



SUMMARY NOTE - ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION III

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL WELLBEING: RETHINKING THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

This discussion event took place on Wednesday 4 November 2015.

This third event in the series aimed to focus on **natural resource management** and sought to understand **how best women can be supported to adapt to a changing natural environment**. Given the current multiple environmental challenges confronted by women and girls, there is a pressing need to balance conservation and consumption demands in an age of scarcity and uncertainty. The issues explored during the event included managing agricultural ecosystem; tackling water scarcity; promoting sustainable energy security; managing agro-forestry resources; preserving biodiversity; sustaining fisheries and managing aquaculture resources as well as the overarching impact of climate change etc. In essence, the discussion aimed to establish, what works, what doesn't and how success might be appropriately scaled-up and replicated?

A number of **significant global policy priorities focused on the environment** were identified. The 2015 Paris Climate Conference negotiations aimed to achieve a universal and legally binding agreement on climate change, with a view to keeping global warming below 2°C. In addition, there is the United Nations sustainable development agenda: at least five of the 17 recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Goals (established to combat global poverty and inequality by 2030) relate to the environment and the management of natural resources. Furthermore, in 2016 the inaugural Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO) will be launched. This represents the first comprehensive, integrated global assessment of gender issues in relation to the environment and sustainability.

Today's pressing global environmental challenges generate local impacts which disproportionately affect women and girls. Their lives and livelihoods are reliant on natural resources, yet compared to men and boys women and girls disproportionately have less access to or control over those environmental resources. In order to better manage natural resources and tackle environmental degradation, the role of women and girls needs to be acknowledged as more than just instrumental in enhancing the wellbeing of households and children. They need to be recognised for their unique and invaluable productive and technical capabilities - as knowledgeable problem solvers who make significant contributions to improving environmental resource management for all.

The burden of inequality

For women, managing environmental resources is driven by a number of critical factors. These drivers shape the different ways in which this process affects men and boys, compared to women and girls. Examples include: respective roles and responsibilities (eg. duties in the household); rural consumption and agricultural production patterns and priorities; levels of inequalities relating to access to a host of resources including natural resources, financial resources (savings, credit, insurance, incomes and other assets); technical resources to build capacity and productivity; access to institutions and institutional knowledge (to help shape policies, programmes and initiatives) as well as access to decision-making processes (including laws, regulation, public policies etc.) and the way in which social norms, customary law and practices influence human interaction. For the most part, many of these factors disproportionately discriminate against women and girls. Given this burden of inequality, the challenge of how women might be better supported to secure equitable, inclusive and more balanced access to natural resources in order to promote conservation and sustainability needs to be addressed. Tackling this challenge is essential to securing a well-integrated and greener economy for all. How can governments, civil society and the private sector collaborate to achieve this and reduce the significant economic and social cost created by the gender inequality gap? How can boys and men contribute to this transformation?



A sectorial approach; environmental resource management for women and girls

This demographic disproportionately faces discrimination and inequality of access to environmental resources. The imbalance this creates leads to vulnerability and compromises the resilience of women and girls when confronted with pressing environmental challenges and the impacts they generate. An example might include precarious access to land due to restricted availability or unaffordability - failing to adequately meet the needs of women's lives and livelihoods. For example, payments for land access are often required in lump sums rather than at more convenient instalment/flexible payments or through rights-based negotiable customary law.

1. **Forest management.** Firewood collection, forestry products and services including plant harvesting for food and medicines are significant in the lives and livelihoods of rural women and girls. Unsustainable use of these resources can often pose economic and environmental threats for women and girls. Examples might include the overuse of common property resources, security and safety issues and restricting human encroachment (to protect forest habitats). It is critical to increase the involvement of women in developing policies and legislation which ensure forests are more economically viable and promote more equitable access, use and management. In addition, sustainable land use options can help to optimise the capacity of forests to mitigate environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, safeguarding wildlife, preserving land, tackling water depletion, protecting watersheds and dealing with soil erosion. Improving the distribution of accessible and affordable energy sources (eg. biofuels, but not withstanding the concerns regarding its impact on food security) can help transform women's household duties, enabling them free-up value time to enhance their productivity and develop greater commercial activity beyond household enterprise. In addition, the challenge of **desertification** directly impacts women's rural livelihoods and food security through its impacts on soil quality, the availability of grazing areas for livestock and the decline in agricultural biodiversity etc.

2. Climate change presents a disproportionate challenge for women and girls, given that collecting household **water** is one of their primary responsibilities. Safe and secure access to clean water remains a time consuming burden, disproportionately borne by women and girls. The key to supporting women to adapt to the challenges climate change poses is securing sustainable access to water. This is also critical to reduce vulnerability, improve food security and support wider rural development. Given these diverse and complex challenges, it is also important to note that environmental management issues can often be effectively addressed by being integrated into policy areas which have the greatest potential to protect and promote environmental sustainability, for example in the areas of education, health, energy, transport and sustainable development.

3. Given the burden of rising food prices on household budgets and women's central role in promoting food security, better sustainable management of **fisheries and aquaculture** (including preparatory work for pre-and-post catching such as mending nets, processing and preparing products for market) might contribute to the development of more affordable and nutritious diets. This can help promote better food security and provide more disposal household income. Yet, to improve food security, livelihoods and the sustainability of this sector - which is often made up of traditional and small scale informal enterprise - greater value and recognition needs to be attached to the contributions made by women. In addition, improving access to credit and training with respect to seafood preservation, processing and storage technologies can help to ensure post-harvest losses are minimised.

Recognising women's knowledge and capacity to tackle environmental challenges

Rural women and girls boast unique traditional knowledge of a range of natural resources; this fact is often insufficiently recognised because they are seen merely as beneficiaries. Women should be more adequately regarded as partners and contributors who provide solutions and advance progress with regard to environmental management and governance.



Building women's networks

Women's groups and organisations are critical to addressing the inequality and imbalance women experience with respect to environmental management challenges. As African economies transform and populations rise challenges for both urban and rural living continue to emerge. As populations increasingly move to large cities and urban areas, community ties are looser and the opportunities to tap into women's support networks become increasingly limited. Yet in the rural context, Africa will be the only global region with growing rural populations in the decades to come. Such migration trends have had an impact on women's roles in crop production, as young people migrate to find work, leaving women to take on more agricultural production responsibilities. What challenge does this present for managing environmental resources, particularly if rural areas are increasingly populated by an aging demographic? Women need platforms to be able to share, exchange and build knowledge and networks which help develop their unique and invaluable insights regarding improvements in environmental management knowledge and practice. How can social perceptions be challenged to recognise that women's time is an important asset?

Responding to environmental challenges

Women's distinctive environmental knowledge and capacity, particularly in the areas of local crop production, provides important contributions to conservation and sustainability efforts. This includes promoting the cultivation of organic products, more nutritious crop varieties which are robust and able to respond to varying weather conditions. India provides a useful example with important lessons the continent of Africa. Women in India are an important source of traditional knowledge and practices (relating to crop diversity, biodiversity management, pest control, crop selection and combatting soil erosion etc.) These knowledge systems are an integral part of effectively managing environmental resources in response to the challenges of improving water productivity in farming, reducing the impact of floods and mitigating against landslides etc. Women are central to climate adaptation responses. Helping to build and develop their knowledge and expertise can provide an effective response to anticipate the adverse effects of climate variability - in order to take appropriate action and prevent or minimise damage. Furthermore, in the interest of sustainability and resilience, it is also important to develop the capacity of young people, ensuring they are at the heart of community responses to pressing environmental challenges.

Improving women's access to relevant and appropriate technology

Technology specifically designed for use by women is pivotal to support their efforts to conserve natural resources for future generations. Gender-informed technology such as affordable, accessible and relevant low cost irrigation technologies including alternative water for agriculture solutions such as farm ponds and water holes are critical for women to transform their roles and responsibilities by reducing their workloads and increasing their ability to generate productive incomes across the rural economy. Beyond providing time-saving benefits, technology can also improve women's capacity to rise up the energy ladder and build environmental resilience - particularly when confronted by natural disasters, climate change and other environmental challenges. How can greater resilience be achieved through incubating and scaling up technologies targeted to women in addition to supporting women to move higher up agricultural value chains?

Beyond gender mainstreaming; measuring impact matters

'If it can't be measured it can't be managed!' Outcomes, NOT outputs need to be monitored and measured in order to identify how to empower women and improve their resilience across agricultural supply chains. Responsible business partnerships can take the opportunity to work through global frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals to help deliver concrete outcomes to improve women's empowerment and resilience. An example of enhancing this impact is illustrated through the [W+ Standard](#) established by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management - WOCAN. This aims to respond to the need to measure the impact of women's empowerment and accelerate investments in products/services which make positive contributions to women's empowerment and sustainable development. W+ Standard achieves this by establishing international certification standards (similar to Fairtrade certification).



USEFUL LINKS PROVIDED BY PARTICIPANTS

[Gender & Climate Change; three things you should know](#) (2011, World Bank)

[The Global Gender and Environment Outlook](#) (to be launched May 2016)

[W+ Standard](#) responding to the need to measure the impact of women's empowerment and accelerate investments in women (Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management - WOCAN)

[Employment, enterprise and skills: Building business infrastructure for African development](#) (2014, Foreign Policy Centre)