with the requirements of development programs.

The most important development in the field of strengthening the regulations and guaranteeing the measures of the environment after the Islamic Revolution is the ratification of principle 50 of the Iran's Constitution which was a turning point to strengthen environmental measures taken after the Islamic Revolution.

A comprehensive study of the laws regarding environmental issues affirms the efficiency of them. Under Article 50 of the Iran's status law, the protection of environment, where people from generation to generation need to experience a social life, is a public duty.

However, the law fails to provide the public with satisfactory reasons. Indeed, a theoretical basis is needed to explain the issue. It is the ecological basis that can justify the need to publicize the protection of environment.

Due to the general and pervasive nature of the environment, the environment law must also be public. To this end, all related sectors are needed to be hold responsible for environment, all state and private institutions should have an opportunity to cooperate, and also it is necessary to provide required protective tools (Faryadi, 2013).

All economic activities which set the stage to pollute the environment or cause irrevocable damages are prohibited. Following Acts 14, 15, and 16 of the law on prevention of air pollution approved by the parliament on April 23, 1995, the activity of factories and workshops which do not comply with the criteria of Article 12 and the activity of factories, workshops and power plants creating excess pollution are prohibited.

The Environment Protection Organization is in charge of detecting factories, workshops, and power plants whose pollution rate exceeds the permissible level of environment standards. After the announcement, their owners need to take necessary actions to eliminate the pollution, or stop working until the elimination of the pollutant factor within the time limit determined by the environment organization with the cooperation and participation of the relevant bodies.

The permissible level of pollution will be first determined by the Environment Protection Organization and then it is approved by the council of ministers. If owners of factories, workshops, and power plants miss the deadline, their work place will be closed at the environment protection organization's request and the order of the relevant judicial authority. Either the permission of the Environment Protection Organization or the decision of a competent court is necessary to resume their operation (Janparvar et al., 2016).

Combating air pollution is a public duty that requires close, mutual cooperation of people and authorities.

Disseminating information about the protection of environment

Promoting the environment culture of the society, encouraging people to use public transport, such as tube trains, instead of private cars, decentralizing administrative jobs in the capital city, increasing the per capita of green space, transferring pollutant industries, factories and workshops out of the city, advertising the use of natural gas instead of petrol, minimizing waste production, building fountains to absorb dust, environmental assessment of all developmental and urban projects, using lead-free gasoline, obliging pollutant industries to use filters to prevent emission of smoke and dust, creating green belts around the cities, overhauling cars every three months and replacing old cars with new ones are among the many effective ways to reduce pollution (Akbarirad, 2013).

The worst water and air polluters

Open disposal and uncontrolled incineration of urban waste, old public transport system, inappropriate use of fossil fuels to produce power for the industry and emission of sulfur oxide from industries to air are most common air pollutants (Michael et al., 2010).

Publicizing the protection of environment under Iran's legal system

Comprehensive and integrated protection of the environment through all environmental institutions is provided by increasing the authorities, developing active intra-organizational units working on the environment, increasing the authority of local institutions and providing the necessary legal framework for the participation of private and civil institutions in order to publicize the protection of environment in Iran's legal system. (Faryadi, 1392).

The principle of cooperation in the resolutions of the UN General Assembly

There are several resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly on the obligation of governments to offer cooperation on the environment:

- Resolution 2995 (1972), entitled "Cooperation between States on the Environment", states that, in accordance with Article 20 of Stockholm declaration, states need to benefit from effective two or more lateral cooperation provided with regional machineries for the protection of the environment to enjoy sovereignty over their natural resources.
- Resolution 3129 (1973), entitled "Environmental Cooperation Regarding Shared Natural Resources Between Two or More Countries" states that the establishment of appropriate international standards for the protection of interest resulting from exploitation of shared natural resources between two or more countries guarantees effective cooperation among states.
- International cooperation of such countries must be based on an information system and prior negotiations within the framework of usual relations among them, and governments should consider the provisions of the foregoing resolution in their mutual relations (the code of environmental laws and regulations).

Principles of international environmental law

Here are some principles of the international environmental law:

- The principle of sovereignty over natural resources
- The principle of commitment to cooperation, informing and assistance in environmental crises
- The principle of protection of the environment
- The principle of obliging polluters to pay compensation
- The principle of prevention and precaution.
- Although their binding level is different, they must be considered a single set because each principle complements other ones (Qurbani and Koosha, 2015).

Principle of Cooperation in UNEP

The program is a subsidiary to the United Nations general assembly, formed following the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and the resolution 2997 that approved on December 15, 1972.

UNEP consists of the board of governors, the secretariat and the environment fund. The board of governors regarding UNEP seeks to strengthen its cooperation with other states on the protection of the environment through drawing up memorandum of understanding. To this end, memorandum of understanding on environmental cooperation with the European Environment Agency, and the United Nations Environment Programs (1997 and 2004) have been signed in two Persian and English copies on March 30, 2004, in Jeju, South Korea. Under the agreement, parties guaranteed to fulfill required cooperation concerning environmental assessment and monitoring, promoting environmental awareness about regional and sub-regional cooperation, projects related to the environmental facility funds, environmental assessment, regional cooperation on the protection of the Caspian Sea, and preparing a comprehensive report on the state of the environment in Iran.

They also agreed to create a high level review committee co-chaired by the President of Iran's Environment Protection organization and the UN Executive Secretary on UNEP to inspect the fulfilment of the given memorandum of understanding annually. In addition, it was agreed that the UNEP will draw up annual reports on its progress (Pourhashemi et al., 2013).

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

UNEP is composed of board of governors, general office and an environmental fund. It was established with the aim of protecting the world environment in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1972. The UNEP mechanism follows instructions and requests of the environment ministers of the member states.

It has six regional offices in Africa, Asia, Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia; in addition an office is also based at the UNEP headquarter to cooperate them.

The UNEP board of governors has played a significant role in concluding regional and global agreements, establishing effective principles and recommendations as soft law, especially in the field of shared natural resources, climate change, offshore exploration and extraction, prohibition and restriction of using harmful chemicals and waste, and pollution from land-based resources as well as the assessment of environmental consequences (Lang et al., 2015).

UNEP is affiliated with the UN. Being responsible to coordinate the environmental activities of member states it applies precise scientific and practical ways to protect the environment. The first environmental convention entitled the International Convention for the Prevention of Oil Pollution, was established in London in 1956 (Fahimi, 2008).

International environmental organizations have been operated since the 1960s. This decade coincided with the period when the most important environmental events occurred whose detrimental effects were not comparable to the past. As a result, regional and international organizations felt the need to take actions to protect the environment (Seyhani, 2011).

International environment organizations

Iran is in a much better position than other countries in terms of the ratification of international treaties, both globally and regionally, the negotiation of bilateral treaties and specialized environmental agreements. Complying with the specialized international environmental convention, setting up two international environmental organizations, namely World association on the protection of the environment and natural resources, and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), ratifying several bilateral environmental agreements and dozens of bilateral protocols between the environment Protection organization and similar institutions in other European, American, Asian and African countries, are among the many legal measures taken by Iran which indicate the importance of the environment law and the international function of this organizations (the code of environment).

International environmental organizations has been established since the 1960s. It coincided with the most important environmental events whose harmful effects were not comparable to the past. Consequently, it was fully recognized the need for cooperation of regional and international organizations to protect the environment (Talaie and Heydari, 2015).

The function of UNEP

United Nations Environment Program

- An introduction into the UNEP

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was developed by the public associations to act as the global, administrative lever of the United Nations after the conference on the environment held in Stockholm in 1972. Its headquarter is in Nairobi, Kenya. It is expected to inspect the environment and manage effects of environmental measures and policies in the national and international scale. In 1982, a high-level UN conference on environment and development held in Rio de Janeiro and brought together 181 nations.

However, the law of International Criminal Court (ICC) was passed in Rome in 1998 to address war crimes, genocide, and humanity, it had no program to avoid destroy of the environment (Talaie & Heidari, 2015). Setting up the International Center for Environmental Technology is one of the UNEP for the management

of waste. It is considered as a part of the United Nations Environment Program, whose main task is to promote environmentally friendly technologies in developing countries.

It has recently focused on waste management issues (IETC, 2014). Here are some measures taken by this center regarding the management of waste:

Solid waste integration management:

The project seeks to develop solid waste integration management. The main steps to develop the process of solid waste integration management programs are:

- Assessing the quality of waste
- Modernizing the existing waste management system
- Setting goals which are expected to be achieved through the run of solid waste integration management (Demonstration & Pilot Projects, 2013)

The approval of the first environment law, also known as the law of hunting, dates back to 1956. The issue of environment being the center of attention when the law on environment protection and improvement was passed on June 18, 1980. Moreover, the legislator paid much attention to this issue after the Supreme Environmental Council and the Environment Protection Organization were set up. The approval of several laws on the protection of environment illustrates how important it is. Article 50 of Iran's constitution is a case in point. Under this law, legislator considers the protection of the environment as a public duty and prohibits any economic activity causing irrevocable damages to the environment.

However, there is no doubt that these laws themselves are not enough to curb the relentless domestic and international attacks on the environment that belongs to all ages and generations and requires more serious measures. Laws regarding the environment are needed to be carefully investigated, so that finding appropriate solutions set the stage to make effective decisions (Talaie and Heydari, 2015).

Conclusion

The beginning of the third millennium, namely centuries 20 and 21, has witnessed a broad development, especially in the concept of environment, due to national and international alterations in different political, economic, technological, scientific, and environmental aspect. Therefore, the protection of environment has become an important issue. Intervention of human and inappropriate usage has led to environment crisis, to the extent that there is a risk that human destroy the arable land. In addition, governments themselves cannot afford the expenses related to the protection of environment and control of pollution.

Understanding harmful consequences related to destroy of the environment, especially in developed countries, from one hand, and development of knowledge and science concerning the environment, on the other hand, has caused to turned the attention of international organizations and states to the negative aspects of pollution and the necessity to face them.

Moreover, the human societies have been grappled with environmental crises for years. Indeed, environmental problems negatively affect human health, business, life style, and financial aspects. The recent rise in the content of oil, chemical, and microbial pollutants in coastal waters, urban and industrial sewage, the excess usage of underground waters, air pollution resulting from unequal distribution of big and small industries in big cities, and inappropriate disposal of urban wastes are matters of considerable public concern.

As a result, the protection of environment, avoiding environmental pollution and how to solve its challenges are not limited to borders, and asks for a mutual, worldwide cooperation. When it comes to Iran, the country's environment has suffered from development after industrialization as well. The destroy of its environment has begun from drilling for oil and continued up to now that the country is one of the largest consumers of technological products. Air pollution and chemical fertilizers are dilemmas which could be turned to serious problem for individual members of the society if would not be managed appropriately. The leading role of UNEP to solve environmental crises is undeniable.

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