

## **"Historical View on the Gender Issues in the Environment Sector"**

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- As President of IUCN - The World Conservation Union, as former Minister of the Environment and as a woman that promotes the concept of Sustainable Development in Latin America, it's my pleasure to address you tonight.
- When Ecuador was negotiating the Peace Agreement with Peru in 1998, a leader of the women's movement said during a Policy Dialogue: "You can't exclude women from this Dialogue; not only are we 50% of the population, but the mothers of the other 50%". There wasn't a woman in Ecuador who didn't support the cause of Peace.
- The topic that convenes us to this meeting is Environment, and today at the beginning of a new millennium, we cannot discuss environment without relating it to Peace, Equity, Poverty, Social Justice and Security. Environment is - in a way - the linking thread. Mismanagement and degradation of natural resources and the environment degenerate a society - creates the conditions that originate fear, uncertainty and often despair. We cannot build hope and social goals in a context where basic needs are not satisfied.
- In this *Historical View on the Gender Issues in the Environmental Sector* I will go only 30 years back:
  - While in 1972 there were hardly any women leading the Environmental Agenda from government (no Ministries of the Environment then), and no more than a handful directed Institutes for the Environment in 1992, there are 38 in 2002 - 22 of which are here today. This is real power!
  - It might be important to reflect on the possible arguments behind the decisions to appoint women as Ministers of the Environment:
    - Is it because budgets are always tight and we can do a lot with very little?
    - Is it because our work continues to depend so much on voluntarism and women know how to stimulate voluntary work?
    - It is because women's sensitivity is a driver in the passion that environmental work requires? I leave these as questions - but it would be interesting to find out.
    - What is true however is that you, Ministers of the Environment, are fully aware that in addition to those three possible considerations, you have the power to promote real change.
- Work on gender issues has been growing in intensity during the last 30 years - and its influence during the last decade has been even more important to the environment agenda. I had the privilege to work in the official preparatory process of the Rio Conference and was therefore able to closely follow the contribution of women's groups to shaping Agenda 21, the Conventions of Biodiversity and Climate Change and the Forest principles.
- Women did not stop at that. Their dedication to the implementation of these agreements has been invaluable. Through silent and unrecognized work at local community level to high level decision makers. The lack of acceptance at the official

level of the Earth Charter Principles did not constitute an obstacle. Women worldwide played a decisive role in moving its debate and acceptance of its final text.

- Intensity of work and growth in the number of projects around the world have also implied more visibility on the role of women in the Environmental Agenda:
  - Media has highlighted the important links of women and the environment, increasing awareness of the general public
  - Decision makers of other sectors in governments and inter-governmental organizations have incorporated the gender discussion into their agendas and programs, and
  - National policies related to gender have, in different degrees, evolved.
- Today the discussion and analysis of gender has moved from being a sectoral or thematic debate to a wider cross cutting issue. From the discussion about women, to the discussion of women. A clear recognition that women are part of every development process.
- During the last decade Women's groups have also increased their work on analysis that relates to present production and consumption patterns to environment. Globalization of the economy in isolation, without the incorporation of globalized social and environmental goals is unsustainable. Women worldwide see this as a tremendous threat to their local societies and to the Planet.
- In trying to identify the sector that has been able to practice Sustainable Development, to create real change, we need to recognize achievements at the local Level. Local Authorities, several of whom are women, have been actors of change. It's an important platform.
- Achievements up to now are like the current of a wide and quiet river - it appears to be harmless, but nothing can stop it. One drop after the other, can break a stone.
- I have been asked to look back - I prefer to look forward, so excuse my intrusion in bringing forward some of what I consider to be the main challenges for Johannesburg and the next decade in the context of environment:

## **Challenges**

- In relation to Biodiversity:
  - The discussion about the equitable sharing of benefits obtained from genetic resources is incomplete. It's not only a matter of participation in their access, use and control. Today's language and reality refer to "communities" - it's not enough. Diversity does not only refer to nature: it also refers to users, models, priorities and needs. Women are not being the beneficiaries of these processes. In payments for environmental services for example, are women explicitly mentioned? No.
  - Management Plans, land use planning must incorporate language that differentiates the way in which women should benefit from planning to implementation.

- General principles of gender equity must be translated into concrete actions: policies, laws and programs must be implemented putting these principles in practice
- It's not a matter of choosing whether bottom-up or top-down approach is more important. Both are equally important, but the comparative advantage of this group is in the potential to influence decision makers at the top, in promoting policies that identify and incorporate women and women's needs in development processes.
- A majority of women around the world hold an enormous power: traditional knowledge. They have a direct influence in their household and societies. But their potential is not yet being properly recognized. Acknowledgement of their capacity to influence the society in which they live is essential.
- Empowerment has different manifestations in different cultures. There are no recipes, no global solutions. But there is a global principle: solidarity. Let's continue here also the debate of how we can support each other.
- We, the policy makers need to influence others, especially at the national level. From Heads of State to colleagues; from those dealing with economics to those dealing with science in technology. And there are no better allies than men who believe and support women's important role in development.
- There is no way out of poverty and no possibility to build the road to Sustainable Development without education. Access to formal basic and high-level education and to information is a priority. Capacity building to face the opportunities of the modern world is often excluding women in many communities.
- Voluntarism is an asset of society. Proper recognition must be given to it and to its contribution to development. It's closely linked to basic human values such as solidarity, responsibility and love. National policies should promote it.

## **Conclusions**

- There is no going back - gains have marked and made a difference in national and international contexts. Our challenge is not to give up.
- IUCN - The World Conservation Union, has for more than a decade dedicated efforts and resources to promote this debate - not enough but sufficient to be aware that we need to continue and increase our work, and we are ready to support your goals as a technical team. Our presence in most of the countries of the world allows us to contribute to your agendas taking into account local cultures, respecting differences in approach and responding to the needs as defined by national processes.
- Many of us have carefully watched the achievements and failures since the Earth Summit in 1992. We all look at Johannesburg as another step in a ladder climbing towards a better world. From Stockholm 30 years ago, to Rio 10 years ago and to Johannesburg in August there is a long and positive story to tell. How much are we ready to challenge ourselves?
- I would like to comment on the too often used North - South term. I try to avoid its use in moments created around the concept of integration. What about referring to us as women who have different and complimentary backgrounds and experiences, building a common agenda?

- Finally, it's important that we ask ourselves how much of a role we, women can play in defining the Earth as a Planet and not as a Market. The ethical principles outlined in the Earth Charter are the basis for such definition.
- Women's international day is tomorrow, March 8 - let's use it to come out of this meeting with a strong message and a proposal for action.

Thank you Minister Satu Hassi for having invited us to this meeting.