

*Development Alternatives with  
Women for a New Era (DAWN)*

---



**ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT:  
GRASS ROOTS WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE**

By  
*Rosina Wiltshire*

---

# ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: GRASS ROOTS WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Rosina Wiltshire



*"Our first environment is our bodies,  
our children and our families,  
the earth that sustains us and  
our communities."*

- Caribbean Women

DAWN is a network of Third World women involved in research, action, policy making and communication, seeking to promote Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era through a global analysis of key development issues. It's current agenda focuses on the themes of Environment, Reproductive Rights and Population, and Alternative Economic Frameworks.

DAWN

Paper Prepared for UNCED 1992 Rio, Brazil



## MEMBERS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

### Founder

Devaki Jain (India)

### General Co-ordinator

Peggy Antrobus (Grenada)

### Regional Representatives:

Sonia Cuares (Caribbean)

Neuma Aguiar (Latin America)

Bolanle Awe (Africa)

Noeleen Heyzer (Asia)

Hameeda Hossain (South-East Asia)

Claire Slater (Pacific)

### Research Coordinators

Rosina Wiltshire (Environment and Development)

Sonia Correa (Population and Development)

Gita Sen (Alternative Economic Frameworks)

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: DAWN Steering Committee

Special thanks to Dr. Lakshmi Jain for his assistance in the revision and editing of the paper.

DAWN is a network of Third World women involved in research, action, policy making and communications, and seeking to promote Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era through a global analysis of key development issues. It's current agenda focusses on the themes of Environment, Reproductive Rights and Population, and Alternative Economic Frameworks.

This paper was prepared in the context of the process leading to the UNCED Earth Summit. It characterises some of the dilemmas and issues that are raised when one thinks about Environment and Development from the perspective of poor women. It attempts to draw lessons from the types of experiences that women have in defining, coping with and challenging environmental degradation.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1987	Development, Crisis and Alternative	5
I. CASE STUDIES: THE HUMAN PICTURE AT THE MICRO LEVEL			
● Kiracot:	Legalised Plunder of Productive Resources of the Poor	7	
● Sarawak:	"Without the forest we are all dead"	7	
● Guyana:	National Policy and Structural Adjustment Snuffing Out Livelihoods	8	
● Jamaica:	Growing Inequity and Deforestation	11	
● Pacific:	Nuclear Testing and the Environment	13	
● Latin America:	Urbanization and Degradation	14	
● Sierra Leone:	The Disappearing Food Base	16	
II. SIGNALS FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCE			
Myth 1.	The Poor are Destroying the Environment	18	
Myth 2.	Population Growth is Responsible for Environmental Degradation	19	
Myth 3.	Lack of Knowledge Responsible for Environmental Degradation	19	
Myth 4.	Structural Adjustment - A Saviour	20	
III. ENVIRONMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE AND PLACE OF WOMEN			
		21	
IV. THE WAY FORWARD			
		23	
Selected Bibliography			

1991 \* Environmental Degradation and Poverty: Women and Children in Island Nations: The Caribbean Experience\* Prepared for UNCED Symposium, Women and Children First, Geneva

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

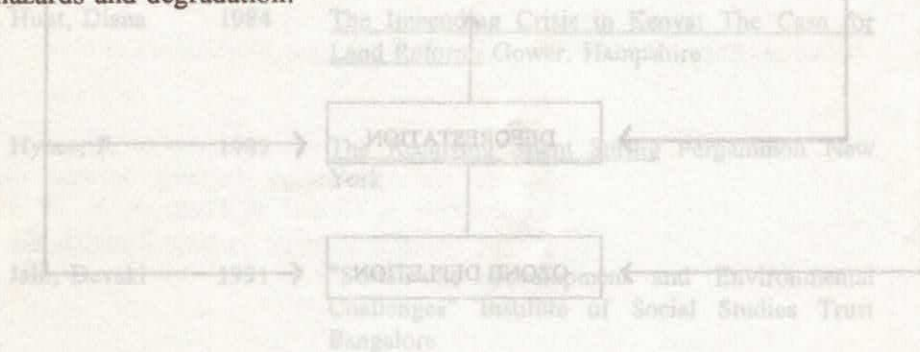
2	Introduction
7	I. CASE STUDIES: THE HUMAN PICTURE AT THE MICRO LEVEL
7	Localised Plunder of Productive Resources of the Poor
7	'Our capacity to sustain our livelihoods and care for our families, our link with our communities and the earth is being destroyed. Our knowledge of the earth and its care is being undermined and we are now told that we have to be taught about the environment. It is hypocritical to be concerned about the survival of a tree when there is little concern about our survival or the survival of our children. The earth is being raped for profit..'
16	- DAWN Workshop on Environment, 1991 -
18	II. SIGNALS FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCE
18	Myth 1. The Poor are Destroying the Environment
19	Myth 2. Population Growth is Responsible for Environmental Degradation
19	Myth 3. Lack of Knowledge Responsible for Environmental Degradation
20	Myth 4. Structural Adjustment - A Saviour
21	III. ENVIRONMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE AND PLACE OF WOMEN
22	IV. THE WAY FORWARD
	Selected Bibliography



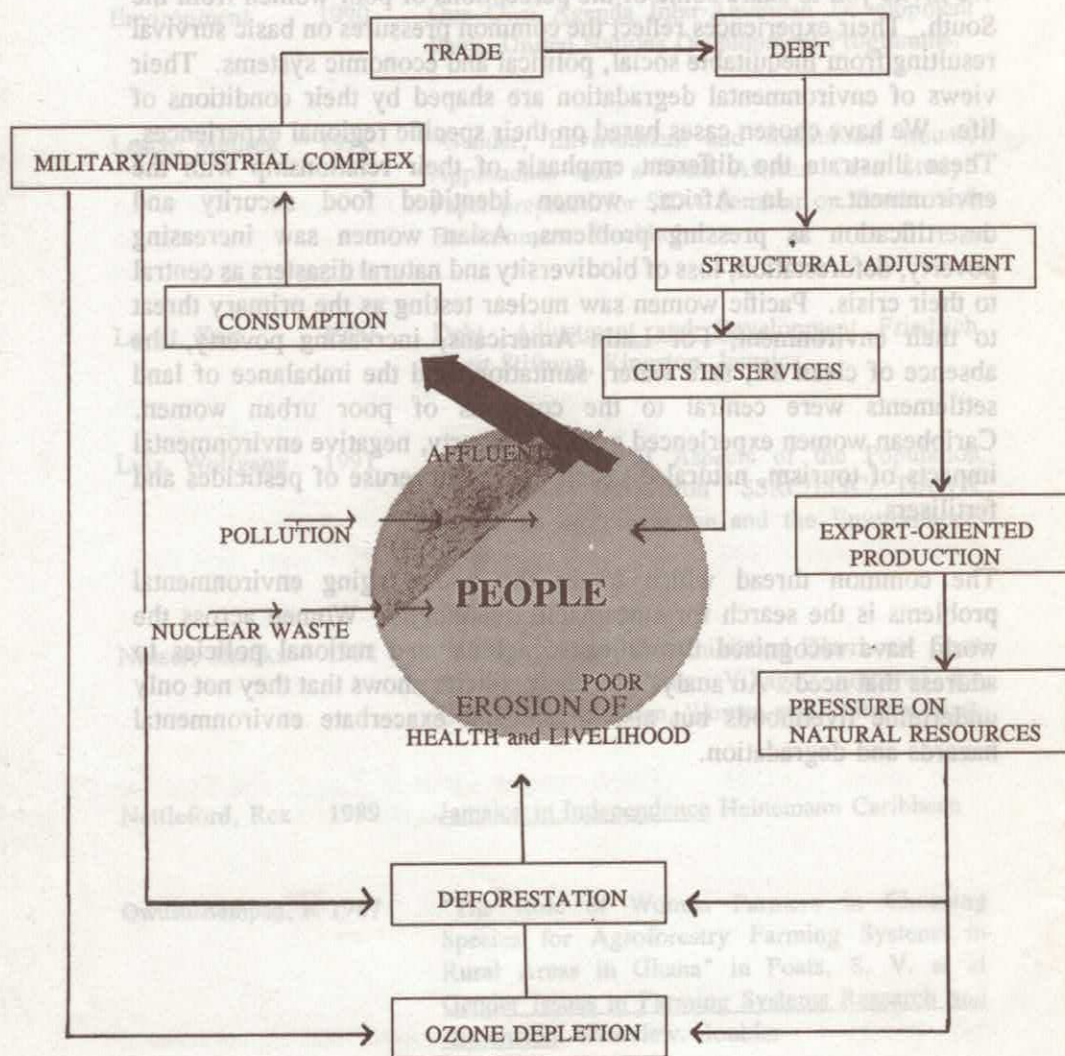
## Introduction

We invite you to share some of the perceptions of poor women from the South. Their experiences reflect the common pressures on basic survival resulting from inequitable social, political and economic systems. Their views of environmental degradation are shaped by their conditions of life. We have chosen cases based on their specific regional experiences. These illustrate the different emphasis of their relationship with the environment. In Africa, women identified food security and desertification as pressing problems, Asian women saw increasing poverty, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and natural disasters as central to their crisis. Pacific women saw nuclear testing as the primary threat to their environment, For Latin Americans, increasing poverty, the absence of clean air, safe water, sanitation, and the imbalance of land settlements were central to the concerns of poor urban women. Caribbean women experienced growing poverty, negative environmental impacts of tourism, natural disasters and the overuse of pesticides and fertilisers.

The common thread which traces the wide-ranging environmental problems is the search for sustainable livelihoods. Women across the world have recognised the failure of global and national policies to address that need. An analysis of these policies shows that they not only undermine livelihoods but also create and exacerbate environmental hazards and degradation.



## GLOBAL ECONOMY



## GLOBAL ECOLOGY

Source: Peggy Antrobus, General Co-ordinator  
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)  
First formulated at SSRC/SSC/DAWN Workshop, Mexico 1992



## I.

### CASE STUDIES: THE HUMAN PICTURE AT THE MICRO LEVEL

#### ● **KIRACOT: Legalised Plunder of the Productive Resources of the Poor**

Kiracot Village in the Himalayas has a large land area and a relatively small population base. With limited useable area, the community has little manoeuvrability for their agriculture and for grazing their animals, but the local government has given a licence to a mining company.

Women in the village have found that the dust deposits from mining have destroyed their crops. Also land has been cleared for the mining activity, forcing them to go miles to graze their animals. While mining has created employment for a few, it represents a direct assault on the livelihoods of the majority. This is worsened by the fact that the land is not even restored after mining.

The mineral is being used for cosmetics, not for food or essential consumption needs. However, because the mining lease is licenced under the law, the entire machinery of the law combines to suppress opposition. The livelihood of the poor is not being protected, but the licence which permits erosion of the community's subsistence is backed by the full weight of the law.

#### ● **SARAWAK: "Without the forest we are all dead"**

The Sarawak area of Malaysia has been the centre of intense conflict between a major government commissioned logging project and the local people. Though this conflict has received world-wide attention, the government has not budged. The income from the export of timber has been of no benefit to the local people who continue to lose their sources of subsistence.



The indigenous nomadic Penan community of Sarawak have traditionally subsisted on grains and forest products for their food, shelter and housing. Their ecologically sound management of the forests is now being threatened by commercial logging. As a result, wild animals are becoming extinct, the water is polluted and the freshwater fish stocks reduced. Non-timber forest products have also been destroyed. In protest, the locals have tried to stop commercial exploitation of the forests by setting up blockades. Women and children have formed human barricades to prevent the timber lorries from operating. One woman said, "We will stay here till they listen to us.... The forest is our source of survival. Without the forest we are all dead." The Government's answer has been to jail the protesters.

The local culture is fast being fragmented, the forests continue to be depleted and the people displaced. Some men in these displaced communities have found employment in the logging company because the logging workforce is primarily male. As a result, women's roles and status are being transformed as is their relationship to their bodies and their natural environment. One group of women researchers found to their dismay, in this once pristine community where women used to be partners in the management of the forests, any woman who now ventures into the logging area is automatically seen as a prostitute.

• **GUYANA: National Policy and Structural Adjustment  
Snuffing Out Livelihoods**

Guyana, which borders Venezuela and Brazil, has a small population base of approximately 750,000 people and a relatively large land area of over 19 million hectares. Population density is thus extremely low with 4 persons for every square kilometre. Indeed, fertility rates have fallen from 5.3 in the period 1965-1970 to 2.8 during the period 1985-1990. The interior is covered with tropical rainforest. Most of the urban population is located along the narrow coastal strip in the capital area. Almost 72% of the population is rural. Indigenous Amerindian populations who are concentrated in the rainforests and subsist on fish and forest products, have traditionally lived in balance with their natural environment.



#### IV.

Guyana is one of the most heavily indebted countries of the world. Interest payments alone account for over 30% of exports while total debt service payments account for 75%. As a result of the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes there was a 230% currency devaluation in 1989, coupled with a rise in interest rates of 35%. Wage rates were simultaneously restricted to a 20% increase. Since then the dollar has been devalued several times, contributing to a sharp decline in savings and wage earnings reducing access to core subsistence goods and shrinking the real incomes of even the professional level employees.

As employment opportunities recede, most people with skills have migrated; the migration of teachers, secretaries and nurses has been particularly significant. Heavy migration has left a large percentage of households headed by women. Single mothers who were in the middle or bottom of the income scale, have been pushed into material poverty. Even professionals earning two incomes admit that they cannot eat three balanced meals per day without supplementary income from migrant relatives. Basic food items such as milk are beyond the reach of large segments of the population. In 1990 one pound of chicken cost G\$65.00, a pound of flour G\$10.50 and a pound of rice G\$48.00. The minimum wage is G\$38.43 cents per day. In 1986, of the children under 5 who attended health clinics, 40.5 % were malnourished and their number was rising. Prostitution among teenage girls to supplement the family income has become a major social consequence of the erosion of livelihoods.

Cuts in budgetary allocations to the health sector have led to progressive deterioration of the infrastructure and the escalation of water borne diseases. The environmental situation has worsened causing a rise in diseases such as typhoid, gastro-enteritis hepatitis and malaria. Women who are responsible for the management of the households and primary health care of family members are shouldering the additional burdens imposed by the consequences of the policies.

Women and children are among those most hard hit and gains made in education over several decades after colonialism ended are being eroded. Literacy which was 95% among adult females in 1985 is declining rapidly. Because of the devaluations and the removal of educational



subsidies, under the adjustment programme, the cost of a primary school text book is now higher than a large proportion of lower income mothers' monthly salaries.

One of the current governmental policies likely to have the most damaging environmental effects is a result of the pressure on the government to generate additional export earnings. A large part of the country's land mass is covered by rich rainforests. The Malaysian and South Korean logging companies which were licenced by the Malaysian government, and have succeeded in decimating the forests of Sarawak, are now threatening the rainforests in Guyana. They have been given 4 million acres of Guyanese forests in a joint concession, in the drive to privatise under structural adjustment and the need to earn foreign exchange, most of which is being consumed in debt repayments. Ironically, at the same time a well designed and integrated forestry action project in a different section of the forests is being launched and supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The pattern of displacement of indigenous peoples, the erosion of their cultures, the absorption of the men into the market economy, growing alcoholism, increasing prostitution and the impoverishment of women and children are glaring symptoms of the imbalance of present 'development' in Guyana as in Sarawak. Apart from logging, people are also suffering from the impact of diamond mining. Indigenous people reported to a fact-finding mission in Guyana that they were exposed to mercury poisoning of the streams and rivers which they use for their drinking water and fishing, by the mercury used in the diamond mining. Because the indigenous people are far from the urban centres and modern medical care, little attention has been given to their plight and no research has taken place into the extent of the damage to their health, social structure, economy and culture.

Another perverse result of current development patterns and policies is that women have been blamed for the destruction of the mangroves which provide an important buffer for a coastline which is below sea level. However, women's recourse to environmentally damaging practices has been prompted by external factors. With the removal of

subsidies on cooking fuel and the erosion of their income base, they have been forced to use the mangroves as an alternative source of cheap fuel.

### ● JAMAICA: Growing Inequity and Deforestation

Jamaica has a population of approx 2.5 million and a land area of 1 million hectares. Fertility rates dropped from 5.4 during the period 1965-70 to 2.9 for the period 1985-1990. Growing poverty and inequity, inadequate resource management and unregulated tourism have caused major damage to the marine and coastal zones and land based resources.

Government emphasis on large scale agriculture for export prompted by IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes has further reinforced trends to growing inequity and unsustainability of small scale agriculture in the rural areas. Because of the World Bank stipulation that concessionary rates of interest be abolished, Jamaican small farmers now have to pay interest on agricultural credit of approximately 23 %. According to the 1978/79 census, land ownership was more skewed than in 1962.

Jamaica's negative net transfers to the IMF, World Bank and bilateral creditors were 16% of export earnings in 1988. The value of the dollar has fallen three hundred percent within one year, with a commensurate erosion in the ability of the poor to feed themselves. The impact of the negative international economic factors on Jamaica, combined with poor domestic planning has exacerbated the crisis of eroding livelihoods for the majority of the Jamaican population and particularly for women and children.

Material poverty was particularly severe among female-headed households. Female unemployment is double that of men and their wages lower in spite of higher levels of educational attainment. Between 1981 and 1985 there was a decline of 14,000 women employed in the public sector. Debt servicing and structural adjustment policies have had similar devastating effects on education and health. During the same period, anaemia in pregnant women visiting prenatal clinics rose from 23



to 43 percent. The percentage of malnourished children rose from 38% in 1978 to 41% in 1985 and infant mortality has also risen.

The environmental impact of these policies has been severe. Deforestation is taking place at a rate variously estimated between 3-5% per annum. This is destroying the hillsides which provide the watershed for the urban capital and its suburbs and threatens to transform "this land of wood and water" into a desert in two decades.

As a result of government subsidy cuts on kerosene, which most materially poor women relied upon for cooking fuel, women have been forced to cut wood for fuel. Much of this cutting is taking place on the hillsides surrounding the urban capital, and is a new phenomenon. Most women would probably go back to kerosene if given the opportunity, particularly because of the time consuming nature of wood cutting and the labour involved.

Increasing coffee production by large coffee producers has had demonstrably more serious effects on deforestation. Use of inappropriate technology by a Japanese multinational coffee producer in the Blue Mountains surrounding the capital, is a case in point. Jamaica is famous for its Blue Mountain coffee which was previously produced by relatively small farmers. The fame of the coffee, the relatively high price of coffee presently on the international market and the need to earn foreign exchange has brought big players into coffee production. The Japanese company cleared hundreds of acres of forests by burning and came under severe criticism from local environmentalists. Combined with the use of heavy machinery on steep slopes, where the small size of the island makes for a very fragile ecosystem, recent expansion of coffee production has been environmentally devastating.

Without the forest cover, water is not being absorbed and landslides are washing the topsoil from the hills. There are now large tracts of burnt earth where only five years ago there were virgin tropical forests. The indigenous Jamaican blackbird which nests at high altitudes has become an endangered species. Water availability is already becoming a problem in urban Kingston and its suburbs, which lie at the foothills of the Blue Mountains.

As in the case of Guyana, environmental degradation in Jamaica is not the result of population growth and pressures, but of national development policies, debt and structural adjustment programmes.

• **THE PACIFIC: Nuclear Testing and the Environment**

The degree to which military activities transform the lives of people, destroy communities and the natural resource base in contexts of very small populations is most evident in the Pacific. Reports from the Pacific indicate that nuclear testing has had the most devastating impact in eroding human livelihoods and destroying the natural environment. Some islands have completely disappeared and in others populations have been completely relocated. Radiation and contamination of soil and marine life are ongoing hazards which the people of the Pacific islands face. The following summary of an analysis by Atu Emberson-Bain provides the basis of our understanding.

One of the earliest experiences was in the Marshall Islands whose people have paid a heavy price for United States testing of 66 atmospheric, atomic and hydrogen bombs between 1946 and 1958. The Marshall Islands comprise 30 atolls and 5 single islands over 375,000 sq miles of ocean with a total land area of 70 sq miles. In the Bikini atoll whose land area of 3 sq miles and an enclosed lagoon of 243 sq miles support a population of 170, three islands were completely eliminated and part of the reef was destroyed exposing the lagoon to sharks.

The Marshall Islands were used as a human laboratory in 1954 with the detonation on Bikini island of a 15 megaton hydrogen bomb over 1,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs of 1945. According to the reports, the US military failed to evacuate the Marshallese living within close range of the test site before or immediately after the test thus exposing them to radiation for two to three days. Children played in the 'fallout snow'. The approximately 240 irradiated adults and children suffered from severe burns, vomiting, diarrhoea and loss of hair. Effects were evident over several years with an increase in miscarriages, stillbirths and a range of radiation-related illnesses. A study of exposed women revealed unusually high



miscarriage rates in addition to exceptionally high rates of congenital diseases such as Down's syndrome, and various birth deformities.

More recently the French nuclear test programme has had serious health and environmental effects, but the secrecy surrounding it makes it impossible to calculate these with accuracy. Scientific evidence that is available, however, reveals that the tests 'have released dangerous levels of radiation into the atmosphere and into the sea, shattered the base of the atoll, and contaminated people living and working around the test sites'. Fish and coconuts which represent an important part of the Polynesian diet are highly contaminated. There is a high level of fish poisoning and in some islands fish and coconuts have been made prohibited food because of the testing. One 1979 bomb caused a tidal wave, and increasing cyclones in the area have destroyed protective radioactive waste seals, releasing plutonium into the waters. Radioactive material, however is not confined to test sites. One of the earliest tests on Moruroa distributed nuclear fall out as far as the Cook Islands, Samoa and Fiji. New Zealand monitoring pointed to contamination throughout the southern hemisphere.

#### • ***LATIN AMERICA: Urbanization and Degradation***

The extreme concentration of wealth in Latin American countries has contributed to environmental imbalance and constrained the opportunities for the poor to sustain their livelihoods. Extravagant investments have in particular accelerated indebtedness. Most Latin American countries have been forced into structural adjustment programmes which have led to industrial stagnation, recession and undermining of social services. This has not only created regional disparities, but inequalities have increased along class, gender and race lines.

Growing mechanization of agriculture, expansion of agribusiness and related industrialization have accelerated the movement of population from agricultural land to urban cities or to the frontier regions. Given the prevailing gender hierarchies in the rural areas, and the differential access that women have to land and employment, migration of women to urban areas has increased. A majority of the Latin American

population is now urban. Nine of the world's largest 37 cities, with a population of over five million, are in Latin America. Ninety percent of the region's poor are concentrated in the cities.

The majority of Latin American countries have had declining fertility rates so that the urban population growth has been largely due to migration in recent periods. High fertility patterns remain in a handful of countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and in limited frontier zones characterised by family production. Fertility also tends to be high among certain age groups especially the adolescent population who are exposed to new cultural patterns of marriage and consensual union.

As rural production is now predominantly for exports, land has been put to intensive use, but production is largely geared to luxury products for the world's wealthy. In the urban areas, the uneven patterns of resource distribution are sharpened by the lack of possibilities to cultivate or collect food. The search for housing causes high speculation in land. The poor are often left to survive on land which is hard to reach or which fails to provide the basic amenities. Where water is rarely available, where the soil is unstable, the land is not welcoming for the urban poor.

Women face the daily rigours of coping with their families in an inhospitable environment, where there is an absence of sewage, no garbage disposal, and water has to be fetched from very long distances. Such conditions have made women very vulnerable. Landslides floods, fires and other forms of damage have eroded women's capacities to cope. In Peru, Bolivia, Columbia and Brazil cholera epidemics caused by the lack of sanitation and sewage have killed many thousands.

The sources of pollution include factories, cement and chemical plants, agro-industry, power stations, oil, gas refineries, and motor vehicle emissions which constitute perhaps the largest single factor. In Mexico city deaths of people over 65 years due to bronchitis, emphysema and asthma increased by 12% between 1978 and 1984. Deaths due to cancer, influenza and pneumonia have increased six fold. There were 2.3 million cases of chronic respiratory illness among children, 105,000



## II.

cases of chronic bronchitis among the elderly. This data does not account for the 38 million people living in cities where contamination is intermittent.

In urban settlements of Latin America, people have developed strong neighborhood links for mutual support. Women have resorted to collective strategies to solve their livelihood problems, preventing diseases and demanding services. Some individuals in portions of power have felt threatened by these organisations. This has led to them taking the law into their own hands and sometimes to organised violence. Political organisations have failed to recognise the important role that women play in organising the poor. Such experiences have demonstrated the resourcefulness of the women in poor housing or squatter settlements.

• **SIERRA LEONE: The Disappearing Food Base**

The Gola forests in eastern Sierra Leone constitute one of the last remaining areas of rainforests in the country. The livelihoods of the local population are based on annual cropping according to rotational bush fallow methods, the cultivation of tree crops such as cocoa and coffee, and the collection of a wide range of non-timber products. Formerly, the population did not encroach on the forest reserve and generally respected the forest ordinances.

A recent study by Melissa Leach reports that currently such conditions are being undermined by the increasing incorporation of the community into market oriented activities, as a result of government policies and worsening economic conditions. Both men and women are now participating in a wider range of commercially-oriented activities, and in difficult economic conditions have to work harder to produce sufficient food and money to meet family obligations. Ironically, government extension workers advice to the farmers has led to ecological stress, by bringing swamps under permanent cultivation as a means of 'improving' the swamps and controlling their water flow.

Female household members cannot plant their usual inter-crops in the swamps because swamp soils are too wet for these crops. Vegetables,

however, are crucial to women's cash incomes and subsistence. Some women have intensified their cultivation of back-yard gardens. Swampland is now being used for vegetable cultivation during the dry season. This is likely to affect the long term ecological balance of the region.



## II.

### SIGNALS FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Local experience explodes several widely believed and oft repeated myths of the environment and development debate.

#### ● MYTH 1 ●

*The Poor are destroying the environment.*

#### Signal

- 1) The poor have the biggest stake in protecting the natural resource base, which provide the water, food, fodder and housing which are the basis of their livelihoods.
- 2) The state, using its legal power, in collusion with big business, contributes to damage to the environment which both in terms of scale and quality of damage has been unsurpassed.
- 3) The data indicate that the interaction between people and their natural environments has been broken by forces external to the community. They include the globalization of capital and the incorporation of even the most remote areas into the global market. These factors, combined with debt and structural adjustment policies, have created major rifts within communities and between people and their natural environments. Material poverty is increasing and both globally and nationally the gap between the materially wealthy and the materially poor is increasing.

● MYTH 2 ●

*Population growth is responsible  
for environmental degradation.*

**Signal**

Repeatedly, areas of low populations, falling populations and decreasing fertility rates were examples of extreme and growing environmental degradation.

- 1) As many of the case studies show, extremes of wealth and poverty leading to over consumption by some and the erosion of the livelihoods for others, skewed distribution and use of resources, and patterns of human settlement have a stronger demonstrable relationship to environmental degradation than population size per se.
- 2) Research has also indicated that fertility rates decline when women have access to adequate reproductive health care and their livelihoods and basic rights are respected. This is extremely difficult to achieve in the current global and national context.

● MYTH 3 ●

*Lack of knowledge is responsible  
for environmental degradation.*

**Signal**

- 1) Though the Sarawak case has been a widely discussed and burning environmental issue, the situation has remained exactly the same and is spreading. Similar instances are to be found in other areas such as Burma and the Chittigong Hills in Bangladesh.



Although the impact of debt and structural adjustment and their negative impact on livelihoods have been widely researched and discussed, the policies continue to be pursued with a recognition that the body is monstrous, but a human face can be an adequate mask.

- 2) The problem is not one of inadequacy of knowledge, but of a clash of interests. The clash of interests is indicated to be not only between governments and people, but governments and major institutions in collusion with big business, which own and control the major share of the world's resources.

#### • MYTH 4 •

*Structural Adjustment will set right  
the problems of poverty, employment and environment.*

#### **Signal**

The signals belie the assertion that Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) will set economic and environmental problems right. Apart from the case studies here, experience of SAP in most countries confirms that SAP causes widespread misery and deprivation of the poor within the population and of poorer countries in general. Evidence indicates that SAP compounds the very problem of debt, destitution and degradation of the environment which it claims to reverse.

In particular, adjustment policies have led to industrial stagnation, recession and undermining of social services. This has not only created regional disparities, but inequality has increased along class, gender and race lines. Through the gateway case has been a widely discussed and researched environmental issue, the situation has been largely ignored. Given the prevailing gender hierarchies in the rural areas, the access that women have to land and employment, migration of women to urban areas has increased. A majority of the Latin American

### III.

#### ENVIRONMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE AND PLACE OF WOMEN

As the cases and the emerging signals demonstrate, women have brought a different perspective to the environmental debate, because of the different experience base. Poor women's lives are not compartmentalised and their work is not seasonal. They therefore see the problems from a much broader and holistic perspective. Women in the South are heavily involved in agriculture and food production. In Africa they are responsible for 80% of agricultural production and in the Caribbean they carry major responsibility for agricultural production and distribution for domestic consumption. Any solutions for food security must fully involve women.

Women's importance to environmental policymaking, planning and programming also derives from the role which they play in many sectors central to environmental planning and management and the fact that they play an important role socializing the young and shaping societal values and attitudes to the environment. Their perspective is therefore crucial to planning, conceptualising and implementation of effective environmental management programmes.

Because women and their children make up the majority of the poor they understand more clearly than policy makers, that economics and the environment are compatible. Their experience makes this clear to them, because the soil water, vegetation which the poor require for their basic livelihoods, necessitates specific care of and good management of the soil, water, vegetation and air quality.

Because women and the poor have the biggest stake in the natural resource base and the best knowledge of local specific conditions, problems and needs, solutions cannot be left up to the most enlightened state, business, institution or representatives of local government.



### .III

Women in the South, and the poor in general because of an intimate knowledge of their local conditions and what is necessary for integrated natural resource management and development, are able to identify the close links between environment and economics.

These agencies and actors must be accountable to the community which include the women. Because women's vantage point is different from that of men, their perspectives have to be specifically included and their involvement in decision-making institutionalised.

---

## IV.

### THE WAY FORWARD

---

The environmental movement has grown significantly and for women and children, it has become an important instrument for change. However, the environmental movement will be strengthened as it becomes fully aware of women's perspectives, and the Women's and Environment movements work hand in hand along with other voluntary action networks.

Despite their growth, it is a disturbing fact that, both the environmental movement and the women's movement are still helpless in getting a revision, let alone a reversal, of policy and damage at the human and environmental levels. How to combat effectively the entrenched interests remains the challenge that we face.

Success will rest not only in raising awareness, but in building alliances to provide countervailing power, which can be marshalled against the senseless destruction of human livelihoods and the natural environment.

Together, the movements strive to press for recognition and acceptance of some ingredients of sound management of environment and a human basis for development.

First, it is imperative that arrangements for natural resource management be pivoted on people and the community, or else rectifications may be partial and distortions ongoing.

Second, present trends lead to more external control and market decisions. The indication is for greater community control. Thus, globalization must be preceded by strong localization of management if livelihoods are to be protected and sustainable development achieved.

Third, food is produced by those who cannot afford to consume it and consumed by those who do not produce it. Inappropriate technology and



## .VI

the ever increasing consumption levels of a minority of the world's population is putting severe stress on natural environments. At the same time, quick fix solutions, which focus on symptoms of poverty and imbalance identify local populations as the source of their poverty and environmental degradation. Population control has therefore become a major theme within the environmental debate. The focus on population per se has gathered great currency in spite of the fact that

- a) The data have repeatedly demonstrated that population size decreases where women are educated and their economic and social status is improved.
- b) There is no demonstrated relationship at the micro level between population size and environmental degradation.

Empowering Women and providing women with reproductive health care is essential to giving them control over their bodies.

Sustainable livelihoods must be the foundation of sustainable development. The essential elements of sustainable livelihoods are material, socio-cultural, political, ecological and spiritual. While the material is the most basic, sustainability is enhanced if these elements reinforce one another. The carrying capacity of the earth cannot sustain present levels of material resource consumption of the industrialised world, however, this carrying capacity is not limited for sustaining human wellbeing. Research has indicated that for every major resource including energy, food and minerals, the wealthy industrialised states, which have least of the world's population, consume the greatest portion of the earth's resources and generate most waste.

A global and national policy thrust which provides the basis for material as well as spiritual well being, cultural integrity and basic human rights will yield more effective and long term results for balanced population growth and sustainable development.

Fourth, the international community has to address the new international economic order as one involving mutual responsibilities and requiring justice with equity as a matter of priority. International financial

as primary objectives of development.

be made accountable to communities.

environment nor for economics.



- Agarwal, Bina 1986 Cold Hearths and Barren Slopes: The Woodfuel Crisis in the Third World Allied Publishers. New Delhi
- 1988 "Neither Sustenance nor Sustainability" in Structures of Patriarchy ed Agarwal B Kali New Delhi
- 1989 "Rural Women, Poverty and Natural Resources" Economic and Political Weekly, October 28th pp 46-65
- 1991 Engendering the Environmental Debate: Lessons Learnt from the Indian Subcontinent, CASID Distinguished Speakers Series Monograph No 8 Michigan State University
- Antrobus, Peggy 1989 "Gender Implications of the Development Crisis" in Development in Suspense eds. Beckford, George and Girvan, Norman. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). Kingston, Jamaica
- Arizpe, Lourdes 1991 "Primary Factors Affecting Natural Resource Use" Paper prepared for the International Council of Scientific Unions ASCEND 21
- Borrini, Grazia 1990 Lessons Learned in Community - based Environmental Management International Course for Primary Health Care Managers (ICHM) Rome
- Boly, Koumba 1991 L'Analyse de l'Environnement Socio-Economique des Femmes et des Enfants d'une Zone peri-urbaine du Burkina Faso. presented at UNCED Symposium Women and Children First Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) 1991 Report of Factfinding Mission to Guyana
- Commonwealth Secretariat 1989 Guyana: The Economic Recovery Programme and Beyond. London

- Introduction* 1991 Sustainable Development. London
- Dankelman Irene  
and Davidson J. 1988 Women and Environment in the Third World  
Earthscan Publications
- Deere Carmen 1990 In the Shadows of the Sun Westview Press,  
Boulder, USA
- Emberson-Bain A 1992 "Perilous Pursuits: The Environmental and Social  
Impact of the Mining and Nuclear Industries in the  
Pacific." Paper Delivered at Workshop on  
Population and Environment. Mexico
- George, Susanna 1991 Environment and Women (Draft) Asian and  
Pacific Development Centre (APDC). Malaysia
- Goldenberg, G. 1990 The Feminization of Poverty Praeger New York
- Kremen Eleanor 1990 The Feminization of Poverty Praeger New York
- Hong, Evelynne 1987 Natives of Sarawak: Survival in Borneo's  
Vanishing Forests Institut Masyarakat Malaysia
- Hunt, Diana 1984 The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for  
Land Reform. Gower. Hampshire
- Hynes, P. 1989 The Recurring Silent Spring Pergamon New  
York
- Jain, Devaki 1991 "Sustainable Development and Environmental  
Challenges" Institute of Social Studies Trust  
Bangalore



Latin American  
and Caribbean  
Commission on  
Development and  
Environment 1990 Our Own Agenda Inter-American Development  
Bank, United Nations Development Programme.

Leach, Melissa 1991 "Gender, Environment and Resources: Issues,  
Approaches and a West African Case Study"  
Paper prepared for SIDA Seminar on Gender and  
Environment. Stockholm

Levitt, Kari 1990 Debt, Adjustment and Development Friedrich  
Ebert Stiftung, Kingston, Jamaica

Lutz, Wolfgang 1991 "Global and Local Aspects of the Population  
Environment Interaction" SSRC/ISSC/ DAWN  
Workshop on Population and the Environment.  
Mexico

Nasser, Shafika 1991 "Women, Water and Childhood Diarrhoea: Case  
Study of an Egyptian Village" Prepared for  
UNCED Symposium, Women and Children First

Nettleford, Rex 1989 Jamaica in Independence Heinemann Caribbean

Owusu-Bempah, K 1987 "The Role of Women Farmers in Choosing  
Species for Agroforestry Farming Systems in  
Rural Areas in Ghana" in Poats, S. V. et al  
Gender Issues in Farming Systems Research and  
Extension. Westview. Boulder

Rocheleau, D 1991 "Whose Common Future? A Land User Approach  
to Gendered Rights and Responsibilities in Rural  
Landscapes" Paper prepared for SIDA/IUCN  
Workshop on Gender and Environment

Rodda, Annabel 1991 Women and the Environment Zed London

Sen, Gita and  
Grown, Karen 1987 Development Crises and Alternative Visions  
Monthly Review.

I. CASE STUDIES: THE HUMAN PICTURE AT THE MICRO LEVEL

SEWA 1990 Banaskantha Women's Project Report. SEWA.  
Ahmenabad. India

Shiva, Vandana 1989 Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in  
India Zed London

1988 The Violence of the Green Revolution Zed  
London

Simmons A.  
and Guengant 1991 "Caribbean Population Movements and the World  
System" in Kritiz M. et al (eds) Global Interactions  
OUP. London

II. SIGNALS FROM LOCAL EXPERIENCE

UNDP 1992 Human Development Report

UNCED 1991 Report of Conference on Women and Children  
First. Geneva

III. ENVIRONMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE

Wiltshire, R. 1992 "Population Environment and Development: An  
Alternative Framework" Paper prepared for  
Workshop on Population and Environment.  
Mexico

Selected Bibliography

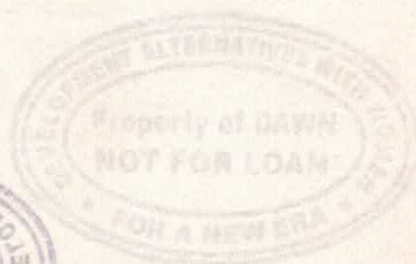
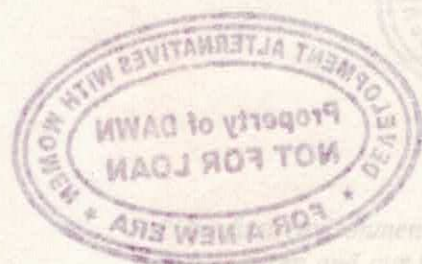
1991 "Environmental Degradation and Poverty: Women  
and Children in Island Nations: The Caribbean  
Experience" Prepared for UNCED Symposium,  
Women and Children First. Geneva



Robda, Annabel	1991	Women and the Environment 2nd London
Sen, Gita and Grown, Karen	1987	Development Crises and Alternative Visions Monthly Review
SEWA	1990	Banaskantha Women's Project Report, SEWA Ahmedabad, India
Shiva, Vandana	1988	Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India 2nd London
Simmons, A. and Guegant	1991	"Caribbean Population Movement and the World - 1991, International Year of the Girl" Global Interactions OUP, London
UNDP	1993	Human Development Report
UNCED	1991	Report of Conference on Women and Children First Geneva
Wilshire, R.	1993	"Population Environment and Development: An Alternative Framework" Paper prepared for Workshop on Population and Environment, Mexico
	1991	"Environmental Degradation and Poverty: Women and Children in Island Nations: The Caribbean Experience" Prepared for UNCED Symposium, Women and Children First, Geneva

# ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: GRASS ROOTS WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Rosina Wilshire



Women is our bodies,  
our children and our families,  
the earth that sustains us and  
our communities.

Caribbean Women

DAWN

Paper Prepared for UNCED, 1992 Rio, Brazil

Kathryn Alleyne  
Rhonda Smith

Layout

Kathryn Alleyne

Cover Design

Color Printer, Wilshire, BARBADOS

Printed By



MEMBERS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

President  
Doreen Lee (India)

General Co-ordinator  
Peggy Anand (Canada)

Regional Representatives

South America (Caribbean)

North America (Latin America)

Europe (Africa)

Asia (Asia)

Harvard University (South America)

China (China)

James Williams

James Correa (Peru)

Glenn Allen (Australia)



EDITORIAL COMMITTEE, DAWN Steering Committee

Special thanks to the Steering Committee for their support and advice in the editing of the paper.

DAWN is a network of Third World women involved in research, action, policy making and communications, and seeking to promote Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era through a global network of development leaders. Its current agenda focuses on the issues of Environment, Reproductive Rights and Population, and Alternative Economic Frameworks.

This paper was prepared in the context of the project leading to the UNCED Earth Summit. It challenges some of the dominant development paradigms that are relied upon when one thinks about development from the perspective of poor women. It attempts to draw lessons from the types of women have in defining, coping with and

Layout:

Kurlyne Alleyne  
Rhuan Smith

Cover Design:

Kurlyne Alleyne

Printed By:

Coles Printery, Wilkey, BARBADOS

---

## ***DAWN***

### ***Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era***

**C/o Women and Development Unit (WAND)  
University of the West Indies  
School of Continuing Studies  
Pinelands, St. Michael  
Barbados**

**Telephone: (809) 426-9288  
Telefax: (809) 429-4854**

---