

OPENING ADDRESS

**DR. JANET KABEBERI-MACHARIA,
SENIOR GENDER ADVISOR, UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
(UNEP)**

**WAVE/WECF CONFERENCE ON RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
BELGRADE, SERBIA OCTOBER 13 2007**

Honorable Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to first extend my sincere gratitude to the Women in Europe for a Common Future for the kind invitation and honor bestowed on me to give this opening address at this important conference.

Firstly, I wish to congratulate WECF for hosting the first ever follow-up to the Women as Voices for the Environment (WAVE) meeting held exactly three years ago in Nairobi Kenya. As many of you may recall the first Global Assembly for Women in Environment was hosted by the UNEP in collaboration with various partners that included WECF and received tremendous support from the Women Minister's for Environment network amongst others. Three years on, although various efforts and initiatives at differing degrees have been carried out all over the world, today's event is of great importance in the sense that it is a trendsetter and will encourage other continents to meet and take stock of where we are three years after Nairobi, where we want to go, and what we want to do to ensure that we keep the momentum going in meeting the commitments made in 2004.

In recognizing the right of everyone to a healthy planet and recognizing the important roles played by women, the WAVE 2004 Nairobi conference recognized that "in order to achieve sustainable development and gender equality, strong alliances and systematic communication are needed across the world" and, further that:

Together, as agents of change, bound together by our commitment to justice, equality and peace, we can sustain our environment and our common future.

Being agents of change is not an easy task. It is a task that continues to be challenged by a myriad of environmental changes intertwined with economic changes, inequities and glaring abject poverty especially in developing countries across the world. Furthermore, in developed countries, is environmental degradation resulting from industrialization and consumer patterns. Across the world we are experiencing the effects of changing climate patterns that have resulted in droughts, crop failures, rising sea levels, heat-waves and floods of untold proportions. Adapting to climate

change is likely to become one of the primary development challenges of the coming decades.

The intricate relationship between poverty and environmental management cannot be underscored particularly as the livelihoods, health and security of people living in poverty – particularly women and children- are entirely dependent on the environment which continues to be degraded at an alarming rate. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment found that 60% of ecosystem services are used unsustainably and concluded that “any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty and hunger eradication, improved health, and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded.”

Gender and sustainable environmental management

Today more than ever, to preserve a healthy environment for human well-being, environmental considerations must be embedded in a wide array of human activities. “Mainstreaming” of environment is thus requisite if we are to address the underlying forces that drive environmental degradation. To ensure that institutional arrangements and policies are conducive to sustainable ecosystem management will entail the development and adoption of pro poor and “people-centered” approaches, where all the stakeholders are participants in addressing the root causes of environmental degradation and identifying solutions. Adopting a participatory approach (that elucidates the needs and concerns of both men and women) to environmental degradation will build trust and credibility and ensure integrated natural resource management.

Men and women have different roles in the family, community and work force, which determine the ways in which they utilise the environment and likewise they will have different strategies and knowledge in adapting to environmental challenges. For example, men often suffer more from exposure to environmental hazards related to their employment (e.g. working in mining or other potentially hazardous industries), while women often suffer more from environmental hazards in the home environment (e.g. waste disposal, exposure to gas or wood-fire stove smoke). The health and economic consequences of pollution and environmental hazards on human beings has been well documented. These consequences also have strong links with chronic poverty and wider implications for a nation’s economic growth.

Although neither men nor women have a “natural pre-disposition” for environmental protection, their gendered role patterns may mean that strategies and policies for

promoting environmental protection at the local and community level need to target men and women differently.

Role of women in ensuring sustainable development

All over the world women continue to rely on existing natural resources for the survival of their families, more so in developing countries than in the developed countries. Increasing poverty and widening gap between poor and rich continues to constrain improvement of women's lives as well bridging the gender gap. Further environmental damage has had a gendered impact for example studies have shown that pollution affects women more than men especially, since women are the ones who are responsible for gathering energy fuel for household cooking, or collecting water even from polluted sources, and often women are employed in low income jobs which expose them to dangers of hazardous chemicals be it on flower farms or in factories.

Despite their daily interaction with the environment - by virtue of the work they do - women continue to be underrepresented in the decision-making tables on matters concerning environmental management. While more research is required to determine the precise nature of this link, it can be argued that greater gender equality in decision-making positions and the adoption of social justice criteria for macroeconomic policy will also enhance attention to sustainable development, including a sustainable global environment.

UNEP's commitment

In keeping with commitments made not only at the international level but also at the WAVE Assembly in 2004, UNEP has systematically undertaken measures aimed at ensuring that gender considerations are fully integrated into its programming and operations both internally and externally. UNEP's Governing Council at its 23rd session in 2005, adopted decision 23/11 on *Gender Equality in the Field of Environment* which called upon Governments and UNEP itself to mainstream gender in their environmental policies and programmes, to assess the effects on women of environmental policies, and to integrate further gender equality and environmental considerations into their work.

An important milestone is the UNEP Global Environmental Outlook for 2005/6 which provided an in-depth analysis on Gender and Environment. The GEO recognized that for environmental management to be gender responsive four major interventions are necessary. These are

- Capacity building of men and women to fully participate policy and decision-making processes;
- Adjusting government priorities so that awareness and promotion of gender equality are integrated into financial planning.
- Improving institutional capacities to incorporate gender-related environmental analysis. Gender-related environmental analysis at all scales, in all regions, and across all topics is hampered by the lack of appropriate data and indicators. Thus there is also need for gender-disaggregated and gender sensitive data.
- Need for explicit commitment to bring issues of gender into the environmental arena

UNEP has thereafter undertaken various measures which include development of a Gender Policy and Gender Plan of Action to roll out the process of integrating gender considerations into its work at all levels internally and externally. Implementation of the Plan of Action is already underway whilst the finalization of the gender policy is on going. A network of Gender focal points has been set up as well as a comprehensive website on Gender and Environment launched on 8th of March 2007 for the International Women's Day. The website http://www.unep.org/gender_env/ has received more than 35000 visits since the beginning of 2007.

Each of the UNEP regional offices and divisions has developed a gender action plan which seeks to implement the Corporate Gender Plan of Action in their respective programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

For gender responsive sustainable development a few recommendations are made:

- **Building alliances:** supporting networks such as the Women Ministers for Environment network so as to ensure that gender is visible on the global environmental agenda; likewise supporting and developing networks of civil society organizations to ensure that environmental policies are translated into gender responsive programmes on the ground
- **Promoting equal participation** of men and women in the highest environmental, macroeconomic and development policy-making positions. Equal participation of men and women in environmental decision-making is a question of equal rights and responsibilities. Both women and men must share the right and responsibility of defining environmental priorities and developing environmentally sustainable development solutions.

- **Research:** There is a need for indepth research (global and national levels) that investigates for example the links between gender equality (particularly in governance and decision-making) and environmentally sustainable macro-economic and development policies or on gendered impact of climate change. Sociological surveys at the household level can assist in identifying different roles men and women play in the management of household resources that affect the environment.
- **Gender analysis of natural resources management policies:** A comprehensive gender analysis and review of policy and practice in areas of energy, solid waste disposal, water or other environment-related issues. Such an analysis would identify ways in which such policies impact men and women, given their different roles in the community. Once the different knowledge and situation of men and women is identified, this information should be integrated into potential strategies for environmental protection.
- **Gender Impact Assessments of environmental policies and actions:** Prior to the implementation of an environmental programme a gender impact assessment should be undertaken to identify how such actions impact on men and women. The Gender Impact Assessments should be part of the Environmental Impact Assessments. The objective is to ensure that appropriate policies are put in place to minimize the negative effects to both men's and women's short-term livelihoods and welfare, while protecting the long-term sustainability of the environment.
- **Gender Budgeting:** Considerable work in gender responsive budgeting is needed to ensure that national budgets (including medium-term expenditure frameworks) and sectoral plans and budgets respond adequately to the gender concerns in environmental management.
- Development and use of **local sustainable development strategies** based on bottom-up approaches that integrate natural resources management in socio-economic development processes, in both rural and urban areas.

CONCLUSION

In ensuring gender responsive and sustainable environmental management, UNEP cannot go it alone and has specifically recognized the importance of strengthening its collaborative work with partners drawn from UN agencies and civil society. The WECF is one such partner that UNEP will continue to work with both at a national, regional and global level. Together with other partners we shall not create a *ripple but a WAVE* in gender responsive and sustainable environmental management.

I wish you most fruitful deliberations in your meeting and sincerely look forward to our working together!

THANK YOU