

**Presentation for the workshop on
"Information for decision-making and participation"**

by Dr. Irmgard Schultz,
Institut für sozial-ökologische Forschung / Institute for Social Ecological Research (ISOE)
Hamburger Allee 45,
60486 Frankfurt/Main
Germany
E-mail: schultz@isoe.de

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, Germany and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Germany**

Satellite-based information and political decision-making

The societies and the forms of policy-making in the countries of the North are extremely knowledge-based.

Very important for us is to understand and to reform the interlink between knowledge-generating and political decision-making.

My contribution focuses a predominant form of getting data ("knowledge") in the field of environmental research and the possibilities of participatory political decision-making.

Satellite-data and information as source for political decision-making

*This strategy is unreflected forced in the Agenda 21 of Rio and explicitly described in chapter 40:
Agenda 21*

Chapter 40: Information for Decision-Making

shows two main strategic activities to better the information-base for decision-making

- 1.: The development, promotion and use of indicators of sustainable development
- 2.: The improvement and use of data collection, data use, methods of data assessment and analysis and strengthening of the capacity for traditional information

My critics in general: It is a one-way strategy to bring in satellite-based information into "traditional information". In fact this form of information is male-expert-based, technology monopolized and excluding all forms of "traditional information". Instead of bringing satellite-based information into "traditional information" it must be asked,

-> how satellite-based information could be "rebound" on "traditional" forms of information.

**One-way strategy of technology-transfer and of information-transfer from the developed
countries to the developing countries**

This strategy is formulated in chapter 40.9.

Chapter 40.9 describes the improvement of methods of data assessment and analysis:

"Relevant international organizations should develop practical recommendations for coordinated, harmonized collection and assessment of data at the national and international levels. National and international data and information centers should set up continuous and accurate data-collection systems and make use of geographic information systems, expert systems, models and a variety of other techniques for the assessment and analysis of data."

These steps will be particularly relevant, as large quantities of data from satellite sources will need to be processed in the future.

Developed countries and international organizations, as well as the private sector, should cooperate, in particular with developing countries, upon request, to facilitate their acquiring these technologies and this know-how.

Feminist Critique on satellite based data

Critique on a new image of the world

Space technology (the first satellites sent pictures of "the blue planet" since the end of the fifties) created a new world view, what can be described as "the planetary glance from outside of the space on earth."

In this "sputnik-view" all social dimensions are excluded. The globe or the blue planet is seen as a conglomeration of substances and energetical flows (for example in the very prominent image of the Earth as "The blue planet becoming grey - the blue planet is dying"). Earth seems to be a societal-free space instead of being a living room for human and other creatures, which are interacting together in complex forms.

Critique on techno-scientific based objectivity:

This planetary glance on Earth is basic for a new form of objectivity, what is exclusively built upon the "externalized proof" of a new technological form of seeing. Other forms of proofing objectivity are excluded. Objectivity is cut from all forms of interacting.

Critique on male based neutrality:

A very small group of above all male scientists, which are the experts in the satellite technique development industries and in the Earth system sciences, are constructing this new abstractifying glance of the world. They see themselves as "neutral", although they are a very small percentage of the world's population.

Critique on techno-based "rational politics"

The techno-based forms of information go well together with purely technological oriented global management strategies. The emotional base of scientific, political and economical interests, which lead to the selection of "photographed fields", is covered.

Feminist name this the "rationality project" of politics (Deborah Stone).

(See: Karen T. Litfin: The Gendered Eye in the Sky: A Feminist Perspective on Earth Observation Satellites. In: Frontiers. A Journal of Women Studies, Vo. XVII, No. 2, 1997, p. 26 - 47)

For example

Indigenous people in the US claim a "right" of not being observed by Earth observation systems. They mistrust, that these "photos" will serve for the exploitation of the natural resources of their land.

Five strategic points for rebounding satellite photos on Earth Life:

Key-question:

How to connect satellite-based environmental monitoring with a social monitoring, that is based on women's (affected peoples') information?

1. Data selection:

The scoping of the fields, where data should be aggregated, must follow problem-definitions, which must be open-laid.

The decision, where geo-scoping methods will be applied, should be participatory.

Affected people/nations must have the right to refuse being geo-scoped.

2. Data aggregation:

Women's interests must be explored by interrogations with the affected women, target groups, "vulnerable groups", ecological/subsistence farmers etc. concerning the same scope of Earth Life.

Data of the affected people have to complement the photo-based data.

A kind of "People's Earth Observation System" must be implemented into existing Earth Watch Systems.

3. Interpretation of data

Experts say, that this is the crucial point. Satellite based photos don't explain themselves by itself. They tell you exactly what the standards of interpretation define. Therefore: satellite data plus the People's Earth Observation data must be interpreted with gender-sensitive standards of interpretation. One would be: The interpretation must be done by the less 3 scientists from different scientific communities.

Transforming information into situated knowledge for participative political decision-making:

1. Information must be transformed into knowledge that can be used for political decision-making. They must become "situated and practical" for different information-users. At least there are two different channels, which must be reflected in this transformation process of information into knowledge for political decision-making:

-> Women/ NGOs/ different social agents/ target groups and the political governmental agents on a local or regional level;

-> Women/ NGOs/ different social agents, which should be represented in governmental institutions making political decisions on a national/international level.

With respect to these different "transformation channels" information will be re-concretized in different ways.

2. One of the biggest obstacles to come to participatory-decisions is the competitiveness between different disciplines and resorts within the political institutions.

Participatory decision-making therefore demands not only new forms of "bridging the gap" between women/lay people/affected peoples and institutions, but also:

> new forms of inter-disciplinary (inter-resort) action groups and new forms of participatory decision-making WITHIN the political decision-making institutions.

Documentation, Availability and other use of this information

The information of social-environmental monitoring systems must be available.

Not only scientists and politicians should have access to these information, but also so-called private people, women, lay people.

The use (misuse) of this information for economical interests must be politically regulated.

With respect to the public use of these information

-> two different strategies should be developed and forced:

1. The Internet should be used for better forms of availability (and recommended selection !!!, We don't need "data-cemeteries") of these information on an international level

2. New forms of information-use should be built up by coalitions between women's activists, scientists, politicians and women in the media (as for example in the radio, see the example of Thais Corral)