

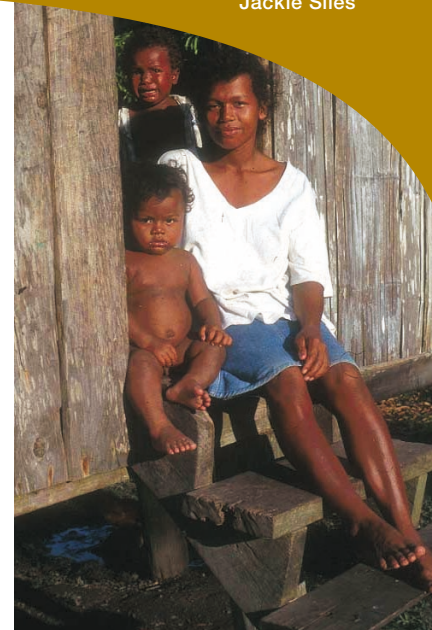
POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENT

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Gender Makes the Difference

- Seventy percent of the world's poor are women. Unlike men, women's opportunities and options for working their way out of poverty are restricted by cultural norms that control their social and economic mobility. Women's opportunities are often limited by their unequal access to land, technology and credit, and their susceptibility to discrimination.
- Every hour 720 boys and girls die of hunger, while 842 million people go undernourished. Drought ranks as the single most common cause of severe food shortages in developing countries and is the cause in 60% of food emergencies. Undernourished women give birth to underweight babies, decreasing their chance of survival. Because women in South Asia face high levels of discrimination in accessing food and health care, the region now experiences one of the world's highest rates of low-weight births.
- Regular access to irrigation water increases agricultural yields, helping to provide more food and higher incomes to three-fourths of the world's poor and hungry who live in rural areas. Women play a major role in food production in many parts of those areas, particularly in Africa. In Sudan, women make up 30% of the labor force in food production, 48% in Burkina-Faso and 80% in Congo.
- In many parts of the world, women do not have the same land ownership rights as men do. For example, fewer than 1 in 10 female farmers in India, Nepal, and Thailand own land. And landlessness is on the rise in Latin America, especially Mexico, where women make up only 21% of total property owners, despite approved land reform.
- Women earn only 70-80% of men's income earnings in both developed and developing countries. Only about 20% of this difference can be explained by such variables as education levels, experience, and job characteristics.
- Two billion people do not have access to regular energy sources. Women of all developing countries spend between 2 and 9 hours each day collecting fuel and fodder. Indoor air pollution, produced from burning biomass fuels such as wood, charcoal, or dung, is estimated to kill 2 million women and children every year.
- More than 1 billion people in developing countries do not have access to clean drinking water, and 2.4 billion lack access to an acceptable sanitary service. More children died from diarrhea in the 1990s than the total number of people who perished in armed conflicts since World War II.
- More than 500,000 women die every year during pregnancy or childbirth. A study in Uttarachal, India, found miscarriages to be five times the national average at 30% and links this to carrying heavy loads of water and fuel during pregnancy. In Nepal, women suffer a high incidence of uterine prolapse, which is associated with carrying heavy loads of wood soon after childbirth. In contrast, men of the developing world spend about one-tenth of the time that women do on this daily task.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Millennium Project
www.un.org/millenniumgoals

United Nations
www.undp.org/mdg

International Development Research
Centre (IDRC)
web.idrc.ca/en/ev-42959-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Women Environment and Development
Organization (WEDO)
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- As primary care givers and health providers for their families and communities, women around the world have attained a tremendous amount of knowledge of medicinal plants and their uses. However, women are often excluded from the economic benefits that arise from patent registration and international trade in medicinal plants. Ironically, the high prices of modern allopathic medicines often restrict poor women's access to essential medicines for themselves and their families.

Due to cultural customs and social norms, women's opportunities for paid work are often limited or restricted, and they are often denied the right to own land. Furthermore, in many developing countries, women suffer from an unequal distribution of, and control over, resources. Without a source of income, secure land tenure, or control over resources, it is more often women, and their children, who suffer from extreme poverty.

The different roles and responsibilities of women and men are closely linked to environmental change and well-being. This is true both for how women and men affect the environment through their economic and household activities and how the resulting environmental changes affect people's well-being. Understanding these gender differences is an essential part of developing policies aimed at both better environmental outcomes and improved health and well-being.

WHY GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN POVERTY REDUCTION INITIATIVES

- Evidence suggests that women use their available economic resources differently than men. Men allocate a greater percentage of their income to personal use, while women tend to spend a greater percentage of their income on family welfare. A study in Cote d'Ivoire reported that raising women's share of income reduced household expenditures on alcohol and cigarettes, but increased expenditures on food.
- A study in Rwanda showed that, under a constant income scheme, members of female-headed households consumed 377 more calories per adult equivalent, per day, than male-headed households. This difference was bigger among lower-income households. In Gambia, control of cereal production by women added 322 more calories per adult, equivalent to household energy consumption per day. In Kenya and Malawi, moderate to severe levels of malnutrition were much lower among children in female-headed households than in male-headed households.
- Broad-based evidence indicates a direct relation between women's education and fertility rates, much more so than with male education. Education delays women's age of marriage and hence age of first birth, facilitates their access to contraception and health services, as well as their ability to use both more effectively. In Kenya, women were able to understand the instructions for administering oral dehydration salts after four or more years of schooling.
- Insecure land tenure influences how different groups use natural resources. Women, the poor, and marginalized groups are less likely to invest time and resources or adopt environmentally sustainable farming practices on land they do not own.
- Understanding women's relationships to the environment plays an important role in developing solutions for more sustainable use of natural resources. Ignoring gender distorts the understanding of human impacts on the environment and the role that poverty plays in environmental degradation.