

**INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS**

PJW-18  
Global Perspectives on Women and Forestry

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Dear Peter,

Three major world conferences took place in July 1985 that brought people together to discuss two vital sets of development issues -- women and forestry. The IX World Forestry Congress was held in Mexico City, Mexico, from 1 to 10 July. Two related conferences on women were held in Nairobi, Kenya: the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Forum, from 10 to 19 July, and the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, from 15 to 26 July. I was fortunate to be able to attend the World Forestry Congress and part of the NGO Forum.

My recent trips to the World Forestry Congress and to the NGO Forum were enlightening, provocative, frustrating, exhausting, and -- I hope -- ultimately worthwhile. The value of a particular conference, I believe, should not be assessed immediately: rather, one needs to wait a few years to evaluate whether a conference has any impacts on the larger society, or on general thinking about a topic. Nonetheless, certain ideas emerged from these conferences that suggest important trends and priorities for research and development, which seem worth examining at this time. Furthermore, the two conferences provided a unique opportunity to sample world opinion on the specific topic of "women and forestry" from two different perspectives.

The IX World Forestry Congress

World Forestry Congresses are relatively unusual events. They are technical and professional conferences, currently held once every six or seven years. The last one, the VIII World Forestry Congress, was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in October 1978. Each Congress is organized and sponsored by the host national government -- usually the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, or other government agency dealing with forestry -- with the assistance of the Forestry Department of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

World Forestry Congresses are attended by a variety of foresters and related professionals, working for governments, international organizations, private industry, research groups, non-governmental organizations, and academia. Each country participating selects an official delegation to represent their forestry interests. Both official delegates and ordinary participants attend and participate in most Congress activities. The final policy declaration of the Congress, however, is drafted by a policy group comprised of selected national delegates and a few other invited

participants. The Congress in Mexico had over 2200 registered participants. Over 190 (9 percent) of the registered participants were women: it is unclear how many of these actively participated in the Congress, versus serving in support functions. Nonetheless, there were markedly more women than there had been at the last Congress, when only about twenty of 2300 participants were women.

The Mexico Congress aimed to appraise the state of the world's forests and their impacts on human society, to evaluate where progress has been made and how, to identify remaining obstacles or constraints, and to recommend strategies for action. As such, the Congress was intended to generate a professional consensus on current forestry priorities.

The IX World Forestry Congress was organized around the theme of "Forests in the Integral Development of Society". Of the eight working days of the Congress, the first two and the last two were devoted to plenary sessions. The middle four days were organized into concurrent sessions of three technical commissions, dealing with "trends and new contributions" in: (I) management of forest resources, (II) forest production and productivity, and (III) institutions and rural development. The latter commission was sub-divided into two sections, one dealing with forestry institutions, the other with social participation in forestry activities, which were the sessions I primarily attended. It was difficult to grasp an overall impression of current priorities in forestry, as the technical commissions met concurrently, and thus it was not possible to attend all sessions. Nonetheless, certain major ideas emerged repeatedly.

One major issue was how to get the Congress recommendations translated into national and international policy, and then into concrete action. What is the use of foresters agreeing that forest management needs higher priority and more funding if politicians or the general public do not agree? The issue is not one of agreeing on professional priorities, but developing the political will to make the necessary changes. One set of speakers, from the World Resources Institute, pointed out that over the past several decades, the proportion of land area in tropical forests has been exponentially decreasing year by year, while the number of resolutions at World Forestry Congresses concerning the need to protect these forests has been exponentially increasing -- to no obvious avail.

Dr. Edouard Saouma, the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, argued that the forester must now move out of the forest and become an integral part of the community. The tropical forests face one problem -- a "crisis of poverty" or "crisis of development" -- that drives poor farmers to put more forest land into agricultural production, or to migrate to cities. Only by tackling the larger problem of rural poverty can forestry issues be addressed.

Other speakers echoed his sentiments. Dr. Shah from India remarked that if we take care of the world's people, the world's forests will take care of themselves. People can grow trees, but to do so, people's basic needs must first be met. Dr. Marcos Flores Rodas, the head of FAO's Forestry Depart-

ment, suggested that forestry must come to grips with two major trends -- the continuing growth of poverty, as the world's population continues to multiply while wealth is concentrated among few people and few countries, and the increasing international debt problems, which will bring about restructuring of resource use. Flores suggested that the answer to these problems lies in integrated and diversified development. For forests to have any future, the forester must be prepared to argue that in certain areas, forests are the best use of lands for development.

A debate focused around the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or voluntary organizations, in promoting community participation in forest development. Several representatives of NGOs participated in the Forestry Congress. Four individuals came on behalf of the United Nations Tree Project (see PJW-16). Many spoke on the important roles that NGOs can play in linking individuals and governments, communities and foresters, for social or community reforestation and forest resource management efforts. Other speakers felt that NGOs were just one of many mechanisms for achieving community participation. A few participants, who work for their government's forest services, argued that governments are -- by definition -- of and for the people, and thus there is no inherent dichotomy between government action and the people's interests, and thus no need for NGOs. The NGOs had, unfortunately, a fairly small voice in the Congress -- they did not participate in the policy working group, and were scarcely represented in the forestry exhibition.

In addition to the formal working sessions of the Congress, a forestry exhibition was held. At this exhibition were numerous displays of forest industries, forest products, and forest technology. Several countries had national displays as well. The forestry exhibition had only a couple of displays representing community forestry activities, such as improved cookstoves and examples of materials used for extension work in Mexico, and representing nongovernmental organizations, such as the UN Tree Project and the Nitrogen-Fixing Tree Association. This distribution of exhibits was understandable considering the high fees charged for exhibition space.

One of the more engaging NGO spokespersons at the Congress represented the Chipko Andolan movement in India. Attired in traditional Indian dress, the speaker told how the Chipko movement had been launched as rural people -- primarily women -- had struggled to preserve their forest resources from government sales to private timber interests. He argued that foresters needed to work more with the people -- to spread the message of conserving trees from village to village. (While he was a very effective speaker, it would have been nice to have had a spokewoman come to discuss why the movement particularly attracted women. Unfortunately, however, the women active in the Chipko movement are not fluent in major international languages, and thus unable to speak at major international conferences.)

The particular question of "women and forestry" demonstrates some of these issues more fully. The topic was only formally discussed as part of a session on community participation. My paper was the only one to specifically address women's participation, although some other presentations did mention women as a group to be considered. In a satellite

meeting on community participation, Shanta Pandey spoke very effectively about how women have been overlooked in forestry development efforts in her home country of Nepal.

The World Forestry Congress was not, unfortunately, very sensitive to issues of "women and forestry". This was rather surprising considering that the Forestry Congress was being held in the very building -- the Medical Congress Center -- where the first UN Conference on Women, marking the opening of the UN Decade for Women, had been held in 1975. The Congress itself was scheduled to overlap with the NGO Forum in Nairobi: consequently some women involved in development forestry who might have come to Mexico did not do so, as they were going to Nairobi instead. (It was particularly significant that there were no African women at all in attendance at the Forestry Congress, and few women from other developing countries.) Only a few of approximately two hundred invited speakers were women. Some women did make presentations at a few satellite meetings. Other women had submitted voluntary papers, but as the Mexican organizing committee decided not to make the voluntary papers available to the Congress participants, there was no way of knowing what proportion of these papers had been submitted by women, nor what proportion of the papers submitted by women originally had been accepted by the Mexican organizing committee. The NGO representatives were also primarily men, inadequately reflecting the degree of women's forestry involvement through such organizations.

Twenty-five women gathered to discuss how the participation of women in forestry, in general, and in World Forestry Congresses in particular, could be enhanced. Several women drafted resolutions to submit to the policy group for consideration for inclusion in the final policy declaration. As many men were supportive of efforts to increase women's participation, their input was solicited at a second meeting, where the draft statement was discussed and revised. That evening the statement was translated from English into Spanish and French, and distributed to members of the national delegations and the policy working group the following morning.

As a result, the final policy declaration was revised to include one sentence specifically referring to the need for women's participation, another sentence that listed women as one of several groups to be considered, and several references in an earlier draft had been changed from "man" to "humanity", "people", or "human beings". (A few references to "mankind" and "spokesmen", however, remained in the document.)

Although the final policy document contained less on women's participation than we had hoped for, it was a step in the right direction. Furthermore, awareness of the issue was raised among many Congress participants. A network of women participants was started: it is to be hoped that this group will be able to build on its efforts in Mexico City, to insure that greater participation of women occurs in the next World Forestry Congress, and to insure that forestry development enhances opportunities for women's participation at all levels.

## The NGO Forum

The NGO Forum had eight days of sessions, with over one hundred different workshops scheduled every day. Attendance far exceeded initial expectations: over twelve thousand participants, mostly women, attended the sessions. As one acquaintance remarked, there were actually, thus, over twelve thousand different conferences -- as each participant chose different workshops to attend, and thus had different experiences.

Most NGO Forum sessions were held at the University of Nairobi campus, but others were scattered around town. Last minute changes in sessions were frequent. People would often dash from one room to another, looking frantically for a particular session about to start. Small groups of women, with programs and city maps clutched in their hands and dazed looks on their faces, were a common sight. Fortunately, the University campus had a big green, where one could relax and catch one's breath, and an area set up to buy refreshments.



Forum participants relaxing on the University of Nairobi green

The UN Decade for Women had been organized around the three major themes of Equality, Development, and Peace, and three sub-themes of Education, Employment, and Health. Workshops were offered on various topics that fit under these six themes, such as women's experience in the military, women and the anti-nuclear movement, family planning, technology, agriculture, literacy, civil rights, media, religion, domestic work, violence, research, and the current "crisis" in Africa. The most heated debates focused on the sessions dealing with women's lives under particular political regimes, such as in South Africa, Nicaragua, and Palestine, and the family planning movement, which was split between the pro-life and pro-choice proponents. Other issues, such as environmental problems, were seen as relatively less controversial.

The NGO Forum in Nairobi offered a wide variety of perspectives on women and environmental issues, where I focused my energies. There were formal lecture programs, workshops, exhibitions, field trips, and tree-planting programs.

Two major week-long environmental workshops ran concurrently. Both were held at the National Museum of Kenya, about a ten-minute walk from the University of Nairobi. One workshop program was sponsored by the Environment Liaison Center and focused on four environmental issues -- forestry, energy, water, and sustainable agriculture. This program featured women from various developing countries -- Ecuador, India, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Sudan, Madagascar, Brazil, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Each speaker presented an overview of environmental issues in her country, stressing how past development had worked to the detriment of both women and the environment.

The ELC sessions were well attended, with usually over one hundred participants per session. The final summary sessions, held on the university campus, had more than three hundred attendees. The discussion sessions were lively and always ran out of time. The sessions were of interest in terms of the consensus on priorities among Third World participants. Overall, participants argued that development that involved massive interventions of technology and capital, particularly foreign exchange, were ecologically and socially unsustainable. Instead, projects should stress locally-based and locally-controlled development, that is ecologically and socially sustainable, utilizing local resources and local species.

Many participants spoke about the need for women to control and manage resources, rather than foresters, development planners, or researchers. One Zimbabwean speaker, Sithembesa Neyoni, eloquently argued that the average poor rural woman farmer in Africa does not need more researchers to come out and question her about her life -- never receiving anything in return. What she needs, Neyoni asserted, is power -- power to make decisions about the resources that sustain her life.

While these points are certainly well taken, many Forum participants overlooked the need to have well-informed and educated women at policy-making levels, to work there to support the efforts of women at grassroots levels. The issue is not one of the "women versus foresters". Women should be trained and promoted in all fields, including forestry, in order to effectively participate in decision-making on resource use. This aspect -- of the need to influence policy -- was discussed briefly, and some participants acknowledged that all research was not meaningless to the rural farmer. The important thing, however, was that the development planners, researchers, and policy makers not lose sight of the concrete, daily realities of women's lives, and the needs to improve women's situations in the short-term.

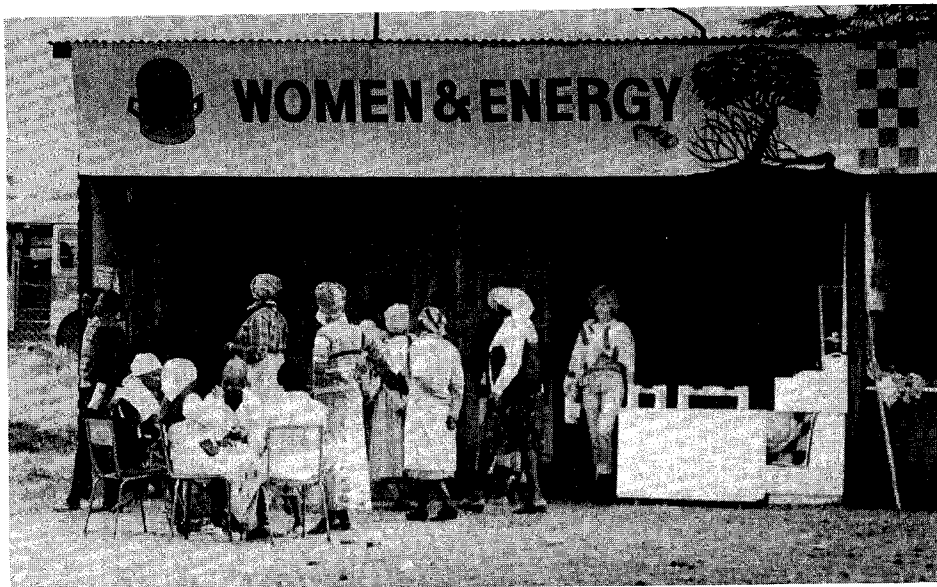
A second workshop session on "The Value of Indigenous Vegetation" was sponsored by KENGO (a network of Kenya Energy Non-Governmental Organizations). The presentations at this series were more academic. These

were, unfortunately, not well attended -- often only ten or fifteen people at a session. It was clearly unfortunate that the two workshops ran concurrently, as they were competing for the same audience.

A formal reception and evening lecture program for 750 invitees was hosted by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), which has its headquarters in Nairobi. Several world-prominent women environmentalists gave brief presentations. Margaret Kenyatta, who is Kenya's permanent representative to UNEP and who was also serving as the President of the UN World Conference, moderated the program.

The speech by Professor Wangari Mathai, leader of the National Council of Kenyan Women (NCKW) Greenbelt Movement, was quite provocative. She argued that the current African crisis -- fundamentally an environmental crisis -- can no longer be blamed on Africa's colonial inheritance. After 25 years of independence for most African countries, blame for the current situation now belongs with the African people and particularly their leaders. (Similar conclusions were reached by this year's meeting of the Organization of African Unity, held in nearby Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, also during July.) Mathai called for African governments to accord environmental issues higher priority in development. She also argued that the African people themselves should not wait for their governments to act, but must launch popular movements to solve these problems themselves.

In addition to these more formal sessions, several interesting informal events were in progress. Two different areas had been set up adjacent to the University campus for exhibits and demonstrations. The "Tech & Tools" exhibit contained numerous booths where different groups demonstrated various development efforts -- such as different models of improved cookstoves, water stills, solar panels, food preservation and processing techniques, handicrafts, and demonstrations of stages employed in the greenbelt, tree-planting campaign by the National Council of Kenyan Women (NCKW).



Congress participants who wished to contribute to the NCKW greenbelt were invited to do so by sponsoring a tree for the "Women Forest". The idea of the "Women Forest" was for women attending the Congress to plant a tree -- for their future, that of their children and grandchildren. (Unfortunately, it seems that there is a fair amount of competition among environmental groups in Kenya. Another tree-planting effort held during the NGO Forum was sponsored by KENGO, under the name of the Global Forest.) Participants were asked to contribute 100 Kenyan shillings (\$6.25) to cover the maintenance costs of a tree. Trees were being planted on the grounds of the Loreto Convent School, a private Catholic girls' school. Schoolgirls helped participants plant their trees. While some Forum participants chose to plant trees because of their personal involvement in environmental issues, others seemed to just want to make a tangible contribution to African development before returning to their homes elsewhere.



Rosalie and Anne planting tree #1999 in the Woman Forest

The second exhibit area was sponsored by another national Kenyan women's organization, Maendeleo ya Wanawake. Chapters from various parts of the country displayed and sold their handicrafts, and other displays showed different programs undertaken by the organization -- disseminating improved cookstoves, nutrition and health programs, clean water campaigns, and reforestation efforts. As I wandered around one demonstration site, I saw prototypes of a hand-cranked water pump, a simple outhouse constructed out of bamboo, a vegetable garden grown using waste water, and lots of Moringa oleifera tree seedlings. A sign piqued my interest, announcing that the Moringa oleifera were "water purification trees". I asked a woman for information. She told me where a seminar explaining the trees' use was currently in progress.



I went over to the nearby Maendeleo House and found the Kimbo Kitchen, the demonstration kitchen and classroom. There Dr. Samia Al Azharia Jahn was explaining how Moringa oleifera can be used to clean water. The seeds are ground to a powder, which is mixed with turbid water. The powder functions like alum, causing the suspended particles in the water to settle out. As many bacteria and others germs present in water tend to attach themselves to particles, the sedimentation of such particles and filtering off of the cleaner water on top can significantly improve water safety. Dr. Al Azharia Jahn has been researching this issue in Sudan and Egypt for GTZ (the German Technical Assistance program), but hopes that it will find wide applicability elsewhere. To date she seems to have had more luck in selling women's groups on the tree's usefulness than she as had with foresters.

#### The UN World Conference

While the NGO Forum was open to all interested individuals, the UN World Conference was open only to members of national delegations, representatives of NGOs having "consultative status" with the United Nations, and accredited members of the press. Although I was not able to attend the UN World Conference myself, I did have the opportunity to talk with participants while I was in Nairobi. The World Conference consisted of several simultaneous activities. The major work of the conference was to reach agreement on the policy document. Document drafts had been discussed for months in advance, at various preliminary meetings. Certain portions of the document had already been approved. Other sections, still under dispute, had been printed in the document within brackets. The bracketed sections formed the subject matter of discussion for the Conference in Nairobi.

The first few days of the conference were devoted to agreeing upon working rules for the conference. Participants decided to adopt measures by consensus: if consensus could not be achieved, then delegations would vote. Two working committees were established to hammer out various sections of bracketed text. In the meantime, the remaining participants met to hear country reports. These country reports provided an assessment of the achievements and remaining obstacles to women's advancement in each country. Various national delegations also sponsored resolutions, of which some were adopted and added to the text. Much discussion was devoted to whether there should be another UN Women's Conference, and when. Participants agreed on another conference, but left the question of how soon -- between now and the year 2000 -- open. Many advocated another conference in 5 years, whereas others felt that such a time-frame might be neither politically nor financially feasible for the UN system.

The policy document discussed women's involvement in agricultural, environmental, and energy issues. No specific mention, however, was made of women and forestry -- just references to forestry insofar as it touched on these broader issues. The Malian delegation, for example, sponsored a resolution stressing the urgent need to address the problem of desertification in Africa, and mentioned the forestry in this context.

## Women and Forestry: Needs and Directions

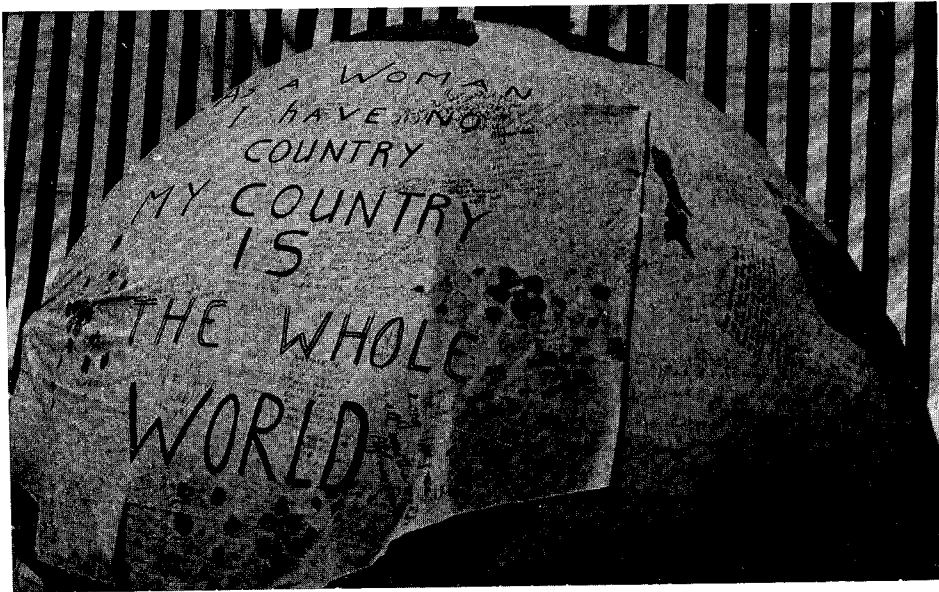
Overall, I came away from the NGO Forum feeling more encouraged about "women and forestry" than I had from the 9th World Forestry Congress in Mexico. Why? I think because I got a much better sense of what women are doing in grassroots development organizations throughout the developing world. Most Forum speakers were from Third World countries. Although lots of North American and European women were in Nairobi, they did not comprise the majority. Over half the NGO Forum participants were Africans.

In terms, specifically, of forestry, women are actively involved in reforestation efforts and reduction of wood consumption, as in improved fuel-efficiency cookstoves. They are actively involved in other means of using woody vegetation to improve their lives, such as growing Moringa oleifera trees for water purification purposes. The Forum itself was important in building women's political networks, demonstrating their concerns with vital development issues -- including environmental issues, and developing their expertise in tackling a large array of important issues.

It seems a pity that the World Forestry Congress, the NGO Forum, and the UN World Conference for the Women's Decade could not have all been held concurrently. Each group of conference participants could have learned much from the others. The foresters need to look at development issues more broadly, and to argue more effectively how forestry is intimately linked to larger concerns of agriculture, energy, and overall social development. This step is vital if forestry is ever to attain broader public and political support, in terms of legislative changes or financial support necessary to enact wiser conservation and management of forest resources to sustain development. Foresters also need to have more contact with grassroots efforts of people, particularly women, to address their resource needs. The activities of NGOs need much more attention. A wider diversity of NGOs should be encouraged as well, with attention given to developing the capabilities of currently under-represented NGOs. Foresters also need to learn that women have diverse needs and interests, and cannot be considered as a solitary group. As was evidenced in Nairobi, women work on environmental issues in a variety of ways, and often differ significantly about priorities and strategies.

Women need to become more actively involved in professional forums, such as World Forestry Congresses, where resource policies are debated and advocated. The efforts of women at grassroots levels are very encouraging. Support for such activities needs to be continued and expanded. By emphasizing the need to train women as resource professionals, including foresters, both objectives -- of enhancing women's grassroots development activities and of participating in policy making -- can be enhanced.

I am hoping that the discussions and networks begun in Mexico City and Nairobi will continue over the years to come, and that by the time of the Tenth World Forestry Congress (in 1991 ?), women will be participating much more actively in forestry, natural resource, and other development activities. Not only will this mean that forestry development activities



The Women's Globe -- Located Outside the Peace Tent at the NGO Forum

will take greater cognizance of the activities of rural women and seek ways in which to enhance women's participation, but also that women will be more active participants in forest management on professional and policy-making levels. For these events to occur, forestry must undergo a substantial reorientation, to become truly integrated into larger development activities. If the events in Nairobi are any indication, many of the world's women share a common concern with their global environment and are actively working together to improve management of environmental resources.



Sincerely,

*Paula J. Williams*

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Forest and Society Fellow

Received in Hanover 10/24/85