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Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development

Towards a Theoretical Synthesis



ZED BOOKS

in association with

INSTRAW

UNIV. OF MASS/BOSTON
Joseph P. Healey Library

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1994

Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development
was first published by Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street,
London N1 9JF, UK, and 165 First Avenue, Atlantic Highlands,
New Jersey 07716, USA, in association with the
United Nations International Research and Training Institute
for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW),
Cesar Nicolas Penson 102-A, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic,
in 1994.

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Cover designed by Andrew Corbett.
Laserset by Rami Tzabar.
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by Biddies Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn.

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A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

US CIP data is available from
the Library of Congress

ISBN 1 85649 183 8 Hb
ISBN 1 85649 184 6 Pb

5. Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Emergence of the Theme and Different Views

Women, environment and development (WED) as a theme within the development debate has increasingly attracted international attention during the last two decades and has been taking shape in a number of different streams of thinking. This chapter broadly sketches out how the WED debate has evolved, who are some of the major actors and how the particular concepts, positions and ideas interact. The historical evolution of WED is treated at some length because this has not yet been recorded elsewhere.

The theme of WED originated in the context of economic development of the countries of the South, that is, discussions on Women in Development (WID) and Environment and Development as well as from within social movements in the South, such as the Chipko and Greenbelt movements. In order to trace WED's origins, and document its evolution within the development debate, it is important to keep in mind the history of the last three UN development decades and the global economic situation as it evolved within these. The second part of this chapter, in view of the two global conferences on women and environment in Miami (November 1991) and the UNCED process (1992) outlines how the topic of WED has gained a new international momentum. This is due to the fact that a larger circle of actors including development critics, political activists, feminists, women environmentalists, and ecofeminists from the North, South and also the ex-Eastern bloc have entered the environmental debate, particularly the WED debate.

In the North, women and environment as a theme evolved within the women's movements in the mid-1970s (Spretnak 1990) with the emergence of ecofeminism, mainly in the US. Implicitly, the relation of women to the environment also emerged as an issue for many women who took part in the peace and anti-nuclear movements at the time. Only recently in the preparatory processes to the Miami Conferences and UNCED have these streams intersected in a more systematic way.

As a result of the fundamental questioning of developmentalism the WED theme opens up, women and men working within the field of development assistance started to question the sustainability of development in the South. In this context they began to understand the topic of WED not solely as observers from the North who assist the South in its economic development but they began to question the sustainability of the dominant model of development in their own countries as well.

It should be noted here that from the start WED, as a theme within the development debate, encompassed a variety of professional fields such as forestry, agriculture, irrigation and water systems. It includes all women's interrelations with the environment in the context of economic development as well as all the effects that environmental degradation has had upon women's lives. Examples of these are an increased work burden to provide household necessities (fuel, water, fodder for animals and so on) mostly in rural areas, as well as the effects of air and water pollution, and increased exposure to chemicals in the workplace in urban settings. Local circumstances vary considerably in respect to the ecological zone (tropical forests or arid zones) as well as cultural, social, class, race, ethnic and age of people living in them.

Women in Development (WID) in a historical perspective

During the 1950s and 1960s the development organizations perceived the economic role of women in reproduction only: as home makers, bearers and rearers of children, and housewives. This was reflected in the approach to women's development: programmes in family planning and population control, mother and child health care, nutrition, home economics and so on. For women, development was seen as an enhancement of their role as home makers, wives and mothers; Caroline Moser (1989) has termed this the 'welfare approach'. Women were seen as mere beneficiaries of development within their reproductive role in the economy, while their productive roles, for example in agriculture, were disregarded. This approach is still widely used today; small, women's programmes in 'female domains' (handicraft production, knitting, sewing, mother and child health care for example) can easily be attached to ongoing development projects without challenging existing gender relations and patriarchal structures in society.

Ester Boserup in her influential book *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) was one of the first researchers to document the considerable contribution of women in the productive sectors of the developing countries' economies, particularly in agriculture. She showed not only that women do not automatically benefit from development programmes, but on the contrary, that the development process had often led to the relative and even absolute deterioration of women's role and status *vis-à-vis* men. Men were increasingly drawn into the modernizing agriculture sectors while women stayed in subsistence agriculture with no access to credits, training and technology. Economists and development planners ignored women's major, often predominant, contribution of labour in agriculture and other productive activities within the household and the community. Boserup concluded that the introduction of new agricultural methods had a negative effect on

women in the South by changing patterns in the sexual division of labour and displacing them from their traditional areas of work. Herbicides; for example, overtook women's role in weeding; newly introduced high yield varieties of crops pushed women from their traditional role in seed selection for traditional crops. With the use of modern technology, men not only became increasingly engaged in commodity production for export but also took over women's traditional tasks. Women continued to produce food for household subsistence by traditional methods of cultivation on marginal land unsuitable for cash crop production.

With declining terms of trade internationally, commodity prices fell as did remuneration of men's labour, while women had to compensate for and supply the means of subsistence for the family. Boserup's theme was equity, an equal share for men and women within the rural household. She documented the importance of intra-household dynamics: due to traditional patterns of control over capital and land, men benefited from modern agriculture, while women did not necessarily benefit equally.

Boserup's work has been an important contribution to WID thinking because it brought out clearly the dimension and importance of gender within the process of development. Her contribution was instrumental in establishing WID as an accepted area of study. She also challenged the myth that a family income would be equally available to all members of the household. But as Whitehead (1990), one of Boserup's many critics has pointed out, she used her findings to popularize the idea that sub-Saharan Africa had initially been a predominantly female farming area, and that modernization had mostly benefited men often at the expense of women. In the light of more recent research, however, Whitehead showed this to be an oversimplification of reality. Production data show that export (largely employing men's labour) and subsistence (women's labour) crop production rise and fall together. Both are produced by a variety of techniques, and subsistence crops are also grown as cash crops. Boserup also underestimated women's involvement in the 'modern' sector of the economy. Whitehead, therefore, contested the notion of a separate subsistence sector with a 'feminine nature'. She highlighted the connections between women's role in food production and the changing nature of African agriculture within complex historical processes of commoditization, locating women's gender specific situation within these processes. She warned that to emphasize the crisis solely in the form of gender conflicts could result in masking a more general crisis of the peasantry (Whitehead 1990:54-68).

Boserup and other women who pioneered in researching and conceptualizing women's role in economic development contributed to

the formulation of policies to translate their findings into development practice. The term Women in Development (WID) was coined in the early 1970s. WID became institutionalized first in the form of separate sections, departments, project components and so on within the donor countries' development bureaucracy. After the Women's Decade and the 1985 Nairobi Conference on Women and Development women's bureaus and ministries were also established in the countries of the South.

By the mid-1970s WID started to become a more or less respected area of study; the number of publications on women and development topics has steadily increased ever since. Women and men sociologists and anthropologists, as well as a slowly increasing number of women development professionals in technical fields such as agriculture, forestry, and engineering for example, from both North and South, moved into the field of development work. The understanding of rural communities in the South and women's role in the local economy, as well as cultural specificities which determine women's lives, increased considerably.

Lobbying activities by WID specialists resulted in a wider concern about and interest in women's role in the development process and the need to adequately account for their contribution. The first UN conference on Women and Development in 1975 was held in Mexico City under the rubric 'Equality, Development and Peace'; subsequently, the years 1976-1985 were declared the Women's Decade. The major outcome of the Decade was the formulation of the Forward Looking Strategies (FLS) at the 1985 Women and Development Conference in Nairobi that marked the end of the Decade. The FLS outline aims to fulfil the demand for equality between the sexes and women's full integration into the mainstream of economic development. Women were to be given equal access to education, training, and such resources as land and capital.

WID had originally addressed the demand for equity (Moser, 1989; the 'Equity Approach'). But, in the wake of the Mexico Conference, governments and development agencies reformulated the need for targeting women in the context of poverty eradication only because the demand for equity was associated with Western feminist ideas. The demand for equity was later linked to the argument of economic efficiency (Moser, 1989, the 'Anti-Poverty Approach'). Women came to be seen as a valuable 'resource' to be 'harnessed' for economic development.

In the 1980s the international economic situation and the debt crisis led to increasing poverty of populations in the South and to what was termed the 'feminization' of poverty. An increasing number of women became the providers of family subsistence, while men often migrated in search of employment. Women suffered disproportionately from cuts in government spending for health care and social services, in so far as these cuts were compensated by women's increasing workloads. Development

was seen to become more efficient and effective through women's increased contribution (workload), their participation and equity were seen as the same thing. Caroline Moser called this the 'Efficiency Approach' to women's development.

The 1980s were the period of a considerable growth in the women's movements in the South. In 1984 the first Development with Women for a New Era (DAWN) meeting took place in India. A group of women researchers from the South had joined forces to criticize the Western development model as well as the WID approach itself.¹ These women from the South began to formulate their own ideas regarding women's development within the framework of an alternative development model. During the 1985 NGO Forum, held parallel to the UN Conference on Women and Development in Nairobi, the DAWN women presented their ideas. Important exchanges between Northern and Southern women's movements and NGOs took place during the two events. The motto of the UN as well as the NGO Conferences was 'Equality, Development and Peace', as a decade earlier.

As Lycklama à Nijeholt (1987) has pointed out, the quest for integration of women into the mainstream of development left no opportunity for them to choose the kind of development they wanted. It was assumed that women wanted to be integrated into a patriarchal Western mode of development. DAWN members were playing an important role in stimulating Northern women also to think about alternative visions of development from a feminist perspective. At the Forum in 1985 the idea of transformations of patriarchal societies at large as well as development according to feminist ideals was stressed. The need for women's autonomy, as a means for them to gain control over their lives, bodies and sexuality *vis-à-vis* men and social institutions, was seen as a prerequisite for such larger social transformations to take place (Lycklama à Nijeholt 1987:33). Autonomous women's organizations were seen as important institutions for women to formulate their own demands. A few years later the Dutch development minister Pronk, for example, took up DAWN's line of argument and formulated the Dutch approach to WID as empowering women to transform gender as well as all other relations, including North/South relations (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991). Such progressive thinking however, remained confined to the policy approach to WID and did not extend to policies on other areas of Dutch development co-operation.

DAWN's and other, mainly Southern groups' concept for women's development has been termed 'Empowerment Approach' by Caroline Moser. It has not been very popular with many governments and aid agencies because of its potential for challenging both local and global patriarchal power structures.

The shift from women in development to gender and development

A recent development from within aid agencies since the late 1980s is the transition from WID to Gender and Development (GAD). The WID approach is associated with a concern to increase women's participation and benefits, thereby making development more effective. Gender and Development represents a transition to 'not only integrate women into development, but look for the potential in development initiatives to transform unequal social/gender relations and to empower women' (Canadian Council for International Cooperation 1991:5).

Gender training – with its tools of gender analysis and gender planning – has recently been institutionalized in most development agencies. This approach is a shift in theory away from WID's sole preoccupation with women towards a:

gender and development trend . . . [that] . . . analyzes the nature of women's contribution inside and outside the household . . . sees women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance . . . question[s] the underlying assumptions of current social, economic and political structures . . . [and] leads not only to the design of interventions and affirmative action strategies which will ensure that women are better integrated into on-going development efforts . . . [but] . . . to a fundamental reexamination of social structures and institutions. (Rathgeber 1988, cited after Feldenstein and Poats 1989: 3)

The GAD approach aims for full equality of women within the framework of economic development. Women experts within the World Bank and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and many other development organizations have begun training development experts in 'gender literacy', that is, accounting for women's concerns on all levels and in all fields of the organizations' work. This encompasses screening policy documents, employment policies, planning of projects, sex segregated data collection, monitoring and evaluation procedures, and so on. All development agency staff pass through compulsory training in gender analysis and gender planning.

GAD, an important element in bringing about equity for women, is the most recent and progressive product of thinking about women and their role in the development process. If fully implemented, it will necessitate important changes within development institutions. In GAD as well as in WID, however, the original feminist concerns are diluted and appear in an instrumental garb: women are 'added' on all levels and in all spheres. GAD, as an approach, does not fundamentally question the assumptions of the dominant development paradigm itself, which

is firmly rooted within the logic of modernization and the economic growth model. Also, women's projects in development programmes address women's problems only partially, by, for example, introducing income generation activities. Such programmes imply that women have time to do more work. Women in the South have very few margins for changing – for instance, work patterns – because they are already heavily overburdened. The feminist concern for changes in the sexual division of labour is evaded; rarely do development programmes lead to increasing men's work burdens. Women's lives and problems are rarely seen in their full complexity. If they are, it would be obvious that they cannot be addressed effectively within the confines of development projects; to so address them would imply more radical changes in society at large.

Approaches to women's development must go beyond the level of improving administrative procedures in development practice, and maintain the broader perspective for the 'transformation of development into a process which leads to a society where people, women and men, are no longer oppressed and exploited' (Lycklama à Nijeholt 1987:34). Apart from giving women the democratic right to participate, it is quite possible that if women were represented on all levels of decision-making they would bring different views into the development process and debate different views. Perhaps, also, different values would contribute to change development from within the institutions. In this respect, WID and GAD are important facets in the variety of positions contributing to transformations of development from within mainstream institutions.

The effectiveness of WID and GAD is limited in so far as, operating as they do in the institutional framework of development agencies and projects, they cannot solve the development crisis alone. Women's quest for equity does not address the roots of the crisis and its epistemological foundation which affect both women and men, as Chapter 3 showed. It is not within the means of development agencies to influence global economic processes and patriarchal structures that have led to women's subordination and their disproportional pauperization relative to men. Within the development context, WID's and GAD's effectiveness will depend entirely on the goodwill of governments in the South, mostly represented by men, and their willingness to allow for far-reaching improvements of women's status in their own countries.

Women, Environment, and Sustainable Development (WED) in historical perspective

In the early 1970s a growing interest in women's relations with the environment in the countries of the South emerged within the development discourse. The following pages briefly review some events that fuelled the emerging WED debate.

The oil 'crisis', initiated by the oil producing countries in 1973, as well

as the large-scale effects of drought in the Sahel, sharply jolted the North into a realization that natural resources were not infinitely exploitable. Development planners began to give serious attention to the need for a more systematic global energy planning for the future.

For development planners it was clear that in the coming decades the majority of the South's peoples would depend for their energy needs on wood fuel and that oil or other energy sources would be simply too costly for them. Women, in their role as users of wood, were to become the target group for a twofold strategy to grapple with the future trends of diminishing resources of wood energy: a) reduce wood fuel consumption by introducing wood-saving stoves; and b) initiate large-scale afforestation to increase wood supply.

This twofold strategy was implemented within the larger framework of replacing wood fuel with other sources of energy in the long run. Energy development was based on urban-oriented and integrated grid systems, that is, national electrification in line with energy plans for modern urban sectors and their economies.

It was soon realized that women not only used but were also responsible for collecting wood fuel (Ki-Zerbo 1981; FAO 1984; Cecelski 1985; Agarwal 1986). Development projects (often forestry projects) and national forestry and energy departments established extensive fuel-saving stove programmes, in which educated, mostly urban women were involved as experts and promoters and thus entered the newly emerging field of 'women and the environment'.

The proposal to maximize wood-fuel production in the South was imbued with a number of generalizations rooted in the large-scale national and regional energy planning procedures and a commercial forestry framework of thinking. The shortage of wood-fuel was identified as a problem to be solved by national planners; hence, energy planners advocated large-scale forestry plantations, regardless of local circumstances and needs. Later, recognition that forestry projects implemented without local people's involvement were doomed to failure led to the emergence of the concept of Community Forestry.²

Another misconception of development planners was their assumption that firewood consumption for domestic energy use by households was the cause of large-scale deforestation and environmental degradation in the South. A powerful image emerged of poor people in the South, with too many children, using too much fuel; the poor were seen to have no choice but to destroy their own environment. Whereas this may be true for some areas in the South, it cannot be generalized. As Madhu Sarin, an experienced stove-promoter working in the Himalayas pointed out, deforestation in this area was due much more to commercial tree felling and the extension of agriculture into forest land than to domestic fuel

consumption (Sarin 1991).

By the mid-1970s, due to Boserup's work, an interest in women's role in agriculture as well as in rural development at large had emerged. In light of global economic problems, increasing environmental degradation and the feminization of poverty in the South the debate on the specific effects of these processes on women gained momentum. It is important to note that the WED debate started from within environment-related disciplines such as forestry (fuelwood energy) and agriculture in the context of development. It became increasingly recognized that women had to spend more time and energy to obtain fuel, water and fodder for household use. Women were subsequently seen as the major victims of the crisis, emerging as the poorest of the poor. In fact, women and the poor were often one and the same group and those two terms came to be understood almost interchangeably.

At the NGO conference held parallel to the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the initiatives of local people in India to protect their forests – the now widely-known Chipko Movement – were reported by Sundarlal Bahuguna, the movement's leader. The success of the Chipko women's activities later inspired other local initiatives in the South, and also those wishing to stimulate bottom-up, people-oriented development work.

The first Western women forestry experts then working in Community Forestry projects were also influenced by the Chipko women. Community, or Social Forestry, is defined by the FAO³ as 'any situation which, intimately involves local people in a forestry activity. It embraces a spectrum of situations ranging from woodlots in areas which are short of wood and other forest products for local needs, through the growing of trees at the farm level to provide cash crops and the processing of forest products at the household, artisan or small industry level to generate income to the activities of forest dwelling communities. It excludes large-scale industrial forestry which contributes to community development solely through employment and wages, but it does include activities of forest industry enterprises and public forest services which encourage and assist forestry activities at the community level.'

Because women had emerged as the main actors in this movement it was concluded that rural women understood that it was in their own interest to protect the environment. It was during the 1972 UN conference that the South's problems of environmental degradation and the growing scarcity of natural resources *vis-à-vis* a growing population were placed firmly on the UN agenda. A parallel concern of development agencies was to take into account the need to address environmental issues within the process of economic development.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), which was to act as a catalyst and co-ordinator on environmental issues within the UN, was established after the Stockholm conference. The task of the Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI), founded at the same time, was to integrate NGO input into UNEP. The headquarters of both organizations are in Nairobi. Both agencies became active in the field of WED around the mid-1980s.

In 1984, UNEP initiated a programme to enhance women's participation in environmental management and consequently established the Senior Women's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development (SWAGSD), comprising a group of senior women specialists interested in environmental issues working in different development organizations. This group structured the input of women on environment and sustainable development within the 1985 UN Conference on Women and Development and were instrumental in the adoption of key paragraphs in the final Conference document: the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies. As a result the topic of women and environment entered the UN's agenda.

At the Nairobi Forum 1985, held parallel to the UN Women and Development Conference, ELCI organized a workshop on 'Women and the Environmental Crisis'. Women's actions and special role in environmental management were presented in case studies that documented women's involvement in forestry, agriculture, energy and so on, based on the experiences of women living in the South. Women were portrayed in these case studies as environmental managers whose involvement was crucial to the achievement of sustainable development. These studies were powerful tools to further the WED debate and stimulate international recognition of women's problems in relation to natural resource management. Active at the Forum were women such as the Kenyan Wangari Maathai, leader of the Green Belt Movement⁴ and Vandana Shiva from India, much of whose thinking and writing has been inspired by the Chipko movement. These two and many more women from the South present at the workshop later gained international prominence in the WED debate and became spokespersons on behalf of the South's poor women.

The ELCI workshop participants drew up a Plan of Action for Women, Environment and Development setting out how different organizations can contribute to awareness-raising and advocacy; strengthening women's leadership in environmental action; providing information to and educating the public; networking and training.

In the years following the Nairobi Conference, of five programmes⁵ set up by ELCI, one was a WED programme initiated to form a network of African women researchers, called WEDNET, to work on WED related issues in the region. WEDNET's activities include workshops and

exchanges within Africa on forestry, environmental security and sustainable development linking up development workers, community groups, NGOs, researchers, and so on. Their most recent work is a compilation of the indigenous environmental knowledge of women in several African countries.

In 1992, the Asian and Pacific Women's Resource Network published a number of case studies of local communities' environmental action, collected by women in the Asian and Pacific region in the follow up of the Forum 85 Nairobi Conference. This collection, in its candid reflection of the perspectives of the local groups themselves in their own words, is unique.

By the mid-1980s the media were increasingly presenting images of poor women from the South, burdened by heavy loads of fuel, fodder and water, against a backdrop of barren landscapes. These images served to alert the public and development agencies in the North to the problems of women in the South brought about by environmental degradation.

In 1986 the UN Secretariat for the Advancement of Women appointed UNEP as the leading agency on women and environment. The UN's Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) highlighted women's rôle in these areas. The task of the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), was to devise training manuals, specifically for women, in view of their primary role in the supply of drinking water and responsibility for their families' sanitation standards. There was a significant increase in the literature on issues such as women's rôles in forestry, agriculture, and animal health, that documented the gender specific tasks women performed, as well as case study material illustrating the effects of environmental degradation on women, and their responses.

The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, promoted long-term strategies for achieving sustainable development (defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs) (WCED 1987:45)⁶ and highlighted the importance of environmental issues in the development process. In the years following publication of the Brundtland Report, the WED debate – conducted mainly by women working on environmental and women-related issues in UNEP, FAO, UNIFEM, INSTRAW and many other bilateral aid agencies and NGOs – focused on the imperative for women's involvement in strategies and programmes aimed at 'sustainable' development. Gradually, 'women, environment and development' became 'women, environment and sustainable development'.

In the late 1980s national and international events organized on the WED theme gained increased momentum. The images of poor women in

the South as victims became transformed into images of strength and resourcefulness. In the wider debate on sustainable development women were increasingly promoted as 'privileged environmental managers' and depicted as possessing specific skills and knowledge in environmental care. Development agencies, advised to address women much more widely in their environmental projects, responded by sending out more women experts from the North to implement such projects, as well as promoting the training of women extension workers in the South. WED slowly became a professional field for women development experts.

More often than not, however, these women experts, trained as technicians, have little awareness of gender issues, and this leads to the implementation of environmental projects in which women are just 'added on'. Often, such projects, geared at recovering the environment, are inappropriate to serve women's needs. For example, involving women in tree planting may mean increasing already overburdened rural women's workload. Unless women are given control over the land on which the trees are growing, and wider social changes are promoted to give them decision-making power over the sale of forest products (traditionally male domains), in the long run they will not be interested in such projects.

As standard procedure in recent years, most development agencies introduced separate environmental and women's impact assessments as part of their project procedures with little success up to date. These impact assessments are often simply tacked on to project planning and evaluation procedures without significantly altering the nature of the particular project. Levy (1992) points out that both gender and environment cut across established development policies and planning procedures; she proposes a dialogue between the two separate planning sectors, which would ultimately lead away from a checklist approach towards an alternative approach to development.

In 1987 a group of women experts from different organizations met to discuss how women's concerns could be brought into the World Conservation Strategy, an important international document written jointly by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and UNEP in 1980. In 1991, the Second World Conservation Strategy, was published; gender issues are included in the document as a result of these women experts' comments.

In 1987, too, *Women and Environment in the Third World*, by Irene Dankelman and Joan Davidson, was one of the first books on the topic to be published. It presented case studies of women's environmental activities in the South. The views expressed in the book were decisively shaped by women from the South, albeit in their capacity as researchers or development personnel. The emphasis of the book is on the close and special connection between women and the environment.

In 1989, at a seminar in Paris, organized by the Expert Group of

Women in Development of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), women from the World Bank, IUCN, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), OECD, UNEP, and others met to discuss the nature of the connections between women and the environment and then translated the outcome into policy guidelines for WED projects. An important outcome of this policy meeting was the imperative for poor Third World women's empowerment: if women must work more in order to improve the environment they must also be the beneficiaries. Women's status must therefore be raised, they must have control over their own bodies in order to control fertility, and they must be granted access to appropriate technology in order to attain social, cultural and environmentally sustainable development (OECD/ DAC 1989). It is important to note this group's holistic conceptualization of sustainable development (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of the concept of sustainable development).

In 1989 UNFPA published a report, *Investing in Women: The Focus of the Nineties*, prepared by Nafis Sadik, UNFPA's Director, in which she drew attention to the link between population and the environment. Brandt (1989) and many others of the development establishment also saw that in coming decades, solving the problems arising from environmental degradation and population growth would present the greatest challenges. Women are recognized as central in both areas.

With accelerating environmental degradation an increasing number of Northern groups engaged in the environmental debate, as well as environmental movements, now identify population growth as the root cause of global environmental degradation. This assumption is seen as sufficient justification for stringent population control measures directed mainly at women in the South. This assignment of responsibility for environmental degradation to population growth has become a matter of fierce disagreement between women's groups and environmentalists within the UNCED process.

In 1989 the Women's Environmental Network (WEN), a group working mainly on consumer issues in the UK, together with War on Want organized a workshop on Women, Environment and Development in London. Participants included activists, researchers, staff of development agencies and NGOs from Great Britain, Europe and the South. The relation between women and the environment was seen by participants as one of mutual caring and nurturing as well as the basis for a critique of the dominant development model. The Workshop's recommendations included an appeal to non-governmental, bilateral and multilateral agencies to reconceptualize the notion of development based on export-led growth, and for the integration of women and environment issues into the mainstream of their work. Women's

empowerment through access to education and appropriate local, regional, and national organizational structures were deemed necessary to enable them to take part in all levels of project planning. WEN has gained international prominence in the field of WED because of successful mobilization of UK women around consumer actions to press their government to introduce more environmentally friendly production processes (Women's Environmental Network 1988, Vallely 1991). They have inspired other Northern women's groups to engage in similar consumer actions and thus promoted the cause of WED in the North.

Another important event in 1989 was the publication of Vandana Shiva's book *Staying Alive*, in which she develops her ideas of an alternative development model based on traditional subsistence agriculture. She introduces the notion of the 'feminine principle', a term originating in Hindu cosmology denoting the life-giving force she associates with women. In Shiva's view the feminine principle needs to be recovered as the basis for a truly sustainable development model. Comments on the essentialist bias of this position, as well as on its potentially empowering effect, have already appeared in Chapter 4. It will be considered further later in this chapter.

Women organize for the Earth Summit

Within the UNCED preparatory process a symposium, organized by UNCED/UNICEF/UNFPA in Geneva (May 1991) entitled 'Women and Children First', examined the impact of poverty and environmental degradation on children and women in view of their potential to contribute towards sustainable development. Participants from the UN, NGOs, and governmental organizations defined poverty as:

... that process which deprives people, particularly women and children, of the basic means for sustainable livelihoods, and that undermines their physical, cultural and spiritual wellbeing. (UNCED 1991:1)

The term 'sustainable livelihood', though not explicitly defined in the report, is seen as distinct from sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Commission. It contains a participatory dimension which refers to 'increasing the capacity that people have to use resources to determine the shape of their own lives' (UNCED 1991:15).

The term 'sustainable livelihood' was proposed to replace that of 'sustainable development', which was understood to denote sustaining the dominant mode of development. Women engaged in the UNCED preparatory process subsequently adopted the former term.

Until mid-1991 women had not been an explicit concern within the governmental preparations for UNCED. Only in the NGO preparatory process women from development and environment groups as well as

women's groups had been active in the national and regional consultations. Through lobbying, networking and organizing women won over some UNCED delegates with the result that decision 3/5 at the Third Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva (August 1991), became the basis for the women's mandate in UNCED.⁷

Women's participation in UNCED was furthered by global women's conferences held successively in Miami, in November 1991. The first was the Global Assembly 'Women and Environment - Partners in Life' organized by SWAGSD/UNEP and WorldWIDE, a US-based international network of women concerned with the management and protection of the environment.⁸ Five hundred invited guests from development organizations heard women from all over the world present 218 accounts documenting how they were successfully addressing environmental problems in their own communities. The second conference, 'World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet' was organized by the women's International Policy Action Committee (IPAC), a body originating in the US Women's Foreign Policy Council and founded specifically to ensure women's input into UNCED. This second conference, organized in the form of a tribunal, was attended by about 1,500 women from 83 countries. It aimed to formulate recommendations and an action plan for a healthy planet for the next century from the point of view of women. The Women's Action Agenda was an outcome of an unprecedented process in which women from diverse backgrounds, positions and geographical regions came to a united position which criticized the dominant model of development.

From 17-21 December 1991 the global NGO Conference 'Roots of the Future' organized by ELCI, which took place in Paris, was the major preparatory meeting of the NGO community before the NGO Global Forum held parallel to UNCED. At this Conference participating groups, worldwide, synthesized their previously prepared regional statements into the Citizen's Action Plan for the 1990s: Agenda Ya Wananchi. It is noteworthy that Agenda Ya Wananchi fully endorsed the Women's Action Agenda 21, drafted in Miami a month earlier and later presented at UNCED.⁹

From 3-13 June 1992 the Brazilian Women's Coalition, together with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), organized and hosted Planeta Femea, the women's conference held within the NGO Global Forum in Rio de Janeiro. Planeta Femea was a concentrated programme of presentations in daily workshops structured around the themes of the Women's Action Agenda 21. Within the NGO process of ratifying treaties parallel to the UN treaties to serve as guidelines for the post-UNCED process involving NGOs globally, women attending Planeta Femea attempted to spread their participation

throughout the NGO treaty working groups in order to bring into them a women's perspective, but with only mixed success. Women took over drafting a Population Treaty and a separate Women's Treaty; the latter was essentially a summary of the Women's Action Agenda 21 drafted in Miami, but in a diluted version. To address this problem, a Women's Declaration initiated by members of the DAWN network emerged from the women's meeting. In terms stronger than those used in the Women's Treaty this Declaration criticized the UNCED agenda for the exclusion of such crucial factors leading to environmental degradation of the environment such as economic and military systems. In a call for action this Declaration urged world leaders present at UNCED to ensure the full implementation of the Women's Action Agenda 21 as drafted in Miami.

A women's caucus at the governmental UNCED conference itself also lobbied the official member country delegates. This conference adopted the document, Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development within the UNCED Agenda 21 as Chapter 24. Chapter 24 also stresses that any successful implementation of the UNCED Agenda 21 will depend on the active involvement of women in economic and political decision-making and implementation of the following conventions and plans of action adopted by the UN earlier: Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the ILO and UNESCO conventions to end gender-based discrimination and ensure women's access to land and other resources, education and equal employment; and the 1990 World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action. Women clearly stressed the need for women's empowerment as a prerequisite for sustainable livelihoods for all people.

Ideas of Women, Environment and Sustainable Development

The WED debate encompasses several main streams of thought. One stream stresses the managerial aspects of minimizing negative effects of the process of economic development by targeting women as recipients of development assistance and simultaneously considering the effects of development on the environment. This approach is propagated by development agencies. Other approaches tend toward anti-development or transformational stances and assert that the model of Western development is fundamentally flawed, as its effect on women, the environment and the South's peoples makes evident. This line of thought calls for transformations towards alternative development (see also Chapter 6). Crucial in the different lines of argumentation is the respective conception of the woman/nature relation (see the constructivism versus essentialism debate in Chapter 4).

An economic line of thinking conceptualizes WED from the viewpoint of women's work: the sexual division of labour that has led to women's particular role in managing natural resources. This role is seen as a product of the historical evolution of patriarchy which has assigned men roles in economic production and women the lower valued roles connected with economic reproduction.

A more 'cultural' stream of thought sees women's position as essentially closer to nature because within the sexual division of labour their work has always entailed a close relationship with nature. Women are depicted as 'naturally' privileged environmental managers who over generations have accumulated specific knowledge about natural processes that is different and more appropriate than that of men in general. This approach perceives the woman/nature relation as one of reciprocity, symbiosis, harmony, mutuality and interrelatedness due to women's close dependence on nature for subsistence needs. Women have successfully used both lines of argument as the basis for political struggles, in accordance with different strategies.

Different conceptualizations of WED in the literature

In reconceptualizing women's work, Maria Mies (1988), coming from a Marxist background, developed her argument by defining women's role in childbearing and rearing as work, and within a Marxist/feminist perspective this was an important contribution. Furthermore, for Mies, reproduction, that is, providing the basic necessities for family survival, constitutes women's closer relation to nature. Through this double role women's understanding of nature is superior to men's: Women not only work closer to nature, women 'are' nature because they give birth and nurture their children, hence they are doubly exploited within patriarchal society globally.

Vandana Shiva has become a prominent speaker on WED since the Nairobi Forum 1985. Her thinking locates her within the South's ecological and alternative development perspective rather than within WED but her work is discussed here because of her influential role in WED. Shiva (1989), as already indicated, draws on Hindu religion and philosophy which describes the 'feminine principle', *prakriti*, as the source of all life. She equates the feminine principle with women in real life and constructs the practical relation that women have with nature in Indian rural reality as the embodiment of the feminine principle. This relation needs to be recovered as a base for a sustainable mode of development. In India, according to Shiva, this mode existed before the era of colonialism. Under colonialism, and later the influence of the development process, a capitalist mode of development and green

revolution technology has penetrated India's rural economies, a process that destroyed the economic base of small-scale local survival agriculture. Shiva condemns the change to large-scale, mechanized and ultimately unsustainable market-oriented agriculture. This process facilitated the marginalization of the majority of the South's small-scale farmers, particularly poor women.

Shiva sees the dominant mode of development as Western, patriarchal and based on a reductionist model of science and technology that serves the global market and is effectively destructive for women, nature and all 'others' — non-Western peoples. Shiva sets up a model of opposition between the destructive Western, white, male, patriarchal development model and the traditional Indian agricultural system that works in harmony with nature. The Western model propagates monocultural plantation techniques in both forestry and agriculture in service of the market and capital accumulation. The traditional Indian economic model is described as having preserved a mutual relationship with nature through the cultivation of multicultural plantations meant for local subsistence production, using only what nature produces within the traditional farming system.

In common with Mies, Shiva's thinking stems from a search for an alternative development model. Both conclude that to recover the systems of subsistence agriculture globally is the solution. The Western development model's commoditization of nature, as well as women's and non-Western people's labour, has resulted in capital accumulation in the affluent 'developed' countries and poverty in the 'developing' countries.

For Mies, Northern women's major role lies in denouncing, and abstaining from, unnecessary consumption with the ultimate aim of undermining capitalism. Shiva cites women's prominent role within the Indian Chipko movement as evidence that the life-creating and preserving 'feminine principle' embodied by these women must be reclaimed as the source for an alternative global development model. 'Recovering the feminine principle as respect for life in nature and society appears to be the only way forward, for men as well as women, in the North as well as in the South' (Shiva 1989:223).

Staying Alive (1989), in which Shiva developed her argument, has been very influential in shaping WED, as well as environmental and alternative development thinking especially in Northern NGOs and social movements, and in development agencies. She has been much less influential in her own Indian context. The problem with her approach is the essentialism she has constructed in the concrete relation of women with nature in subsistence agriculture as a theoretical category — the feminine principle as the life-giving force. She propagates the idea that only poor, rural women, bearing the brunt of the environmental and

developmental crisis in their daily struggle for survival, know, and have known, how to survive since time immemorial and therefore have the solutions to the crisis.

Shiva idealizes Indian subsistence agriculture and recreates a past where people lived in perfect harmony with nature, and women were highly respected in society. But this romantic past may never have existed. Subsistence agriculture in India replaced tribal people's cultures, often by violent means. Indian history shows that the agricultural system was introduced on the sub-continent only with Arian invasion. In India, there is a large number of tribal peoples outside the caste system who, even today, are not integrated into society. Shiva's model of traditional society fails to account for highly exploitative structures along the axes of race, class and caste within Indian society today; she also ignores patriarchal structures within Indian society. Instead, she lays blame for the environmental crisis wholly on 'the state' and the global economy. Shiva's total neglect of class in Indian society has brought her much criticism, especially from Indian Marxist scholars.

As already indicated, both Mies and Shiva propagate a global model of subsistence agriculture. The question is, however, would the subsistence model alone, even though attractive in certain aspects, be a viable option in the present situation, especially if we think, for example, of the densely populated countries of Europe as well as India?

Yet, what Shiva (and many other scholars too) has brought out in her argument is a fundamental questioning of the Western model of development as the only possible model. Instead, she outlines the validity of subjugated and marginal people's knowledges in the search for sustainable models for development and environmental protection. She illustrates that such knowledge is sophisticated rather than 'primitive', being based on generations of close observation of natural processes, albeit often relevant in a specific local setting only. She also introduces the question of different values and perceptions: what is real material poverty and what is only culturally perceived as poverty? Are rural people living off local resources 'backward', *vis-à-vis* urban people in the North who are overconsuming global energy and natural resources at unsustainable levels? In this respect she contributes to a challenge of the epistemological assumptions underlying the dominant development model and highlights its violence to people and nature and destructive effects on local cultures and lifestyles¹⁰.

The positions taken by many Northern (and Southern) NGOs on WED have been strongly influenced by Shiva. Within the wider search for an alternative development paradigm, many of them wholeheartedly embrace the idea of women's privileged position in environmental management and their closer connection to nature. Often they take ecofeminist thought (see Chapter 8) as a source of inspiration for their perspective on WED. It is noteworthy here that the work of Vandana Shiva

has had an important impact on the Northern environmental movement.¹¹ Many social movement-oriented NGOs subscribe to the notion of an intrinsically closer woman/nature connection, situated in the imperative for alternative development models based on changed North/South relations and different value systems. NGOs oriented strictly towards development work subscribe more to aid agency views.

Development agencies' conceptualization of WED

Mainstream development organizations' line of argumentation on WED is cast within the frame of an improvement of present development practice. Usually the neglect of women and destruction of the environment within the development process are compared. This argument basically stresses the institutional nature of the problem. If only women and the environment were considered in development practice the environmental crisis could be solved. Consideration of both 'poor Third World women' and the environment is seen as crucial for the attainment of sustainable development. The conceptualization of the woman/nature connection in this type of argument is often not explicit, but rather implied as 'special', that is, inherently closer than that between men and the environment. The sexual division of labour usually forms part of the argument: women depend on nature directly for survival because they collect fuel, fodder and so on for domestic use, while men are mainly engaged in cash crop production for the market. Women's increased workload due to environmental degradation is another important element in this argument, which in practice leads to a call for the implementation of more women's development projects in fields related to the use of natural resources. Rarely is a connection made between macro-economic and political processes: overconsumption of natural resources by the few in the North and poverty of the many in the South.

In both the Mies/Shiva and many NGOs arguments and those propagated by development agencies, women's and environmental interests to a certain extent become identical: the cause of the restoration of the environment becomes the cause of (poor Third World) women. The two lines of argument differ in their proposed solution to environmental degradation: on the one hand that the basic parameters of the development model need to be radically rethought; and on the other that they simply need to be improved.

Within the UNCED process, during the second Miami Conference, these two positions merged into a united critical stand against the dominant development model by women worldwide.

Of interest for the evolution of the WED debate is the shifting image of poor Southern women as the 'Poor Third World Woman' manifested mainly in Western development media (Häusler 1990). But, whereas the image of poor Third World women in the mid to late 1980s typified them

as victims of the environmental crisis, more recently the emphasis was put on their strength (see Davidson in OECD/DAC WID, 1990). Recent WED publications depict women as privileged environmental managers because of their intimate knowledge of natural processes due to their closer relationship with nature: therefore, women are seen as the answer to the crisis; women have the solutions; they are privileged knowers of natural processes.

This valorization of women's ways of knowing may seem positive to us, but the accuracy of promoting them as exclusive and privileged knowers of natural processes is doubtful. This issue is somewhat problematic because, in the rural economies of the South, men also possess such knowledge, except related more closely to their own traditional areas of work.

Within the developmentalist framework women are seen as *the most valuable resource* in the process towards achieving sustainable development. 'Current wisdom is to see women not just as victims but as major local assets to be harnessed in the interests of better environmental management' (Davidson in OECD/DAC WID, 1990:5).

The imagery of women as 'valuable resources' and 'assets' has now prompted development planners to seriously consider women's roles in environmental projects and in virtually all environment-related project documents there is at least rhetoric about women, but the instrumentalization of women for the sustainable use of the environment and environmental recovery needs to be seriously questioned.

As indicated earlier, experience derived from involving women in environmental projects such as tree plantations shows that the end result is ambiguous: while they invest their valuable time planting and weeding tree plantations, they have no legal control over the resources created. Women rarely benefit from tree planting schemes involving pine or eucalypts, for example, because these trees are unsuitable for local use; but when the trees are sold men reap the benefits and get the money. Hence, the imperative for women's involvement in environmental projects clashes with the market orientation propagated in most development projects.

In response to these difficulties Davidson (ibid) asserted that women's participation in environmental projects must be complemented by strategic policies to ensure their involvement in all stages of development projects and thus increase their access and control over resources, training, education and family planning. In this way sustainable development can be achieved. Hence, environmental projects will eventually facilitate women's empowerment in society. In this line of argument women's empowerment, understood as their increased access and control over their bodies and resources, is yet further evidence of the interlinking and

common interests both of women and the environment: women care for the environment and this eventually facilitates their empowerment. Wangari Maathai, for example, uses this argument in her booklet on the Greenbelt Movement (Maathai 1988). This Movement's primary concern is to restore the environment in the rural areas of Kenya; as a welcome byproduct tree planting will facilitate women's empowerment because they can show that they have a valuable contribution to make to the economy, which in turn will give them confidence and status in their own communities and in society at large.¹²

In a specific situation women's initiatives may lead to an improvement in the environment as well as their empowerment, but to define this as a replicable and normative procedure seems questionable. It would simply reinforce the notion that if only women were involved in environmental projects the crisis could be overcome. The wider social, political and economic changes needed in order to arrive at a sustainable mode of development become secondary or are evaded.

For movements in the South, such as Chipko and Greenbelt, the assumption of an inherent women/nature connection as a basis for political action is acceptable because it accords with traditional notions of women as 'natural' carers and nurturers in the rural societies in which they originate. It must also be noted that neither movement sees itself as exclusively a women's, let alone a feminist movement. From our perspective, the problem with these movements' approaches is that women's empowerment has to take place within the confines of the traditional sexual division of labour and gender ideologies. Yet, for example, to compensate for gender-specific ways in which women suffer from environmental deterioration might necessitate a change in the sexual division of labour resulting in men taking on traditionally female tasks. Also, for women who are de facto household heads, existing gender ideologies are often an impediment to their assumption of the legal position as head of household, thus making them even more vulnerable and subject to ostracization within their own societies in absence of the male head of household.

Criticism of the WED approach expounded by Shiva (1989) and subscribed to by many NGOs, North and South, comes largely from members of Northern women's (and environmental) movements who, for some decades, have grappled with the woman/nature connection in their emancipatory struggles. These, mainly Northern, critics argue that to equate women with nature has reinforced women's continued subordination to men. While in the South's cultures the male/female relation has traditionally often been seen as complementary, in the North's perspective this relation has been one of superiority/inferiority since the middle ages. Therefore women from the South find identifying with nature less difficult and hence use this type of argument as a basis for

their struggles. Nevertheless, there have been important initiatives by Northern women, for example, the Greenham Common actions or the campaigns organized by the Women's Environmental Network in the United Kingdom, which take their inspiration from an inherently close woman/nature connection.

From within the development context and in a different vein, Melissa Leach (1991) takes the approach of gender and development, GAD, described above, as a point of departure for her WED argument. She argues that more appropriate development policy-making is needed and sees the woman/nature link in a differentiated way. Leach examines gender relations, not simply women, and how they interact with the responsibilities, rights and activities in natural resource management and use over time. She analyses a case study from Sierra Leone where the introduction of cocoa and coffee cash crop production altered the whole pattern of agricultural production. By demonstrating the changes effected on household rice production, time allocation of different groups, land use rights and resource use access on the one hand, and gender relations on the other, she is able to show their interdependent nature. This approach allows for an identification of differences between groups of women as well as men, which a focus on women alone would obscure.

From the environmental angle, it is possible to see how changing gender relations – such as in control over crops or money – alter resource management practices, with tangible ecological effects. From the gender angle, looking at environmental change from a micro-political economy perspective provides the useful opportunity to analyze gender relations in a way which puts resource issues right up front (Leach 1991:15).

In conclusion she recommends participatory planning procedures for development projects and for arising social conflicts to be resolved by the different men's, women's and mixed interest groups.

As mentioned earlier, the stress on improvement of development practice advocated by this gender-focused approach neglects such dimensions of the ecological crisis as international economic processes, unfavourable exchange rate mechanisms and terms of trade that favour the affluent North. There is no room to question the epistemological assumptions underlying the dominant mode of development. The silence about the need for wider transformations in development that could facilitate a sustainable development model on a global level serves basically to preserve the status quo by slightly improving the present model. Leach's analysis, however, supports the arguments in Chapter 1, in which we point out that the interconnections between women, the environment and sustainable development are not based on the sex of the actors alone. The focus of the WED debate on the woman/nature and

man/nature connections, obscures the dynamic aspects of environmental degradation and how it affects different groups, women as well as men, over time. Besides the wider changes necessary to halt environmental destruction in both the South and the North, the process of environmental recovery is as much women's task as it is men's. Leach's propositions represent an important input into the improvement of development project procedures and hence, are an important element for prospective transformations from within mainstream development agencies.

Bina Agarwal (1991) develops an approach to WED that encompasses many elements of the WED debate outlined above in a holistic way. She combines the levels of material reality and ideological constructs of meanings in her analysis of the Indian experience of the environmental crisis, its causes, effects and responses to it. She argues that women are both victims of this crisis in gender-specific ways as well as important actors in resolving it. Agarwal, like Shiva, draws on experience in India, but unlike Shiva she asserts the need to contextualize the fact that poor rural women have emerged as main actors in the environmental movements in India because, due to their marginality, they have had to maintain a reciprocal link with nature. For Agarwal, the woman/nature link has been socially and culturally constructed, not biologically determined (Agarwal 1989:60).

the link between women and the environment can be seen as structured by a given gender and class (caste/race) organization of production, reproduction and distribution. Ideological constructions such as of gender, of nature and of the relationship between the two, may be seen as (interactively) a part of this structuring, but not the whole of it. This perspective I term feminist environmentalism (Agarwal 1991:8).

From this position Agarwal calls for struggles over material as well as symbolic resources. She suggests as a two-pronged strategy the need to grapple with groups who control resources, and ways of thinking about resources, with the help of media, educational, religious and legal institutions. Feminists, she suggests, should challenge and transform notions about gender as well as struggling against the actual sexual division of labour; and environmentalists should challenge and transform the representations of the relationship between nature and people as well as the actual methods of appropriating natural resources for the benefit of the few. She concludes by stressing the need for a transformative rather than a welfarist approach to economic development.

Agarwal's argument is most in line with our own thinking on WED because she contextualizes the material situation of women within the ideological construction of the woman/nature connection, pointing out

that in reality this construct caters to certain vested interests.

From yet another point of departure, the Development with Women for a New Era (DAWN) network presented another Southern women's position in their publication *Environment and Development: Grass Roots Women's Perspective* (Wiltshire 1992), which was specifically prepared for UNCED. Refraining from an explicit elaboration on their understanding of the woman/nature connection, DAWN's position is predominantly based on an analysis of global economic processes as perceived by Southern women: overconsumption in the North and by elites in the South coupled with excessive military spending, unfavourable terms of trade, the debt crisis, structural adjustment programmes and export-oriented production increasing the burden on the environment in the South.¹³ Starting from an analysis of women's experiences of environmental degradation in different regions in the South, Wiltshire contests the Northern developmentalist myth that the poor are destroying their environment, that population growth is responsible for environmental degradation, and that local people in the South need to be taught by Northern 'experts' how to recover their environment. Her critique concludes with an appeal to include women in environmental policy-making, planning and programming because of their 'special' environmental knowledge. Wiltshire refrains from romanticizing the woman/nature connection, but a certain essentialism can be read into earlier DAWN statements on the 'poor Third World woman' as the intersection of all forms of domination – based on sex, nationality, race, class and caste – resulting in her privileged perspective in defining parameters for an alternative development paradigm (see Chapter 6).

The thrust of Wiltshire's argument however, is an attack on the international economic order and affluent lifestyles in the North, and of elites in the South. Wiltshire stresses the imperative for democratic, decentralized and people-centred approaches to natural resource use. This basis for 'material as well as spiritual well being, cultural integrity and human rights will yield more effective and long term results for balanced population growth and sustainable development' (Wiltshire 1992:24).

WED and the UNCED process

As indicated earlier, an increasingly transformative view on women, the environment and sustainable development entered the UN system within the UNCED preparatory process. In the proceedings of the 'Women and Children First' workshop (May 1991) the need for 'a new development paradigm is explicitly stated (UNCED 1991:37). Participants from the North and the South were representatives from different UN organizations, from universities, research institutions and development agencies. A vision statement in the workshop proceedings makes a

number of recommendations for far-reaching changes, including an end to violence, militarization, economic growth, misdirection of science, technology and industry, oppressive economic, social and political structures, to the destruction of basic human and ethical values and to the general exclusion of women's concerns.

We are determined to change the a-symmetric and dominant relationship of the economy with nature, of men with women, and of the North with the South. Our aim is nothing less than a revolution on behalf of women, children and the environment (ibid:35).

The draft decision for consideration of the Third Preparatory Committee to UNCED in article 281 also called for 'an end to a developmentally unsustainable world order and trend and a replacement by a new development paradigm that takes into account the rights of people, especially women and children' (UNCED 1991:37).

The process set in motion within the UNCED preparatory process by women from NGOs, aid agencies, research institutions and grassroots action groups which culminated in the Miami conferences, especially the 'World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet' and the drafting of the Women's Action Agenda 21, represents a historical landmark. Despite their widely differing positions, political persuasion and geographical origin, women collectively agreed to challenge the dominant paradigm of development. In Miami, women asserted the centrality of people in the development process as the point of departure for their political analysis of access, use and distribution of natural resources at all levels from the household to the international level. The global developmental and environmental problems were summarized as wasteful overconsumption in the developed world, inappropriate development leading to debt and structural adjustment in the South, increased poverty and continued land and forest degradation, environmental damage, pollution, and toxic wastes, population growth, creation of ecological refugees and last but not least, excessive war and military spending associated with environmental damage. The Women's Action Agenda 21, based on the principles of global equity, resource ethics and empowerment of women, represents the basis for a paradigmatic shift in development as demanded by women globally, and provides detailed recommendations on how to deal with the problems. In Miami women demanded the right to bring their perspectives, values, skills and experiences into policy-making on all levels and to be on an equal footing with men in UNCED and beyond. They called for a 'Healthy Planet' in which participatory democracy, open access to information, accountability, ethical action, justice and full participation of women are realized. They challenged the present development model with its economic conception of sustainability and suggested a more holistic

notion of politically, socially and culturally sustainable development, that is, sustainable livelihoods for all.

The Miami Conferences represent a major breakthrough because for the first time ever women across political/geographical, class, race, professional and institutional divides came up with a critique of development and a collective position on the environmental crisis, arrived at in a participatory and democratic process. The problem was no longer seen as confined to the South but as global; the global crisis was identified in its regionally different manifestations. Separate statements in the workshop proceedings (World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet 1992) by women from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North America, Europe, the Pacific as well as women from the South, women of colour from North America and indigenous women outlined the different ways people and the environment suffer from the global crisis in their regions.

The Planeta Femea in Rio de Janeiro 1992 did not go beyond what was achieved in Miami. The spirit of the women's conference was clearly one of enthusiasm and solidarity and women had every reason to celebrate their success in asserting their presence at the NGO Forum. Nevertheless, the event revealed many problems that, despite the women's achievement in asserting their presence within the UNCED process, remain to be dealt with in the future. One was the overly simple assumption of the existence of a global sisterhood and the associated silence about problems related to differences between women. Possibly, this was because, while aware of the pressing need for cross-cultural alliances, the short run-up to UNCED left no time to work out the practical implications of their own beliefs. Political differences came to the fore, but were not openly addressed. The spectrum of positions ranged from demanding equality for women in all matters relating to the environment (held by Bella Abzug, chairperson of IPAC and a central figure in the forum), to rejecting the Western development model in its entirety (expressed by many DAWN women, in particular, its present chairperson Peggy Antrobus). Planeta Femea proceedings were sometimes dominated by women who had been heavily involved in the UNCED preparatory process and saw the urgent need to tactically ensure women's input into mass media and the main conference at the cost of silencing others. Some women, notably Brazilian women of colour, felt marginalized in the forum because they were not given enough space for expression. Related to these was the relegation of most problems to the other 'others': governments, some environmentalists, economic and political systems, and men.

Because of these impediments, without an equivalent degree of critical discussion, there were no positive confrontations of differences among women. Instead, there was a masked tendency to emphasize commonalities between women, resulting in an implicitly essentialist

position – women as closer to nature than men – as the basis for a collective position. Some women did see themselves as better environmental managers than men, and as privileged knowers about the environment, but this position was not propagated in a naive way, rather there was a more or less tacit assumption that women see themselves as nurturers of the planet, as people who ‘care’. As Bella Abzug stated repeatedly, women ‘care’, therefore they have the right to be heard when the future of the planet is at stake. Arguing that women have a special connection with the environment has undeniably had the effect of forcefully bringing out their right to be heard by other actors involved in the environmental debate and within the UNCED preparatory process. Yet, this position, as we have argued earlier, will have to be problematized in the future for building politically effective alliances between women globally; as well as between women’s and environmental, developmental and other movements.

Planeta Femea proceedings were somewhat disappointing in so far as the participating women had done little concrete strategizing for the future. The workshop on consumerism was a notable exception because here women made some concrete proposals for future action and strategies. One of the major impediments was that the emerging WED movement lacked a strong grassroots base. Participants in the second Miami Conference, who had arrived at a common position, were mainly women from developmental, environmental, reproductive rights and feminist groups as well as women from academia.

It is imperative for women globally to increase networking and collective strategizing, despite inevitable differences, in order to maintain the momentum created in Miami. At the same time women must increasingly form coalitions with environmental and other movements on specific issues; women taking part in these movements need to address the male bias inherent in the groups they are part of. Events at the 1992 Global Forum certainly made clear that a major task ahead for women will be to push for women’s perspectives and needs to be considered not only in theory, but also in practice by governments as well as NGOs.

But women involved in this process must take care to avoid reproducing hierarchies and reversing dualisms in the process of forming new coalitions. New types of politics and non-dominating epistemologies are essential in order to effectively address the continuous spread of patterns of domination. It is here that we hope to contribute to the ongoing WED debate by offering our analysis and pointing to the in-depth arguments and discussions which so far have not been articulated. Important lessons can be drawn from the experiences in collective strategizing between the women’s movements, feminist politicians and feminist bureaucrats who succeeded in placing women’s concerns on the UN agenda since the early 1970s

(see for example Lycklama, Testino, Vargas, Wieringa, forthcoming).

These are some of the major challenges for women involved in the post-UNCED process globally. Before the 1995 Women and Development Conference in Beijing, where a common platform on women and the environment is also planned, there is time to develop the potential to mark a period of historical changes within the global women's movement.

Notes

1. Some Northern women, too, were present at the founding meeting of DAWN. See Chapter 6 for an outline and critical review of DAWN's position.
2. For a critique of Community Forestry see Häusler (1991).
3. FAO, 1978, Forestry for Local Community Development, Forestry Papers No. 7 Rome.
4. The Greenbelt Movement is based in Kenya and has gained wide publicity through its leader, Wangari Maathai after the 1985 Nairobi Conference. The goal of the organization is to establish public green belts and fuel wood plots by local people, especially women, in the spirit of self reliance. The objectives of environmental recovery go hand in hand with local women's empowerment as they actively engage in improving their own as well as environmental conditions in their area.
5. The other four were food security and forestry, energy, industrialisation and human settlements, international environment and economic relations.
6. For the full definition and a discussion of the concept of sustainable development see Chapter 7.
7. For a more detailed account of how women gained access to UNCED see Corinne Wacker's article in WIDE (1992, 1:12-15).
8. WorldWIDE publishes a global directory of women professionals working in environment-related disciplines.
9. For a report on women's input into the Paris Conference see Celine Ostin, in WIDE (1992, 1:26-7).
10. Recently, Shiva has concentrated her critique on biotechnology approaching it from a WED perspective by pointing out that the control over biodiversity was traditionally women's domain; women for example selected seeds for the next year's crop. Patenting of seeds brings an end to reproducing seeds within the rural household, which in turn, also contributes to women's disempowerment and farmers' poverty.
11. Shiva herself pointed out in a presentation during an IPAC study day held in June of 1991 in Amsterdam that hitherto she had addressed mostly male representatives of the environmental movement in the Netherlands and that this was the first time that she spoke there before a female audience.
12. It is important to note that Maathai has tactically used her prominent position