

United Nations
Environment
Programme

Women and the Environment

POLICY SERIES



UNEP



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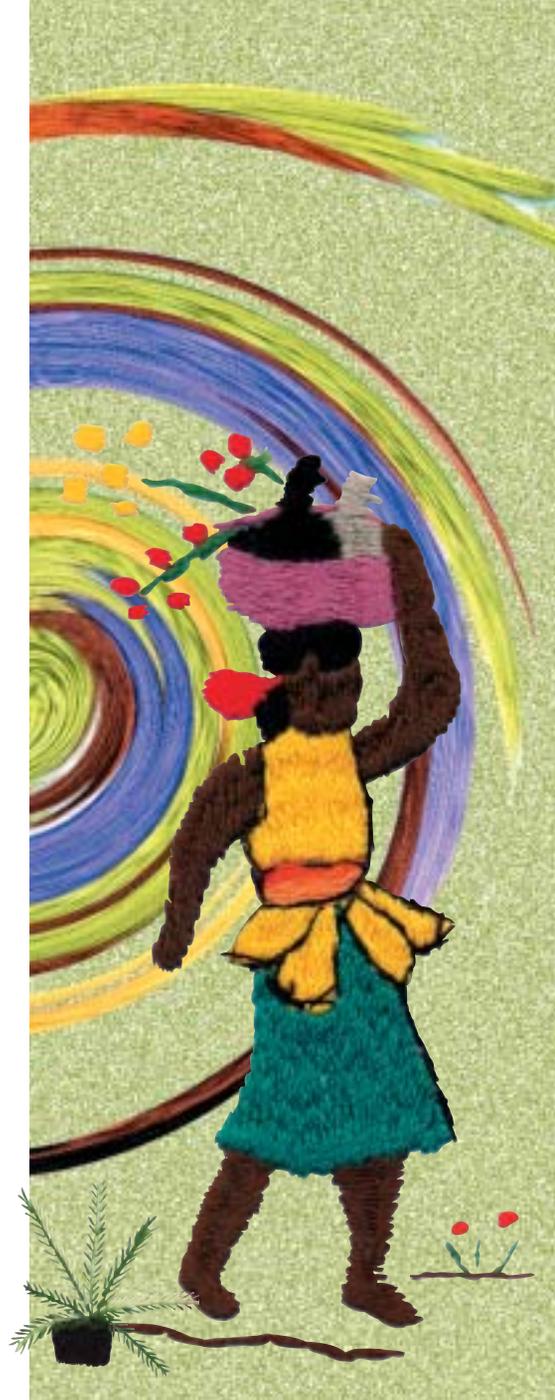




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Foreword



With *Women and the Environment*, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) pays tribute to the essential contributions of women to environmental conservation and management. *Women and the Environment* sees women as crucial agents of change. It places half the world's population at the heart of the work of UNEP and its partners and challenges us all to take action accordingly, recognizing that gender equality and

equity is essential for achieving sustainable development, eliminating poverty and upholding human rights.

As the majority of the world's poor, women play decisive roles in managing and preserving biodiversity, water, land and other natural resources, yet their centrality is often ignored or exploited. This means that a chance for better management of those resources is lost, along with opportunities for greater ecological diversity, productivity for human sustenance and economic development. Moreover, while environmental degradation has severe consequences for all human beings, it particularly affects the most vulnerable sectors of society, mainly women and children.

This publication makes the often hidden links between women and the environment visible, with an explicit focus on the gender-related aspects of land, water and biodiversity conservation and management. UNEP hopes that *Women and the Environment* will inspire the environmental and sustainable development community to better understand the importance of gender, and to integrate a gender perspective across all of its work.

Box 1 chronicles how gender issues have been part of the UNEP mandate since the 1980s. As part of its objective to help achieve sustainable development, UNEP is now urging that national and





international policies and programmes at large must reflect gender equality and empowerment. This falls in line with the Millennium Development Goals – in particular Goals 1, 3 and 7, which call for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Efforts in this direction also build upon the outcomes of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Collaboration and partnerships with civil society, including women's organizations, are essential. Strategic actions, as outlined in the last chapters of this publication, will help us to fulfil our mandate of environmental conservation for human development.

Klaus Toepfer
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme

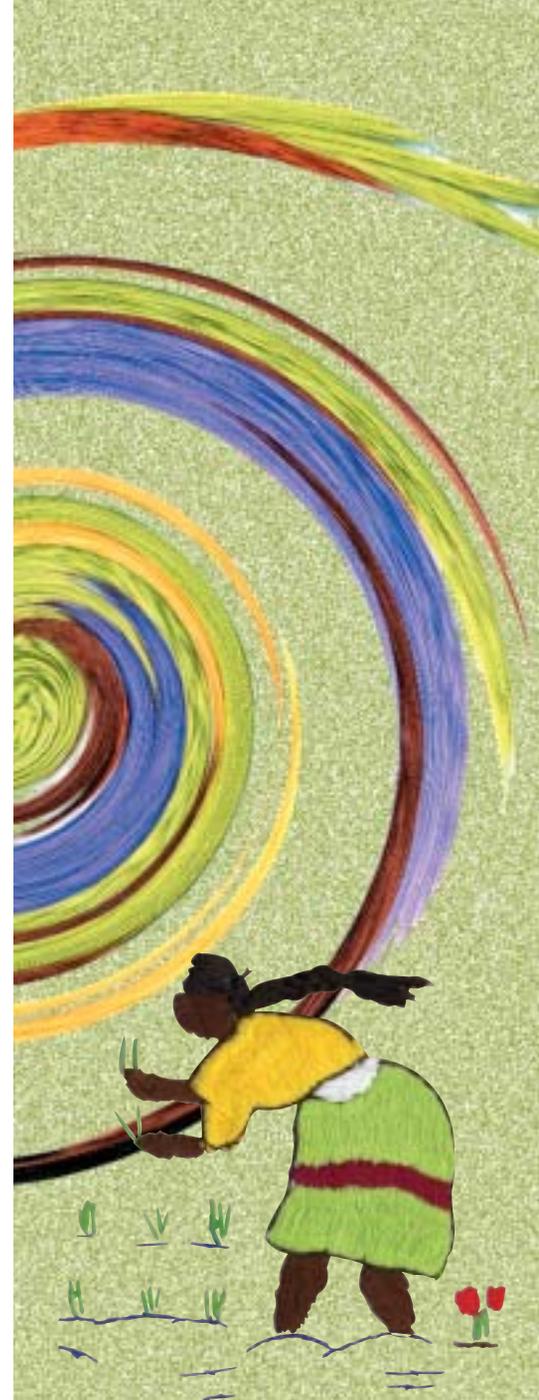
I Introduction

“We need to use natural resources properly so they will be there for generations to come.”

Sara Bock, Namibia

Women comprise over half the world’s population. They make a major contribution to the well-being and sustainable development of their communities and nations, and to the maintenance of the earth’s ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources. In *Women and the Environment*, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights the many roles that women play. This publication shows that a gender perspective on environment and development calls for a specific focus on the contributions, needs and visions of women, as their positions have too often been neglected in environmental arenas. Stressing the value of examining sustainable development through a gender perspective, it explores specific policies, strategies and practices in environmental use and conservation. These should inspire and advance the work of UNEP, its constituencies and partners, including governmental and international agencies; and also civil society organizations.

Designed to appeal to women and men alike and enhance their awareness of gender issues, *Women and the Environment* invites men in particular to take an active interest. It is now widely understood that: “policies that target women only cannot achieve the best results. Nor can those which assume that public actions are gender-neutral in their effects. Hence, promoting gender equality implies a profound change in socio-economic organization of societies: not only in the way women work, live and care for the other members of the households, but also in the way men do, and in the way their respective roles in the family and community are articulated with the need to earn a living” (United Nations, 1995).





Box 1: UNEP's work on women and the environment

1980s	UNEP plays a pioneering advocacy role in linking women and the environment.
1985	Holds a Special Session on women and environment at the UN Third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi. Hires senior women advisers on sustainable development.
1991	Co-organizes the Global Assembly on Women and Environment in Miami, Florida, United States of America.
Since 1992	Focusing more on internal functioning, less on external advocacy.
1993/1995/1997	The 17 th , 18 th and 19 th sessions of the UNEP Governing Council issue decisions on the organization and the role of women in environment and development.
1995	Issuance of the publication Gender and Environment: A UNEP Perspective.
1996	A policy statement from the Executive Director sets forth guiding principles for integrating gender into UNEP activities.
1997	Inclusion of gender sensitivity guidelines within UNEP's Project Manual.
1999	Appointment of a UNEP gender focal point. Report to the 20th session of the Governing Council on the "Role of Women in Environment and Development" (UNEP/GC.20/10).
2000	Issuance of the publication Success Stories: Gender and the Environment.
2004-2005	UNEP Programme of Work includes a commitment to make gender a cross-cutting priority in all its programmes, with an emphasis on the empowerment of women in environmental decision-making; active participation of women; technical assistance to women's networks; a focus on women in reports on environmental links to ill health; development of education and training materials; organization of workshops; and gender balance in meetings.

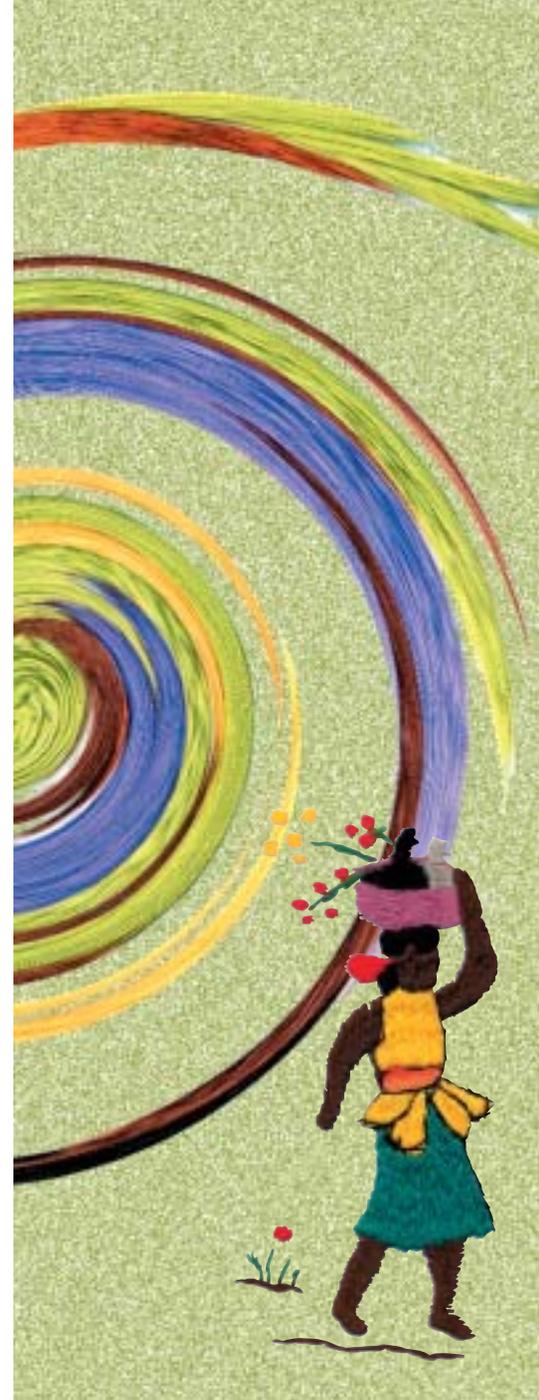
Sources: INSTRAW, 2003; personal communication with Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, August 2003

The following pages result from a partnership between UNEP and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). An international advocacy organization, WEDO works to achieve a healthy and peaceful planet, seeking environmental, social, political and economic justice for all through women's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making, from the local to the global arenas.

Women and the Environment is based on 20 years of experience in this field, on existing publications and expertise, and on consultation between organizations and networks. A peer review meeting held in Nairobi on 17 and 18 November 2003 brought together 14 experts who shaped the development of the publication and its recommendations. Case histories submitted by women from around the world document with great clarity how women's knowledge and dedication are vital to sustainable environmental management.

This publication has come to life through the generous financial support of the United Nations Foundation, which promotes a more peaceful, prosperous and just world by supporting the United Nations and its Charter. Through grant-making and by building new and innovative public-private partnerships, it acts to meet the most pressing health, humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. UNEP is grateful to the Foundation for making *Women and the Environment* possible.

Following this introduction, the second chapter opens with an outline of some of the major issues related to women and the environment. It looks at the broader context of the still large gaps, for most women, in gender equality, along with some of the attempts to narrow them. Describing the evolution of development analysis from a focus on women as a separate group to its current more holistic emphasis on gender, the chapter considers an analytical framework for future discussions of women, the environment and development.





As biodiversity, desertification and water management are critical priorities in the work of UNEP, chapters III, IV and V highlight the importance of exploring those areas from a gender perspective. They delve into how women use resources, contribute their knowledge and promote environmental management and conservation. Those chapters also give an overview of the most relevant policy developments and points for future work. We hope that other issues, such as energy use and climate change, toxic substances and marine issues, will be tackled in future studies and documents.

The sixth chapter summarizes key strategies and policy recommendations for integrating gender perspectives within environmental management. It touches upon the institutional challenges, gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and links between opportunities and capabilities. A series of conclusions appear in the seventh and final chapter, which also assesses the challenges and opportunities ahead and gives recommendations for future research and action.

As additional resources, the annexes feature definitions, a list of annotations, references and a bibliography, other sources of information, and contact points for contributors to the publication.

A great number of people played a role in *Women and the Environment*. Special thanks go to those who wrote case studies and boxes: Lorena Aguilar, Kitty Bentvelsen, Alice Bouman-Dentener, Thais Corral, Hilary French, Sascha Gabizon, Aseghedech Ghirmazion, Minu Hammati, Iona Jacob, Mia

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