

CSD Women's Caucus Issue Paper

The Role of Women in Approaches to Information for Decision Making and Participation in Sustainable Development

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Women's participation in sustainable development and information to support this goal was a critical element of Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 with governments being called upon to take steps in a range of areas including (but not limited to)

- a) increasing the number & proportion of women involved in decision making for sustainable development,
- b) b) strengthening of government institutions such as women's bureaus and other mechanisms that systematically bring a gender perspective to government policymaking
- c) strengthening NGO capacity, and
- d) d) strengthening gender sensitive approaches to research, data collection and dissemination.

Women's Representation

Clearly, women's participation in sustainable development cannot be divorced from advances in women's participation in government as a whole. Several countries report outstanding progress in this area, for example, in Sweden where women now occupy 47% of seats in parliament and 82% of cabinet ministries. Electoral changes of this type can clearly impact participation of women in sustainable development. Finland reports that passage of a quota for women in municipal elections has increased the numbers of women in municipal committees making land use decisions. In Namibia, women represent over 40% of local officials. In South Africa, where women have 29% of the seats in the National Assembly, women parliamentarian have played a key role in introduction of the women's budget, which aims at analyzing governments budgets from a gender perspective. Models also exist for improving women's contribution to various levels of government. In the Netherlands for example, the government has also provided funds to civil society to train and coach women for posts on executive committees.

While some progress has been made, there is currently inadequate research and analysis on women's participation either in decision-making roles related to environment and sustainable development. This would include more substantive understanding of existing barriers to participation and strategies to overcome them. Preliminary review of national reports submitted

for both Beijing +5 and National Plans on Agenda 21 indicates that “measurable” data on governmental efforts to increase the proportion of women in decision making on sustainable development is quite limited. Some notable exceptions exist. For example, Namibia provides detailed information on women at varying levels of responsibility in forestry, nature conservation and agriculture agencies in the country, as well as on women enrolled in university programs for agriculture, conservation, engineering and natural resources. Other country reports generally overlook this level of detail and only sporadically report on representation of women in important boards, commissions or agencies on environment or sustainable development. A consistent comparable reporting methodology should be instituted to allow tracking over time of women in decision-making roles on sustainable development in countries worldwide.

Strengthening Institutions

Structural changes to facilitate a gender approach have been instituted in some countries. For example, in some countries the agencies responsible for women’s affairs have implemented efforts to increase participation in environmental concerns. More long-lasting strategies will incorporate gender mainstreaming in national environmental agencies. In Zambia for example, the Gender in Development Division has been incorporated into the Water, Sanitation and Health Education Program. In Nigeria, technical and financial assistance were given by the Federal Environment Protection Agency (FEPA) to demonstrate its support for women’s efforts in raising the level of environmental awareness in Nigeria. In order to tap women’s knowledge on issues related to the environment, FEPA has strengthened the Women Environment Desk within its structure. In Ethiopia, a Gender Conservation Strategy is being integrated into the National Conservation Strategy. These efforts must be backed by adequate funding and support, and should be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness and replication in other countries.

An INSTRAW/UN Department of Economic and Social Development Workshop on Women and Sustainable Development has recommended that joint women/environment task forces should be established within each primary institution such as agencies responsible for agriculture and energy to ensure the full engagement of, and interaction of women in ecosystem management. The agriculture, energy, economics and other sectors should be considered in this process. One country to adopt this approach is Brazil where a task force on gender policies, guidelines, strategies and plans is contemplated as part of the Technical Committee for the Brazilian Agenda 21. In the United States, the first Federal Interagency Working Group has been created to foster cross agency collaboration to investigate environmental effects on women’s health and promote research in this area. The requirement that this be mandated internationally should be of high priority. It is also critical that more national environmental institutions develop mechanisms for structured input and consultation with women’s NGO’s active on sustainable development.

Local Agenda 21 processes represent a special opportunity to increase women’s participation in sustainable development, however few localities have made efforts in this area. To a large extent to date, there has not been an explicit approach to gender in most countries as part of LA 21; however, surveys conducted both by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) showed there is ample room for development of such an approach. A 1996 LA 21 survey of 2,500 municipalities 53% reported that they include women in their processes and important models exist of cities that have proactive approaches to incorporating women in these strategies. Other barriers in LA 21 communities include a general lack of awareness by both women and men

about the connections between environment and women's roles, lack of interest and political will among local authorities and a lack of desire to change the balance in current power relations.

Strengthening Capacity of Women's NGO's

Broad based, grassroots approaches to involving women and obtaining their input on sustainable development issues need to be implemented. High priority should be given to working with women's NGO's active on sustainable development to facilitate investments in innovative information and communications technologies, which represent an important opportunity for women's empowerment. The ability to communicate their perspectives and concerns is a central empowerment issue, both for publication of their concerns and perspectives, and for access to information and education that will promote women's consciousness-raising. Further, the decentralized, interactive and non-hierarchical nature of these technologies present a unique space for women to develop their views, opinions, benefit from the synergy of interactive communications with women. In addition, once the initial costs of access and technology are covered, it presents a low-cost and relatively simple mode of publishing newsletters, articles, statements, etc. Special attention should be given to involving women's NGO's in training and support, in partnership with technology providers.

Information and Research Availability

Review of the United Nations "Indicators for Social Aspects of Sustainable Development", reveals that few of these are gender specific. For example, only the overall unemployment rate rather than gender disaggregated labor force participation rates. As countries continue work programs on development of the broader range of environmental indicators, they must ensure a gender analysis as part of this review. The Women's Caucus has previously suggested that a comprehensive effort for 2002 should be conducted to measure progress. They have pointed to the utility of the Human Development Report's (HDR) two gender-related indices, the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure, provide useful and up-to-date data. The GDI is based on the Human Development Index (HDI) that measures the average achievements in a country in the basis of three dimensions, namely longevity, knowledge and real GDP per capita. The GDI takes account of inequality in HDI achievement between the sexes. The GEM aims to evaluate whether women are able to actively participate in key areas, namely the economic, social, political. GDI focuses on capabilities and conditions, while GEM is rather concerned with their use for full participation. It is critical that these indices be integrated with the sustainable development indicators to more fully take gender into account

The self reported ratings by governments in the National Reports on Sustainable Development of the availability of sustainable development information for women at the national level shows that in Africa, of the eight reporting countries, the large proportion (six) had no response on this issue. The other two indicated that there was some good data but with significant gaps. Of the twelve reporting countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, a quarter did not report, another quarter indicated that availability of information was good or very good and one indicated that data was poor. For the Middle East, out of 11 countries, less than half (4) provided a rating with one saying that information in this area was poor, one saying that there was some good data with substantial gaps and two indicated that information was good. For the Asia/Pacific region of 21 countries,

almost half (10) countries provided no rating, 1 saying information was poor, 2 countries show some good data and another 5 indicating that information was either good or very good. Out of 37 countries in Europe, 13 had no rating, 2 said that information was poor, 10 (27%) said that there was some good data with gaps, and 12 (32%) indicating that information was either good or very good.

Participatory “action oriented” gender sensitive research has been initiated in some places. In Greece, the General Secretariat for Equality has reported to have drawn up an “action framework” for women and environment, formulating a record of problems encountered by women in their daily lives. This includes formulating proposals and solutions. In the United Kingdom the “Listening to Women” postcard campaign to provide Ministers with direct feedback about policies and women’s concerns represents another model approaching this need. In Guyana, the National Commission on Women’s issue paper on *Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development* was followed up with a roundtable discussion in rural areas to disseminate these findings and get the views of women’s organizations. A one half hour television program on Women and the Environment was developed and the videotape is available.

Adequate funding to support gender sensitive research and information in decision-making on sustainable development remains a barrier. Clearly, efforts need to be made to provide funding for creative partnerships between government, women’s NGO and universities active on gender and sustainable development for comprehensive strategies for research development and dissemination. Additional gender sensitive research at the international level also needs to be enhanced. For example, a comprehensive international analysis of policies for women’s access to land and efforts to reform land legislation would be useful. At the local and national level, lack of land education remains a critical issue, and must be approached in conjunction with innovative methods of improving women’s ability to understand legal texts.

Towards Rio +10

Commitment to strategies for strengthening women access to information for participation and decision making in sustainable development necessitates that special attention should be given to women’s involvement in all phases of preparations for the Rio +10 2002, including 'bottom-up' consultations and involvement of women as a major group in high level consultations so that women can contribute as active partners in developing consensus on solutions related to this issue.