EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unavoidable Current

Gender Policies for the Environmental Sector in Mesoamerica

Lorena Aguilar
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1. From Practice to Synthesis: The Significance of Formulating Policies

At present, equity and equality between genders constitutes one of the fundamental and inexorable principles associated with the redefinition of democracy.

How can we speak of democracy when 50% of the population has limited participation or none at all?

How can we speak of citizenship rights when a large number of women cannot, are not allowed to, or do not know how to exercise their rights?

Not long ago, the world was shocked by the practice of apartheid in South Africa, where a civilian society restricted and limited the rights of a group of individuals and deprived them of their citizenship rights simply because of physical characteristics such as the color of their skin or type of hair.

Today, hundreds of thousands of people are shocked by the persistence of systems or mechanisms preventing or restricting women’s participation, based on certain physical characteristics (hips, breasts, or ability to bear children.)

The principles upon which ethnic racism is based are very much like the principles upon which women’s discrimination has been built.

International pro-democratic movements favor granting citizens (male and female) an increasingly active role. National governments are transferring responsibility to the local governments, processes leading to national consensus are being initiated, and greater citizen participation is sought through referendums or popular vote on specific topics.
Within the movements supporting democratic liberalization, social justice and human rights, women’s recognition and participation has constituted the most important challenge.

If there is one event that by the end of this century will convey fuller meaning to democracy and justice, it will indisputably be that the foundations enabling half of the population “to be” have been established.

However, the actions and procedures aiming at guaranteeing, first equity and then equality, are far from fully designed and accomplished. This explains the importance of reviewing the manner in which power has been exercised through governmental structures and within legislation and public policies.

As propounded by Rosa Paredes (1994), public policies are the mechanisms through which processes are institutionalized. Through ministries and planning institutions responsible for social, financial, fiscal and credit policies, actions are articulated to respond to the development model. Through public policies, governments develop programs and allocate resources to rectify social inequalities and improve the population’s living conditions.

At present, public policy formation faces a major challenge. In light of global movements leading to a new millennium based on equity and equality, and within the framework of human rights principles, public policies cannot continue being “neutral.” It is essential that their stances and actions reflect consideration of the fact that women and men have different living conditions and needs, depending on the cultural, economic, political, ideological and environmental context in which these take place.

Failure to take this reality into account has led to:

- Policies that do not reflect the national and international commitments adopted by the countries with respect to human rights and gender equity;
- A belief that development is the same for everyone, denying the fact that its impact is different depending on gender;
- Direct actions and participation for only one sector of the population. As set forth by Maité Rodriguez (1998), this is clearly reflected in the environmental sphere, where there is a lack of proportion with respect to the resources allotted to men and women participating in sustainable development activities. This fosters a limited vision of the problem and leads to a situation in which all knowledge and access to technologies for addressing problems of environmental degradation are transferred to men only;
- The tendency to avoid considering structural problems that generate inequity and inequality (i.e., land tenure, natural resources control);
- The formulation of policies that have a negative impact on women; and
- The reproduction of gender inequalities.
All this would seem to pose a major challenge when we try to link environmental policies to sustainable development and environmental activities from a gender perspective. This is far from true. If we analyze the basis and philosophy behind the ecological movement and the movement seeking equity and equality, it becomes clear that the two have many principles in common.

2. **How is the Conservationist Struggle Linked to Equity and Equality?**

For many years now we have been arguing that sustainable development is not possible without equity, and that this fact is a prerequisite for any action aimed at improving people’s quality of life. However, the relationship between sustainable development and equity still seems unclear.

On several occasions, in sessions with biologists or ecologists we have asked who among them goes into a forest and studies the behavioral patterns of only the male jaguars or monkeys. This example provokes smiles and even seems ridiculous.

Whereas biologists find such a practice laughable, professionals involved in development seem to consider it a norm.

Both science and philosophy have been able to develop a conceptualization and theorization about knowledge that has visualized populations as homogeneous groups. To this effect, they have created the universalization of the human being, represented by “man”

Based on this assumption, for many decades data gathering tools have been developed, surveys have been carried out, policies have been designed, and development activities have been directed towards that “man” as the *sine qua non* representative of boys, girls, women, young people and the elderly.

These philosophical conceptions are deeply permeated within the assumptions of the conservationist movement. This is noteworthy, since there is a great similarity of thought and ideology between ecologists and the movement proposing equity and equality.

As advanced by Celia Amorós (1991), conservationism, or the ecological conscience is presented as a new and self-critical form of the conscience of the human being as an inappropriately suicidal species established in its natural environment. Conservationism points out the highly irrational character of this situation and appeals to a sense of species survival as opposed to the destructive and self-destructive megalomania and unconsciousness that have accompanied certain options of civilization.

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1 As proposed by Celia Amorós, this “man” is not the male itself, either, (the subject matter of philosophical speech) but—obviously—certain males pertaining to certain dominant or ascending social groups or linked to forces of social significance (Amorós, C. 1991.)
If conservationism represents—or is at least able to represent, if correctly proposed—a form of deep and self-critical conscience about the human species, with respect to its insertion into and relationship with the group as a whole, the movements seeking equity and equality represent the self-criticism of the human species with regards to the way in which it has exercised and defined its own leading role as a species.

Thus, in the same way that the conservationist movement attests to the mistreatment of nature by humans, the movement advancing equity and equality attests to how human beings have oppressed half of their own species.

In addition, a gender equity perspective stems from a visualization and recognition of social, individual and cultural diversity (the heterogeneity of groups.) Likewise, conservationists promote the value, respect, recognition and importance of biodiversity.

Another point of convergence is the fact that both stances propose a new way of life of a more integral and holistic nature, in which the various dimensions of life are equally important (Vega, S. 1995.)

Thus, it may be concluded that both represent complementary forms of dealing with the crisis experienced by current civilization. As conservation-oriented people seeking equity and equality, our commitment is to propose new innovative ways of interrelating with nature and to redistribute and reformulate our own species’ internal relationships. This will lead us to the initiation of a process of liberation that will promote the introduction of new cultural forms and create a new way of living and feeling reality, based on relationships founded on equity and autonomy both between genders, and with nature.

Within this context, our challenge lies in successfully incorporating these new cultural forms into the design and formulation of public policies related to the environmental sector.
II.

PROPOSAL TO BUILD GENDER EQUITY POLICIES

When we decided to collaborate in the formulation of public policies endorsing gender equity within Mesoamerica’s environmental sector, we began a research process to identify and analyze useful schemes or outlines for policy formation. To our surprise, there were no guidelines or parameters.

A review was made of a vast amount of policies, declarations, and action plans prepared by international cooperation agencies such as the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Germany’s International Cooperation Agency (GTZ), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Denmark’s International Development Agency (DANIDA), Norway’s International Cooperation Agency (NORAD) and the Dutch Government, as well as the following documents: CATIE’s Gender Policy; the Earth Summit (1992); the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994); the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995); the Convention to Combat Desertification (1997); and proposals on policies for Central America’s agricultural sector. Likewise, processes related to policy legalization in Mesoamerica were also studied.

As a result of this review, the following conclusions were reached:

- Confusion exists about the meaning of a policy, an action plan, and a strategy. Many of what are called “policy documents” include sections outlining objectives, goals, actions, and a series of technical criteria, which are more appropriate to an action plan.

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2 Mesoamerica includes Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama and Belize.

3 CATIE: Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center.
Due to this confusion, the legalization process resulting from such extensive and complex documents is made considerably slower and more difficult. There are some instances when the documents are simply rejected by the various institutions because of the vast amount of paragraphs and sections the various management units have to agree on and approve.

A clear distinction should be made between a policy or policy declaration and an action plan. The policy should be conformed by a brief and simple document outlining the organization’s intentions and commitment about a specific subject (in our particular case, gender equity perspective within the environmental sector.) When dealing with a concise document, internal analysis and discussion take place over a much shorter period of time. The resulting policy is subsequently legalized in accordance with each country’s regulations (e.g., executive or ministerial decree.)

**Table No. 1**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A POLICY DECLARATION**

*What is a policy declaration?*

- It is not an extensive document.
- It is from 3 to 10 pages long.
- It outlines the organization’s intention and commitment regarding the incorporation of gender equity.
- It should be accompanied by an action plan outlining the policy’s operational aspects.
- Specific action plans by department or topic may derive from the action plan.
- A policy declaration should undergo each organization’s “legalization” procedure.

Unlike the policy, the action plan is of a technical nature, outlining the operational aspects of the policy declaration. It is prepared once the policy declaration has been legalized within the institution. It is strongly recommended that all of the organization’s departments, sectors, or management units participate in its elaboration. The action plan will stem from the institution’s needs or constraints to implementing the various commitments included in the declaration. In addition, it will propose concrete actions to be executed by each structure.
CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ACTION PLAN

What is an action plan and what does it consist of?

- It is a document that outlines the operational aspects of the policy declaration.
- It takes up the theoretical and fundamental stance stated in the policy.
- It is a strategy outlining the means through which the objectives indicated on the policy will be achieved.
- It contains key goals or objectives, with activities for the short, medium, and long term that can be adequately measured.
- It may result in the execution of additional concrete activities through annual plans by department, unit, or topic.

Although the two documents are complementary, their structure differs considerably. Based on our analysis and comparison of these documents, we propose the following guidelines for their elaboration.

GUIDELINES FOR THE ELABORATION OF A POLICY DECLARATION

What are the aspects included in a policy declaration?

- An introduction summarizing the policy and its intention.
- Heading of the declaration.
- The institution's long-term mission or objective.
- Theoretical basis in which the institution acknowledges:
  - Its mandate as a result of international declarations and agreements (e.g., Earth Summit-Agenda 21, 4th Conference on Women.)
  - Its understanding of gender.
  - The relationship between gender equity and natural resources, as reflected in the use, management, access, and conservation of those resources.
  - The relationship between gender equality and equity, as part of human rights.
- How the institution deals with equal opportunity (it should determine whether this topic will be included as part of the declaration.)
- Integration of gender equity within the institution.
- Brief explanation of how it will be integrated (methodology.)
- Priorities or points of entry (if relevant for the institution.)
GUIDELINES FOR THE ELABORATION OF AN ACTION PLAN

What are the aspects considered in an action plan?

• An introduction with:
  - The institution’s mission.
  - The origin of the action plan.
  - How it relates to the institution’s history?
• Theoretical basis (extracted from the policy):
  - Its mandate as a result of the Earth Summit (Agenda 21) and Beijing Summit.
  - How is gender understood?
  - The relationship between gender equity and equality, as the basis for human rights.
• How the Action Plan will be carried out.
• Long-range objective or goal and specific objectives.
• Strategy to achieve the objectives:
  - Indication of the situation leading to the objective.
  - Specific activities by objective.
• Structure of the entities responsible for the execution and monitoring of the action plan:
  - Gender units.
  - Person responsible.
  - Role of the country’s Offices for Women’s Issues.
  - Institutional changes required in order to execute the Plan.
• Resources needed:
  - Contributions made by the institution?
  - External support required (financial, human, materials)?

For illustrative purposes we will use the gender policy declaration issued by Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of El Salvador. The declaration’s text includes most of the above components, although not necessarily in the same order. It must be borne in mind that these guidelines are just a point of departure. What is important is to capture the meaning of the policy, as well as clarity and commitment.
**EXAMPLE OF A GENDER POLICY DECLARATION**

**Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources**  
(MARN)  
Gender Policy Declaration of  
El Salvador

**Introduction**

This policy declaration calls for the advancement of both equity and equality as an essential factor for environmental sustainability, and as an integral part of conservation efforts. It presents equity and equality goals and objectives within the context and mission of the MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, providing a brief conceptual framework, as well as the basis for taking equity issues into consideration within its environmental activities. It also calls for an effective strategy for the declaration’s integration in the programs, plans and projects of the National Environmental Policy.

**INTEGRATION OF THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT A POLICY DECLARATION**

**The mission of the MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES (MARN) is to restore and ensure the quality of both the environment and natural resources, as part of El Salvador’s sustainable development.**

**What is Gender?**

MARN believes that gender refers to the attributes and opportunities related to being men and women, and the socio-cultural relationships between men and women. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed, and are learned through socialization processes. They are specific to context and dynamic in nature. Within our society there are differences and inequalities between men and women in terms of activities carried out, access and control over resources and decision-making opportunities.
Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context; it also takes into consideration aspects such as class, financial situation, ethnic group, and age.

Therefore, MARN is aware of the fact that the adoption of a gender equity perspective means focusing on women as well as men, and on the relationship between them and natural resources, by promoting the co-responsibility of both genders.

This means working with a comprehensive perspective that permits and acknowledges national and regional diversity. MARN assumes that integration of the gender perspective means creating a working environment that facilitates the application of this perspective, promotes and prioritizes awareness and training activities for its personnel, and considers such training a prerequisite in future hiring criteria.

**Why is Gender Equity Essential for the Sustainable use, Management and Conservation of Natural Resources?**

*Mandate originating from international declarations and agreements* MARN complies with the 1994-1996 Government Plans, and the National Policy for Women’s Issues, and adheres to commitments made by the Salvadoran government at international fora, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1984); the Earth Summit (1992); the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995); and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (1997), as well as the provisions stipulated in El Salvador’s Legislation on the Environment, Item IV.

*Relationship between gender equity and equality as human rights* Based on the above, MARN acknowledges that gender equity and equality are fundamental to human rights and social justice, as well as being a pre-requisite for sustainable development and the achievement of its mission. With respect to the use, management and conservation of natural resources, women and men have different roles and responsibilities. Often women make their contributions to the household, the community and society in conditions of disadvantageous access to, control over and benefits from these resources and their use. Frequently this inequality exists within a context of discrimination and unequal power relationships.
Consequently, MARN believes that relationships concerned with gender and the environment involve undertaking a thorough analysis of use patterns, knowledge and skills related to natural resource conservation and sustainable use. It is only through a gender perspective that it will be possible to fully discern human ecosystem relations.

MARN assumes that working with a gender perspective requires an analysis and understanding of the various roles and responsibilities, relationships, needs and visions of men and women in rural and urban areas. Moreover, working with a gender perspective does not only signify going beyond a simple acknowledgment of gender differences, but also promoting the necessary changes toward more equitable relationships among men and women regarding natural resource use, benefits and decision-making. MARN’s commitment to gender equity and equality constitutes an integral part of all its policies, programs, plans and projects, as well as in the context of its activities as the regulating and governing body for the country’s environment-related matters.

Mainstreaming of Gender within the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources

As the environment’s regulating and governing body, the ministry defines the gender component as a central crosscutting theme of its work throughout the System Governing the Environmental Sector (SINAMA), as stipulated by article 6 of the country’s Legislation on the Environment.

MARN acknowledges that understanding and agreement among the various sectors of Salvadoran society can only be achieved through participation of both men and women on a basis of equality, which will further guarantee the execution of activities related to environmental protection and restoration. It is to this effect that the ministry has established the Gender, Environment and Development Unit.

MARN understands that a gender perspective can be mainstreamed by assessing the implications for women and men of any possible action, including policies or programs and projects within any area and at all levels. This process brings the concerns and experiences of women and men to an integral dimension within the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of...
policies, programs, plans and projects of the various environment-related areas (e.g., policies, social, natural resources), so that women and men may benefit equitably, thus avoiding the perpetuation of injustices and inequalities. As the environment’s regulating and governing body, MARN advocates for the incorporation of this policy declaration into the fundamental principles of the country’s National Policy on the Environment and all of its components.

The implementation of this policy within SINAMA entails implications regarding its priorities, management and administration systems, particularly concerning:

a) The establishment of environment-related mechanisms within public sector institutions for the purpose of implementing the environmental dimension with a gender perspective in the country’s development;
b) The establishment of a structural and operational organization for environmental management applying a gender perspective within public sector institutions;
c) The establishment of procedures for generating, systematizing, recording and issuing sex-disaggregated information related to environmental management and the situation of the environment as the basis for preparing environmental plans and programs to assess the environmental impact of sectoral policies and assess the performance of the environmental activities conducted by members of SINAMA;
d) Establishment of the responsibility of each public institution for implementation, execution and follow-up of environmental efforts with gender perspective; and
e) The establishment of regulations for participation and coordination between SINAMA and the Ministry.

Along with the adoption of this policy declaration for the incorporation of gender equity, an action plan will also be developed and implemented for the incorporation of gender perspective in MARN.

Ministry heads assume full responsibility for its implementation through the Gender, Environment, and Development Unit, established for this purpose. MARN also understands that the full implementation of the policy and the working strategy or action plan requires the participation and commitment of both Ministry staff and civil society.
III.

INITIATION OF A PROCESS

1. Regional Context

The Central American governments are signatory to various international conventions and declarations, endorsing a series of commitments assumed for the advancement of equity between women and men. Examples of these instruments include: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1984), the Earth Summit (1992), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the United Nations’ Convention to Combat Desertification (1997.)

Within Central America, in August of 1994 the various governments adopted the “Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development” (ALIDES). This partnership “is an initiative related to short, medium, and long-term policies, programs, and actions, outlining a change of development scheme, and of our individual and collective attitudes, along with local, national and regional policies, and actions aiming at the political, economical, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability of society” (ALIDES, 1994.)

Following are some of the principles, actions and commitments to be promoted by the alliance in connection with the subject of equity and equality:

• Political freedom, respect, protection and promotion of human rights; the fight against violence, corruption and impunity and respect for international treaties are vital to promote peace and democracy as basic forms of human coexistence;

• Execution of programs supporting households and vulnerable groups, for the purpose of facilitating the comprehensive development of children, young people, the elderly and women;
• Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in order to improve their quality of life and society; and

• Continue promoting full equality between men and women, thus increasing women’s contribution to the countries’ progress and social development. In addition, policies will be promoted toward elimination of the constraints preventing such equality, based on women’s full participation in activities aimed at improving society and decision-making processes.

Despite the existence of these regulations, institutions in the environmental sector face difficulties, needs and problems that hinder them from undertaking actions exercising a crosscutting effect on more equitable relationships. In some countries, regulating bodies have carried out a series of actions which, up to the late 90’s, did not translate into major changes at an institutional level.

2. It All Started with a Letter...

At the end of 1997, the Social Area of the IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica received a letter from El Salvador’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources requesting our cooperation to incorporate gender perspective in their activities. At that time, neither the financial resources nor the time required were available to respond to this request.

In early 1998 we received two more requests. The RUTA project requested our collaboration in undertaking a training process in Honduras’ Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources; and representatives of the Costa Rican Government requested our support to strengthen the incorporation of the gender equity perspective in the Ministry of Energy and Environment.

As a result of other initiatives being implemented by IUCN’s Social Area throughout the region, representatives of non-governmental organizations (FUNDAGUATEMALA and in Mexico, Itza Castañeda, with a grant from the MacArthur Foundation) worked with the countries’ environmental regulating bodies to assess the possibility of a regional process aimed at linking gender and environment. As part of these efforts, Guatemala’s National Commission for Environment (CONAMA) and the Planning Office of Mexico’s Ministry of Environment, National Resources and Fishing (SEMARNAP) joined the Mesoamerican initiative.

For IUCN’s Social Area, these requests were highly significant- the result of eight years of hard work throughout the region to facilitate the incorporation of gender equity as an essential and inexorable element for achieving sustainable development.

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4 RUTA is a regional project funded by the World Bank in Central America.
A series of meetings were held in response to these requests, and it was decided that the Social Area would support the elaboration of a policy on gender equity and corresponding action plan for each country.

Thanks to the financial support provided by the Ford Foundation, in July of 1998 a Mesoamerican workshop was conducted. Policy drafts were generated for El Salvador’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources; Mexico’s Ministry of Environment, National Resources and Fishing; Guatemala’s National Commission on Environment and Costa Rica’s Ministry of Energy and Environment. Participating in this workshop were the officials responsible for gender within each ministry, as well as representatives of civilian groups from each country.

Subsequently, three ministries (Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica) asked IUCN to give a presentation on this experience at the Central American Commission for Development and Environment (CCAD).5

During the 11th Special Meeting, held in Guatemala in 1998, IUCN presented the findings from the first workshop and the regional strategy to incorporate gender equity in environmental activities.

At the meeting, CCAD agreed to:

Thank Lorena Aguilar, IUCN, for her presentation, and considering the importance of strengthening the gender perspective within all the activities carried out in connection with natural resources and the environment, as well as within the framework for the integration system, it is agreed to: continue strengthening women’s participation in the various environmental activities carried out at national and regional levels, strengthening the processes currently being undertaken by the various ministries in connection with the formulation of policies and action plans in order to incorporate the gender equity perspective and encourage international cooperation organizations to participate in this process.

As a result of the CCAD agreement, three other countries, Panama, Nicaragua and Honduras, joined the regional process. By October 1998, policy drafts for these ministries were finalized. Thus, seven ministries had their own policy declaration draft.

To formulate the policy declarations, we applied a design that would allow us to draft the documents in an orderly and consistent manner. Once prepared, each country began legalizing its policy in accordance with national legislation.

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5 CCAD (Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo) is part of the Central American Integration System, and includes all of the region’s ministers of environment. Currently it is the most important political forum in the region with respect to environmental issues.
Below is a description of some of the procedures used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NICARAGUA</th>
<th>COSTA RICA</th>
<th>EL SALVADOR</th>
<th>GUATEMALA</th>
<th>PANAMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree</td>
<td>Ministerial Decree</td>
<td>National referendum</td>
<td>Approved during CCAD’s regional process</td>
<td>Approved by the Legal Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approved by the Ministry’s Legal Department</td>
<td>Approved by the Legal Department</td>
<td>Submitted by the Ministry for its incorporation into the National Environmental Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporated into the Legislation on the Environment through an amendment</td>
<td>Approved by the Technical Advisory Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above was not a simple process; it entailed a series of consultations within each country, all the way from reviews carried out by various ministerial departments to national consultations.

The process was entirely different in two countries. In Mexico, given the fact that SEMARNAP’s administrative structure is much larger than the rest of the region’s ministries, the internal consultation to legalize the declaration required a great deal more time. Civilian groups (academia non-governmental organizations and networks) undertook a national consultation to validate the declaration and determine implementation strategies. This initiative was fully supported by the National Commission for Women’s Issues (COMUJER.) In Honduras, due to the national emergency caused by Hurricane Mitch, the gender policy was not adopted until September of 2001.

Once the policies were approved, we conducted national workshops in order to elaborate action plans for policy implementation purposes.

Formulation of the action plans began by:

- Acknowledging the Ministry of the Environment’s weaknesses and needs with respect to the incorporation of this perspective;

- Identifying a desirable future by answering the following questions: Where does the institution expect to be regarding gender equity? What would an institution where gender equity is mainstreamed look like?, and;

- With this vision in mind, participants defined the steps or actions to be taken in order to move from the current to the desired situation.
3. Preliminary Findings on the Status of the Incorporation of Gender Equity into the Region’s Ministries of the Environment

During the analysis made prior to the formulation of the policy declarations and action plans, the following difficulties were identified with respect to the incorporation of gender equity in environmental activities. Table No. 5 summarizes the current situation regarding application of gender equity perspective within the Mesoamerican ministries of environment during the late 90’s.

Major weaknesses or needs:

- **There are no gender units or departments whose position within the institution’s structure that gives them the capacity to influence environmental strategies implemented by the regulating bodies.**

Throughout the region’s seven countries, one person has been designated as the focal point for women’s or gender-related issues. Most of these officials have no budget or adequate terms of reference. In three of the countries, this responsibility was simply tacked on to their regular responsibilities.

In only two countries did the institutions formally include their gender unit as part of the organizational chart, and even then, they are located in fairly non-strategic positions, making it impossible for the units to influence other departments.

- **Lack of training at all institutional levels.**

Many of the institutions’ departments lack adequate guidance for applying gender equity in environmental activities.

- **There is no system for information disaggregated according to sex.**

With the exception of Nicaragua, where progress has been made in designing a system of information disaggregated according to sex, the
rest of the institutions are not able to determine how different populations are being impacted by their programs, activities or projects.

• **Practical methodologies for applying gender equity perspective are unavailable.**

During the workshops, participants repeatedly identified the lack of specific techniques to implement gender equity perspective as a major limitation. Even for the gender officials and a large part of the staff that has received training on the subject, at times it is hard or impossible to digest and apply what they have learned from textbooks to their daily work.

• **Need for suitable environmental indicators reflecting impact on the transformation of inequalities.**

• **Application of the gender equity perspective is insufficient and inadequate; the prevailing concept is erroneous or viewed as a passing fad or a mean to obtain resources or work for women.**

• **Lack of human, financial and material resources to implement gender equity.**

When analyzing the difficulties encountered in incorporating the gender equity approach, all countries mentioned this limitation as one of the most important. Nevertheless, due to the weakness of the units and because this topic has only recently been positioned within the agencies regulating environmental activities, these institutions do not have the resources needed to carry out action plans to implement the gender equity policy, which definitely impairs the potential impact of the policy.

• **Unwillingness on the part of officials and technicians to adopt the gender equity focus.**

Changes always generate insecurity and opposition, particularly when they concern topics that seem very complex.

• **Need to disseminate the gender equity policy through the formulation of a series of proposals outlining recommendations and procedures.**

• **Gender is viewed as a component with no connection to other areas, not as an issue that must be mainstreamed.**

There is a general belief that gender issues are the responsibility of one particular “specialist,” and that it is unnecessary for everyone to receive training on this subject. Although it is not expected that everyone will become an expert on gender equity, the entire staff needs to have a basic understanding of the theoretical, methodological, and philosophical foundations of gender equity as a fundamental requisite for development.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>GENDER POLICIES WITHIN THE INSTITUTION</th>
<th>TRAINING OR AWARENESS</th>
<th>BUDGET</th>
<th>STRUCTURE TO INCORPORATE GENDER</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>PUBLICATION</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NICARAGUA</td>
<td>Yes, within the World Bank project and through REDNA (National Network for the Toward Equity Project)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>April 1, 1998</td>
<td>Technical assistance for projects</td>
<td>Yes, a system of indicators</td>
<td>No budget available; Untrained staff; Unit needs consolidation and strengthening</td>
<td>Will; Commitment; Information system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTA RICA</td>
<td>Yes, 10% of staff</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Ministerial offices (dissemination of the Sexual Harassment Law); SINAC Strategies (ACA-Tilarán); ACLA-Pacific; Female leaders; Training</td>
<td>Sex-disaggregated information is non-existent</td>
<td>Yes, proceedings reports, directory, reference material</td>
<td>Does not reach the decision-making level; Isolated, and short-term; Generated by individual requests; Lack of political will; Complex structure; Male predominance in technical aspects; Little planning</td>
<td>Political will; DECAFOR support; Acknowledgment of the issue; Availability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUATEMALA</td>
<td>Individual awareness (regions); Appraisal of women and men; 2 sessions (not permanent); All personnel 2nd half of '96</td>
<td>No budget; Only one person</td>
<td>Environmental Awareness Program; 1996 Environmental Program, women and sustainable development</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Is not incorporated</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Needs to become a ministry; Lack of gender solidarity; Lack of personnel; Lack of information; Rivalry among organizations</td>
<td>Frameworks for policies; Focal point for public participation; Support of CONAMA9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL SALVADOR</td>
<td>3 technicians trained; Facilitation (counter-productive)</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Program for Gender and Environment</td>
<td>National Appraisal; Policy formulation; Action plan; Preparation of a funding project</td>
<td>Short time in place; Operates very efficiently</td>
<td>One publication</td>
<td>Lack of information regarding gender; Resistance/negative reaction; Clarification of conceptual underpinnings</td>
<td>Political will; Incorporation of gender within the institution; ISDEMU10 support; IUCN networks, Arias Foundation, IICA11; HABITAT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 DECAFOR: Forestry Peasants Development Program, Costa Rica  
7 SINAC: National System of Protected Areas, Costa Rica  
8 ACA: Arenal Conservation Area, Costa Rica  
9 CONAMA: National Commission on the Environment, Guatemala  
10 ISDEMU: El Salvador Institute for the Development of Women  
11 IICA: Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>GENDER POLICIES WITHIN THE INSTITUTION</th>
<th>TRAINING OR AWARENESS</th>
<th>BUDGET</th>
<th>STRUCTURE TO INCORPORATE GENDER</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>PUBLICATION</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PANAMA</td>
<td>A national process does not exist</td>
<td>As of 1986 greater orientation toward awareness, 35 people have undergone training</td>
<td>$55,000 contributed by the European Union for 5 years of budgeted projects</td>
<td>Additional responsibility assigned to one person from the environmental education area</td>
<td>Training for technicians and farmers; Research; National survey</td>
<td>Internal evaluation; Results of the survey</td>
<td>No, only training pamphlets</td>
<td>Need to create a unit; Lack of trained personnel; Monitoring system</td>
<td>Political will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Assigned as additional responsibility</td>
<td>No program exists, but the National Program for Women Issues stipulates that it should be adopted by all of the Federal institutions</td>
<td>Regional activities with women; Work is conducted in coordination with CONMUJER</td>
<td>There is no system of information disaggregated by sex; No monitoring system in place</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No budget available; No specialized office</td>
<td>NGO’s and academic support; Interest and support in several Ministry departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HONDURAS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, only 2 people</td>
<td>No budget available</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>No, only the Olancho pilot project</td>
<td>Incorporated into the Olancho project</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Budget; Lack of training; Need to reorient programs and projects; Lack of dissemination and communication; Lack of institutional coordination; Lack of regulations and standards; SERNA is fragmented; Lack of leadership and planning; Loss of human resources</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary training (stressing the environmental area); Current legal framework; Political will; Presentation of environmental services; Olancho project budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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SERNA: Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources of Honduras.
The constraints faced by institutions throughout the entire region during the late 90’s, described above, may be summarized as follows:

*Acknowledgment and appreciation of the gender equity perspective within Mesoamerica’s environmental activities are partial, fragmented, and insufficient.*

4. A Step toward the Incorporation of Gender Equity

After more than seven years, it is now evident to the region’s ministries of environment that a gender equity policy is a mechanism that institutionalizes the process of seeking equal opportunity and equity between women and men and in their relation with natural resources. Gender policy has facilitated the recognition that women and men have differentiated needs and interests and rights and responsibilities over natural resources, and that they experience different impacts from conservation processes and interventions for development.

It is also recognized that to promote sustainable conservation it is necessary to facilitate social change enabling transformation in the relations of human beings and social institutions with natural resources, and that the gender policy and its plan of action have made it possible to perceive the particularities with which these relations are established in order to make interventions more efficient. Gender policy has also permitted the promotion of equitable participation by all persons in environmental management processes, which strengthens their viability and sustainability.

In the internal institutional sphere, having a gender policy has improved relations between the people who make up technical, administrative and hierarchical teams. It has been understood that an equitable institutional environment promotes the participation of women and men and a fair distribution of resources, which significantly contributes to the quality of their performance and raises levels of efficiency in environmental management.

To date, and based on the results of the countries’ action plans, we are now tackling the elaboration of a regional initiative aimed at mainstreaming gender equity perspective at all levels of the Mesoamerican bodies responsible for regulating environmental activities. Some results of putting gender policies into practice at Mesoamerican ministries of the environment have been the following:

- All of the regulatory organisms for the environment have a gender equity policy and respective plan of action.
- All national mechanisms have a gender unit that forms part of the institutional structure.
- Hierarchical, technical and administrative personnel have an awareness of the basic principles of gender equity and have been trained in the use of gender methodologies as applied to environmental management.
• Institutional strategic and operating plans have incorporated actions aimed at gender equity.

• Recommendations regarding the incorporation of gender equity perspective have been made for laws, regulations, strategies and other instruments. Consideration of this principle from the start was achieved recently with respect to the preparation of some of these instruments.

• Gender units have been able to establish mechanisms for building consensus and forging alliances among themselves and with civil society organizations at both the national and regional level.

• Gender units and national women’s mechanisms have created spaces of coordination and joint work.

• The process has begun of constructing gender indicators for incorporation in information systems and of promoting the disaggregation of existing statistics according to sex.

• More participation of women in environmental management has been promoted in both local and national spheres.

• There is greater incorporation of women in productive initiatives being promoted in zones next to protected areas.

• More equitable work environments have been generated, which facilitate ownership of gender equity as a guiding principle of regular institutional life and practice, both internally and externally.

• Officials of regulatory institutions in the environmental sector have expressed their satisfaction regarding changes taking place at the personal and family level thanks to awareness-raising processes.

Also, at the regional level, greater efforts have been made to support incorporation of the gender equity perspective in activities conducted by the Central American Commission for Development and Environment (CCAD.) In August of 2001, a gender policy and action plan were formulated. Also, the ministers of environment have requested that all regional proposals CCAD submits to international cooperation agencies must include the mainstreaming of gender.

Hopefully, through this joint effort we will be able to make an important contribution toward the transformation into societies that are far more equitable and democratic.
IV.

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IUCN - The World Conservation Union was founded in 1948 and brings together 79 states, 112 government agencies, 760 NGOs, 37 affiliates, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 141 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. Its mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. Within the framework of global conventions IUCN has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN has approximately 1000 staff, most of whom are located in its 42 regional and country offices while 100 work at its Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland.

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