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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, linkages between gender and the environment have become an important focus both of research and of development policy and practice. They figured strongly at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, 1992, and seem set to do so in the forthcoming Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995. At IDS, gender-environment relations have been a major theme of recent work, with the Environment Group linking into the Institute's long tradition of work on gender and development (e.g. Leach 1994; Joeques *et al* 1994). We have been interested in gender relations as integral to the social and economic organization which mediates people's relationships with particular environments (cf. Leach and Mearns 1991). And we have been concerned with gender as a key dimension of social difference affecting people's experiences, concerns and capabilities in natural resource management. Researching the two-way relationships between gender relations and environmental change in a variety of settings, we have also attempted to integrate gender issues into analysis of environment and sustainable development policies in ways which will lead to progressive change for women.

These are the concerns underlying the present Bulletin, which brings together findings from some of the latest IDS-related research on gender-environment relations with the work of other leading scholars and practitioners in the field.

In the multi-stranded debates of recent years, a spectrum of perspectives has emerged. They are in agreement that there are differences between women's and men's environmental relations, and that these differentials should inform policy concerning environment and sustainable development. They nevertheless conceive of gender-environment relations in very different ways, and this is where policy implications diverge. A brief, critical review of perspectives is useful for situating the articles in this Bulletin, and for locating our deliberate emphasis on **gender relations** and environmental change here as a response to flaws that we see in more women-focused, static approaches.

2 PERSPECTIVES

A predominant set of perspectives highlights women as having a 'special' relationship with the environment, as its users or 'managers'. In development circles, this approach has become known as WED (Women, Environment and Development), and as a common emphasis of policy and intervention from NGOs to major donor agencies, it represents an explicit attempt to link earlier WID (Women in Development) approaches with recent environmental policy concerns. Green and Baden in this Bulletin, for instance, analyse how WED perceptions underpin the new consensus on integrated water resources management.

Both theoretical and more popular WED discussions draw heavily on images of women's current roles as users and managers of natural resources; hewers of wood, haulers of water, custodians of genetic resources, food producers, and so on. These support the view that women have an especially close affinity with the environment, and that women's and environmental interests are complementary - what is good for women is good for the environment and *vice versa*. In policy terms, this has often become an argument for women's increased participation in environmental management.

Within a general focus on women's current, material roles, the emphases of WED discussions vary and have shifted over time. First, evidence was mustered of women's use of natural resources and close dependence on them in their daily lives, especially in sustenance roles which provide for the survival of their families and communities. Women are seen thus to acquire particularly deep environmental knowledge and concerns for the resource base. For Mies and Shiva, women's 'subsistence perspective' leads inevitably to them 'respecting both the diversity and the limits of nature which cannot be violated if they want to survive' (Mies and Shiva 1993: 19).

Second, especially in the early 1980s, there was emphasis on women as the major victims of environmental degradation, bearing the brunt of pollution and deforestation and the major responsibility for coping with shocks such as drought, epitomized in

powerful images of women struggling to find food and fuel in degrading land and treescapes. Women are seen as victims not only of natural degradation and disaster, but also of ill-conceived scientific and development processes (sometimes characterized as 'patriarchal') which have systematically undermined their resources for 'staying alive' (Shiva 1988). By implication, women have no choice but to participate in environmental conservation and rehabilitation, if their lives are not to become even harder.

Third, the late 1980s saw a shift to what one might term a post-victimology stance, emphasizing women's roles as efficient environmental managers. This drew on evidence of women engaged in environmental protection and rehabilitation: building soil conservation terraces, planting trees, dealing with seeds and wild plants to safeguard biodiversity; and also of grassroots movements such as Chipko which have been portrayed as 'women's movements' demonstrating feminine environmental concern. All this indicates women to be capable agents who can be mobilized for conservation projects.

There is some truth in each of these sets of images, and they combine into a compelling narrative: women's subsistence concerns make them the agents for conservation and this will be good both for them and for the environment. It is a narrative open to strong criticism on several grounds, as we explore below. But first it is important to note its support from a different set of perspectives: those derived from ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism views women as 'close to nature' in a spiritual or conceptual sense, different from - yet able to be invoked in support of - the appreciation of material relations found in WED. Although largely of western origin, ecofeminism has an increasingly vocal international presence (for example through the work of Vandana Shiva), and an implicit influence on many development perceptions (cf. Jackson 1993, Braidotti *et al* 1994). Ecofeminists argue that women are closer to nature at a conceptual level than men, who are associated with culture. In 'patriarchal' thought nature is seen as inferior to culture, and hence women are seen as inferior to men. The domination and oppression of women and the domination and exploitation of nature have thus gone together. This gives women a particular stake in ending the domination of nature. To scale up from individual to organization, it is argued that the common objectives of feminist and environmental movements are conducive to a merging of perspectives and action.

For some ecofeminists, the woman-nature link is a biological given; they point to the female body as the source of experiences which situate women differently with respect to nature from men. It gives them a life force which links them to each other and to other life forms (Starhawk 1990), and even gives women different forms of consciousness (Salleh 1984). The link is thus related to a notion of female essence, irreducible and unchangeable. Others, avoiding the obvious problems in biological determinism, have considered women's perceived naturalness as a cultural construct, universally built upon the specifics of female biology but not reducible to it. Women's reproductive functions, the social roles and psychic structure acquired in consequence, all lead them to be universally seen as closer to nature. By contrast men are free to or forced to create artificially, i.e. through cultural and technological means, and, in doing so become associated with culture (Ortner 1974).

Because these viewpoints see the woman-nature link as inevitable, they commonly envisage a more environmentally-sustainable future to depend on celebrating it. This view was reproduced at the UNCED conference in Rio, in the message that women are caring, non-violent, and better attuned than men in how to 'save the Earth and themselves'. The ecofeminist Merchant argues, for instance, that 'turning the perceived connection between women and biological reproduction upside-down becomes the source of women's empowerment and ecological activism' (cited in Braidotti 1994:164).

Other ecofeminists see woman-nature connections as ideological constructs which have arisen historically in particular societies. Thus Shiva (1988) powerfully argues that western images of nature and culture, female and male as separate, the former to be dominated and subordinated by the latter, have been imposed on 'indigenous' societies in Asia and Africa through development processes during and since the colonial period. They often replaced very different non-hierarchical conceptions which sanctioned more balanced relations between women and men, and people and their environments; it is these which need to be recovered and built on to re-orientate development, not simply the revaluation of woman-nature. This strand of ecofeminist thought potentially raises questions about the social and historical construction - and the variability - of concepts relating to gender and the environment. However, this potential is rarely carried through, tending to translate in WED into a presumption that 'indigenous'

conceptual frameworks are or were necessarily the opposite of western ones (gender-egalitarian and people-environment harmonious), and often that this non-hierarchy was somehow feminized. Thus Shiva, for example suggests that all precolonial societies 'were based on an ontology of the feminine as the living principle' (Shiva 1988:42), further bolstering the view that third world women have the key; feminine principles need to be recovered from what patriarchal /colonial development has imposed.

3 CRITIQUES

Many of the contributors to this Bulletin have found difficulty in reconciling these WED and ecofeminist images with the situations they have studied or experienced; with women's and men's experiences and perceptions as they live and deal with their complicated environments. Nor does this imagery sit easily with other areas of scholarship concerning gender and change. Alternative approaches to the analysis of gender-environment relations-illustrated by the present Bulletin articles - have developed partly through critiques of WED and ecofeminist concepts and categories.

Grouping 'women' as a category in their relationship to the environment is shown to be invalid in these alternative approaches, given that enormous social, cultural and economic differences within and between societies mean women may not experience their relationship with 'nature' in the same way. The UNCED fora presented women's interests as united, begging important questions about how far this dominant voice really spoke for women in southern cultures (Braidotti 1994). Equally, it is misleading to present all 'third world women' as the same, as certain authors and activists imply. And within any society, the category 'women' ignores differences related to class, ethnicity, age, marital position and so on. The contributions to this Bulletin suggest the need to recognize diversity among women, and to situate their perspectives both ideologically and materially, whether around class differences as emphasized in Mackenzie's article, for example, or age, as discussed by Joekes, or the age and status distinctions of wives and mothers-in-law as illustrated by Jackson. WED approaches have also been strongly censured for invisibilizing men (Leach 1992). The Bulletin contributions are more variable in this respect, with some articles highlighting the relations between men and women now recognized as crucial to a gender analysis of environmental

change, and others limiting themselves to a more narrow focus on women.

Recent approaches have also criticized the connection forged between 'women' and 'nature' in ecofeminist-influenced studies. The concept of a woman-nature link is now widespread. But anthropological studies, in particular, show the enormous variability of meanings attributed to 'female' and 'male', and the ways they are linked with concepts such as 'nature' and 'culture'. They show that the *a priori* nature-society distinction upheld in western thought is by no means universal (Croll and Parkin 1992), and that women's reproductive roles by no means necessarily mean they are conceived of as closer to a universally-conceived nature. Joekes describes such a contrary belief system in Northern Pakistan, and Leach and Fairhead emphasize the importance of alternative distinctions in the Guinean context. Attention to people's own diverse concepts show how misleading a false imposition of western ones can be, and potentially undermines the ecofeminist political project: how can one recast as a virtue what people do not perceive?

Ecofeminist analyses which treat woman-nature links as ideological constructs sometimes avoid this universalizing trap, but even so, generally leave little room for the coexistence of several ideological strands, and for the possibility that different women and men in society might see and experience things in different ways (cf. Moore 1988:19). Alternative approaches suggest the need to see how certain ideas are produced, debated and entrenched within social and political processes, and in relation to particular groups and institutions. And woman-nature links, where they are found, need to be analysed as part of processes of ideological construction, linked to power relations; an argument which applies equally when they are invoked in global development debates.

The conceptualization of 'environment' in dominant WED/ecofeminist perspectives is also open to criticism. Ecofeminism, grounded in a western conceptualization of binary oppositions, tends to take nature to encompass all things ecological in the environment, as well as natural (biological) human needs and capacities. Equally in WED discussions, generalized references to 'common environmental crisis', 'pro-environmental change', and 'environmental sustainability' are common. But equating 'the environment' with 'nature' can obscure the

historical and continued shaping of landscapes by people, often within conceptions of society and environment as inseparable. Treating 'environment' as a category can obscure the plurality and the politics of environmental perceptions, not least as different North-South, class or particular scientific perspectives lead to different environmental priorities, and to different perceptions of what constitutes 'degradation' or 'improvement'. Clearly, there is a need for context-specificity, and for local environmental problems to be defined from a close focus on 'people in places' (cf. Leach and Mearns 1991). In this respect these Bulletin articles illustrate inhabitants' specific concerns such as with soil fertility and productivity (David and Ruthven), sites and fallows (Leach and Fairhead), forest product availability (Shah and Shah, Sarin), or species diversity (Rocheleau). Contributions also refer to conflicts between such local livelihood concerns, and very different valuations of the same environments by non-local groups. Thus in the case described in Malaysia by Heyzer, the timber interests of politically-powerful loggers contrast - and conflict - with local interests in extracting forest products. Rocheleau discusses the contrasting ways that biodiverse Kenyan landscapes are perceived by northern preservationist movements, biotechnology agencies, and the people living from their crops, plants and animals. Each will have different priorities for conservation and development.

Environmental perceptions, values and priorities may also strongly differ within rural communities, not least between women and men. Thus the articles by Sarin and by Shah and Shah show how Indian 'village' forests have meant very different things to women and men, according to their respective tree species 'preferences' as shaped by gendered role expectations. Studies of rural communities commonly reveal complex ideas about the physical and non-physical attributes of different micro-environments and diverse links between environmental categories and gender. Here, for instance, Leach and Fairhead show how the same soils and sites can be considered as politically-salient ruined villages by patrilineage elders, or - very differently - as fertile potential gardens by wives. Such socially-constituted differences of perception in turn influence gendered struggles for control over resources, and over how local environments are managed. In emphasizing environmental change in this Bulletin's title, we aimed to give scope to consider both the dynamics of the natural re-

source base as influenced by people, and socially-differentiated ways of understanding and evaluating such change.

However, the focus of this Bulletin on environmental **change** should not obscure the fact that there is some **continuity** in the way in which patterns of gendered resource usage tend to reflect hierarchies which, more often than not, favour men. Historical analyses such as Mackenzie's article on land rights in Kenya is suggestive of this tension between continuity and change.

Building from such critiques towards a gender analysis of environmental change, a number of new approaches are emerging under different banners and with slightly different emphases: feminist environmentalism (Agarwal 1992), feminist political ecology (Rocheleau *infra*), and gender, environment and development (GED), for example. These share a common emphasis on material relations and on their structuring by gender relations. Some encompass what Leach (1991) has termed a micro-political economy of gendered resource use: a detailed 'unpacking' of differences and divisions in activities, responsibilities and rights in processes of natural resource management and use, and an examination of their interaction with gender relations. This allows for the identification of differences between groups of women as well as men, and can be applied over time to examine the interactions between changing gender divisions and environmental change. Wider social relations of gender structure processes of resource use, whether patterns of marriage or power relations between women and men. And as Agarwal (1992) argues in the Indian context, ideological constructions of gender and of nature, and the relationship between the two, may be seen as (interactively) part of this structuring, but not the whole of it.

4 EMERGING THEMES

Positions which fall broadly into this latter group characterize most of the contributions to this Bulletin. Focusing on rural environments in Africa and Asia, and drawing together a number of exciting recent studies, the Bulletin illustrates different ways of applying gender analysis to environmental relations. The articles themselves are very different in origin, scope and topic. They deal with rural ecologies as diverse as tropical forests, desert margins and mountainous highlands, and with topics ranging

from trees and soils to water resources. Three (by Alaoui on Morocco, Oniango on Kenya and Heyzer on Malaysia) are case studies researched within a broader UNRISD project on 'Women, Population and Environment' co-ordinated by Susan Joeques. The articles by Joeques on Pakistan, Leach and Fairhead on Guinea, Jackson on Zimbabwe, Rocheleau on Kenya and Mackenzie on Kenya are also case studies derived from field research undertaken in a relatively academic context. In contrast, David and Ruthven's study of Sahelian migration was conceived mainly to respond to the concerns of donors and practitioners, while Shah and Shah report explicitly on a rural development project experience. Several articles draw comparative perspectives from several study areas, including David and Ruthven's, Alaoui's on Northern Morocco and Sarin's in the Indian context. Sarin addresses issues of national and donor environmental policy as related to forest management, while Green and Baden's article, based on literature research carried out at IDS for BRIDGE,¹ is similarly pitched at a broader policy level. But across these differences, a number of themes emerge which carry more general implications for understanding and for policy.

First, the articles illustrate the two-way relationship between gender relations and rural environmental change. Gender relations have a powerful influence on how environments are used and managed, and hence on patterns of ecological change over time. Yet environmental trends and shocks also impact on gender relations, whether directly - for example as ecological degradation alters the gender distribution of resources, or encourages particular coping strategies - or indirectly, in the political or ideological use of environmental issues to uphold or challenge particular relations or forms of subordination.

Rocheleau's article is suggestive of this two-way relationship, showing how the biodiversity and complex, changing plant assemblages in rural areas of Kenya depend on gendered work, property and knowledge relations, but also how changes in diversity patterns impact on women's and men's relationships with each other. In a similar vein, Leach and Fairhead show how changes in gendered farming organization, responsibilities, labour and crop control in Kuranko areas of Guinea are increasing the prevalence of particular farming practices involving

'soil-ripening' which encourage woody vegetation to develop in the savanna landscape. Extended soil ripening is also associated with greater economic autonomy in relations between women and men, challenging the once strongly-reinforced notion that wives, mothers and their gardens were 'for' men's patrilineages.

An emerging theme, too, is the inadequacy of the WED assumption of women's and environmental interests as complementary. Clearly, there are cases where because of the organization of gender relations, women have little incentive for environmental sustainability or improvement, or are obliged to become agents of environmental degradation. Alaoui's Moroccan study describes such a situation. Mackenzie's article suggests it to be the case in Murang'a district of Kenya, where the intersection of gender and class relations has undermined some women's control over land and labour such as to push them into relatively short-term, and she suggests soil-degrading, forms of food-cropping. The article by David and Ruthven, focusing on Sahelian areas subject to male out-migration, suggests that women's insecure usufruct rights to land 'loaned' by their husbands limits their perceived returns to investment in, and thus their commitment to, environment-conserving land practices. In other cases, an apparently positive involvement in environmental use or management may reflect women's subordination or resource constraints within gender relations; or, contrary to appearances, be of little benefit to women. Such instances raise the important possibility of conflict between women's and environmental interests. But a discourse of conflicts and complementarities may ultimately be unhelpful, not least because it encourages the freezing of women into static environmental relationships. These images are laid open to seizure by policy-makers with the prospect that women again become immortalized as victims or saviours of the environment. As Jackson (*infra*) suggests, we need to move beyond this discourse to understand the factors and processes mediating gendered environmental experiences.

In this respect, the emerging themes in this Bulletin suggest a number of important elements which can usefully be made part of a framework for analysing gendered dimensions of environmental change.

¹ Briefings on Development and Gender, an information analysis project at IDS.

4.1 Divisions of labour and responsibility

The identification of gendered responsibilities and labour and work routines is an important first step in a gender analysis. Relevant divisions are not only between women and men: Jackson's article exemplifies the significance of age- and status-related labour divisions among women, while both Alaoui and David and Ruthven allude to the importance of children's labour. Issues of labour access and control are also significant: several articles show how women's limited control over their own labour and restricted access to the labour of others condition their environmental management. Documenting the 'doing' of work and responsibilities may be insufficient, however, without broader attention to the values and subjectivities within which gender-divided roles acquire their meanings. Furthermore it is abundantly clear from articles here, notably Joekes, that gender divisions of labour cannot be used to 'read off' gendered property rights or decision-making power. As Rocheleau and Heyzer argue, there is often a gap - or a mismatch - between gendered responsibilities and rights.

4.2 Property rights

Also important, then, are the implications of gender differences in property relations for natural resource management incentives and opportunities. Several articles suggest that rights to land and trees are a critical mediator of gender-environment relationships. Insecure rights to land may force women into situations where they may compromise their knowledge of sustainable land management by prioritizing short-term livelihood needs. Mackenzie's paper, which makes this case, also suggests the need to move beyond a legalistic framework for understanding rights in resources. Her research in Kenya indicates that women have been adept at manipulating the meanings of and exploiting the spaces between customary and statutory legal tenurial frameworks. This questions the notion that land rights are inelastic and suggests that the replacement of customary land rights with statutory rights may remove for women a vital basis for negotiation over land. Rocheleau draws important attention to the intricately-nested landscape 'niches' and resources over which different women and men have different rights. Such complexity may be much more general than is often recognized (cf. Leach 1994), raising the possibility that under tenurial and technological change, the 'less visible' rights of subordinate groups risk being undermined or obliterated.

Questions of gendered property rights are no less pertinent within broader village or 'community' level institutions, as when land, forests or water are managed as common property resources. Sarin shows the specific, and variable, nature of women's resource rights within 'community forest management institutions' that neither represent unified community interests, nor are immutable. Indeed she argues that as these institutions have acquired state support, so they have been transformed in ways which reduce many women's access to resources they need.

4.3 Institutions

Property rights issues link with the more general analysis of institutions: how positioning in households, communities and other institutions involved in environmental decision-making is gendered. Jackson's article argues that an analysis of conjugal contracts is useful in situating gender relations. Indicative of the marital obligations between spouses, it also indicates scope for bargaining around conjugal expectations, for modifying the meanings of marital obligations and perhaps avoiding the duties allocated under gendered divisions of labour. Focusing on environmental relations constituted through marriage also raises interesting questions about the positions of women who are *de jure* or *de facto* husbandless: several articles address the consequences of men's out-migration on natural resource management. In the cases described by David and Ruthven, women with absent husbands seem to be drawn closely into the relations of authority and obligation of their husband's lineage in environmental matters. The situation Alaoui describes in one village in Morocco amounts to a mass desertion of many women by male migrants who marry outside their sending community, but who retain total control of the resource base.

Clearly, though, marriage provides only one institutional context for gendered environmental relations. Issues of authority and obligation within descent groups and broader family compounds are addressed by Leach and Fairhead, for example. Shah and Shah consider gender differences in influence within village-level resource-managing institutions, as well as arguing convincingly for the need to address gender within geographically-broader sets of social relations such as those that characterize inter-village or urban-rural ties.

4.4 Wider political economy

Studies taking a feminist political ecology approach, in particular, have strongly emphasized how the micro-political economy of gendered resource use articulates with regional, national or international economic or political change. A number of the Bulletin articles illustrate local land-use change as shaped by this intersection of macro and micro: for instance where men out-migrate in response to broader economic opportunities, as discussed by Alaoui, Ruthven and David, Joekes, and Leach and Fairhead; or where macro-economic changes in crop or resource prices alter local incentives for different types of land and labour use, as discussed by Mackenzie in relation to coffee in Murang'a; or where limited property rights among settlers in a marginal area in Embu, Kenya, as described by Oniang'o, constrain effective natural resource management by men and women alike. Wider marketing and cash-earning opportunities clearly influence people's environmental relations, not least by providing alternative sources of livelihood which do not depend so closely on environmental resources. Heyzer makes this point, arguing that in Malaysia gendered livelihoods are separating, with many men withdrawing from forest dependence at the same time as their female kin become more tied to it. In Pakistan, as described by Joekes, the significance of a local NGO's project interventions directed at women is that they have prevented complete segregation along these lines by supporting women's access to the wider economy.

4.5 Ecology

Finally, several contributions allude to the importance of particular ecological characteristics in shaping the processes and outcomes of environmental change. Differences in the local dynamics of soil, water, vegetation, fire, climate and animals may profoundly alter how land responds to the same use practices. Thus while Leach and Fairhead show that intensive gardening tends to convert grassy savanna to forest fallow vegetation in part of West Africa's forest-savanna transition zone, the same practices might have very different effects in other ecologies. While this point might seem obvious from a natural scientific viewpoint, social scientists focusing on social or gender dynamics of resource use frequently fall easily into generalization and assumption about their environmental impacts; that 'short-term' farming is inevitably soil-degrading, for instance. In this respect, several articles leave questions begging: how are Murang'a's soils actually responding

to the land- and labour-constrained women's food cropping practices described by Mackenzie, for instance? And how do the different ecological - as well as social - characteristics of the four areas compared by David and Ruthven affect patterns of change? This is an argument for interdisciplinarity within future research agendas; and as Watts and Peet (1993) emphasize, for stressing the 'ecology' as well as the 'political' in political ecology approaches.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Hand in hand with fine-tuning theories concerning gender relations and environmental change, we need to consider their policy implications. Although the policy implications of WED have been thought through (and criticized), the practical implications of GED approaches have yet to receive serious attention. However certain points seem clear.

- (1) There needs to be a shift away from the instrumental WED approach. Policies cannot be premised on an assumption of a generalized affinity between women and nature, or simplistic observations of 'what women do' - there are serious risks of simply adding 'environment' to the already long list of women's caring roles, instrumentalizing women as a source of cheap or unrewarded labour. Women have all too often been mobilized as a source of cheap labour for 'community' forestry whose tree products have come to be controlled by men, for instance. Green and Baden show that the new World Bank policy on integrated water resources management holds potential for repeating this mistake in relation to water and sanitation projects.
- (2) Any effects on workloads, as a consequence of policy or intervention, must be accompanied by means to secure or enhance women's entitlements to environmental resources. Women must gain from what they do. If environmental improvement is to be an opportunity for women, this often means attention to gender-redistribution; to ensuring that gender relations allow women sufficient rights and decision-making power to gain and hold on to benefits.
- (3) Vigilance is needed about changes which may affect property regimes. There is a need actively to monitor women's property rights in a project or programme context given that rights are socially structured and not immune to change. Policy must anticipate that property rights may be undermined

by abrupt change in relatively elastic regimes; and that less visible, 'in-nested' rights of women or others may disappear in the process.

(4) This in turn implies adopting an analysis of institutions. It will be important for outside agencies to support and build on the often less visible institutional arrangements and networks which provide channels for women to press their concerns and guard their entitlements in situations of ecological stress or environmental change. Here,

there is a strong case to be made for strengthening and supporting women's organizations, as emphasized by WED approaches. But in other contexts different organizational bases or coalitions may be more appropriate. Age, class, ethnicity, place or issue-based as well as gender-based, these may better reflect the differentiated, context-specific, and intersecting perceptions, priorities and organizational forms suggested by gender relations/political economy analyses of environmental change.

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