

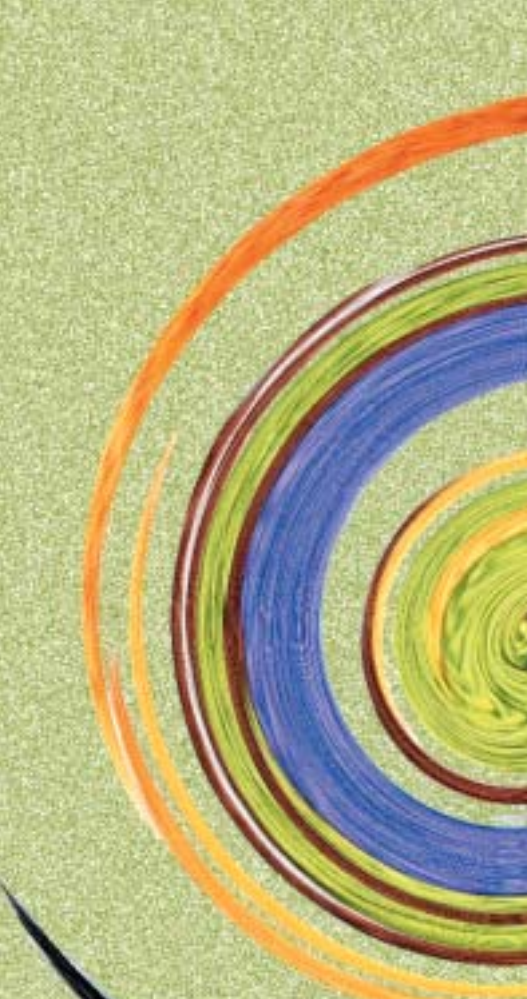
## VII A time to act

“There have been many advances in international governance for the environment and gender equity over the last decade. International environmental treaties such as those on biological diversity and desertification now recognize the central role of women as stewards of the natural world, as do the action plans adopted by a series of important international conferences, including the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

“Despite these notable paper achievements, actual on-the-ground practices in most countries and communities around the world have not advanced nearly far enough, reflecting a widely-decried ‘implementation gap’. Bridging this divide will require greater efforts to translate international commitments into policy changes at all levels of governance, as well as better mechanisms for bringing wisdom gained through hard-won local experience to the international environmental negotiating table.”

Hilary French, Worldwatch Institute





**W**omen all over the world are calling for a peaceful and healthy planet. They work, organize, debate, engage and sustain their vision of making this a reality, now and for the future. However, too often their voices fade in the clamour of crowded global, national and local arenas. **Women and the Environment** clearly documents why their perspectives must be heard, and why women's active participation and the application of a clear gender lens in all environment and sustainable development work is imperative.

The challenges facing the world community are enormous. An increasing number of people are struggling to meet their most basic needs. Globalization trends encourage consumption on one hand and deprivation on the other. For those losing out, the split is fostering a growing sense of alienation, despair and lack of control over their own destinies.

Compounding matters, the number of failed States is on the rise, leaving a wake of conflicts within and between States and civilizations, while the HIV/AIDS crisis is destroying the lives of millions of people and in some cases whole communities. Overt and hidden discrimination and violence plague millions of women around the world. And the foundation of life itself, the planet Earth, is suffering as its ecosystems and resources are overexploited, degraded and polluted.

As daunting as they may seem, these crises still offer opportunities to us all, both as institutions and as individuals. And women in particular, as creative and passionate advocates of change in every corner of the globe, have shown that they are more than ready to counter-act and make the world a better place for all.

Although reams of literature, official recognition and lip service exist, is given or is paid concerning women's contributions to environmental conservation and sustainable development, the many official commitments at conferences and in speeches, international agreements



and policy documents have not resulted in structural improvements. Few practical steps have been taken to ground the concepts in reality. Therefore, above all, this publication is a call for action, for implementation, and for empowerment and encouragement of women's leadership.

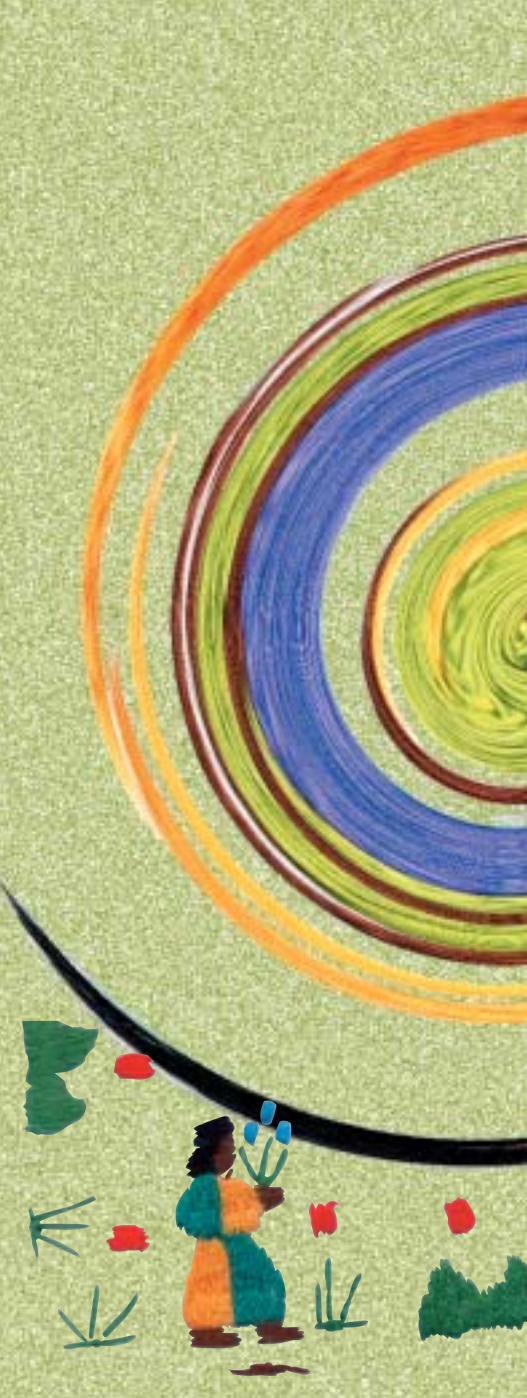
There are several reasons why many institutions have failed to integrate a gender perspective and include women in their work. These start with a lack of understanding of the links between gender and other issues, and the contributions women can make. Staunch resistance to the concepts of gender equality and equity exists, as these threaten prevailing structures of power. Other issues include the lack of involvement of civil society and alienation between the political (ruling) class and the people. A lack of institutional arrangements and policy coherence, and the low priority of environmental and social issues in institutions, policies and actions are also to blame.

Overcoming these obstacles requires honesty about the persistence of power dynamics and about the need to shift towards more equitable relationships, including between women and men. Political will and accountability at all levels is a first requirement. A coherent, gender-responsive institutional architecture should be guaranteed, including allocation of responsibilities and tasks and the participation of civil society in general and women in particular.

While many problems are global, solutions often must be local. Peoples have the right to self-determination, including over their resources. Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems must be kept intact, and formal education should build on these rather than on alien importations. Two-way communication and interaction between policy-makers and communities must take place, and information should be accessible to communities.

Also, funding for the large-scale implementation of efforts related to gender and the environment should be mobilized. There is already a need





to develop best practices in mainstreaming gender in environmental work; gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation of policies and actions should help in learning which policies and projects work – and which do not. One critical overall consideration involves linking sustainable development to human rights and to the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

This publication could not cover all existing experiences concerning women and the environment. The gender aspects of energy consumption, climate change, marine issues, urbanization, production and consumption still need further exploration. There is a pressing need too for further action and research on gender and environmental implications in the areas of globalization, trade and market liberalization; indigenous knowledge systems and their protection; environmental change; sustainable practices; health and the environment; and the position of the girl child with regard to the environment and sustainable development. A cross-cutting issue is the social differentiations between women, which need extra attention.

Ultimately it is not a question of pitting women against men or of placing an extra burden of environmental regeneration on the shoulders of women, but of combining efforts that lead to better, happier, more peaceful societies. In 2005, 10 years after the Beijing Women's Conference, we should all be ready for that.

