

Gender and Environment Framework/Agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Gender and Environment Framework/Agenda

Gender is particularly relevant in the context of natural resource management in the developing world because of the close connections among increasing poverty, the feminization of poverty, and the world environmental crises. There is growing awareness that the burdens of natural destruction may fall most heavily on women in poor households. An extraordinary challenge to development policy and practice is found in growing linkages among poverty, gender roles, resource decline and ecological degradation. Female headed households are growing and women are increasingly supporting their children in declining rural economies. It is essential to incorporate gender and environment into development policies and practice. The purpose of the Gender and Environment Framework/Agenda is to identify gender and environment linkages, identify key research focus areas within BRAC program activities for potential action oriented research and study.

A gender/environmental dimension in BRAC's projects is necessary not only to enhance BRAC's overall goals and objectives but also to contribute to natural resources conservation in Bangladesh. While there is no one rule, guideline or model for integrating women and environment into any aspect of sustainable development and environmental management, there are some basic tenets to consider:

- Acknowledge women's role and their contributions to environmental management.
- Acknowledge and highlight the importance of community participation.
- Emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge
- Provide education and information
- Encourage participation and feedback (formal and informal)
- Involve women in decision making
- Increase or improving women's access to resources
- Participate in project implementation

Women are key participants in the struggle against environmental deterioration. Therefore, there is an obvious need to address women concerning this struggle. There is no doubt that women have a close relationship with the environment, and that they can do something to improve it. Women have the motivation, knowledge and desire to save their natural resources. If women are trained to manage the environment sustainably, it would further their ability to improve their livelihoods and conserve natural resources.

SECTION I

Role of Women and the Environment

Traditional Role of Women

Traditionally, the woman's role in Bangladesh has been of wife and mother. Bangladeshi women in custom and practice, remain subordinate to men in almost all aspects of their lives. The dirtiest and most tedious tasks, such as gathering and drying animal manure, planting, weeding, cleaning, taking care of farming, livestock, fetching water in addition to childcare and housework, are considered "women's work". Women in Bangladesh, especially women living in total poverty, are considered second - class citizens. Most are deprived of education, access to health care facilities, property, and employment. They carry a double, even triple, burden of work as they must cope with housework, childcare, and subsistence food production. Poor women seldom stop working, in a single day, they work in fields, markets, their households and communities. During times of economic crises, women work longer hours to ensure family survival. In Bangladesh, it has been estimated that women spend an average of 10-14 hours per day on productive labor (household tasks are not taken into account in this estimation). Women farmers work longer hours and have fewer assets and lower incomes than do men.

Women have direct contact with the environment, they collect fuel, food, and fodder, trees and plants supply them with these three essentials. Natural resources are utilized in so many ways by the poor, especially poor women. For example, fuelwood serves a number of purposes. Besides being used for cooking, the fire provides light at night and heat to dry wet harvests, and it is also used to boil water to extract natural medicines from leaves and bark. Plants from various tree supply medicines as well as foods, and raw materials for construction related work. Unfortunately, these resources are being depleted at an alarming rate. To collect these materials, women must walk very long distances and carry heavy loads.

Women play the role of wife and mother and spend the bulk of their time taking care of their families, cooking and food preparation and they also grow many crops for both income generation and for family consumption. As a wife women have little freedom and are financially dependent on their husbands for everything. Women are not usually allowed to make important family decisions without discussing it with their husbands. Women also clean everything in their households including livestock, family environment indoors and outdoors as well. Another role women play is income earner through numerous ways such as sericulture, homestead gardening, poultry rearing,

and many other income generating activities. Women's indigenous knowledge is an essential part of women's everyday work. Women have knowledge of plants, herbs and roots which are meant for medical use.

Linkages between Women and the Environment

Women and Environment Linkages	Examples
women and water	water essential for cooking, cleaning, washing, livestock, hours to collect it, shortages,
women and agriculture	women grow many types of crops for consumption and income generation
women and deforestation	forests products are used for handicrafts, cooking, agriculture, fodder
women as collectors of food, fuel, fodder	women sometimes spend hours collecting these resources
BRAC women dominated activities	sericulture (worm rearing), chick rearing, agriculture activities

Women as Victims of Environmental Degradation

Women are victimized the most from environmental degradation because they deal with the environment so closely and rely on it for survival, they suffer the most from the degradation.

Water shortage

- walk further and wait longer to get water
- carrying the heavy load can be dangerous to their health.
- exposure to the hazards of polluted water more so than men
- women come in most contact with polluted water because they must fetch it, wash clothes and utensils in it, and cook with it
- water is one of the many natural products women use to make handicrafts

Plants

- plants provide raw materials for household
- repair work in the household using plants for thatching material
- use plants for medicinal purposes

Health issues/deterrents

- housing is often tiny, dirty and unsanitary

- insufficient housing situations can lead to high accident rate, mental stress from overcrowding,
- increased risk of infection, indoor air pollution, and intra family violence.
- insufficient food intake
- male migration
- natural disasters
- smoke inhalation from cooking
- broken bones and other related injuries from carrying and transporting water

Migration

- men migrate into urban areas for jobs
 - women are left alone to take care of the family
- husbands do not come home often
- women still needs husbands approval for household decisions

Constraints to Women's Progress

Lack of political participation, education, property, credit, and employment, are among the constraints women in developing countries face. If women's opinions were asked, they could contribute substantially to help the environmental situation. However, failure to take into account women's opinions and considerations are not the only things that keep them from progressing. In developing countries, many constraints keep women from changing their circumstances in ways that would be beneficial to the environment.

Lack of credit

Women are also denied access to credit. They have no form of collateral to borrow money. so they may borrow from unscrupulous money lenders as a last resort. When women borrow from moneylenders, they are often harassed and hounded to repay very quickly. Since women have no access to borrow money from banks, they also have no access to technology. Women cannot purchase tools, equipment, and fertilizers to improve their crops.

Lack of decision making

Women as wage earner sometimes cannot make decisions even though they are earning money for family survival.

Lack of education

Education is the key to women's future. Educated women compared to uneducated women tend to marry later, and not have as many children. Women are more likely to find decent paying jobs to

help support their families. Women can also play a more active role in development projects if they are educated; they would also be better equipped to manage the environment. Women are also more effective in educating their children in issues like health and the environment. Unfortunately, women do not have much, if any, access to education.

Women make up two thirds of illiterate adults in developing. Males are usually given preference over females in access to education in many developing countries. Males are seen as the moneymakers, and females are seen as labor in the house and for collecting firewood and water. In some societies it is felt that educating daughters will ruin their chances to get married.

Deeply rooted cultural belief which are biased against women

Some cultural, social and religious norm are deeply rooted and cannot be changed but awareness can be raised.

Lack of property rights

Most women in developing countries do not have the right to own their own property. Women are usually dependent on their husbands for access to land.

SECTION II

Identification of Key Research Focus Areas

When integrating women and environment into programs and policies it is important to answer the following questions and take them into consideration in the planning and implementation process.

- Who benefits from the project?
- What is the impact of the project on women's social and economic status?
- What is the impact on women's time and workload?
- What is the impact of the project on the community's environment?
- What is the impact of the project on the role of women as natural resource managers within the community?
- Are technologies environmentally-friendly and suitable for women?
- Is women's knowledge, especially on ecosystems and biological diversity taken into account?
- Are women professionals and experts used?

RESEARCH AGENDA

1. Sericulture Study

There have been previous studies on sericulture but none have examined the environmental and gender aspects of sericulture activities. A study should be conducted investigating the sericulture activities and the affects on women workers followed by action research activities to address these issues.

- worm rearing

Worm rearing is done in the home which can lead to numerous harmful affects such as bad odor from worms (sometimes worms die), poor air circulation, possible infections and contamination from worm droppings, etc.

- affect of silk reeling

Silk reeling seems to have a harmful affect on women's hands. Women's hands are usually cut, infected and burned due to the hot reeling water and they do not have gloves to protect their hands.

- affect of chemicals on health of women workers, burns, infections, bad odor, stinging skin

Awareness building of environmental issues related to sericulture program . This can be done during monthly meetings and should be participatory.

Providing gloves, first aid kit and monthly doctor visits at program sites.

2. Environmental Education Program

Recently the Environment Group at BRAC conducted an Environmental Education Orientation for senior BRAC management at Head Office. The orientation was a general introduction to environmental issues and problems and it also focused on environmental issues in Bangladesh. The Environment Group also conducted a Training of Trainers (TOT) for ten BRAC TARC trainers. The TOT was very similar to the head office orientation but more intense and detailed. In the coming months the Environment Group will conduct another TOT for an additional 10 trainers so that there will be a core group of 20 trainers who will eventually train the Regional Managers, Area Managers, Program Officers and Program Assistants. The training's are an excellent beginning to environmental education and awareness for BRAC staff, however the Village Organizations (VOs) should also receive such information and orientation. An environmental education/awareness/orientation program should be developed and implemented specifically for VO's and focus on Bangladesh's environmental condition, causes of environmental degradation, conservation suggestions, environmental activities such as tree planting, vegetable and fruit gardening, and recycling, discussions on local environmental problems and

possible solutions in communities. Further efforts could include development of posters for the Village Organizations illustrating the multiple roles of women, environmental problems, environmentally safe technologies, natural resource depletion and degradation, environmental links to technologies, and illustrate environmentally sound methods of daily work. Benefits of such a education program are cohesion, motivation, cooperation among women, increase interests in preserving natural resources, extract new ideas, suggestions and knowledge from women and help improve their overall livelihood. Program assistants in area offices can conduct the environmental orientations/awareness training's for the VOs. This environmental education/orientation could use NFPE's environmental curriculum as a model/example of basic environmental awareness building. NFPE's environmental education program is for its teachers (99% women) and students (70% girls) and focuses on various concepts such as family, house, cleanliness, food and health relationships with environment. These concepts can be utilized to educate and build awareness among the VO members.

3. Recycling

Rural women know how to utilize resources in the most efficient manner, they know what can be recycled and how it can be used in many ways. Everyday household items are recycled and utilized to the maximum point. For example, rice husks, stalks and dung are used for fuel, bran and peelings are used as cattle feed, and food scraps are fed to poultry. In addition, water used for washing rice and pulses are used to feed cattle and water plants, ashes from stoves are used for washing utensils as well as for fertilizers and insecticides. Threads from worn out cloth are used or making quilts and leaves and straw are used for weaving baskets. A recycling program can be implemented with women as the key participants. Possible recycling activities could include making handmade paper, jewelry, baskets, glassware, etc.

4. Pilot Improved Stove Project

There have been several attempts in the past to build and implement improved stoves but none have been truly successful. As a first step in addressing this issue, it will be necessary to investigate past efforts on improved stoves and identify reasons for failure, technical difficulties, and unacceptance from the communities especially the rural women. Cooking in Bangladesh has many serious affects to not only the environment but also to women's health. Collecting fuelwood is a major contribution to deforestation in Bangladesh. Wood for cooking, heating, and construction is very high in demand. Deforestation has made it very difficult to obtain fuelwood. Women also suffer from smoke inhalation from cooking

several hours a day. Sometimes when wood is scarce women have to resort to burning weeds and whatever they can find and sometimes these types of fuel emit poisonous smoke. The smoke women inhale can lead to serious health problems such as lung disease and other illnesses. Research is necessary to implement a more efficient resource conserving cooking alternative. An affordable solar cooker could supplement traditional cooking facilities and reduces the demand for kerosene and firewood. Solar cookers can not take the place of traditional stoves using conventional fuels, however there are benefits from solar cookers such as saving fuel and time, less need for wood, thereby affording women an opportunity to improve their lives. Another alternative is research stoves used in countries similar cooking methods as Bangladesh and collaborate with them.

5. Environmental Health Issues

Women often suffer from many health problems related to the environment. The following are some examples of environmental health related problems facing women:

- cooking on traditional chula → severe smoke inhalation, indoor air pollution,
- unsanitary housing conditions → high accident rate, mental stress from overcrowding, diseases increased risk of infection
- water → river blindness, water borne diseases, diarrhea
- insufficient food intake → malnutrition, anemia
- carrying and transporting water → broken bones, migraines
- child birth → infections

As a first step in addressing environmental health issues, it will be necessary to initiate a pilot study to find out what the health environmental problems are and the reasons why and possible solutions. The following are some research possibilities to consider:

- air pollution/respiratory problems
- social environment issues (violence, marriage, childbearing, education, healthcare, etc.)
- rural and urban health problems (unsanitary housing, disease, water illness, overcrowding, ect.)

Other areas for possible research:

Arsenic

Recently, the Environment Group has started arsenic testing in one thana in Comilla in collaboration with the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE). Arsenic contaminated

water is spread throughout Bangladesh. Efforts to test tubewells and seek alternative water sources has become one of BRAC's primary focuses. Its important to keep in view the constant interaction women have with water and incorporate gender issues in future arsenic activities. They cook, clean, wash, feed their families and livestock and use water for many income generating activities in their daily lives and exposed to arsenic contaminated water in heir daily household duties.

Chick Rearing

Women are primary participants in BRAC's chick rearing activities. The way in which chicks are reared can be extremely unsanitary and a health hazard. Sometimes chicks are reared inside the homes which can lead to disease, dirty air, food contamination and other such health problems. A study to address these issues in chick rearing could provide insight to improved rearing practices and conditions.

Organic Farming

A short study on organic farming activities has recently been conducted by the Environment Group to learn what other NGOs are doing in this area and possibly initiate BRACs own organic farming activities. Since women already play a leading role in agriculture activities, they have essential skills and knowledge in this area to contribute to organic farming practices. In BRAC agricultural activities women maintain homestead gardens, seed preservation, cultivate, harvest, thresh and are involved in other activities. A next step to this organic farming study could be to start a pilot organic farming project involving women and utilizing and incorporating their knowledge and experiences.

SECTION 111

Approaches for integrating women, environment and development linkages

1. Acknowledge women's role and their contributions to environmental management and protection by:

- involving them in identification of a problems
- relying on their participation, leadership and input in designing a solution to the problem

2. Acknowledge and highlight the importance of community participation in projects by:

- utilizing participatory approaches that empower women
- developing campaigns to popularize environmental ideas

3. Emphasize the importance of local and traditional knowledge by:

- understanding traditional knowledge and its relevance to project activities
 - validating women's knowledge as important and relevant
4. Promote environmental awareness and responsibility
- sensitizing communities to gender/environment issues
5. Identify and adapt alternative and appropriate technologies and systems with women's involvement by:
- asking women their opinions and the problems they face
 - asking women their ideas for solutions
6. Increase women's participation by:
- providing education and information
 - encouraging feedback and consultation
 - involving women in decision making
 - increasing improving women's access to resources
 - participating in project implementation