

Involving Grassroots Women's Organisations in the Management of our Environment: What Lessons for the SDGs/Post 2015 Framework?

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The current state of the Global Environment is alarming to say the least. Tsunamis and hurricanes have often almost brought the Major Economies of the world to their knees. Prolonged droughts, violent storms and landslides have left populations in the Global South, the least developed part of the world almost always begging for food aid.

Attempts have been made at solving the environment challenges of our time. Convention after Convention has been held; The UN Convention on Sustainable development in 1992 followed by the recent Rio + 20, The Ramsar Convention, The Kyoto Protocol, The POPs, name it!, yet ecosystems continue to be degraded at an ever increasing rate.

While the grassroots people are eking out a difficult living from an increasingly shrinking natural resource base, exacerbating poverty and its ramifications, Industrialists and Corporations, with the approval of their puppet Politicians are pursuing the profit driven economic model which does not take into consideration the concept of Sustainable Consumption and Production. Yet, sustainability counsels that, "As we meet the needs of the present we must take care not to compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It is this model of wealth accumulation that is directly responsible for the crises we now confront. Policies that promote unsustainable production and consumerism, financial speculation, unmitigated exploitation of the world's resources, privatization of the Global Commons and militarism have made the world unsustainable, insecure and grossly unequal.

Sad to say, the burden of these policies is borne by those least responsible: the impoverished and marginalized grassroots people, especially women and children in the global south who are never involved in Environment Planning, Policy Formulation and Decision Making.

We must realize that involving the grassroots is not an act of charity but a precondition for reducing poverty and solving environment challenges.

What can be gained from involving the grassroots in the management of our Environment?

It will help to:

- Capture the specific knowledge, skills and experiences of grassroots people especially women as primary natural resource users, and the different roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women, as well as their particular use patterns and knowledge of natural resources;
- Ensure the accuracy of information on drivers of environment degradation;
- Ensure efficient and effective measures for the sustainable management of natural resources;
- Ensure consistency with the human rights based approach to development.

However, how can we maximize the contribution of the grassroots women to solving the environment challenges when they:

- remain tied down by patriarchal structures that require women to carry the burden of the vast amount of the world's unpaid and low-paid work,
- are being bought and sold as child-bearers, wives and workers while still not respected as equal rights holders?
- are most likely to die in climate related disasters,

- most likely to be displaced as subsistence farmers,
- most likely to suffer from the privatization of public services, goods and commons.
- suffer the tyranny of violence inside and outside the home and even internationally where might is normalized as the source of power?

How can youth and children be part of the environment solution when;

- millions are barred from getting an education and fulfilling their potentials.
- Even those who have degrees are denied decent work opportunities and therefore a life of dignity.
- thousands of girls work in slave-like conditions in factories and plantations and mines or in homes of the better-off; to prop up the avaricious economic structures that demand increased consumption and production to benefit a tiny few.

Appeal:

Concentrate on the grassroots, especially women. **"Women's access to and control of natural resources is critical for their economic security and for the economic security of their children and husbands. When women own and control their own assets, they have more independence and a bigger role in decision-making in their households and communities. It will help improve the strength and prosperity of societies."**

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for your kind attention!