

## • Women and environment

People don't often think of gender issues when they think of the environment, but in fact sustainable development in many of the world's most <sup>different type of life found on earth / genetic variation</sup> bio-diverse regions has a lot to do with women's health and well-being. "Women play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy and often have a <sup>deep</sup> profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them" World Bank   
*existing or happening in same period*

The environment today is a pressing global challenge facing our world, and therefore it is essential to focus on <sup>to plead something in favour</sup> advocacy towards understanding the linkages between gender and a variety of environmental/sustainable development topics (i.e. the differential cause and effect of environmental degradation on men and women and importantly, the role of women as agents of change in regards to mitigation and adaptation to the changing environment.) <sup>make something less severe</sup> Men and women use resources differently and have different roles in society. To be effective, strategies to preserve the environment must therefore pay close attention to the impact of disparities between women and men on access to resources and opportunities. On the other hand, gender equality is a development objective in its own right, and sustainable development strategies must aim to foster women's empowerment and effective participation. This implies involving women and men as partners and allies in formulating and pursuing strategies for more equal societies

Dependent as they are on the environment to feed their families and eke out a living, the world's poorest people suffer the most from changes in climate and the degradation of natural resources. The world's poorest inhabitants six out of ten of whom are female are therefore most severely affected by increasingly longer droughts, more severe storms and flooding, species depletion, soil degradation, deforestation, and other negative alterations to the natural environment.

While changes in the environment affect everyone, they affect men and women differently. Women's and girls' traditional responsibilities as food growers, water and fuel gatherers, and caregivers connect them intimately to available natural resources and the climate, making them more vulnerable to environmental hardships.

### What do you mean by "the environment"?

The environment is everything around you, indoors or outdoors. The air you breathe, water you drink, the ground you walk on, and food you eat are all part of your environment. It's important that you know what things in the environment can affect your health and what you can do to help **protect yourself and your family.**

## Why sex and gender matter in terms of health and the environment?

The need for a sex- and gender-based analysis of environmental effects on health is urgent. Whether it's climate change or our daily exposure to toxins in the air, water or food, the environment affects our health, and the effects are different for women and men. Since the 1930s, scientists have produced an impressive body of evidence to show the different effects of toxic exposures on women and men. And in recent years, women are finally beginning to be heard on the international scene about the impacts of climate change demanding input into decision-making around climate change that recognizes the different impacts on women and men, girls and boys

### How can the environment affect women's health?

Chemicals and other substances in the environment can cause serious health problems in women, such as cancer, lung disease, or reproductive system problems. They can also make health conditions worse. Scientists are studying the ways toxins in the environment may play a role in conditions such as breast cancer, endometriosis, and menopause.

Environmental toxins can cause medical problems that are difficult for the average doctor to identify and treat. Milder, environmentally induced illnesses are all around us and include anxiety, allergies, autoimmunity and intolerances to chemicals. The toxins found in pesticides, solvents, and heavy metals and especially those produced by indoor mold can hit women especially hard. Women are four times more likely to exhibit symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Chemical Sensitivity than are men. Worse, it can be overwhelming for people (particularly those who are already ill) to learn about living a less toxic lifestyle and avoiding environmental contaminants. Environmental Medicine offers specific answers by giving both doctors and patients the tools to treat illnesses caused by toxic exposures. Sadly, very few people learn about Environmental Medicine until they are on health's door.

### How can the environment affect children's health?

Many types of environmental exposures are more harmful for children than for adults. There are many reasons for this:

- Relative to their body weight, children eat, breathe, and drink more than adults do. So children take in higher concentrations of any toxins in their food, water, or air.
- As organs develop, they are more likely to be damaged by exposure to toxins.

- The ways that toxins are removed from the body are not fully developed in children.
- Children spend more time outdoors, where they may be exposed to outdoor air pollution and ultraviolet radiation.
- Children do more intense physical activity, causing them to breathe air pollutants more deeply into their lungs.
- Young children tend to put their hands, dirt, or objects into their mouths.

### **How can the environment affect women who are pregnant or nursing?**

Exposure to some toxic substances including lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, pesticides, solvents and household chemicals can increase the risk of miscarriage, preterm birth, and other pregnancy complications. These and other environmental toxins can also harm the developing bodies of fetuses and infants. Women who are pregnant or nursing or who plan to become pregnant should take special care to avoid exposure to certain chemicals discussed here.

### **How can the environment affect older women?**

Pollutants in the environment can contribute to some illnesses that are more common in older adults. Indoor and outdoor air pollution can aggravate the symptoms of cardiovascular and lung diseases, including high blood pressure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and asthma. These conditions are more common in women over the age of 50 than in men over 50.

Older adults may be more susceptible to the health effects of toxic chemicals. People who are exposed to pollutants over the course of a lifetime may have health problems when they are older. For instance, long-term exposure to pesticides may cause cancer or dementia. Lead is a toxic metal that may be stored in bones. In postmenopausal women who were exposed to lead early in life, bone loss can release lead into the bloodstream. This may cause kidney damage, increase the risk of high blood pressure, and decrease cognitive functions.

### **Food Security**

Food security implies the fulfillment of essential food needs of the population of a country. This requires an increase in food production relative to the country's population; improvement in per capita food supplies; and controlled and stable food prices. However, food security alone is not sufficient to improve the nutritional status of individuals [Alderman (1993); Alderman and Garcia (1993); Malik and Malik (1993); and Malik (1994)]. Various household characteristics, such as, household income, household consumption patterns, household's living condition, and tastes and preferences are the

determining factors of individuals' nutritional standard in the family. The Rome Declaration of Wc. Food Summit (1996) described three major dimensions of food security as availability, accessibility, and sustainability. The implications of these three dimensions at national, household and within household level are different

### Food Security and Gender

Recognizing the role of women as food producers and managers of household food security; access and control of food in the household; nutrition; tools for analyzing gender within food security initiatives.

Women in their roles as producers and managers of household food security often bear primary responsibility for maintaining household consumption and nutrition in the face of mounting costs. However they are often <sup>hinder</sup>impeded in their efforts by limited access to assets, traditional norms, and the challenges posed by their often <sup>competition</sup>competing roles

In developing countries, rural women and men play different roles in guaranteeing food security for their households and communities. While men grow mainly field crops, women are usually responsible for growing and preparing most of the food consumed in the home and raising small livestock, which provides protein.

Rural women also carry out most home food processing, which ensures a diverse diet, minimizes losses and provides marketable products. Women are more likely to spend their incomes on food and children's needs - research has shown that a child's chances of survival increase by 20% when the mother controls the household budget. Women, therefore, play a decisive role in food security, dietary diversity and children's health.

But gender inequalities in control of livelihood assets limit women's food production. In Ghana, studies found that insecure access to land led women farmers to practice shorter <sup>unutilized</sup>fallow periods than men, which reduced their yields, income and the availability of food for the household. In sub-Saharan Africa, diseases such as HIV/AIDS force women to assume greater caretaking roles, leaving them less time to grow and prepare food.

Women's access to education is also a determining factor in levels of nutrition and child health. Studies from Africa show that children of mothers who have spent five years in primary education are 40% more likely to live beyond the age of five.

• Having an adequate supply of food does not automatically translate into adequate levels of nutrition. In many societies women and girls eat the food remaining after the male family members have eaten. Women, girls, the sick and disabled are the main victims of this "food discrimination", which results in chronic under nutrition and ill-health.

The physiological needs of pregnant and lactating women also make them more susceptible to <sup>of proper</sup> malnutrition and <sup>essential</sup> micronutrient deficiencies. Twice as many women suffer from malnutrition as men, and girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys. Maternal health is crucial for child survival - an undernourished mother is more likely to deliver an infant with low birth weight, significantly increasing its risk of dying.

Good nutrition and health depends on the safety of the food consumed contamination leads to illnesses such as diarrhea that are a major cause of illness and death in children. Efforts to improve food safety must take into account existing gender roles in the food chain training for women in hygiene and sanitation can make an immediate contribution to household and community health.

Food and Agricultural organization of United Nation estimates that around one billion people are undernourished, and that each year more than three million children die from under nutrition before their fifth birthday. Micronutrient deficiencies, which affect about two billion people, lead to poor growth, blindness, increased severity of infections and sometimes death.

The root causes of world hunger - including rural poverty, population growth and environmental degradation - are exacerbated by the global economic slowdown, volatile food prices and the impact of climate change.

*Food Agriculture Org*

#### **FAO's targets 2008-2013**

To mainstream gender equity in its programs for improved food security and nutrition, FAO has set itself the following targets to 2013:

#### **Nutrition policy**

Promote sector policies and programs for nutritional improvement at national and community-levels that recognize gender-defined needs, opportunities and constraints.

## **nutrition education**

Develop gender-sensitive nutrition education initiatives, training programs and materials that target men, women, girls and boys.

## **Food quality and safety**

To reduce disease outbreaks caused by home-prepared food, develop awareness and educational materials on household handling of food.

## **Street foods**

Improve the quality and safety of street foods through training for men and women vendors in basic hygiene.

## **Gender-specific data**

Promote assessments of nutrient requirements, dietary intakes and nutritional status that analyze gender, age and development stage.

## **Situation In Pakistan**

In Pakistan, the aggregate levels of per capita food production, per capita food availability, per capita income and average calorie and protein intake has increased and the incidence of household poverty fell over the period up to 1990. Yet the levels of female and child malnutrition increased over the same period [Malik and Malik (1993); Alderman (1993); Alderman and Garcia (1993); Malik (1994); and Khan, et al (1996)]. The level of household income and prevailing market prices play an important role in making a household food secure. According to the Household Integrated Economic Survey (1992-93), the average monthly income of 67 percent (74 percent in rural areas and 48 percent in urban areas) is below Rs. 3500. In rural areas, 55 percent households earn less than Rs. 2500 per month. A major proportion of total expenditure is devoted to food items. This indicates a high incidence of food poverty. The poverty line based on the per capita calorie intake indicates that nearly 17 percent of the total households of Pakistan were not able to fulfil their caloric requirements in 1990- 91 [Malik (1994a)]. The estimates show that Rs. 320 per adult equivalent per month were required in that year to fulfil the minimum caloric requirement whereas the average monthly income of 41 percent of households was less than Rs. 2000 and the average household size was 6.6 persons during that year.

- Despite a decline in food poverty in recent years, no signs of improvement have been noted in child nutrition; and calorie, protein and iron intake of pregnant and lactating women [see National Health Survey of Pakistan (1998) and Jafri (1999)]. Malik (1994) concludes that due to the price instability of essential food items, the incidence of malnutrition and poverty is growing in Pakistan. He pointed out that nutritional security should be recognized as a policy objective that is distinct from food security and thus highlighted the importance of intra household distribution issues in Pakistan.

### **Intra-household Resource Allocation and Food Security**

The relationship between food security and intra-household resource allocation merits attention in developing countries. The gender bias in the allocation of resources within a household is an important component of this relationship in these countries. Within a family, parents may have different preferences with respect to investment in boys and girls depending upon from where they can receive higher returns to these investments. Boys are generally considered as a source of future security for the parents, and hence, are more likely to be preferred. They are desired and valued for carrying forward the family name and providing security to their parents in old age. On the other hand, the daughters move to another family after marriage and hence investing in their education is perceived to have no economic and social benefits to the family, especially in rural areas. These biased preferences are reflected in the lifelong neglect of women in terms of their extremely low status that not only limits their access to good nutrition, health, education and employment opportunities but also restricts their taking part in key household decisions.

Women's involvement in two dimensions of food security, i.e., availability and accessibility is broadly cited in the literature. In most of the developing countries, women remain involved in various stages of agricultural production not only in family farms but also in others farms in the village. Because of their responsibilities of fetching water, collecting fodder, firewood and crop residue, grazing animals, and collecting plants and herbs for either own use or to sell as food or medicine, they remain closely associated with natural resources and therefore have better knowledge about them. It has also been observed that women devote more resources under their control towards improving household concerns related to food security as compared with men. [Thomas (1990); and Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad, and Pena (1995)].

Sustainability is the third dimension of food security that provides an insight into the resource distribution part of the intra-household resource allocation. The existence of vast gender disparities in terms of literacy rate, health status, labour force participation, and the share of earned income indicates an implicit bias against women in the distribution of household resources in most of the

developing countries. The extent of gender bias is more pronounced in South Asia. Haq (1997) reports a considerably low value of Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for this region, only 0.41 and 0.23, respectively. The value of GDI for Pakistan is 0.383 that is higher than Bangladesh (0.336) and Nepal (0.308) and lower than India (0.410), Maldives (0.599) and Sri Lanka (0.699). The value of GEM is found to be the lowest for Pakistan among the five countries that indicates the lack of opportunities for women to participate in economic and political activities as compare with men.

High incidence of poverty and resultant malnutrition indicates the prevalence of food insecurity in Pakistan. Despite a considerable increase in per capita income and per capita food availability, and decline in the overall levels of poverty; the level of human resource development is extremely distressing. Understanding the dynamics of intra-household decision making is crucial not only for the effective design and implementation of welfare policies but also for their evaluation. Examining the intra-household dynamics would shed light on how resources are generated, controlled and distributed in a household. Due to the lack of appropriate data, this issue forms a black box in Pakistan's case. So gender sensitive policies and planning are needed to overcome the issues regarding food security.

*Making responsible decision that will reduce negative impact on the environment.  
→ protect natural world.*