

Biodiversity for the Well-being of Women



Convention on
Biological Diversity

WOMEN ARE KEY TO POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACTS

INCREASE FOOD SECURITY

Women control 60-80% of the world's food production; produce the three main staple crops (rice, wheat and maize) that provide nearly 90% of the food for the rural poor. Given the same equal access to productive resources as men they could increase their farm yields by 20-30%.

DEPENDANCE ON ECOSYSTEMS

Women provide almost 80% of the total wild vegetable food collected in 135 different subsistence-based societies. Up to 80% of the population in many developing countries relies on traditional medicine. Women often have a more specialised knowledge of various local and neglected species.

COPING STRATEGIES

Women and children are 14 times more likely to die during a natural disaster. Women from indigenous and local communities possess repertoires of traditional coping strategies to adapt to global changes.

Of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70% are women; 60% of the chronically hungry people are women and girls; and, 70% of the world's blind are women suffering from trachoma in communities with limited access to water. Between 40-80% of **women in developing countries are affected** by increasing scarcity of fuelwood.

In poor communities, women and girls spend on average 2-20 hours per week fetching water and collecting firewood. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation jeopardize their livelihood by increasing their workload, affecting their health and reducing their opportunities. This is a **huge constraint to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**.

Women are the nexus of agri-nutrition-health through their roles as plant gatherers, home gardeners, plant domesticators, herbalists, medicinal plants' collectors and seed custodians. Their knowledge of biodiversity and its values for meeting the food, fodder, fuel-wood, medicine, clothing, transportation and shelter needs of their families is crucial for securing the subsistence and development needs of the poorer segment of society. The 20-30% increase in farm

yields that women could achieve, if given the same access to productive resources as men, could play a key role to food security by reducing the global number of hungry people by 100-150 million.

Women produce, select and save up to 90% of seeds and germplasm used in smallholder agriculture and also play key roles in the multiplication, improvement and storage of seeds. In many countries they have been managing the **interface between wild and domesticated species** of edible plants for thousands of years. They are also main guardians of livestock diversity and play an important role in **water management and forestry**.

Women:

- Have different and complementary knowledge than men
- Are different in the way they perceive, think, their choice criteria, preferences, needs, practices and uses of biological resources
- Receive, organize and transmit their knowledge and skills by different means, and respond differently.

Biodiversity is the cornerstone of the work, belief systems and basic survival of many women, who traditionally use various

more information:

www.cbd.int/gendersecretariat@cbd.int



United Nations Decade on Biodiversity



flickr.com/icrisat

indigenous plants, and account for plants' multiple uses, providing a balance to market pressures for high yields and uniformity. Actively involved in the household economy, **women control consumption** patterns and provide health care using a wide diversity of species for food and medicine than are traded in markets as well as managing wastes.

Home gardens nurtured by many women are like mini genetic resource centres. In Thailand, research on 60 home gardens revealed 230 different species, many of which had been rescued by women from forests before being cleared. **Women also play a vital role in their family's well-being** by collecting and conserving edible plants that contribute between 50% and 70% of dietary requirements for their family's food security and proper nutrition and spending up to 90% of their income on their family's needs.

Indigenous women are well known custodians of traditional knowledge with a responsibility to pass it to next generations. Their knowledge includes an awareness of the structure of, and symbiotic relations with, ecosys-

tems, functionality of species, understanding of wild ancestors and geographic ranges of plants and animal species that could help avoid genetic erosion and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Women are powerful agents of change and their leadership is critical in community revitalization and renewable natural resource management. Women have intimate knowledge of their ecosystems, including diversification, pest management, soil conservation and development and use of plant genetic resources by selecting good seeds based, *inter alia*, on resistance to diseases and drought, storage quality, and adaptation to agro-climatic conditions, and preserving them with a variety of traditional methods. Women's role in *in-situ* plant genetic resource conservation is invaluable as they continue to maintain diversity by preserving cultivars which are environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable.

Accounting for women's knowledge, currently at risk of loss, and ensuring their full participation can contribute substantially to sustainable development.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR BIODIVERSITY 2011-2020

Mainstreaming the roles of women, their knowledge, concerns, needs, preferences and uses of biological diversity and ecosystem services as integral dimensions of decision making, design, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and activities is a **cross-cutting issue** and crucial for **poverty eradication and sustainable development**.

Accounting for **women's perspectives** in terms of their **relationship to biological resources and ecosystems, and ensuring their full participation in their management** can play a huge role in reversing environmental degradation, improving governance, and helping **policy-makers design more effective approaches** to promote better understanding of biodiversity and achieve the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 for the welfare of **current and future generations**.

TARGET 14

By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.