

Information for Decision-Making and Participation

Women's Caucus Contributions to the CSD Intersessional Working Group

12 March 2001

Introduction

Women in the developing and the developed world come into the global debate on sustainable development from a broad range of entry points. Their contributions may take the form of collecting garbage for recycling like women from the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, planting trees such as in the Green Belt Movement initiated by Wangari Maathai of Kenya to combat desertification and generate income for poor women, or even to save local forests on which their livelihoods depend by hugging trees, as the rural workers from the Chipko movement in India.

About half the world's food is grown by women. In Africa they produce most of the food their families consume, while in Asia and Latin America women carry out key stages of producing and processing crops and are the main producers of vegetables, poultry and livestock for the household. Women's knowledge of local soil conditions and growing cycles make them central in conservation. This perspective, born of everyday experience, often differs from priorities laid out by environmental groups.

The reality is that women often bear the worst consequences of industrial logging, commercial fishing, intensive use of pesticides in agriculture, toxic dumping, nuclear testing and other activities that ignore the principle of sustainability. If the water is contaminated or large tracts of forests destroyed or huge dams built, or technology displaces man power, it is women who have to cope with the increased difficulties of day to day survival for their families (Corral & Ransom 2000).

Information and Participation

With regard to measuring environmental quality and states of development, we suggest to closely examine the tools currently used and promoted. Some of them, such as satellite-based systems, provide a large amount of useful data, but also raise important questions of the costs involved, and of consent of populations in observed areas. An equally fundamental question is raised by the increased focus on such technologies, which reflect the **dominating world-view** being comparably science-based and technology-oriented. While this paradigm provides an important tool in order to understand environmental, economic and social inter-linkages, it needs to be complemented by the 'human factor', reflecting the diversity of human experiences, e.g. through using quantitative as well as qualitative indicators (Schultz 2001, Berlin Conference 2001).

The development of modern information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet, has generated new and incomparable opportunities for many people to access information. However, due to the **digital divide between and within countries**, there are significant gaps of access to information and knowledge as well as opportunities for participation, particularly between North and South and between women and men (HDR 1999, UNED 2000). The UNDP Human Development Report 1999, for example, is outlining strategies designed to bridge these gaps. Governments and donor agencies should support projects related to these strategies.

We welcome the negotiation by the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe of the **Arhus Convention** on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. We call on all countries that have signed this convention to ratify it by the year 2002. We also suggest that the other U.N. Regional Commissions consider negotiating similar conventions for their regions.

We are very worried about the growing trend towards the **commercialisation of information** previously held in the public domain. We fully support the recommendation in the Secretary General's report addressing this issue. However, we feel it does not go far enough. We suggest that the CSD requests UNCTAD to develop guidelines for governments on how to adequately deal with trends of commercialisation of information.

Overcoming **barriers to women's access to information and participation** in sustainable development encompasses a rigorous analysis of women's needs at the different levels in each country. The creation of gender disaggregated data systems is a critical tool to start crafting the adequate policies that will meet the minimum requirements for women to be integrated as full citizens. Currently, very few countries have developed those tools in their national data systems. Progress can be recognized in the areas of health, education and political participation but gender disaggregated information continues to be rare in areas related to environment and sustainable development.

Illiteracy and **extreme poverty** are fundamental problems that prevent women's full engagement in civic participation, but sensitivity to **childcare** needs, **meeting hours** and appropriate **transportation** also plays an important role in encouraging women's participation, even in developed countries.

Overcoming women's **apathy** and **lack of understanding of government processes** means that special types of outreach must creatively involve women in all phases of program development and design. These programs must be carried by governments as well as NGOs. We highlight some of the lessons learned since Rio as recommendations for future action:

Implementation of successful **communication strategies** needs increased funding for women's NGOs and for government policy-makers to continue these efforts. Public interest groups need to be empowered to serve as intermediaries of relevant information on gender and sustainable development policies.

New **information and communication technologies** should be supported, with increased funding and strategies for access. Equal access by women to information technology and its application in interactive decision-making for sustainable development needs to be ensured.

Formal and informal education needs to make increased efforts to assess progress in integration of gender strategies in environmental educational curricula. Strategies also need to increasingly reach out to young women to guide them towards careers that will increase their chances of moving into important roles as decision makers in environment and sustainable development.

Local Agenda 21 planning processes represent another important structure through which gender sensitive strategies can be implemented. The municipal level offers the opportunity for building stronger alliances among stakeholders and giving better visibility to the needs of women in terms of information for participation in Sustainable Development.

Greater efforts also must be made to facilitate transfer of "**best practice**" between governments and NGOs on effective gender sensitive strategies for information and participation by women.

Clear strategies need to be developed to identify environmental risks, building environmental educational programs that equip women with the information and the necessary tools to cope with potential problems. Creative means of regularly engaging community members in **identifying real and perceived risks** are essential.

An **interactive approach in developing indicators** should be used, and women should be involved in developing indicators for a specific community in terms of sustainable development. Public roundtables may bring together people with a wide range of skills and viewpoints, with individuals encouraged to put aside their individual narrow perspectives and give thought to what types of measures would be needed to determine how sustainable their community will be in the long term, e.g. 50 years.

Effective gender analysis does more than assure women's participation in sustainable development. It reflects the correct information on how resources are allocated between men and women, highlights con-

straints imposed by women's socially-constructed and confined roles, and proposes women-empowering policies.

Gender expertise needs to be integrated into research; scientific advisory bodies; and environmental impact assessments (EIAs). For example, women and women's NGOs must participate in the development of social-environmental information systems. Social monitoring must be integrated into environmental monitoring; institutions involved in designing environmental monitoring should collaborate with social scientists and gender experts to further such integration (Corral & Ransom 2000).

Indicators

Indicators are a tool to help policy-making. One missing element from the material supplied for this meeting is what impact the collection of these indicators has had on **policy-making in the pilot countries**. For Earth Summit 2002 it would be very useful to have an analysis of this by the pilot countries.

Indicators can serve as important tools which should inform decision-making at all levels. At the local level, through **Local Agenda 21 processes**, indicators have been developed in many cases through a participatory process. Prescriptive indicator packages developed at the international or national level are often not as effective in delivering change at the local level. The development of community indicators by local stakeholders enable local priorities to be recognised and acted on.

Gender equity is an important component of social equity which in turn is one of the three pillars of sustainable development. Therefore, information on gender equity must be covered by any set of indicators aiming to capture the state of sustainable development.

With regard to each area of environment and development, we need to identify if there is a need to differentiate information by social categories (such as age, income level, education, gender, ethnic group, rural/urban, etc.). Some of these will be "**high-impact categories**", that is social categories which significantly impact the area in question. Gender is a high-impact category with regard to, for example: Income level; education; power / decision-making; and access to, ownership and control of natural resources (e.g. land).

The **CSD Indicators of Sustainable Development** include only one indicator (ratio of female wage to male wage) specifically relating to gender. The working group preparing this list shortened the list of indicators from 134 to 58. While a series of the social indicators in the final list mention disaggregating statistics by gender, out of an original working list at least seven useful indicators related to gender were cut (e.g. representation of major groups in national councils; contribution of NGOs to sustainable development (disaggregated); maternal mortality; poverty gap index (disaggregated); male/female school enrolment ratios; net migration rate (disaggregated); women per 100 men in the labour force).

Gender disaggregated data need to be **integrated into the core set** of CSD indicators for sustainable development. The CSD should, on the basis of the research done by UNIFEM and others and in consultation with the Women's Caucus, conduct a gender review of the current CSD set of indicators and produce a revised version. This can build on existing analysis and existing gender sensitive indicators designed for various areas of sustainable development. In addition to the existing indicators for the areas listed below, other the key issues that need to be included are:

- proportion and participation of women in decision-making bodies related to sustainable development;
- the gender division of labour (including paid and unpaid work);
- budget allocation to gender related issues in the field of sustainable development

(Berlin Conference 2001).

Available Indicators on Gender & Sustainable Development

Corral & Ransom (2000) have undertaken a review of indicators in the area of women / gender and sustainable development which have been developed since the Rio Earth Summit by a number of organisations at various levels.

Among those which should be considered are:

Participation in Environmental Decision Making: Indicators of participation in environmental decision making relate both to issues of women in management of environmental agencies, including NGO's and government, but also attempted measurements of the extent of community involvement through mechanisms such as outreach, training and use of participatory tools.

Water: Indicators related to gender and water include a series of measures related to women's both access and ease of access (e.g. time spent collecting) to water. Most of the other indicators are efforts to identify the extent of women's involvement in planning and management of water projects, both within agencies and at the community level.

Energy: Existing indicators cover three categories: 1) non "gender specific" basic measures of energy sources such as "quantity/use of gas stoves" and "% of population using traditional fuel's" etc. 2) women's access to alternative or improved energy sources and 3) women's involvement in energy planning and implementation.

Forests: There are indicators of women and women NGO's involvement in forestry activities, and gender related activities in forestry agencies.

Human Settlements/Environmental Health/Urban Environment: A variety of types of indicators are available. In terms of settlement programs, equity of access is the principle measure while a variety of indicators relate to environmental health including a series of indicators attempting to measure gender sensitivity through EIS processes and environmental health training.

Land and Credit: Women's access to land is a critical issue in many developing (and developed) countries and a series of measures are proposed attempting to analyse equity of access. In terms of credit, in many developing countries women do not have adequate access to credit through formal institutions, which needs to be identified through systemic measurements that identify the "gender gap".

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