

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 Hemmati, Iona Iacob, Mia MacDonald, Abby Taka Mgugu, Biju Negi, Margriet Samwel, Anna Tsvetkova and Leonor Zalabata. Gratitude is due also to the participants in the peer review meeting for sharing their time and expertise: Kitty Bentvelsen, Barbara Gemmil-Herren, Aseghedech Ghirmazion, Minu Hemmati, Davinder Lamba, Mia MacDonald, Mary Mbeo, Abby Taka Mgugu, Lucy Mulenkei, Biju Negi and Danielle Nierenberg. Finally, there is much appreciation for the written comments of Betsy Hartmann, and a very special word of thanks goes to Gretchen Sidhu and Edward Freeman for their editing work. All of your

contributions prove once again how collaboration between people of different regions, backgrounds, ages and genders can help us achieve a just and sustainable planet for all. A further testament to the role of women in particular in maintaining this momentum appears in the four boxes in this introduction.



Box 2: Khalida Bibi, Takya village, Pakistan

Khalida Bibi, 39, is one of 33 laureates who received the Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life 2003 bestowed by the Women's World Summit Foundation. Khalida's great knowledge of indigenous seeds makes her active in biodiversity conservation in her village. She can evaluate quality and water requirements simply by holding the seeds in her hands.

Within her house, she has created a village seed bank with more than 70 seeds from different crops. She grows both indigenous and hybrid varieties to test their productivity, and conserves only the best quality for distribution to other women farmers. A role model for these women, Khalida shows how they too can benefit from their indigenous knowledge, generate income and improve family living conditions.

Source: Women's World Summit Foundation Global Newsletter, no.12, July 2003, p.19

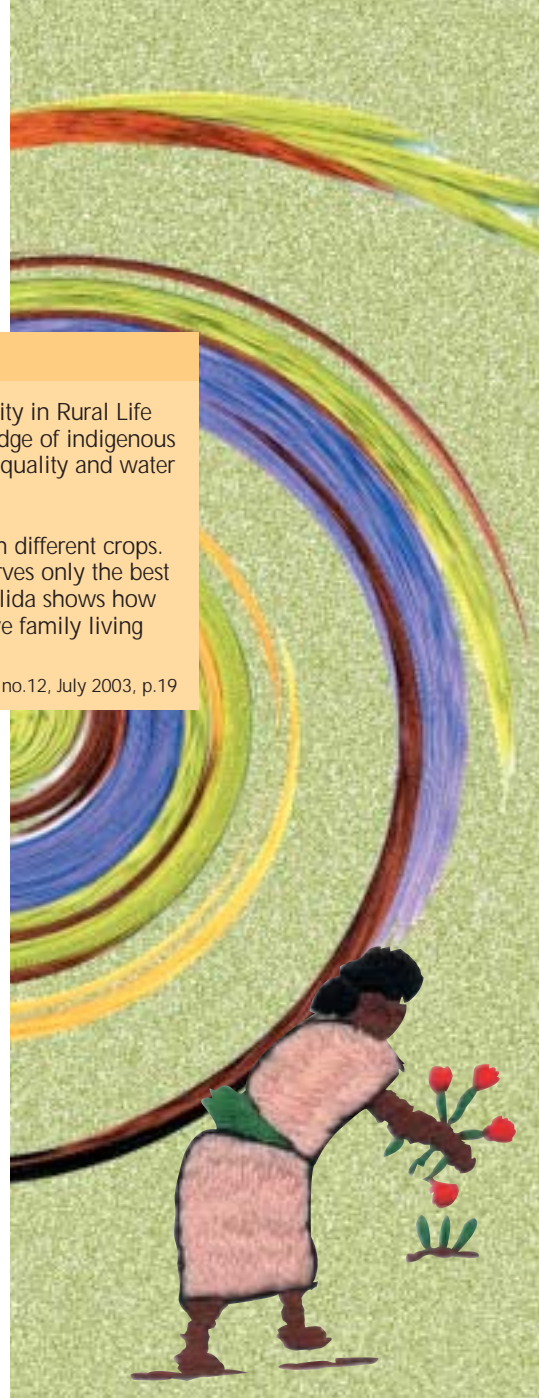


Box 3: Sara Bock, Nico-Noord community, Namibia

"At the beginning of 1990, we started a farmers' league and I was elected as chairman of the organization ... In 1993, the drought got worse and the livestock began to die at a fast rate and none of us could help each other. There was no grazing land and trees were cut to feed animals. I think the drought affected women the most because they could no longer (afford to) send their children to school, and the men had to go and work for the railway or very far from home.

"In 1995, we started a campsite project and other small projects. I also started a nature protection fund with the money that I received from the NNF (Namibia Nature Foundation), with the aim of combating desertification. Right now we are preparing a practical farm management project at Nico-Noord. I just pray that the Lord will grant my wish to restore communal lands and make life easier. I want to help improve the land because only that can help us. We need to use natural resources properly so they will be there for generations to come."

Source: <http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/localcommunities/namibia1-eng.pdf>





Box 4: Maria Benavides, Dominican Republic

Maria lives in a small, isolated village in the Dominican Republic, a country where water is an increasingly scarce resource. Only 66 per cent of the urban and 25 per cent of the rural population have access to a safe supply. Until recently, Maria had to dedicate hours a day to fetching and storing water, with the help of her children.

Then the women's group to which she belongs stepped in and asked for support from MUDE (Mujeres en Desarrollo, or Women in Dominican Development), an organization that has worked on water and sanitation projects for nearly a decade. It collaborates with communities to provide appropriate technology, such as gravity systems, pumps and solar energy, and a distribution network with a tap in each home. Incorporating women's and men's particular knowledge of water sources, quality and other environmental conditions, MUDE also promotes the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Government's water and sanitation policies and initiatives.

Today, the entire community in Maria's village is involved in a MUDE-assisted water project, which includes a community water-management committee coordinated by a woman. Water is now more available and better in quality, while women are saving hours of work.

Source: Williams, 2002



Box 5: Milya Kabirova, Ajgul, Russia

"We don't know how long the secret of the radiation accidents at the Mayak nuclear facility would have been kept had the Chernobyl tragedy not happened. Chernobyl stands at the cradle of the Urals ecological movement. My own work is inspired by that of my mother, Sarvar Shagiakhmetova. In 1995 she was the first person to start a lawsuit in order to get recognition of her and our family's diseases linked to radiation and to get compensation from the Mayak nuclear plant. The lawsuit that could have created a precedent for other cases was stopped when my mother died in October 1998."

"I have been working now for many years with other organizations in the Chelyabinsk region, and in 1999 I founded the (non-governmental organization) Ajgul, which means 'Moon Flower' in Tatar. It is a beautiful name for a sad flower that grows not under the sunshine but in the white stillness of the moon, resembling the nuclear winter. Our main objectives are to protect the civil rights of people who have been exposed to radiation and their descendants, to promote an ecological way of thinking, to promote the principles of humanism, to eliminate nuclear arms production and usage, and to promote public participation in shaping state policy and laws."

Source: Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), 2002, pp.97-100

