

**Gender & Environment / Sustainable Development:
Defining the Issues**

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Presentation at the International Conference on

**‘Gender Perspectives on Earth Summit 2002 -
Energy, Transport, Information for Decision-Making’
Berlin, Jagdschloss Glienicke, 10 – 12 January 2001**

**jointly hosted by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and
Nuclear Safety and the Heinrich Boell Foundation**

Ms Chairwoman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

good afternoon and thank you for giving me the floor at this stage of the workshop for a talk. Allow me to start my presentation on women and environment/sustainability with two remarks, one of which is on the subject of this workshop in general and the other one on my presentation. In these remarks I will focus on some historical facts and on the problem I faced when I prepared my speech against the background of the papers written for this workshop, in which almost everything I could say here is covered already. Therefore, my presentation will be a kind of superficial synopsis of facts and ideas expressed in a multitude of papers, brochures and books. Let me start with my historical remark:

First, I would like to thank the organizers of this workshop, and especially would I like to thank Barbara Schäfer for her initiative to carry out this event. It almost was inconceivable some years ago that in the near future gender issues might be on the agenda of the Federal Environmental Ministry or that gender issues might even be brought up for discussion by the Ministry with the aim of developing a corresponding strategy for the Earth Summit 2002.

Those of you who speak or read German might know the brochure which some years ago was published by the Environment Ministry of Northrhine Westfalia (Ministerium für Umwelt, Raumordnung und Landwirtschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, no year given). In this brochure, sustainability was looked at from the viewpoint of women. This was mainly done by women who had been active in the field of women and environment, women and sustainability, for years. At the time this brochure was published, there had not been any comparable activity by the Federal Environment Ministry. Undoubtedly, the initiative taken by the Environment Ministry of Northrhine-Westphalia was also a result of the fact that at the time this ministry had already been headed for several years – and incidentally is still headed - by a female minister who furthermore is a member of the Green Party. Another reason is that some of her staff members had been very active in the field at issue.

This brochure describes activities in the field of women and environment and women and sustainability both at international level and in Germany. Furthermore, it focuses on the problems which German activists in the field of women and environment faced when they tried to bring up this issue at the national level, for example in the preparations for the UN World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995 (Geschäftsstelle zur Vorbereitung der 4. Weltfrauenkonferenz, 1994; Office for the Preparation of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1994; Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 1994). The experiences gained during this process were more or less the same as those gained during the Beijing follow-up

processes. In 1999, the Heinrich Boell Foundation published a report describing the NGOs' view of the national implementation of the Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (Heinrich Boell Foundation 1999). The chapter on women and environment in this report not only included a number of demands but also identified the problems: Up to that point it had not become apparent that the Federal Environment Ministry sees a need to focus on this issue; and it still seemed to be the official understanding that chapter 24 of AGENDA 21 is relevant mainly for the countries of the South. Actually, this was not the case, although the change had not yet become apparent.

Against this background, the fact that we have been invited to participate in this workshop initiated and carried out by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the Heinrich Boell Foundation has to be clearly acknowledged as a considerable step towards an official recognition of the existing gender differences in approaches towards environmental policy and sustainability, and even more so of the need to focus on gender issues if sustainability is to be achieved. But it has to be stated as well that without the continual work and admonitions of – still few - activists in the area of women/gender and environment or women/gender and sustainability we might not have come together at this workshop. Some of the activists and constant admonishers of those days are participants of the workshop, some others were not able to attend the workshop.

The second remark is on my presentation and it might serve as another part of the introduction: After I had read the papers for this workshop which Jasmin Enayati sent us before Christmas, I asked myself what actually is left to define. For the task I was given is to define the issues, mainly as I see them, the issues women and environment as well as women and sustainability. I decided to leave out the three themes Energy, Transport, and Information for Decision-Making on which we are going to work during the next three days. This is because I think that the papers prepared for this workshop define these issues sufficiently.

As far as I can see, women have worked on visions of sustainability in several areas that are relevant for sustainable development in any society, for example on consumption and product innovation, on waste management, on transport and mobility, on biotechnology, on a preventive or precautionary and caring economy, on a new conception of work, on intra- and intergenerational equity, on time policy, on gender and feminist perspectives in general as well as on gender equity (e.g. Busch-Lüty et al., 1994; Hofmeister/Spitzner, 1999; Schulz 1993; Schulz/Weller, 1995; Weller et al., 1999). Nevertheless, it seems to me that in spite of everything done so far **we are lacking a more than fragmental vision, a general vision of sustainability from a women's viewpoint**. I think that it would be extremely helpful to have a study similar to the one carried out by the Wuppertal Institute on behalf of BUND and MISEREOR (1996), the title of which is „Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland“ (which translated means „Sustainable Germany“ as well, due to different German translations for the word sustainable). This study was strongly criticized by women involved in research and activities on women and environment, gender and environment, women and sustainability, gender and sustainability (e.g. Frauen aus dem Bundeskongress entwicklungspolitischer Aktionsgruppen, 1996; Forum Umwelt & Entwicklung 1997; Scheich, 1999; Schulz, 1996). Reasons for the critical response were that gender perspectives and an analysis of power relations between different spheres of society and different members of society as well as between the countries of the North and the South were not included in this study.

The study on sustainable development in Germany, which was published two years later by the Federal Environmental Agency (FEA, 1998), did not meet with a similarly critical response from women or men working on gender issues in environmental protection and sustainability (although this study does not focus on gender perspectives either). The lacking response regarding the non-inclusion of gender issues might be due to the different expectations people have regarding NGO's, on the one hand, and institutions which are part of public administration, on the other. It might also be due to the content of the study by BUND/MISEREOR/Wuppertal Institute, which in its main part consists of visions for a possible development toward sustainability in different societal spheres and areas (e.g. a right measure of time and space, a green market agenda, cyclic instead of linear production processes, living well instead of owning much, the city as lebensraum, and so on). In this kind of problem description, it is much more evident that a gender

perspective should be involved than in the description of different scenarios in some areas which are of great importance to environmental protection and sustainable development. The latter was done in the FEA's study for the areas energy, mobility, food production, material flow management, consumption patterns. Furthermore, it was criticized that hardly anything was said in the Wuppertal Institute's study about the instruments for and the pathways towards an implementation of its visions. Whereas the FEA's study includes a range of instruments to achieve sustainable development, instruments specific to the various areas covered in the study as well as a range of general instruments.

Most of the activities presented happened some years ago and we have to ask ourselves in what direction we are or should be heading today:

It seems to me that up to now, in general and outside the room in which we are sitting, it is **not at all** clearly acknowledged among the public and in the political sphere that environmental problems and policies are related to gender. And it is acknowledged even less that sustainable development is not achievable without the realisation of gender equity and gender democracy (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2000) - although this requirement for sustainability was acknowledged and stated in the Action Platform of the 4th World Summit on Women held in Beijing in 1995. On the one hand, this lack might be caused by different definitions of and views on sustainability, especially regarding the relation of ecological, economic and social aspects which all three have to be dealt with in combination to achieve sustainability. On the other hand, this lack is due to the distribution of power and the gender-unequal access to power and decision-making in most of today's societies.

In my view this lacking acknowledgement is a further argument for the necessity to develop general visions of sustainability from a gender, from a female perspective and to define the different impact of environmental policy measures on women and men and the different impact that roles and functions of women and men are having on environmental degradation and destruction. One of the main faults in the discussion and research carried out through the years might have been that women were caught again and again and too much in a victim's perspective, a perspective of those who are not appropriately recognized by those who have the power to define the concepts and programmes. I think that women need to define what their goals and visions are more proactively, where they want to go to and what their visions of a good life are – from an ecological, an economic and a social point of view.

In the last part of my presentation I would like to do three things, as I think I do not need to explain to anybody at this workshop what the common definitions of sustainable development are and what basic assumptions have been formulated in the areas gender/women and environment or sustainability. What I will do first is to name some of the problems we are faced with when exploring possibilities for the realization of sustainable development: I will do this partly by asking questions about the problems. Secondly, I will identify some of the problems we are facing when we deal with the issue women/gender and environment/sustainability. And thirdly, I will add a few remarks on possible strategies which we need at least to keep in mind or even need to address during the next days and maybe years.

So, first, problems faced when dealing with the issue sustainable development:

So far it is not quite clear how progress, economic growth and even development and modernization are to be understood and defined in relation to sustainability. Furthermore, it is not quite clear how we could manage to get a holistic concept, a holistic view, of ecological, economic and social aspects of sustainability, even though the need for this has been acknowledged since the beginning of the discussion about sustainable development. How should these three spheres be viewed together and be related to each other, and how is this currently being done? Is it that we need to consider, define and respect limits which could be set by evaluating our knowledge about ecological aspects, about limited resources and a limited capacity of ecosystems to deal with pollution? The approach of the Federal Environmental Agency and the Federal Environment Ministry is to define environmental quality targets which are to be understood as a kind of ecological limits for economic and social development, but in other political areas other approaches - and priorities - are favoured, for example definition of economic requirements or limits. How could we obtain a societal consensus on the goals to be achieved to

realize sustainability? How is participation to be managed? How could equity, inter- and intra-generational and inter-gender equity, be achieved? How are the contrasting interests as well as the interests to maintain the present power relations to be dealt with? What kind of indicators are the most appropriate to serve as guidelines for an adjustment of both collective and individual behaviour? How are people to be trained to deal with issues of such high complexity as development towards sustainability?

Let me now move on to the second subject and outline some problems and questions regarding the issue of women and gender with respect to sustainable development:

Are we quite sure that sustainability is the concept we are willing to work towards in the present and in the future? Is the concept of "Sustainable Livelihood" still more appreciated by those who are activists on women/gender and sustainability?

We know that sustainable development in industrialized countries means something different than sustainable development in developing countries - and so it does for women in different countries and as well for different women in a single country. How do we have to deal with the differences between women?

Is gender mainstreaming a concept which helps us to relate to our view of sustainability as do Article 24 of the AGENDA 21 and the Action Platform which resulted from the World Summit on Women in 1995? What kind of conceptualization of gender and gender equity do we need with regard to sustainability? What is to be said about gender roles and the gendered division of labour with regard to a new concept of work in a sustainable society? How do we have to deal with the gender impact of environmental measures and instruments for sustainability without being caught in fixing gender roles by ourselves? Could different concepts of gender roles be integrated in a shared vision of sustainability among women who are activists in this field? Finally, what are our visions of a sustainable society, a question I already asked in the beginning of my talk. Could we manage to have a common vision among ourselves?

Thirdly and almost at the end, I have some remarks to make regarding our strategies:

What kind of strategies will help us to realize our goals - after we clearly defined them? Is gender impact analysis an appropriate measure which we should develop in the (environmental) policy sector? What kinds of indicators should we propose with regard to gender equitable sustainable development? Should there be a conference of women, of gender sensitive activists in advance of the Earth Summit 2002 and how could it be organised? What should be our contribution to the Earth Summit 2002? What should be written in the national report for Earth Summit 2002 about women and sustainability, women and environment? Should we work towards an article in the Earth Summit 2002 document on women and sustainability, an article which could not so easily be denied by the decision-makers, e.g. in the northern countries?

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the project „Gender and Sustainability“ which some women working at the Federal Environmental Agency initiated in the year 2000. The project proposal was approved by our Agency's Board of Directors, which consists of the President, the Vice President and the heads of the five departments of the agency. The project will be carried out over the next two years, perhaps over the next three years depending on the findings obtained in the first two years. In addition to a lot of information material I brought with me, I brought copies, hopefully enough for all of you, of the description of the project in English (Federal Environmental Agency, 2000). We are happy that we were able to define this project on gender and sustainability and hopefully we will be able to carry it out successfully during the next few years.

It is women who drew up the concept for this project and have been carrying out it so far. It is mostly women who are dealing with the issues women and environment and women and sustainability, at least this is the situation in Germany. We therefore are acting as „agents of change“, to use the phrase applied by Hespina Rukato (2000) in her paper prepared for this workshop. In this paper the author discusses the situation of women in the South, in this case regarding energy. But isn't it the same in the North and the South that almost nothing is going to change with regard to our situation as women if we don't act as the „agents of change“ and, furthermore, that we expect of ourselves and others expect of us that we are the „agents of change“ working towards an improvement of society in general? The backside of this coin is the

heavy pressure we put on ourselves and the pressure to act that is exerted on us by others. The danger is that we might become the „Trümmerfrauen des Patriarchats“, the women to handle the ruins of patriarchy, as Christina Thürmer-Rohr (1992⁶) has called the fact that men and women expect women to clean up what men have polluted and damaged.

Thank you for your attention.

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