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ON THE ROAD TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELPOMENT

Promoting Gender Equality and Addressing Climate Change

United Nations Development Programme

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BECAUSE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS WILL MIRROR—AND EXACERBATE—UNDERLYING GENDER INEQUALITIES, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT POLICY MAKERS, PLANNERS AND SCIENTISTS TAKE GENDER DIFFERENTIATIONS INTO ACCOUNT IN THEIR CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND LAND-USE PLANNING, DECISIONS AND ACTIVITIES.

INTRODUCTION

Long-term awareness of humanity's dependence on the environment has been reflected in professionals' and philosophers' calls for sustainable natural resource use; these appeals date back as far as Plato (430-373 BC), Plinius (23-73 AD) and Von Carlowitz (1645-1714) (Van Zon 2002). However, for a long time interactions between human society and the physical environment were generally neglected.

More recent public and policy maker attention to the relationships between the socio-sphere and the biosphere was drawn by Rachel Carson (1962), Barbara Ward and René Dubos (1972), Dennis and Donella Meadows (1972), Gro Harlem Brundtland (1987), Wangari Maathai (2006) and millions of unnamed natural resources users and managers. Organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Wildlife Fund and many other international, national and local non-governmental organizations and the scientific community played an important role in raising this awareness. These efforts increased the visibility of our dependence on limited, exhaustible and renewable natural resources, and highlighted the importance of a clean and well-functioning environment to people's and the ecosystem's health.

Most studies, publications, presentations and related activities have not clearly differentiated between the interactions with the natural environment of diverse social groupings (such as women and men, urban and rural populations), except for some basic understanding that impoverished and marginalized groups have a much more challenging point of departure than those living in affluence. This notion was reflected in the policy discussions at the first Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, where rich and poor countries—with their diverse interests—took very diverse positions, for example on who should bear the burden of addressing environmental degradation.

In the 1970s, some scholars started to underline that women and men play distinct roles and are affected differently by interactions between humans and the environment. Gender-specific roles, rights and responsibilities in the physical environment were first highlighted by scholars such as Esther Boserup (1970, 1989) and organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (regarding agriculture and forestry) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (regarding biodiversity conservation) (Dankelman 2010). The science historian Carolyn Merchant argued that there is a major parallel between environmental degradation and the oppression of women (1980). She posits that one of the main causes of environmental degradation lies in societies' changing valuation of nature during the Enlightenment, when societies began seeing nature as something to be used, explored and exploited. At the same time, women were perceived as having inferior and serving positions in communities and households.

Women's and men's differentiated roles, rights and responsibilities in using, managing and maintaining the environment became more and more visible—although there were clear warnings by some authors to avoid biological determinism (such as

women being closer to nature than men because of their biology). Since the mid-1980s, scholars, activists and development workers have been exploring this nexus between gender, environment and sustainable development (ELC 1985, CSE 1985, Cecelski 1986, Dankelman and Davidson 1988, Shiva 1988).

Although the 1987 report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission), *Our Common Future*, discusses topics such as equity, growth-redistribution, poverty, essential human needs and conserving and enhancing the resource base, it pays little attention to women's rights and gender equality. Its discussion of gender issues mostly focuses on lowering fertility rates, although it occasionally demonstrates a broader awareness (e.g. noting that family planning is a basic human right of self-determination, that women and men should have equal educational opportunities and that housing projects often misunderstand women's needs) (Dankelman and Davidson 1988).

The notions about women's and men's specific relationships to the environment fed into the efforts to incorporate gender perspectives into the international environmental and sustainable development deliberations and agendas of the 1990s, including the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit). While the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the UN in 1979 and commonly known as the first international bill of women's rights, obliges parties to take necessary measures to ensure that women are involved in all aspects of planning for development, the environmental agenda rarely included references to gender, and women's participation in developing and implementing these was very limited. Although the Fourth International Women's Conference in Nairobi, in 1985, recognized women's contributions to environmental conservation and management, the conference could not directly influence the global environmental agenda. The Women's Conference did, however, encourage the United Nations Environment Programme and the Environment Liaison Centre (which was headquartered in Nairobi) to become engaged in the UN deliberations in Nairobi and in several regional women and environmental initiatives. In 1988, Dankelman and Davidson published *Women and Environment in the Third World: Alliance for the Future*, which—at the global level—described for the first time the diverse roles and responsibilities of women and men in environmental use and management.

The first broadly supported efforts to build a gender perspective into the sustainable development agenda started with the preparations for the 1992 Rio Conference. A broad coalition of non-governmental organizations, including the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and Worldwide, and Brazilian women's organizations such as Rede de Desenvolvimento Humano, started a broadly supported discussion on the main themes for Rio, and undertook an extensive advocacy process to mainstream gender and reshape that agenda. These efforts were reflected in the Women's Action Agenda

21, which was developed and adopted by participants from 83 countries during the WEDO-organized 1991 Miami World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet.

The Women's Action Agenda 21 exceeded the existing scope of the women and environment agenda and criticized ongoing economic thinking and existing models and practices of development. It formed the basis for women's efforts to profoundly influence the Earth Summit negotiations. In that sense, it left the Women in Development approach and developed into a Gender and Development approach.[1]

Although women's groups were disappointed with the Earth Summit's overall outcomes, from a gender perspective the results were notable. Rio Principle 20 acknowledges women's "vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development" (UNCED 1992). Women were recognized as an important major group and ally for sustainable development, and in addition to many references throughout the text, a specific chapter on women's roles was adopted in Agenda 21. The Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biodiversity referred to the importance of gender aspects in environmental conservation and management efforts. Further, the contents of the overall Rio outcomes changed because of a strong women's lobby: "women do not want to be mainstreamed into a polluted stream: they want the stream to be clean and healthy" (Bella Abzug, 1920-1998, US congresswoman and co-founder of WEDO).

THE WOMEN'S ACTION AGENDA 21

Following a visionary Preamble, the 1991 Women's Action Agenda 21 identified eleven critical areas that needed action urgently. Specific recommendations were presented for each area. The areas included:

- Democratic rights, diversity and solidarity;
- A code of environmental ethics and accountability;
- Women, militarism and environment;
- Foreign debt and trade;
- Women, poverty, land rights, food security and credit;
- Women's rights, population policies and health;
- Biodiversity and biotechnology;
- Nuclear power and alternative energy;
- Science and technology transfer;
- Women's consumer power; and
- Information and education.

Given these positive results at the Earth Summit, it is remarkable that the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) lacks any reference to gendered aspects or the differentiated roles and positions of women and men in climate change.

During the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reflected the importance of the interface between gender equality and sustainable development. It recognized that "women remain largely absent at all levels of policy formulation and decision-making in natural resource and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation, and their experience and skills in advocacy for and monitoring of proper natural resources management too often remain marginalized in policy-making and decision-making bodies, as well as educational institutions and environment-related agencies at the managerial level" (UN 1995).

Three strategic objectives were identified to overcome these shortcomings: involving women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; integrating gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development; and strengthening or establishing mechanisms at national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climatic changes have always been around us, and people and ecosystems have adapted to these over millennia. It has only recently become accepted that natural fluctuations and trends are influenced by human activities. The physical effects of climate change (e.g. rising mean temperatures, variations in rainfall patterns, increased likelihood of extreme weather events) will directly and indirectly impact on peoples' and environmental health and security. In addition to being natural incidents, climatic changes also comprise manifestations of the failing arrangements and priorities of human societies.

Disasters tend to impact more heavily on those living in poverty, and other disadvantaged groups. Not only do these groups lack the assets and capacities to resiliently cope with the consequences of disasters, they also tend to live in more vulnerable situations (e.g. in disaster-prone areas or with ecologically insecure livelihoods and a great dependency on natural resources). This results in poorer health and lack of resources to avoid or escape these insecurities.

Climatic change will impact on all aspects of human security: on people's security of life, their security of livelihood (including food, water, energy and shelter, economic and ecological security), and on people's dignity—including meeting basic human rights, development of capacities and societal participation (Dankelman 2010). By impairing these securities, climatic changes will increase existing social inequalities.

Gender inequalities are among the most pervasive inequalities in the world. Although

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