

# A Take on Ecofeminism: Putting an Emphasis on the Relationship between Women and the Environment

Rita Marie L. Mesina\*

I. INTRODUCTION .....	1124
II. ECOFEMINISM: THEORIES AND MANIFESTATIONS.....	1125
A. <i>Definitions and Theoretical Framework</i>	
B. <i>Common Themes</i>	
III. THE FACETS OF ECOFEMINISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS.....	1135
A. <i>Support in International Environmental Law Instruments</i>	
B. <i>The Relationship between Women and the Environment According to the Beijing Declaration</i>	
IV. ECOFEMINISM IN CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ADVOCACIES.....	1145
V. SUMMARY .....	1149

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Women comprise over half the world's population. They make a major contribution to the well-being and sustainable development of their communities and nations, and to the maintenance of the earth's ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources.<sup>1</sup>*

The role of women in the formation and implementation of environmental policy is mostly an uncharted territory. While it has been recognized that

---

\* '09 J.D. cand., Ateneo de Manila University School of Law. Member, Board of Editors and Executive Committee, *Ateneo Law Journal*. She was the Co-Lead Editor of Vol. 53, Issue No. 1 and the Lead Editor of Vol. 52, Issue No. 4. Her previous works in the *Journal* include: *The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006: Changing Patterns and Responses for Juvenile Offending*, 52 ATENEO L.J. 293 (2007), which she co-authored with Associate Dean Sedfrey M. Candelaria and Assistant Court Administrator Nimfa Cuesta-Vilches; and *Consequences of Disclosure: The Case of Bantay-Republic Act No. 7941 and Rosales v. Commission on Elections*, 52 ATENEO L.J. 176 (2007).

Cite as 53 ATENEO L.J. 1124 (2009).

1. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Women and the Environment 5*, available at <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=468&ArticleID=4488&l=en> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) [hereinafter UNEP, *Women and the Environment*].

the participation of women is a key element in all areas of sustainable development, this function is still in its nascent stages of development — more is yet to be witnessed in the field of environmental law and policy-making. In an era of environmental catastrophe and socio-political oppression, there is a need to pave way for an interdisciplinary framework that will provide solutions for the improvement of both the fields of gender equality and environmental protection. The importance of this integration is emphasized by the United Nations at the forefront, whereby it stresses that “[s]ustainable development is not possible without equity. [G]ender equality and equity are not only a question of fundamental human rights and social justice, but are also instrumental, and a precondition, for environmental conservation, sustainable development and human security.”<sup>2</sup>

This Essay seeks to explore and highlight the importance of forging a relationship between women and the environment through the use of an ecofeminist perspective. In addressing this objective, the author presents the issue in the subsequent Parts. Part II introduces the concept of ecofeminism as an advocacy and its theoretical approaches. Part III explores the facets of ecofeminism in international environmental instruments, as well as its manifestations in the pillars of gender rights as embodied in the Beijing Declaration. Part IV emphasizes the importance of adopting an ecofeminist perspective on the level of participation in environmental policy-making and advocacy, as it surveys various accounts of global women leadership and expertise in the protection and preservation of the environment. Part V serves as an integration, as it summarizes the main points of this Essay.

## II. ECOFEMINISM: THEORIES AND MANIFESTATIONS

### A. Definitions and Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism, as a theoretical approach, does not have an exacting hard-letter scope and definition. Rather, its essence, as understood in literature, is articulated to be “an effort to link feminism, the study of women and women’s values, with the exploration of environmental issues.”<sup>3</sup> It has been further defined as “an activist and academic movement that sees critical connections

---

2. *Id.* at 11 (emphasis supplied).

3. Richard Delgado, *Our Better Natures: A Revisionist View of Joseph Sax’s Public Trust Theory of Environmental Protection, and Some Dark Thoughts on the Possibility of Law Reform*, 44 VAND. L. REV. 1209, 1222 (1991) (emphasis supplied).

between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women.”<sup>4</sup> Karen Warren, a noted ecofeminist from the United States, likewise defines it as “ecological feminism: the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand, and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other.”<sup>5</sup> Considered as multi-faceted view of addressing environmental issues, the term “ecofeminism” was first used in 1974 by French feminist Francoise d’Eaubonne,<sup>6</sup> which later developed into an epistemological advocacy used to depict the various inequities in society.<sup>7</sup> Vandana Shiva, a famous ecofeminist from India, exemplifies the cornerstone principle of the approach, as she writes:

Maldevelopment militates against this equality in diversity, and superimposes the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures, and genders. Diversity, and unity and harmony in diversity, become epistemologically unattainable in the context of maldevelopment, which then becomes synonymous with women’s underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination), and nature’s depletion (deepening ecological crises).<sup>8</sup>

The ecofeminist perspective in environmental law analysis basically focuses on correlating gender struggles with ecological struggles. According to Keith Hirokawa, “*the disparate treatment of men and women, coupled with the disparate protection afforded to property rights and environmental sanctity, illuminate the institutional subordination of both women and the environment to patriarchal*

- 
4. Lois Ann Lorentzen & Heather Eaton, Ecofeminism: An Overview, *available at* <http://faculty.bemidjistate.edu/dsiems/courses/ConsBio/ecofeminism.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 10, 2009).
  5. Karen J. Warren, Introduction, *in* ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, CULTURE AND NATURE xi (Karen Warren & Nisvan Erkal eds., 1997).
  6. Francoise d’Eaubonne, Le Feminisme ou la mort, *in* NEW FRENCH FEMINISMS: AN ANTHOLOGY (Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., 1980); *see generally* Lorentzen & Eaton, *supra* note 4; Laura Hobgood-Oster, Ecofeminism: Historic and International Evolution, *available at* <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/bron/PDF--Christianity/Hobgood-Oster--Ecofeminism-International%20Evolution.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).
  7. Hobgood-Oster, *supra* note 6. Popular ecofeminist theorists include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Sallie McFague, Luisah Teish, Sun Ai Lee-Park, Paula Gunn Allen, Monica Sjöö, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren, and Andy Smith.
  8. *Id.* (citing VANDANA SHIVA, STAYING ALIVE: WOMEN, ECOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT 83 (1989)).

values ... [such as] *the patriarchal insistence on neutrality and property rights that institutionalize harsh, oppressive treatment.*"<sup>9</sup> From this definition, ecofeminism may be viewed as an integration of the inequalities that promote dominant structures in the formation of present environmental policies, all of which fashion a negative impact not only on women, but necessarily on other minority groups as well. This perspective thus asserts, among others, that in order to fully protect the environment, "*the use of women's values and priorities should infuse and shape environmental thinking.*"<sup>10</sup>

### B. Common Themes

Ecofeminist thinking espouses two basic themes: first, on the level of disproportionate environmental burdens, whereby it is posited that women (and necessarily, other minority groups) are so situated to suffer the most from environmental degradation and resource pollution,<sup>11</sup> and second, on the level of interconnectedness, whereby women and nature are connected conceptually and/or culturally/symbolically, such that women (and other minority groups) are in a privileged position to aid in creating new practical and intellectual ecological paradigms.<sup>12</sup> These two claims shall likewise serve as the theoretical framework in the concept of environmental protection and policy creation in Part III.

#### 1. Women, Minority Groups, and Disproportionate Environmental Burdens

A basic principle in ecofeminist thinking advocates the principles of environmental justice,<sup>13</sup> whereby women and minority groups are said to be

---

9. Keith Hirokawa, *Some Pragmatic Observations About Radical Critique in Environmental Law*, 21 STAN. ENVTL. L.J. 225, 238 (2002) (emphasis supplied).

10. Delgado, *supra* note 3, at 1222 (emphasis supplied).

11. Karen J. Warren, Taking Empirical Data Seriously, in *ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, CULTURE AND NATURE* 6 (Karen Warren & Nisvan Erkal eds., 1997) [hereinafter Warren, *Empirical Data*].

12. Lorentzen & Eaton, *supra* note 4.

13. Though generally non-binding, the delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit adopted these principles which have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

1. Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.

- 
2. Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
  3. Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
  4. Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
  5. Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
  6. Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
  7. Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
  8. Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
  9. Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
  10. Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
  11. Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
  12. Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural

at the greatest risk of suffering the negative impacts of environmental degradation and resource pollution.<sup>14</sup> Along this perspective, it is posited that minority groups suffer the most from negative environmental impact, and that these burdens will only be alleviated if a “distributive” sense of justice be inculcated in the formation of environmental policies.<sup>15</sup> Lois Ann Lorentzen and Heather Eaton refer to this theme as the “empirical claim”<sup>16</sup> in

---

areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13. Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth’s resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Principles of Environmental Justice, *available at* <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009); *see also* Dorceta E. Taylor, Women of Color, Environmental Justice and Ecofeminism, *in* ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, CULTURE AND NATURE 39-44 (Karen Warren & Nisvan Erkal eds., 1997).

14. Warren, *Empirical Data*, *supra* note 11.

15. *Id.*

16. Lorentzen & Eaton, *supra* note 4; *see also* Annie Rochette, *Stop the Rape of the World: An Ecofeminist Critique of Sustainable Development*, 51 U.N.B. L.J. 145, 152 (2002). Annie Rochette enumerates several lines of conclusion demonstrative of environmental burdens:

The empirical and linguistic data provided by ecofeminism are significant philosophically. These data suggest (1) the historical and

ecofeminist perspective, outlining research and evidentiary proof to streamline the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by women and minority groups.

The empirical claim is that in most parts of the world environmental problems generally disproportionately affect women. The increased burdens women face result not from environmental deterioration per se, but from a sexual division of labor found in most societies that considers family sustenance to be women's work. It is increasingly difficult for women in such societies to provide food, fuel, or water. Empirical data support this claim.<sup>17</sup>

The determination of these conclusions is gathered from an extensive research and compilation of empirical data, particularly from the experience of women located in the poorest areas of third world countries. A classic example of the claim for disproportionate burdens would be the case of land and water rights across South Africa and India. According to a study made by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), more than two-thirds of South African women depend on land and other natural resources for their livelihood.<sup>18</sup> "Across the region, however, glaring inequalities between men and women prevail in relation to access to and ownership and control of land, ... [whereby] [a] related issue is access to water, which is often linked to land rights."<sup>19</sup> Ownership of land in the areas of Zimbabwe and Tanzania are generally governed by customary laws that inculcate discriminatory

---

causal significance of ways in which environmental destruction disproportionately affects women and children; (2) the epistemological significance of the 'invisibility of women,' especially of what women know (e.g. about trees), for policies which affect both women's livelihood and ecological sustainability; (3) the methodological significance of omitting, neglecting, or overlooking issues about gender, race, class, and age in framing environmental policies and theories; (4) the conceptual significance of mainstream assumptions, e.g., about rationality and the environment, which may inadvertently, unconsciously, and unintentionally sanction or perpetuate environmental activities, with disproportionately adverse effects on women, children, people of color, and the poor; (5) the political and practical significance of women-initiated protests and grassroots organizing activities for both women and the natural environment.

17. Lorentzen & Eaton, *supra* note 4.

18. UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1, at 28.

19. *Id.*

inheritance and land transfer rules, subjecting the women of these areas to be excluded from their use and acquisition of land.<sup>20</sup>

In India, most women and children are designated to perform the water-collection work.<sup>21</sup> Highly related to this task is the risk of acquiring illnesses from unsanitary water<sup>22</sup> in the poorest communities. Karen Warren notes empirical studies which reveal that “[e]ach year[,] millions of people, predominantly women, are affected by major illnesses acquired while drawing water — 300 million people with malaria, 20–30 million with river blindness, and 270 million with elephantiasis.”<sup>23</sup>

Other areas which reveal disproportionate environmental burdens ultimately relating to gender issues include the role of women in land cultivation, forestry work and duty to find subsistence for their families. According to a UNEP Report, “in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, [women] produce and market over 90% of all the food grown locally, [s]o they are the first to be hit by soil erosion and deforestation.”<sup>24</sup> Further, the Report reveals the burdens of the domestic duties of women in said countries which create strong negative impacts on their health.

As the trees are felled, women also usually have to spend more time getting both fuel and water. Not long ago, women in the Indian state of Gujarat only had to go out to collect firewood every four of five days; now they have to spend four of five hours every day at the back-breaking task. Collectively, women in India spend a staggering 150 million work days a year fetching water, and in South Africa they walk the equivalent of going to the moon and back 16 times every day.

---

20. *Id.*; see Geetanjali Misra, et al., *Poor Reproductive Health and Environmental Degradation: Outcomes Of Women's Low Status In India*, 6 COLO. J. INT'L ENVTL. L. & POL'Y 273 (1995).

In India, “[w]omen face barriers ranging from inheritance law to property ownership regulations that have a cumulative effect of making women dependent upon communal forestry resources.”

Misra, *supra* note 20, at 289.

21. Warren, *Empirical Data*, *supra* note 11, at 7.

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* at 7–8 (citing ANN OLSON AND JONI SEAGER, *WOMEN IN THE WORLD: AN INTERNATIONAL ATLAS*, § 25 (1986)).

24. UNEP, *Gender equity & the environment*, available at [http://www.unep.org/pdf/Tunza\\_4.4\\_English\\_v7.pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/Tunza_4.4_English_v7.pdf) (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) [hereinafter UNEP, *Gender equity & the environment*].



Both fuel and water often bring sickness home with them. Unclean drinking water causes diseases that kill more than three million people a year, mainly children, and as the carers of the family, women take the strain. Meanwhile, the smoke from burning firewood swirls around the homes of the poor, carrying a toxic load of pollutants, and killing more than another 1.5 million people each year, mostly women and children, who spend the most time indoors.<sup>25</sup>

Studies likewise reveal the propensity of women to be exposed to the dangers of chemical and toxin poisoning, particularly due to their exposure in keeping the household.<sup>26</sup> According to Warren, “[p]ersistent toxic chemicals, largely because of their ability to cross the placenta to bioaccumulate, and to occur as mixtures, pose serious health threats disproportionately to infants, mothers and the elderly.”<sup>27</sup>

The highly susceptible impact of environmental burdens on women is also reflected in the data in relation to survival from disaster aftermaths. Women are said to be more vulnerable due to “physical and biological differences that can disadvantage their initial response to natural hazards; social norms and given roles that affect the way they react to a disaster; and an inequitable distribution of aid and resources caused by social hierarchies.”<sup>28</sup> In a research conducted by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization, it was reported that “[i]n inequitable societies, women are more vulnerable to disasters; for example, boys are likely to receive preferential treatment in rescue efforts and both women and girls suffer more from shortages of food and economic resources in the aftermath of disasters.”<sup>29</sup> Reports as to recent environmental disruptions likewise show empirical proof of increased vulnerability for women during times of environmental disasters:

In the 1991 cyclone disasters which killed 140,000 in Bangladesh, 90% of victims were women. Similarly, in industrialized countries, more women

---

25. *Id.* at 4.

26. Warren, *Empirical Data*, *supra* note 11, at 10.

27. *Id.*; see also UNEP, Gender equity & the environment, *supra* note 24.

28. Ariana Araujo & Andrea Quesada-Aguilar, Gender Equality and Adaptation, available at <http://www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/genderequaladaptation.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

29. *Id.* (citing Eric Neumayer & Thomas Pluemper, The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981-2002, available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=874965> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009)).

than men died during the 2003 European heat wave. During Hurricane Katrina in the USA, African-American women who were the poorest population in that part of the country faced the greatest obstacles to survival. During the 2006 tsunami, more women died than men — for example in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, male survivors outnumber female survivors by 3 or 4 to 1.<sup>30</sup>

In the same vein, the susceptibility of women in conflict situations, such as the adverse effects of warfare and militarization are proven to be markedly interconnected. According to Aseghedech Ghirmazion, “[t]ogether, gender, the environment and peace present a very distinct interrelationship. Women are the major actors in the environment, and thus their role in environmental management cannot be overemphasized. Conflict causes major destruction of the natural world, hurting women the most and hindering their crucial roles as environmental managers.”<sup>31</sup> Further,

[i]n the face of war, women and children suffer enormously, forced to adjust to a life of uncertainty that is characterized by harassment, social and cultural decay and lack of access to services such as water, food and shelter. They may also be cut off from their natural environment, which, especially in rural areas, is detrimental to their very survival and that of their households.<sup>32</sup>

From these data, it could be asserted that women, especially those situated in poor communities, are made susceptible to receive and suffer greater environmental burdens such as degradation and natural disasters, given their biological makeup and socio-cultural orientation. The ecofeminist theory highlights this inclination, and addresses this as a basic theme in the formulation of possible solutions to counter the negative impact of environmental burdens.

## 2. The Principle of Interconnectedness

The other common theme in ecofeminist thinking deals with the principle of interconnectedness, mostly resting on “*organic conceptions of nature and*

---

30. Araujo & Quesada-Aguilar, *supra* note 28, at 1 (citing Lorena Aguilar, Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation, available at [http://www.genderandenvironment.org/admin/admin\\_biblioteca/documentos/Climate.pdf](http://www.genderandenvironment.org/admin/admin_biblioteca/documentos/Climate.pdf) (last accessed Feb. 22, 2009); I. Davis, et al., Tsunami, Gender, and Recovery, in Special Issue for International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, South Asia Disasters (2005)).

31. UNEP, Women and the Environment, *supra* note 1, at 99.

32. *Id.*

*gender, whereby the earth was seen as a nurturing mother.*"<sup>33</sup> "In many parts of the world, women are the providers of food, water, heat and other resources for their children and extended families. *To survive, many have developed an intimate understanding of nature and are in the front line of managing and preserving our natural resources.*"<sup>34</sup>

The principle of interconnectedness springs from the ideology in the first theme depicting women's experiences to disproportionate environmental burdens: "[t]he fact that women are most adversely affected by environmental problems makes them better qualified as experts on such conditions and therefore *places them in a position of epistemological privilege; that is, women have more knowledge about earth systems than men.*"<sup>35</sup> To further articulate, data from the UNEP Reports reveal that women's constant interaction and use with the environment and other natural resources have inculcated a knowledgeable sense of preservation among local women in various grassroots communities across Africa, Asia, and England:

It is no surprise, therefore, that women are in the vanguard of the battle for the environment. They formed the Chipko movement which halted the felling of forests in Northern India. In Sierra Leone, one study found, they could name 31 uses of trees, whereas men only knew of eight. And they often conserve important food crops: research on 60 kitchen gardens managed by Thai women found 230 different vegetable and other species, many saved from a nearby forest before it was cut down. The soil in women's plots in Ghana keeps its fertility longer than the earth tilled by their menfolk, while half of Britain's organic farmers are female, 10 times the proportion of women farmers in the country as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

There is also literature acknowledging the women's aptitude in providing effective survival strategies to combat the effects of desertification in arid and semi-arid countries. According to the UNEP:

As is true in other environments, women in dryland areas are the primary custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. They have acquired extensive understanding of their natural environment, of its flora, fauna and ecological processes. They know the best trees for fuel, which plants have

---

33. Exploring Ecofeminist Perspectives: An Introduction to Ecofeminist Thought, available at <http://w3.gre.ac.uk/~bj61/talessi/tlr49.htm> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) (emphasis supplied).

34. UNEP, Gender equity & the environment, *supra* note 24, at 6 (emphasis supplied).

35. Lorentzen & Eaton, *supra* note 4, at 1 (emphasis supplied).

36. UNEP, Gender equity & the environment, *supra* note 24, at 5.

medicinal uses, where to find water in the dry season and the conditions for growing local crops. The coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers in Kenya noted: "When we go to the field, especially in the semi-arid parts, we find that women are the invisible managers and practitioners in combating desertification."

Women take this knowledge and develop survival strategies. For example, in Yazd, the 'desert capital' of the Islamic Republic of Iran, they have devised a number of highly sophisticated technologies for agricultural production, such as food production in tunnels constructed underground.<sup>37</sup>

As demonstrated above, women, by virtue of their constant interaction with nature and the environment, are innately more responsive to the challenges of environmental disruptions and resource depletion. The next Part of this Essay shall further develop on this framework as it explores the traces of ecofeminism in international environmental law instruments, as well as the advocacy of placing women in crucial decision-making positions when it comes to environmental policy formation.

### III. THE FACETS OF ECOFEMINISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

#### *A. Support in International Environmental Law Instruments*

The ecofeminist perspective espousing a gendered sense of environmental protection finds support in various international environmental law instruments, among which highlight the indispensable role of women in the conservation, protection and nurture of environmental resources. Below is a brief survey of both international environmental laws which take on an ecofeminist perspective, recognizing the role of women in the protection of the environment and sustainable development.

#### 1. The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21

In June of 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, drafted and adopted the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration),<sup>38</sup> a set various principles which "define the rights of people to development, and their responsibilities to safeguard the common

---

37. UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1, at 52.

38. U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Braz., June 3-14, 1992, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I) (Aug. 12, 1992) [hereinafter Rio Declaration].

environment.”<sup>39</sup> In essence, the Rio Declaration aims to establish a better system of environmental protection, “[w]ith the goal of establishing a new and equitable global partnership, through the creation of new levels of cooperation among States, *key sectors of societies and people*.”<sup>40</sup> In line with this objective, it expressly recognizes the important role of women as a key sector in environmental conservation and preservation. Principle 20 of the said Declaration expressly states that “[w]omen have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.”<sup>41</sup>

Supplementing the Rio Declaration is Agenda 21,<sup>42</sup> a document likewise drafted during the Earth Summit of 1992, designed to be “a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations system, governments, and major groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment.”<sup>43</sup> A blueprint for concretized methods of action across the world, Agenda 21 is divided into four major sections, each presenting specific courses of initiative: Social and Economic Dimensions,<sup>44</sup> Conservation and Management of Resources for Development,<sup>45</sup> Strengthening the Role of Major Groups<sup>46</sup> and Means of Implementation.<sup>47</sup>

In its third section, the Agenda devotes an entire chapter on the Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development,<sup>48</sup> recognizing the role of women in meeting the objectives of the Agenda and

---

39. Agenda 21 for Change, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, available at <http://www.iisd.org/rio+5/agenda/declaration.htm> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

40. Rio Declaration, *supra* note 38, Preamble.

41. *Id.* Principle 20 (emphasis supplied).

42. Report of the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Braz., June 3-14, 1992, *Agenda 21*, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/26/Vol. I/Annex II (Aug. 12, 1992) [hereinafter *Agenda 21*].

43. United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, *Agenda 21*, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/index.htm> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

44. *Agenda 21*, *supra* note 42, § 1.

45. *Id.* § 2.

46. *Id.* § 3.

47. *Id.* § 4.

48. *Id.* § 3, 24.1-24.12.

the Rio Declaration. As basis for this plan of action, the United Nations has acknowledged that “*the international community has endorsed several plans of action and conventions for the full, equal and beneficial integration of women in all development activities ... which emphasize women’s participation in national and international ecosystem management and control of environment degradation.*”<sup>49</sup> Relating to this foremost recognition, the Agenda has outlined several objectives in strengthening the role and participation of women in sustainable development.<sup>50</sup>

---

49. *Id.* § 3, 24.1 (emphasis supplied).

50. These objectives are as follows:

- (a) To implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, particularly with regard to women’s participation in national ecosystem management and control of environment degradation;
- (b) To increase the proportion of women decision makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields;
- (c) To consider developing and issuing by the year 2000 a strategy of changes necessary to eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioral, social and economic obstacles to women’s full participation in sustainable development and in public life;
- (d) To establish by the year 1995 mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the implementation and impact of development and environment policies and programs on women and to ensure their contributions and benefits;
- (e) To assess, review, revise and implement, where appropriate, curricula and other educational material, with a view to promoting the dissemination to both men and women of gender-relevant knowledge and valuation of women’s roles through formal and non-formal education, as well as through training institutions, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations;
- (f) To formulate and implement clear governmental policies and national guidelines, strategies and plans for the achievement of equality in all aspects of society, including the promotion of women’s literacy, education, training, nutrition and health and their participation in key decision-making positions and in management of the environment, particularly as it pertains to their access to resources, by facilitating better access to all forms of credit, particularly in the informal sector, taking measures towards

Agenda 21 likewise notes several areas for urgent action by state parties, specifically instructing them to minimize the disproportionate environmental burdens to which women, especially those situated in poor communities and developing countries, are understood to be highly vulnerable. According to the Agenda, States Parties “should take urgent measures to avert the ongoing rapid environmental and economic degradation in developing countries that generally affects the lives of women and children in rural areas suffering drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsuitable agro-chemical products.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, the Agenda urges Governments to eliminate all forms of discrimination which can be considered as root causes of increased environmental risks and burdens towards women, and instead, move for their empowerment.

Governments are urged to ratify all relevant conventions pertaining to women if they have not already done so. Those that have ratified conventions should enforce and establish legal, constitutional and administrative procedures to transform agreed rights into domestic legislation and should adopt measures to implement them in order to strengthen the legal capacity of women for full and equal participation in issues and decisions on sustainable development.<sup>52</sup>

---

ensuring women’s access to property rights as well as agricultural inputs and implements;

- (g) To implement, as a matter of urgency, in accordance with country-specific conditions, measures to ensure that women and men have the same right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and have access to information, education and means, as appropriate, to enable them to exercise this right in keeping with their freedom, dignity and personally held values; and
- (h) To consider adopting, strengthening and enforcing legislation prohibiting violence against women and to take all necessary administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate violence against women in all its forms.

Agenda 21, *supra* note 42, § 3, 24.2.

51. *Id.* § 3, 24.6.

52. *Id.* § 3, 24.4; *see also* Agenda 21, *supra* note 42, § 3, 24.3 (As a corollary to the said objective of eliminating forms of discrimination to encourage women’s active role in sustainable development, the Agenda encourages States Parties to undertake several activities for the promotion and empowerment of women in their respective communities.).

The Agenda also recommends specific measures and activities in addressing these gender-specific environmental problems, particularly encouraging States Parties to make “*women ... fully involved in decision-making and in the implementation of sustainable development activities.*”<sup>53</sup> This likewise follows the basic theme of the ecofeminist perspective, whereby the advancement of women participation is considered crucial in the creation and implementation of environmental policies. The Agenda notes several activities that meet this objective.<sup>54</sup>

---

53. Agenda 21, *supra* note 42, § 3, 24.7 (emphasis supplied).

54. These activities are:

Countries should develop gender-sensitive databases, information systems and participatory action-oriented research and policy analyses with the collaboration of academic institutions and local women researchers on the following:

- (a) Knowledge and experience on the part of women of the management and conservation of natural resources for incorporation in the databases and information systems for sustainable development;
- (b) The impact of structural adjustment programs on women. In research done on structural adjustment programs, special attention should be given to the differential impact of those programs on women, especially in terms of cut-backs in social services, education and health and in the removal of subsidies on food and fuel;
- (c) The impact on women of environmental degradation, particularly drought, desertification, toxic chemicals and armed hostilities;
- (d) Analysis of the structural linkages between gender relations, environment and development;
- (e) The integration of the value of unpaid work, including work that is currently designated ‘domestic,’ in resource accounting mechanisms in order better to represent the true value of the contribution of women to the economy, using revised guidelines for the United Nations System of National Accounts, to be issued in 1993;
- (f) Measures to develop and include environmental, social and gender impact analyses as an essential step in the development and monitoring of programs and policies; and
- (g) Programs to create rural and urban training, research and resource centers in developing and developed countries that will serve to disseminate environmentally sound technologies to women.



## 2. The Convention on Biological Diversity

Likewise drafted during the Earth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>55</sup> was entered into force on 29 December 1993, in order to protect the earth's natural and biological resources.<sup>56</sup> In this Convention, the United Nations has recognized the special role of women in preserving the earth's biological resource pool, acknowledging their exposure and dependence to natural resources as a direct function of their role in the family.

*While both genders have strong links to biodiversity, women are more often the first and most affected by environmental problems. As the women's primary responsibility is raising a family, she must be able to secure enough resources to meet their needs. In the majority of countries, the survival of women, their well-being and empowerment depend on biodiversity. For women in developing countries, in particular in the least developed countries, their survival, that of their households and communities, depends on access and control to natural resources.<sup>57</sup>*

Thus, the Preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes that its measures are likewise geared towards the protection of women in the scene of international environmental law, where it recognizes "the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation."<sup>58</sup>

## 3. The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development

In response to the Rio Declaration and its subsequent subsidiary agreements, the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development<sup>59</sup> was entered

---

*Id.* § 3, 24.8.

55. The Convention on Biological Diversity, June 5, 1992, 1760 U.N.T.S. 79, 31 I.L.M. 818 [hereinafter Convention on Biodiversity].

56. See generally United Nations Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity, *Sustaining Life on Earth: How the Convention on Biological Diversity promotes nature and human well-being*, available at <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-sustain-en.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

57. United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, *Women*, available at <http://www.cbd.int/women/> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) (emphasis supplied).

58. Convention on Biodiversity, *supra* note 55, Preamble.

59. The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development, available at <http://www.un-documents.net/h2o-dub.htm> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) [hereinafter Dublin Statement].

into force by the delegates of the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Ireland, on 26–31 January 1992.<sup>60</sup> Recognizing the importance of both preserving the world's water resources and the inextricably linked role of women in their conservation, Principle 3 of the Dublin Statement expressly acknowledges women as a central key player in the use and conservation of water resources.

*Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.*

*This pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programs, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.*<sup>61</sup>

#### 4. Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

A recently-enacted legally binding instrument, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (Stockholm Convention),<sup>62</sup> was ratified on 17 May 2004 by 128 countries and 151 signatories.<sup>63</sup> In its main text, States Parties bind themselves to minimize and totally eliminate the presence of persistent organic pollutants,<sup>64</sup> specifically recognizing the risks that women face at the forefront, in recognition of their natural reproductive heritage.

According to the Stockholm Convention, these chemicals must be eradicated, being “[a]ware of the health concerns, especially in developing countries, resulting from local exposure to persistent organic pollutants, in

---

60. Urban Water Resources Management, Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development, available at <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/water/dublin-statement.html> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

61. Dublin Statement, *supra* note 59, Principle 3 (emphasis supplied).

62. Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, 40 I.L.M. 532 (2001) [hereinafter Stockholm Convention].

63. Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, Status of Ratification, available at <http://chm.pops.int/Countries/StatusofRatification/tabid/252/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

64. See L. Ritter, et al., Persistent Organic Pollutants, available at <http://www.chem.unep.ch/pops/ritter/en/ritteren.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009) (“Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are organic compounds that, to a varying degree, resist photolytic, biological and chemical degradation.”).

*Id.* at 7.

particular impacts upon women and, through them, upon future generations.”<sup>65</sup> In this regard, the Stockholm Declaration, apart from its measures to reduce or eliminate the release, trade and use of persistent organic pollutants,<sup>66</sup> mandate States Parties, where appropriate, to “cooperate directly or through global, regional and sub-regional organizations, and consult their national stakeholders, including women’s groups and groups involved in the health of children, in order to facilitate the development, implementation and updating of their implementation plans.”<sup>67</sup> Information campaigns as to the use of persistent organic pollutants are likewise mandated to be targeted to women, children and other minority groups who are to be most at risk with their exposure.<sup>68</sup>

*B. The Relationship between Women and the Environment  
According to the Beijing Declaration*

On 15 September 1995, the United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women produced and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action (Beijing Declaration).<sup>69</sup> Considered as the main international instrument with respect to gender mainstreaming,<sup>70</sup> it “emphasized [on] the crucial links between the advancement of women and the progress for society as a whole ... [emphasizing that] *societal issues must be addressed from a gender perspective in order to ensure sustainable development.*”<sup>71</sup>

In this respect, the Declaration identified “gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment” as a critical area of concern.<sup>72</sup> A significant portion of the Beijing Declaration recognized the disproportionate environmental burdens that women — particularly those situated in developing countries and those

---

65. Stockholm Convention, *supra* note 62, Preamble (emphasis supplied).

66. *Id.* arts. 3, 5, & 6.

67. *Id.* art. 7, ¶ 2.

68. *Id.* art. 10, ¶ 1 (c).

69. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, U.N. Doc. A/CONF. 177/20 (1995) & A/CONF. 177/20/Add. 1 (1995) [hereinafter Beijing Declaration].

70. See Women’s Conference, Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), available at <http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/women.html> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

71. *Id.* (emphasis supplied).

72. Beijing Declaration, *supra* note 69, ¶ 44; see also Beijing Declaration, *supra* note 69, ¶ 46.

belonging to indigenous groups — receive.<sup>73</sup> Paragraph 34 of the Declaration provides:

*The continuing environmental degradation that affects all human lives has often a more direct impact on women. Women's health and their livelihood are threatened by pollution and toxic wastes, large-scale deforestation, desertification, drought and depletion of the soil and of coastal and marine resources, with a rising incidence of environmentally-related health problems and even death reported among women and girls. Those most affected are rural and indigenous women, whose livelihood and daily subsistence depends directly on sustainable ecosystems.*<sup>74</sup>

The Beijing Declaration further elaborates on this marked susceptibility to environmental risks, by discussing the profound relationship between women and the continual degradation of environmental resources. This was enunciated by the Beijing Declaration in this wise:

Women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management, as was recognized at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the International Conference on Population and Development and reflected throughout Agenda 21. Awareness of resource depletion, the degradation of natural systems and the dangers of polluting substances has increased markedly in the past decade. *These worsening conditions are destroying fragile ecosystems and displacing communities, especially women, from productive activities and are an increasing threat to a safe and healthy environment.*

...

In both urban and rural areas, environmental degradation results in negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of the population at large, especially girls and women of all ages. Particular attention and recognition should be given to the role and special situation of women living in rural areas and those working in the agricultural sector, where access to training, land, natural and productive resources, credit, development programs and cooperative structures can help them increase their participation in sustainable development. *Environmental risks in the home and workplace may have a disproportionate impact on women's health because of women's different susceptibilities to the toxic effects of various chemicals. These risks to women's health are particularly high in urban areas, as well as in low-income areas where there is a high concentration of polluting industrial facilities.*<sup>75</sup>

---

73. See Beijing Declaration, *supra* note 69, ¶ 102.

74. *Id.* ¶ 34 (emphasis supplied).

75. *Id.* ¶¶ 246-247 (emphasis supplied).

In response to these acknowledgments, the Beijing Declaration's Platform of Action provided strategic measures of action that Governments may take to minimize — and in the process, totally eliminate — the heightened risks of women against environmental degradation and pollution. According to the Declaration, the principal strategic objective in combating environmental risks, would be to “*involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels,*”<sup>76</sup> specifically at the level of municipal governments,<sup>77</sup> international organizations and the private sector,<sup>78</sup> and non-governmental organizations.<sup>79</sup> The Platform of Action elaborated on this measure of action in this wise:

*The strategic actions needed for sound environmental management require a holistic, multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach. Women's participation and leadership are essential to every aspect of that approach. The recent United Nations global conferences on development, as well as regional preparatory conferences for the Fourth World Conference on Women, have all acknowledged that sustainable development policies that do not involve women and men alike will not succeed in the long run. They have called for the effective participation of women in the generation of knowledge and environmental education in decision-making and management at all levels. Women's experiences and contributions to an ecologically sound environment must therefore be central to the agenda for the twenty-first century. Sustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported.*<sup>80</sup>

Proceeding from this main objective, the Beijing Declaration likewise outlines other measures to promote the involvement of women in environmental policy-making and sustainable development among its States Parties, such as the integration of gender concerns and perspectives in the policy formation for sustainable development,<sup>81</sup> and the development of mechanisms at national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.<sup>82</sup> An overview of these courses of action clearly reflects the principle of interconnectedness

---

76. *Id.* strategic objective K.1 (emphasis supplied).

77. *Id.* ¶ 253 (The specific actions targeting this objective are geared towards performance by actors in both municipal and international levels.).

78. *Id.* ¶ 254.

79. Beijing Declaration, *supra* note 69, ¶ 255.

80. *Id.* ¶¶ 249–51 (emphasis supplied).

81. See Beijing Declaration, *supra* note 69, strategic objective K.2.

82. See Beijing Declaration, strategic objective K.3.

from an ecofeminist perspective, whereby women, being conceptually linked to the dynamics of the environmental system, to be afforded participation in key areas involving environmental policy-making and sustainable development.

#### IV. ECOFEMINISM IN CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ADVOCACIES

Reports from the UNEP reveal the multi-faceted efforts of women all over the world to foster advocacies towards the promotion, preservation and conservation of the environment.<sup>83</sup> From an ecofeminist perspective, these accounts exhibit the interplay between the reality of disproportionate environmental burdens that women suffer and the principle of interconnectedness, which operate on the female expertise in the preservation and conservation of the environment. This Part, as a follow-through from the preceding discussion, shall present several movements and advocacies which evidence the crucial role that women play in the protection of the environment.

The very first reported initiatives of women's environmental activism came in the 1970s. With respect to the issue of water rights and land use, women from the Himalayan Hills of India sought the Chipko agreement, whereby they opposed the tree-felling operatives of logging contractors throughout the locality.<sup>84</sup> This effort relating to proper streamlining of water rights and irrigation was subsequently amplified by several other movements in various localities in other parts of the world.

According to the UNEP, women in Cameroon "withheld their labor in an irrigated rice project as they were not assigned land but were expected to

---

83. See generally UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1.

84. According to the UNEP Report,

By the 1970s, women in several parts of the world had started actively organizing to stop degradation of their water systems. Village women in the Chipko movement in India held on to the water-saving capacity of their forests by opposing felling by contractors. Narmada Bachao Andolan (the Save the Narmada Movement), also in India, has struggled for years to stop the damming of the Narmada river. Women, under the leadership of Ms. Medha Patkar, are in the forefront of the Movement. Although the submergence of villages has started, the crusade for justice continues.

*Id.* at 67; see also Anne E. Simon, *Whose Move? Breaking the Stalemate in Feminist and Environmental Activism*, 2 *UCLA WOMEN'S L.J.* 145, 157-59 (1992).

work in their husbands' fields ... [t]hey started growing sorghum for family subsistence outside the irrigation scheme, where they had control over their own labor."<sup>85</sup> Similar cases of said efforts were also reported to have occurred in Burkina Faso, Gambia and Kenya.<sup>86</sup> "In Bolivia, Ukraine and the United States, among many other countries, women are protesting the sale of water services to multinational corporations ... cleaning up rivers, maintaining watershed areas and initiating a diverse array of water projects."<sup>87</sup> Further, it was reported that the women of Limai in Indonesia "formed a women's group that started a water project, first choosing the locations and then raising the initial capital by cultivating a communal field. They later invited the men into the local water committees that manage the service."<sup>88</sup>

There have also been reports of women's concrete responses to disaster aftermaths. In 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Soviet Union suffered a steam reactor explosion which resulted in fatalities across the region, some even attributed to the radioactive/nuclear effects of said accident.<sup>89</sup> In response to the degenerative effects of the nuclear disaster, a group of young Ukrainian mothers established MAMA-86 as a Kyiv city public organization in 1991.<sup>90</sup> Member Anna Tsvetkova relates the objectives and initiatives of the said organization to the UNEP in a report:

From the start, its principal objective has been to secure the environmental rights of Ukrainian citizens, primarily of children and women. Today,

---

85. UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1, at 68 (citing World Resources Institute, UNEP and UNDP, *World Resources 1994-1995* (1994)).

86. UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1, at 68.

87. *Id.*

88. *Id.* (citing Jennifer Francis, *Gender and Water*, a paper prepared for the Gender and Water Alliance (2003)).

89. See World Nuclear Association, *Chernobyl Accident*, available at <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/info7.html> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

According to the World Nuclear Association, the Chernobyl Accident "killed 30 people, including 28 from radiation exposure. A further 209 on site and involved with the clean-up were treated for acute radiation poisoning and among these, 134 cases were confirmed (all of whom apparently recovered). Nevertheless 19 of these subsequently died from effects attributable to the accident."

*Id.*

90. UNEP, *Women and the Environment*, *supra* note 1, at 76.

MAMA-86 has blossomed into a national environmental NGO network of 17 organizations from various regions of Ukraine and is an active partner in Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF). Its activities call upon the public to take charge of the sustainable development of their society, with a special focus on the environmental challenges of an economy in transition.

With water being such a serious problem, MAMA-86 kicked off the Drinking Water in Ukraine campaign in 1997, together with 11 organizations from its network. The goal is to improve access to safe and affordable drinking water through public awareness, participation in decision-making and the development of pilot projects. One early initiative addressed a lack of information disclosure, which makes it difficult for the public to obtain the kinds of reliable official data, including data on water, that help people decide on practical steps which they can take. Believing that education on the uses of information can revive citizens' sense of ownership and personal responsibility for resources, MAMA-86 began carrying out regular data-gathering and independent research on drinking-water quality, along with polling public opinion on the issue. It presented the results at round tables, workshops, seminars and conferences at the local, national and international levels.

...

Since 2001, MAMA-86 has been implementing a specific program of technical solutions for improving access to safe drinking water in urban and rural areas. It consists of 11 pilot projects that work on the local level, fostering public involvement in sustainable solutions through partnerships between the authorities, the public, science and business. There is a strong emphasis on public education on water saving and resource protection, the use of water meters, reliance on local water instead of long-distance transportation, cost-benefit analysis and shared responsibility for funding and co-maintenance.<sup>91</sup>

In the area of biodiversity, the UNEP has also recognized the significant role of Filipino women in efforts leading to the conservation and management of biological resources. According to the Report,

With regard to projects and programs, several initiatives around the world aim to enhance women's position in biodiversity conservation and management. Examples include the action, research and outreach program Green Health, set up by the University of the Philippines at Los Baños Institute of Biological Sciences. It has worked among women and men in the communities of Surigao del Norte on the north-eastern tip of Mindanao, teaching women the use of herbal plants to treat simple ailments. The women have learned not only

---

91. *Id.* at 76-77.



which plants can cure which ailments, but also how to make herbal medicine to bring in additional income.<sup>92</sup>

With climate change as an impending threat to the global community, women's efforts to curb its drastic effects have been manifested in various initiatives and organizations all over the world. According to gendercc.com, global network of women and gender experts towards climate justice, "[w]omen's knowledge of natural resources, and their common responsibilities in households and communities can be crucial for adaptation and disaster management"<sup>93</sup> with respect to the adverse effects of climate change. It further stresses that Governments must "[a]cknowledge women's role in adaptation, and ensure the full participation of women in planning and decision-making."<sup>94</sup> Specifically, the network advocacy lobbies to "integrate gender analysis into National Adaptation Plans and ensure that these are closely linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, integrating poverty alleviation and income diversification [with the effects of climate change impact]."<sup>95</sup> In the same manner, the Women's Environment & Development Organization, a group which seeks to empower women as decision-makers, believes that "women are essential to any successful response to climate change ... [such that] technical solutions are not enough. Energy legislation must reflect the particular impact of climate change on women and their role as key agents in the U.S. and the global response [to climate change]."<sup>96</sup>

The Women's Environmental Network and the National Federation of Women's Institutes in the United Kingdom likewise expressed initiative in lobbying women representation to the development of policies which tend to the issue of climate change. In 15 May 2007, they adopted the Women's

---

92. *Id.* at 41.

93. Gender CC, Impacts of Climate Change, Vulnerability and Adaptation, *available at* <http://www.gendercc.net/policy/topics/adaptation.html> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

94. *Id.*

95. *Id.*

96. Women's Environment and Development Organization, Media Fact Sheet: Women: Essential to Climate Change Solutions, *available at* <http://www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/wdaccmediafactsheet.pdf> (last accessed Feb. 15 2009).

Manifesto on Climate Change,<sup>97</sup> acknowledging that “[w]omen in the U.K. have a key role in tackling climate change as consumers, educators and ‘change agents’ in our homes, encouraging the adoption of lower carbon lifestyles and passing on green values to the next generation.”<sup>98</sup> In its Manifesto, these women’s groups resolve to curb climate change by adopting practical solutions within their respective homes, with the help of “clear guidance, advice and practical support to enable women to switch to a low-carbon lifestyle, ... [including] [m]ore government grants and incentives to make green energy choices, including energy conservation, cheaper and more easily available.”<sup>99</sup>

#### V. SUMMARY

*A gender sustainable development perspective should be infused with a commitment to change the cultural values and sexual division of labour, to attain, in the near future, a state where men and women share power and labor in the management and control of fragile ecosystems.*

- Mariam Abramovay & Gail Lerner<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, women share an intricate relationship with the environment. It has been demonstrated that the role of women in the protection and conservation of the environment takes its roots from the inherent interconnectedness with their socio-cultural role as guardians and keepers of their homes, their family and their natural and ecological resources. As seen from the presented empirical data, women are so situated to be highly at risk respecting environmental burdens such as environmental degradation, resource pollution and other forms of abuse. They are likewise more susceptible to environmental disruptions such as environmental accidents and disasters, given socio-cultural barriers which prevent them from taking an active role in risk-prevention and aftermath control. Using an ecofeminist perspective, women indeed suffer disproportionate environmental burdens, which is detrimental to the continuity of life.

---

97. Women’s Environmental Network & Women’s Institute, Women’s Manifesto on Climate Change, available at [www.wen.org.uk/climatechange/resources/manifesto.pdf](http://www.wen.org.uk/climatechange/resources/manifesto.pdf) (last accessed Feb. 15, 2009).

98. *Id.*

99. *Id.*

100. UNEP, Women and the Environment, *supra* note 1, at 84 (citing Mariam Abramovay & Gail Lerner, Introduction, in GENDER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A NEW PARADIGM – REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (Ana Maria Brasileiro ed., 1996)).

It is precisely because of this overlap that women are proven to be more proactive in safeguarding the environment. A survey of international environmental agreements, declarations and treaties, as well as those which deal directly with women's rights, demonstrates that women play a crucial role in the creation of effective environmental policies and in the implementation of programs which aid the conservation of the many aspects of the environment. Using an ecofeminist perspective, it is because of this female expertise and interaction with the natural environment, that they must be empowered to actively participate in the decision-making process respecting environmental plans of action. As presented in this Essay, there have been quite a number of initiatives which women have already undertaken to protect their environment, not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of the entire global community.

The Earth has always been depicted as Gaia, a nurturing mother to all of her children. True enough, the ecofeminist perspective of encouraging a gendered sense of environmental protection must be considered and used in various plans of action towards sustainable development, in order to provide practical, realistic and effective solutions for the conservation of the only habitat which humanity has.