

Policy impacts on women and environment

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Introduction

In a simpler time, not so long ago, environmentalists talked about saving forests for hiking, streams for rafting and clean air for the pure enjoyment of breathing it. Now, as the 1990s approach, the talk has turned to the science of survival—saving forests for oxygen, keeping streams from spreading toxic pollutants, cleaning the air to avoid catastrophic global warming. The threat of an environmental catalysm is replacing nuclear holocaust as the scariest menace to civilisation.¹

Environmental trends in the world today threaten to radically alter the planet, endangering the lives of many species including human beings. Africa is facing an environmental crisis of greater magnitude than ever before. Reversing Africa's decline in productivity will require carefully orchestrated national efforts to organise millions of people to plant trees and build soil conservation terraces and plan smaller families.²

The global and continental assessments and predictions of the situation of the environment for the last decade of the 20th century are as alarming as they are real. The 1990s will therefore be a critical decade for arresting and reversing the current trend of environmental degradation. The World Bank has suggested that no time should be lost in putting in place, country by country, environmental action plans and in mobilizing broadly based population support for their effective implementation.³

Environment here encompasses both the *natural* and *human* (social) environment. The natural environment (of rivers, lakes, forests, wildlife) interacts with the human environment of people and their creations to form the

total environment. In this interaction, human beings have throughout history striven to control the natural environment in order to serve their needs at any given period. It is in this context that governments design environmental policies aimed at ensuring that the natural environment serves the needs of society, while on the other hand ensuring that the latter does not destroy the former in the process.

Effective control of the environment requires well designed policies and infrastructure to facilitate the implementation of policies. Towards this end, the state, as the most supreme institution in any given society, is best placed to mobilize the necessary resources to design and ensure the implementation of national environmental policies. And in designing a national environment policy the underlying guideline should be that sustainable national development depends on the country's natural and human resources and how well they are managed and harmonized. This in turn reflects on the existing national policies and the level of public awareness of the need to conserve the natural resource environment.

The public should therefore be aware of the close dependence between their human and natural environment, that proper management of natural resources and conservation of the environment promotes opportunities for improved public health, nutrition, shelter, employment and generation of national wealth. The success of any programme (environmental or otherwise) largely depends on the target groups that are expected to participate and benefit from such a programme. How well those target groups participate in the implementation, how well their problems and the total environment of implementation is understood and incorporated in policy planning, largely determines the outcome of this effort. If women as a major target group in the implementation of environmental programmes are not adequately addressed in policy planning, the environment effort is unlikely to succeed.

Environment policy in Kenya

In Kenya, the need to conserve the natural environment was recognized by the post-colonial government quite early after independence. This was reflected in Sessional paper no. 10 of 1965, 'African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya', which set the basis for national planning in subsequent years. The paper summarized the government's environment policy position as follows.

The heritage of future generations depends on the adoption and implementation of policies designed to conserve natural resources and create the physical environment in which progress can be enjoyed. The thoughtless destruction of forests, vegetation, wildlife and productive land threatens our future and must be brought under control. A national land use policy must be created and physical planning must be extended from the towns and cities to

districts and rural areas. The conservation of water supplies and productive land through the maintenance of forests and windbreaks, proper methods of land cultivation, and prevention of fire and flood must be actively promoted by the government and the people must be fully informed and their cooperation ensured. The importance of wildlife to Kenya's future prosperity must be appreciated by everyone and national parks and reserves must be protected and preserved'.⁴

Despite this policy statement of intent, environmental issues were not placed high on the government's agenda during the 1960s. The government was preoccupied with the consolidation of the newly acquired political power and with promoting growth and stability of the economy. The government instituted measures to intensify export crop production and import substitution. These measures had major negative effects on the environment, and despite the government's promotion and reliance on the tourist industry as the second major foreign exchange earner after coffee and tea, environmental issues maintained a back seat during the 1960s.

Towards the end of the 1960s, however, several factors combined to force the Kenya government to move away from rhetoric to more forthright action in regard to environmental management. For one, the government had come to realize that any long-term sustainable growth of its two major foreign exchange earners—cash crops and tourism—was highly dependent on good environmental management. Secondly, the effects of environmental degradation that had begun in the colonial era were becoming more manifest with increased population and rapid expansion in agricultural land use and deforestation. Thus, the need for more concerted efforts in soil and water conservation and afforestation became urgent. Furthermore, issues of environmental management had by then become of major global concern and were being discussed in various international forums.

Thus in April 1971, the Kenya government set up an *ad hoc* Working Committee on Human Environment to review knowledge of the environment and conservation requirements of Kenya. The report arising from the work of this Committee was presented to the United Nations Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm, in 1972, and may have contributed to the decision by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1972 to locate the newly created United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi. This was followed by a similar siting in Nairobi of the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in 1975 and the UN Centre on Human Settlements in 1978. The Kenya government responded to these sittings by setting up, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Liaison Unit on environmental matters.

The increased government concern over environmental conservation management was reflected in the 1974–1978 Development Plan, which stated:

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The Government recognises the conservation of the environment is becoming increasingly important as the growth of population and the impact of development and technology bear on the capacity of the environment to sustain the use being made of it. The Government will therefore increase its conservation activities and, whenever possible, restore damaged environments. Initially this will involve enforcement of present conservation legislation, but in the long run, education to create a conservation minded population is the only lasting solution.⁵

The legislations which were enforced by the 1974–78 Development Plan related to conservation of soil, water, wildlife, fish resources, national parks and control of grass fires, industrial pollution, maritime oil pollution, water apportionment and pesticides.

In addition to the emphasis placed on implementing existing environmental programmes and legislations, the plan also emphasized the need to identify environmental problems, suggest conservation measures and evaluate the impact on the social environment of conservation programmes.

By the mid-1980s, the major environment problems had been identified and some public awareness on environmental issues had been created. Additional institutions and programmes had been created to cope with the rising degradation of the environment. Among these were the National Environment Secretariat (NES), as a co-ordinating department operating within the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. It was created to implement government policy, facilitate environmental research and education and promote environmental health. One of the appointed tasks of NES was to facilitate a review of the existing laws to provide information leading to the presentation of a comprehensive Environment Bill to Parliament.⁶ Other environmental institutions are the Presidential Commission and the National Tree-Planting Fund. Environmental education is also becoming institutionalized within the normal school curriculum at all levels, including university. At Moi University, for example, a school of environmental studies has been established to provide advanced environmental education, a forum for research deliberations and action on the environment by the professionals and society at large. In 1989 the government established another ministry focussing largely on environment management—the Ministry of Reclamation and Development of Arid, Semi-arid and Wastelands.

By 1989, therefore, many legislations and environment institutions were in existence and public awareness of environmental issues had also increased. And yet environmental degradation remained a serious problem. Juma observes in this regard that:

Despite the growth in environmental awareness, the capacity of the country to integrate environmental consideration into the development process is

still limited. There is a disjunction between political pronouncements and institutional responses. Although the country has numerous laws which deal directly with environmental conservation, their implementation has remained largely poor.⁷

Thus the 1989–1993 Development Plan reflects this dissolutionment with past environment conservation efforts. In particular the plan expresses the view that ‘In the past, economic analyses of development activities have often ignored the social costs leading to uncontrolled environmental degradation’.⁸ In other words, despite past policy rhetoric on the need to conserve the environment the praxis has been that short-term individual, state and corporate economic gains have taken precedence over genuine environmental considerations.

As environmental degradation continues, Kenya, like many countries of the world, has also been undergoing an economic crisis that has led to government cutbacks on many social and economic programmes that previously used to be financed or subsidized by the government. Such programmes are in the area of health, education and environment. In regard to the latter, Kiriro and Juma note that ‘numerous conservation programmes planned in the mid-1980s have not been implemented due to lack of funds. In addition, conservation activities that were previously undertaken by local authorities on behalf of the central government are threatened as a result of financial difficulties’.⁹ Indeed the 1984–88 Development Plan already stated quite clearly that ‘since the economic environment during the Plan period will be characterised by shortages of financial resources, resources will not be available on a large enough scale to rehabilitate areas that have already suffered damage’.¹⁰

The dilemma that now faces Kenya in a situation of economic and environmental crisis is how to reshape the environmental agenda to meet the rapidly rising human needs while at the same time arresting the current trend of environmental degradation. In other words the major policy issue is how to achieve sustainable development without further environmental degradation. The current plan expresses this dilemma as follows:

The rapid growth of GPD will require the efficient use of technology, human resources and natural resource inputs such as land, water, minerals and forests on a sustainable basis. The implied developmental activities while conferring benefits to the individual and the nation have the tendency of generating diseconomies in the form of soil erosion arising from excessive cultivation or overgrazing, gaseous emissions, liquid effluent and toxic accumulations from industrial activities all of which pollute the environment.¹¹

As a demonstration of how seriously the government is now taking the issue of environmental degradation, the 1989–1993 plan devoted some 30 pages to discussing sound environment management consistent with growth requirements.

Kenya has come a long way since 1985 on matters of environment, as demonstrated by policy developments, creation of institutions and programmes and the increased sensitization and mobilization of the public. These positive developments notwithstanding, Kenya is still grappling with even more complex problems which demand new solutions and alternative strategies. The seriousness of environmental problems in the late 1980s in part arises from past mistakes made in policy planning which failed to fully integrate environmental considerations in the total or sectoral development plans. Most importantly, it arises from policy planning that failed to address the major target group in environmental planning and implementation—the women of Kenya.

Women and the environment

There are many important reasons why women are so central to environmental conservation and management. Firstly, Kenyan women, both individually and in groups, have historically tended to be more active in self-help community initiatives than men. In many self-help rural projects, including environmental conservation, many of the active participants are women. This reality has been confirmed by many studies, including those conducted in Kitui District, where 95 per cent of the *mwethya* group participants in water and soil conservation projects were women. Men who had not migrated to urban areas were found to participate mainly in those projects where they were paid a wage.¹²

Secondly, women in Kenya contribute the greatest amount of the necessary resources for society's subsistence and national economic growth. Needless to say, agriculture is the mainstay of the Kenyan economy, and women are the major food producers both for subsistence and for marketing. Kenya cannot therefore afford any environmental degradation that negatively affects food productivity. And yet degradation has been allowed to occur in the food sector. Development policies have tended to favour the male-dominated non-food cash-crop sector, with most of the agricultural inputs, extension services and credit being directed to this sector. With increasing soil degradation poor rural women and their families have become impoverished as they now have to buy much of the food they previously used to produce for themselves. In this connection, national current estimates show that about 64 per cent of the total expenditure of smallholders is devoted to purchasing food and non-alcoholic beverages.¹³

The goal of national food self-sufficiency can never be attained unless the government begins to restructure policies and development plans in a manner that places women at the centre of agricultural productivity and envi-

ronmental conservation. In other words, the food question cannot be separated from the environmental question. Even global predictions show that there is an increasing global food scarcity occurring alongside an increasing environmental deterioration.

In addition to the centrality of women in food and other agricultural production, women are also the custodians of the family health environment. They are the nutritionists, the nurses, the maintainers of domestic hygiene. Women are also the educational trainers of the young, as well as the energy and shelter providers. In a nutshell, in their multiple roles, women literally carry the entire human environment on their backs. In so doing, they are interacting very closely with the natural environment. This means that almost any issue of environmental management and use has a direct or indirect linkage with many of the human survival and national development activities that women engage in on a daily basis. Women are important environmental conservation forces, not only because of the *positive* contribution they have made and continue to make towards the conservation of the environment, but also because of the *negative* impact the environment has on them and vice versa. In this respect, it is important to note that it is the poor, the majority of whom are women, who are likely to feel most acutely the effects of environmental degradation. They are also likely to be the ones who may not only be unable to contribute effectively to environmental conservation but may even contribute (unintentionally) to further degradation. Often, policy makers fail to establish this important linkage between poverty and environmental degradation and the vicious cycle inherent in that situation.

It is also the poor women who feel most acutely the impact of government cutbacks on social amenities (health, education and social amenities) under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). The implementation of SAP in Kenya has taken the form of cost-sharing, which only makes sense to those with high incomes. The majority of Kenyans are poor and hence do not have the financial ability to pay the required user charges. The impact of implementation of SAP has therefore resulted in a deterioration in the human environment, with serious implications for the poor, especially women and children.

The impact of women on the environment and vice versa, becomes very critical in looking for solutions to environmental degradation in the context of underdevelopment. Indeed, if the quality of human resources largely determines the pace and nature of development, then women become a critical motor not only for environmental management but for national development efforts in general. It then means that the role of women in policy planning and implementation cannot be ignored. But as outlined below, the gender question has remained marginal to development planning and policy making in Kenya.

The forgotten factor

Nowhere are women mentioned, let alone acknowledged, in the environmental policy statements and discussions contained in official Kenyan government documents. The exception is President Moi who acknowledges the role of women's groups in environmental management.¹⁴

It is not particularly surprising that such an important policy omission has been made. This reality is quite consistent with the country's national development policies which have only recently begun to acknowledge gender as an issue in development planning and implementation. A close look at the post-colonial history of national policies and programmes in Kenya will quickly show this to be the trend up to 1975—the end of the UN Women's Decade. Prior to 1975, the government acted as if the gender question as a policy issue was of no relevance to Kenya. National development plans and other major policy documents talked of rural producers, agriculturalists, farmers and peasants and failed to acknowledge that the majority of these are women. Even the provocation contained in the 1972 ILO report, *Employment, Incomes and Equality*, did not deter the government from its position that there was no problem of access and equity for women in Kenya. Since 1975, however, Kenya like other United Nations members has heeded the General Assembly's demand that member states promote policies for the advancement of women, establish women's national machineries and strengthen existing women's organizations. Kenya accordingly established the Women's Bureau in 1976 which was to serve as the government's instrument for the expansion and co-ordination of the women's group movement in the country. Additionally, the government decided to strengthen and give active support to the oldest and largest women's NGO, *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, established in 1952. In 1987 this merged with the ruling party KANU and has hence changed its name to KANU-MWYO. This women's organization has increasingly assumed many of the functions originally performed by the Women's Bureau and the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK). NCWK was formed in 1964 to be the national co-ordinating organization for all women NGOs (including MWYO) in Kenya.¹⁵

In addition to strengthening selected women's organizations, President Moi has since early 1986 appointed a number of women to some important public positions. At the end of January 1986, the President appointed seven women to senior executive posts in government parastatals. It was also during the mid-1980s that a number of women were promoted to senior diplomatic positions and as judges to the High Court. The most significant appointment perhaps was made in 1987 when the first woman Permanent Secretary was appointed in the Ministry of Commerce. The President also appointed several women to sit on various parastatal boards. These ap-

pointments are a step in the right direction. Despite this progress the policy position on gender inequalities has not altered dramatically. Government policy position remains that gender inequalities are non-existent in Kenya. Women have accordingly been cautioned to desist from making demands for rights and representation which they are already enjoying.¹⁶

Although there is as yet no systematic Women in Development policy in Kenya, government documents (national development plans, manifestos, sessional papers) have only recently begun to make scattered references and acknowledgements to women's roles in development. Since 1985, women's issues have also been accorded some significant visibility in the media; a few national seminars focussing on women have been organized and public awareness of gender has increased.

In general, however, the women of Kenya as in many other parts of the world, remain marginalized, are even more overworked than in the past and are still structurally subordinated to men. Gender inequalities in opportunities and access to resources are still very prevalent in Kenya. Despite women's centrality in food and cash crop production, the majority do not own land or implements of production. Modern technological inputs, extension services and credit facilities are often directed to male farmers.

Women are still marginalized in formal employment, and their share of total wage employment has only slightly increased in the last ten years, from 17.5 per cent in 1981, to 21.2 per cent in 1987. Similarly, the shelter and amenities situation is generally worse for women than for men. In a 1988 study it was found that the majority of women in Kenya's urban areas lived in very poor housing, with only a small minority owning decent housing.¹⁷ Table 9.1 illustrates this situation.

Table 9.1 Type of structure by sex of owners

Type of Structure	Male		Sex of Owner		Total	%
	Male	%	Female	%		
House	1,801	83.4	358	16.6	2,159	100
Maisonnette	111	94.9	6	5.1	117	100
Flat	112	80.6	27	19.4	139	100
Swahili	822	74.5	282	25.5	1,104	100
Shanty	275	67.2	134	32.8	409	100
Others	828	80.2	203	19.7	1032	100
Total	3,949	-	1,010	-	4,959	-

Source: : KANU-MWYO, 1988, p. 12.

The same study reveals that as far as provision of amenities is concerned, by 1988, only 26 per cent of urban women occupiers had access to piped water compared to 37 per cent of men occupiers. Futhermore, 46 per cent of

women depended on communal water source, compared to 36 per cent of the male occupiers. Similarly, 47 per cent of women occupiers were using pit latrines as compared to 40 per cent of the men and only 15 per cent of women had access to private flush latrines compared to 25 per cent of the men. Additionally, only 19 per cent of women had private-indoor bathing facilities as compared to 30 per cent of men.¹⁸

Gender inequalities are also apparent in the area of politics. Despite the fact that political participation by men and women on equal terms, including standing for elective office, is guaranteed in Kenya's constitution, socio-cultural, ideological and economic factors have conspired to keep the majority of women out of political decision making positions. Indeed, women of Kenya remain grossly under-represented at all levels of decision making, especially in state and party hierarchy. And yet, it is in the arena of politics where most of the important decisions affecting the entire society are made. Since Kenya became independent almost 30 years ago, there have been few women holding political office. For example, between 1969 to 1983, available data reveal an extremely low level of women representation in parliamentary politics.¹⁹

In the last decade of the 20th century, women's political participation remains low at the level of decision making. As of 1990, there are only two elected women MPs and one nominated woman MP out of a total of 188. Of the three women MPs, only one sits on the front bench as an Assistant Minister for Culture and Social Services, while the other women are backbenchers. The position of assistant minister is the highest position a woman has ever held in Kenya's political establishment. Furthermore, in KANU, women have consistently played a rather secondary role, despite the existence of a women's wing.

While the situation of Kenyan women in employment and education has significantly improved since Independence, women are still invisible in important policy making positions. And the few women who have managed to break the barriers of male political dominance often do not occupy central positions in policy making. Under these political circumstances, it is no wonder that women have been left out on matters of environmental policy.

Significant gender inequalities exist in the physical and human environment aspects of men and women. The latter are quite clearly disadvantaged. There is urgent need therefore for restructured environmental policy and greater involvement of women in development planning. In particular, development policy should seek to empower women as a strategy of attaining national environment conservation objectives. Harassing and punishing women who are deemed to be liabilities rather than assets of environmental conservation aggravates rather than solves the problem.

Empowering women for environmental conservation

The United Nations noted in respect of the impact of the environment on women that

environmental degradation has already pushed great numbers of poor women into marginal environments where critically low levels of water supplies, shortages of fuel, overutilization of grazing and arable lands and population density have deprived them of their livelihood. Most seriously affected are women in drought-afflicted ASAL areas and in urban slums and squatter settlements. These women need alternative means of livelihood.²⁰

The above statement largely summarizes the situation in Africa and especially Kenya, which has one of the highest population growth rates in the world, as well as having more than three-quarters of its land mass qualifying as ASAL. In addition, the crisis of the 1980s and the accompanying structural adjustment programmes have pushed many poor women to a situation of desperation and sometimes dehumanizing existence as they struggle to keep themselves and their dependent households alive.

Ironically, while these poor women employ the only survival strategies they know, they are often blamed for contributing to the degradation of the natural and social environment. In the urban areas, these are the poor women who live in squalid slum conditions at the margins of towns and cities. Usually, such women have no permanent formal employment and hence their livelihood derives from the informal sector of the economy. Many engage in activities which are, in the view of government officials, a health hazard and hence are actively discouraged through harassment and outright punishment. For example, women who earn their livelihood through hawking on street corners in Nairobi are harassed by city commission officials, who usually confiscate their goods without compensation and extract money fines from them. The business of prostitution is even more precarious. Apart from the psychological impact of being looked upon by society as immoral carriers of dangerous diseases, including AIDS, female prostitutes are arrested and end up in jail if unable to pay the fine imposed upon them. While many of the activities of the poor urban women may not be considered environmentally desirable, the government should view this as a problem whose solution lies in providing them with alternative means of livelihood.

In the rural areas, poor women may contribute to environmental degradation without intending to do so. Being poor, they may not be able to afford fuelwood for their cooking purposes. They may, for example, result to the use of dry cowdung as fuel. These are also the women who usually cultivate very small patches of land and cannot even afford modern inputs in the form of fertilizers and pesticides. Consequently, constant cultivation of the same piece of land over time leads to soil exhaustion and low yields. Furthermore,

non-availability of fuelwood also leads many poor families to feed on non-nutritious foods which do not require cooking such as bread and soda, which in turn leads to poor health. Thus the vicious cycle of poverty becomes complete and is manifested in poor health, low crop yields and soil degradation. In this vicious cycle, the constant struggle for survival leaves women with hardly any time or energy for participating effectively in any community environment projects.

In view of this situation, therefore, it is not enough for the government to direct that soil and water conservation programmes be given high priority in development planning. The success of such a directive would first require the creation of an enabling human environment for the targeted labour force—women. The government would need to provide social amenities and support services that would enable women to participate effectively. Past environmental approaches and strategies need to change to accommodate the needs of women. Women can no longer be assumed to be a convenient and readily available labour force to be used for environmental and other development programmes. Women have increasingly taken up more roles than they used to and as a result are even more impoverished and marginalized. The few gains they attained during the Women's Decade have now been eroded by Structural Adjustment Programmes. Environmentally, poor women now stand as the most endangered human species, as they live and work in marginal and hazardous environments, whether in rural or urban areas. Rather than ostracizing them, as has sometimes happened in the past, policy restructuring should focus on finding alternatives for these women. It is only when this female majority of the Kenyan population acquires the power to ensure survival of self and family that they can fully appreciate and be effectively mobilized for environmental conservation and other development programmes.

However, it is not only the poor women that government development efforts should address. Even the few who are middle class and/or highly educated can be an important asset for environmental efforts. Education alone equips such women with the necessary skills for high level decision making and development planning. They are also the calibre of women who could effectively carry out relevant research on issues that affect women; some of them could also serve as extension officers for the predominantly female agriculturalists, who in the past have been deprived of such services by male extension officers. They can then serve as trainers of other women, thus transmitting relevant skills and awareness of environmental and other development issues.

Highly trained and skilled women with commitment are therefore well placed to organize other women around environmental activities of direct relevance to their immediate needs and have an empowering component for participants. There are already some good examples of this kind of mobi-

lization of women by other women, whereby environmental programmes have also been made to meet the more basic needs of the women participants.

Cases in point are the energy project of KANU-MWYO and the Green Belt Movement. The significance and importance of these two projects does not lie so much in the quantitative level of conservation achievements that have been made through them. Rather, their importance lies in their ability to link the objective of natural environment conservation with human environment conservation. Indeed, the improvement of the quality of life of the women and their families is high on the agenda of these two projects. For example, Maendeleo's energy project, which involves the dissemination of energy-saving stoves to rural women, has as its major objective the improvement of the living and working conditions of the rural population.²¹

Similarly, the Green Belt Movement's major objective is not simply to plant trees for the specific goals of afforestation and fuel energy provision; the movement's major objective is to empower women through their environmental activities. The Green Belt project aims at the development of a positive image of women, the argument being that,

Development issues provide a good forum in which women can be creative, assertive and effective leaders and the Green Belt Movement, being a development project, provided the forum through which to promote a positive image of women. The myth of male superiority can only be demolished with shining examples of female achievement against which nobody could argue intelligently. The Green Belt Movement and many other rural projects initiated by women, are exemplary examples of female achievement which should serve at least to encourage women to form a positive image of themselves.²²

Other objectives of the Green Belt Movement are to train women as cultivators of seedlings to create public environmental awareness, to promote environmental education in schools, to create employment for the handicapped and school-leavers in their own communities, to promote water and soil conservation and to make rural communities self-sufficient in fuelwood.

The Green Belt Movement remains a shining national example of women's achievements in environmental conservation. The tree planting programme and the many related benefits women participants derive from this environmental participation underlines its importance. President Moi is on record as having cited the GBM as one of the few women's programmes actively and effectively participating in environmental conservation efforts.²³ Given the urgent need for mobilizing national support for environmental conservation, the country cannot afford to demoralize or discourage any group involved in conservation work, however modest its achievements.

A need for policy restructuring

Because of the centrality of women in environmental conservation and other development issues, their concerns should be integrated in policy making and implementation. This calls for a restructuring of existing policies. There are numerous policy changes that could be affected in favour of women.

Firstly, it is important, both for democratic and development reasons, that women be involved at all levels of the decision making process, especially in those areas that directly affect their lives and where they are the major policy implementors. In this regard, women are major actors in almost all the key socio-economic areas of development: agriculture, health, education, technology. All these socio-economic issues are closely linked to natural environment concerns. Thus, women should be involved in the designing and implementation of all development and environmental policies.

In this connection, the surest way for women to influence policy making on these issues is by striving for greater political participation and representation in the legislature. It is in this legislative arena where most of the important decisions affecting the entire society are made. It is therefore in this arena where women can ensure that matters of environment, agriculture, health, education, technology and law are debated with women's perspectives and concerns.

While it would be unrealistic to expect immediate gender parity in political decision making, there are a number of policy interventions that can be made to facilitate greater female participation in political decision making. These include ensuring that at least 50 per cent of the nominated members of parliament are women and appointing at least 50 per cent of the incumbent women MPs to head important non-social welfare ministries, such as finance, agriculture or science and technology. Also, women should be appointed to executive positions within the ruling party hierarchy at branch and national levels, and women's units should be created in key ministries with women as managers to ensure that women's needs and aspirations are adequately addressed in policy making.

The extent to which the policy restructuring suggested above can be implemented will largely depend on the political willingness of those already in powerful positions. In this regard, one can only hope that many of the Kenyan policy makers do not share the same negative attitude towards women's political participation as that expressed by an assistant minister in the Office of the President, to the effect that women should only play a subordinate role in politics. In his view, women should never be permitted 'to the highest levels of political power' as they 'are dangerous when they come to power'. He also believes that it would be inconsistent with African culture for a woman to become a president of an African country.²⁴

Secondly, policy restructuring should also address the problem of poor women and the impact on them of environmental degradation and structural adjustment policies. The government should review the current adjustment programmes and design new ones, taking into account women's needs and the support services they need to participate effectively in environmental and other national development activities. In this regard, even the World Bank experts, who only a few years ago advised African governments to drastically cut back on social expenditures and subsidies, have now reversed their policy position on this issue. The Bank is now talking of a 'human centred development strategy' and of 'short term specific interventions (by governments) such as food subsidies or employment and income schemes targeted on vulnerable groups'.²⁵

In designing new policies to reverse the negative impact of SAPs, emphasis should be put on improving poor women's employment prospects and ensuring women's access and control over productive resources such as land, technology and credit facilities. The adjustment measures should also include labour- energy- and time-saving devices for women. Such measures should pay particular attention to women's needs to have close and easy accessibility to water and fuel sources, child care centres and health clinics. In regard to fuel provision, energy-saving stoves should be considered as only a short-term measure, since they are dependent on wood and may eventually beat the goal of afforestation efforts. In the long term therefore, the policy objective should be to attain nation-wide electrification and completely discourage all wood-based fuel use.

Policy restructuring should also pay particular attention to the general deterioration in the health situation especially since the emergence of the deadly killing AIDS and the re-emergence of highly contagious diseases such as meningitis. The government needs to significantly increase its health and social amenities budget, which has been drastically cut since the early 1980s.²⁶ The problem of poor women in prostitution needs to be tackled as one way of arresting the deteriorating health environment.

Thirdly, as women's groups and organizations have historically participated in environmental conservation, a concerted effort should be made to step up material and moral support to all women's groups in the country that are engaged in conservation efforts, however modest their achievements. In the past, government expenditure on women's group activities as a percentage of its total national expenditure has been extremely low. For instance, between 1978 and 1982 government allocations to women's programmes were 0.1 per cent of total expenditures for that period. Furthermore, government grants to women's groups dropped significantly from 3.3 million Kshs. in 1986, to 2.6 million in 1987. This expenditure should increase in recognition of the important contribution women's groups are making towards national development efforts. With more encouragement and support,

women can become the most viable instrument for mobilizing the population, especially in rural areas, for environmental conservation activities.

Fourthly, given the government's own objective of food self-sufficiency and the interrelatedness between food production and environmental conservation, affirmative action should now be taken to redirect production resources to the food sector. Needless to say, in the food sector, as in other areas of national development, women are only pleading for an enabling environment to allow them effective participation and performance.

Finally, public awareness training on matters of the environment should continue and be accelerated to ensure that by the end of this century, every Kenyan fully understands the close linkage between the natural and human environment, the dangers posed by environmental degradation and the major strategies of arresting and reversing environmental deterioration.

Conclusion

The close linkage and interaction between the human and natural environment shapes the development process. In particular, there is close linkage between poverty and environmental degradation. The majority of Kenyan women, by virtue of their low social status and the multiple roles they play in the development process, are thus an important factor in addressing the environmental problem. In view of this, development efforts and environmental ones in particular will not succeed unless women become an integral part of that development. The creation of an enabling environment for women should therefore not be viewed as a concession to women but as a necessary strategy for attaining sustainable development. This is the development where the sustenance and basic needs satisfaction becomes the organizing principle for natural resource use, as opposed to exploitation of resources for profit and capital accumulation by the wealthy minority in society at the expense of the majority.

Notes

1. 'Environmental Concern', *Daily Nation*, December 15, 1989, p. 6.
2. 'Healing the Earth', *Kenya Times*, January 1, 1990, p. 14.
3. World Bank, 1989a, p. 189.
4. GOK, 1965, p. 39.
5. Republic of Kenya, 1974, p. 190.
6. See Moi, 1986, p. 55. The Environment Bill, entitled *National Environment Enhancement and Management Bill* has been drafted but at the end of 1990 had not yet been presented to Parliament for debate.
7. Kirirot and Juma, p. 58.
8. GOK, 1988a, p. 169.
9. Kirirot and Juma, p. 55.

10. GOK, 1983, p. 137.
11. GOK, 1988a, p. 169.
12. Nzomo, 1987a; Mutiso, 1975, p. 258.
13. Kiriro and Juma, p. 65.
14. Moi, 1986, p. 59.
15. It has even been recently suggested that, in future, all women's organizations in Kenya would be required to be affiliated with KANU-MYWO. Previously this role was played by NCWK (see for example *Daily Nation*, March 1, 1990, p. 4).
16. Nzomo, 1987a, p. 124.
17. KANU-MYWO, 1988, p. 12.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
19. GOK, 1985, p. 42.
20. United Nations, 1986, p. 53.
21. KANU-MYWO, 1985, p. 23.
22. Maathai, 1985, p. 19.
23. Moi, 1986, p. 58.
24. 'Towards a Dangerous Trend', *The Weekly Review*, November 10, 1989, p. 1.
25. World Bank, 1989, p. 189.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 264.