

# Women and the Environment

*Climate change: impact on grassroots women*

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# It is widely acknowledged ...

- *“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.”* (Principle 20 of Rio Declaration)
- *“Women’s experiences and contributions to an ecologically sound environment must ... be central to the agenda for the twenty-first century.”* (Chapter K Beijing Platform for Action)
- *“... enhance the full participation of ... especially women, at all levels of population and environmental decision making to achieve sustainable management of natural resources.”* (Chapter 3.31 International Conference on Population and Development)

# Deepening challenges

- **Financial crisis:** *greater inequity/poverty*
- **Natural resource crisis:** *food insecurity, degradation of environment, pollution, migration, unplanned urbanization*
- **Unsustainable production and consumption patterns:** *energy shortages, over extraction*

## Additionally:

- **Climate change:** *unpredictable, devastating*

# View from the ground -1:

## *livelihood shifts*

**Cropping patterns:** *from* subsistence mixed farming *to* cash crops

**Agriculture:** *from* natural fertilisers and inputs *to* chemicals, pesticides, hybrid seeds

**Forests:** *from* thick riverine growth providing fuel, fodder, honey *to* banana plantations

**New dams:** *from* rich fish stock *to* none

# View from the ground - 2:

## *climate change*

### Previously:

- Rains more predictable (droughts and floods)
- Summers hot but manageable

### The change:

- Increased intensity of summer heat
- Abrupt/unpredictable heavy rains
- Devastating climate induced disasters



# View form the ground- 3: *impact is cumulative*

## “Development process” + changes in climate

- **Changed cropping patterns:** changes in working conditions, food habits
- **Use of chemicals:** diseases, water logging, drying of local trees, loss of nutrients
- **Clearing of forests:** wood, honey, natural fodder, birds and animals disappeared, cool forest air
- **Dammed river/polluted waters:** drastic reduction in fish catch
- **Intensified micro climate:** wind storms and heat; shortened working hours
- **Floods:** loss of life/livestock, property (houses, crops) intensified poverty

# Women's perspective - 1

## **Responsibilities and roles:**

Unchanged –  
Care/reproductive

**Conditions:** depletion of forests, pesticide use, need for cash, poverty, reduced livestock

**Result:** Men displaced as result of “mal-development,” inequities exacerbated - the burden of generating additional income on women



# Women's perspective - 2

**Economic opportunities:**  
“double edged”

**With Climate change:**  
reduced working hours;  
reduced incomes; un-  
prepared for climate  
induced disasters/risks;  
increased  
vulnerabilities;

Conflict, anger and  
frustration





# Limits of resilience

Women in **middle/upper income groups** have benefited from development e.g. education

**Poor women** and those on the margins worse off – health, income, poverty

**Resilience severely tested/reduced:** traditional wisdom does not apply, mismatch of skills and needs

**Scope of adaptation limited:** though eager to learn

# What can be done?

**Integrate:** climate change realities in national development processes for “climate compatible development”

**Encompass:** rights, poverty reduction, conservation –through effective health/RH services, education and skill development

**Ensure:** women’s equal status/opportunities, factor-in women’s role of sustaining livelihoods in policy, create women owned/controlled assets

# Do-able initiatives

- **Green governance:** devolve decision making closer to the ground and make space for 'critical mass' (33%) of women in *local* government, *joint* resource management committees, and other decision making levels
- **Climate Finance:** create a financing window for grassroots women backed up by training and extension facilities

# Need for a paradigm shift

- Ultimately the *need* is for a paradigm shift
- At the local level *only* limited adaptation possible *unless* “development” is rethought
- For *women* imperative to meet their personal growth and development needs of:
  - *education, health and reproductive health*
  - *choice in marriage and age of marriage*
  - *opportunities, voice and say*



**Thank You**