

**PRESENTATION ON: WOMEN AND
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**

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Definitions:

Environment

Environment can be defined to mean the total sum all the surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as danger and damage.

Environmental conservation

Is the act of saving the natural resources through careful management thus it involves the use of the resources carefully and wisely so as not to affect the future generation and this done through reducing waste, saving trees, recycling, using renewable resources that don't deplete our natural resources.

Women groups

These are women who come together with an aim of fulfilling specific goals and objectives. They meet regularly, usually in order to organize themselves and work towards creating a change in the community, society.

History of women's engagement in environmental conservation

Worldwide, women have manifested themselves as agents of change for environment and sustainable development. This has resulted in a gender-specific approach in environment and sustainable development policies and practices. These policies and practices range from local, national and international levels. These particularly have been discussed at the international conferences like United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio De Janeiro in 1992, World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002, United Nations Division for Advancement of Women (UNDAW) held in November 2001 in Ankara. These led to the formation of women movement and groups like the Women's Action Agenda 21 (WAA21), Women in Diversity, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) and all these meant to promote women's active and equal participation in the decision making process and also empowering them to have a voice at discussion forums in their attempts to maintain the status of the environment and mitigating climate changes.

This therefore raised a question of the community's realization of the role of women and the need for women's involvement in environmental conservation since they are more of nurturers than users of the environment and given their direct interaction more often with the nature.

By 2005, three major conventions on natural resource issues explicitly addressed the participation of women in environmental decision-making and the need to raise awareness among women on environmental issues: the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2004), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1993) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (1996).

Women participation in environmental conservation:

A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC, August 2012) of community water and sanitation projects in 88 communities found that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those that do not.

Therefore, Women's engagement in environmental conservation was first documented in India on a woman who gave her life to safeguard the environment, and this dates back to three hundred years ago. The Maharaja of Jodhpur, Rajasthan (India), wanted to build a new Palace and required wood for it. His men went to the area around the village of Jalnadi to fell the *khejri* trees. When Amrita Devi, member of the Bishnois community, saw this, she rushed out to prevent the men and she hugged the first tree. But the axe fell on her and she died on the spot. People from 83 surrounding villages

rushed to prevent the men from felling the trees and by the end of the day more than 350 had lost their lives. When the king heard about this, he apologized and promised the villagers that they would never again be asked to provide timber. With that incident, the recorded history of the Chipko movement started which is well known of its actions to resist the destruction of their lands and livelihoods since 1974. (UNEP GEO-Yearbook 2004/5, p.60: Rawat, 1996)

In Japan, in the 1950s, the Nakabaru Women's Society and Sanroku Women's Society protested loudly against pollution from industries and power plants in the Tobata region. While industrial development had made the society richer, the environmental destruction began to threaten the health of local citizens. Women started to raise their voices in opposition and organized an increasingly powerful movement. They discussed how to prevent pollution, while holding basic study meetings on pollution and conducting field surveys, collecting scientific knowledge through several years of action. This resulted in major pollution prevention measures taken by the local government and corporations. (Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, 1995)

Dankelman (2008), In Brazil, the women's organization Ação Democrática Feminina Gaúcha (ADFG) was founded in 1964. Its main objective was to promote social change for equal

opportunities through women. Since 1974, ADFG's agenda is environmental protection. Its projects and campaigns began to oppose chemical-based agriculture, and lobby for environmental protection laws. ADFG has developed into Friends of the Earth-Brazil, one of the most important environmental organizations in the country.

Another well-known example of women's long-lasting involvement in environment is the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya. Launched on Earth Day 1977 by the National Council of Women, this environmental campaign resulted in the mobilization of thousands of women planting indigenous trees. It led to the creation 6,000 village nurseries, designed to combat creeping desertification, restore soil health and protect water catchment areas. The 50,000 women members of the Movement have planted about 20 million trees. The movement has always sought to address issues of gender disparities, and food security in combination with environmental protection. The movement's work has spread to other countries through the Pan-African Green Network (Maathai, 2003).

In Uganda the involvement of women in conserving the environment dates back to 1990s and this started with small groups of women who came up with small projects which were geared towards environmental protection. A case in point is KAFRED in Kabarole District-Bigodi which was combining Bigodi

Women's Group (BWG) with 40 members, the Bigodi Peanut Butter Group with 8 members, and the Enyange Drama/Actors singing and acting group.

ETC.

Major challenges faced by women in their attempt to conserve the environment

Control over means and resources: for instance **Land ownership**- user rights as opposed to ownership rights, Majority own commercial plots. FAO: Dimitra newsletter (2016) puts it that women in Uganda own only 16% of the registered land.

Decision-making: this is still a challenge as some of the views brought up by women are sometimes not heard and considered or not implemented.

How can women be actively engaged in whole process?

- Strengthening and localizing the existing policies. Operationalization not just tabling of these policies i.e. to be felt by the every woman so as to encourage them to participate at all levels.

Network of Women Ministers of the Environment (NWME)

The NWME recognizes that women constitute a majority of the world's poor, but are severely underrepresented in policy-

making roles. Given that women can bring to the table new ideas, new approaches and strategies for protecting people and natural resources. Creating a critical mass of leadership to influence international and national policy is vital. (UNEP: 2004. *Gender, poverty and environment*)

The Beijing *Platform for Action*, notes the importance of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach in dealing with environmental issues. (This is where system thinking comes into play)

- Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels:

The Beijing *Platform for Action* underscores that Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes, including, as appropriate, an analysis of the effects on women and men respectively, before decisions are taken.

- Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development

E.g. the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2004), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1993) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (1996), (In Uganda there

is a vote for environment conservation in each district (is one 1 trillion budget allocation for environment (2019) adequate?)

- Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional or international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

The first Global Women's Assembly on the Environment: Women as the Voice for the Environment (WAVE), was organized by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), in close collaboration with civil society groups and the Network of Women Ministers on Environment. The Assembly that attracted 150 men and women from 65 countries was held from 11 to 13 October 2004 in Nairobi, Kenya

- Introducing, training, encouraging and supporting women in energy conservation programmes like Biogas, solar, and energy saving mechanisms and this should be a national initiative and policy to back up.

For instance, Egypt trained women to use biogas in cooking. Mauritania reported reduced indoor air pollution and the amount of time women and children spend collecting firewood as a result of similar efforts. China

assisted women in remote mountainous areas to build water tanks.

- Using traditional/ indigenous knowledge and women practices to develop joint research activities that are supported by both actors in development and establishing community centers that spearhead the research process.

Conclusion

In communities around the world, women manage water, sources for fuel, and food, as well as both forests and agricultural terrain. Women produce 75 percent of food in developing countries, but still inheritance laws and local customs prevent them from owning or leasing land and securing loans or insurance. This has led to a continued challenge in expanding their work on conserving the environment.

Adoption of different declarations and their implementation is very critical in bringing about lasting change and a shift in the way women will conserve the environment.



A woman in Tsetan, Tibetan Autonomous Region, China, uses a home-made solar cooker to boil water.



Rural grandmothers are being trained as solar engineers at a Barefoot College workshop session.

