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RECLAIMING RIGHTS AND RESOURCES

Women, Poverty and Environment

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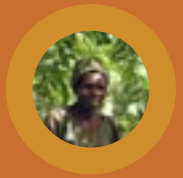

RECLAIMING RIGHTS AND RESOURCES:
Women, Poverty and Environment

By Professor Wangari Maathai, M.P., Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2004

I see our trees as soldiers. A soldier's job is to guard our land from invasion from hostile forces. Here in Africa, we often ignore our most stealthy, creeping and damaging enemy: desertification. If neighboring countries took as much land from us as desertification does, then we'd deploy all our troops at the border, and order them to fight hard to prevent further damage.

Instead, chunks of land are lost annually to this mighty adversary and we help the process along with shortsighted policies. Without investing in our 'soldiers', particularly indigenous forests, we continue to harm our precious natural resources.

If we conserved better, conflict over land, water and forests would be far less. Protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace. Instead, most African budgets still prioritize traditional defense expenditure over environment, to the detriment of their people. As a primarily land-based economy, rural Africa has no buffer when environmental degradation occurs, whether through natural means or destruction by vested interests.

When the rural environment becomes unsustainable, it's the women whose lives are most disrupted. Men can decamp to the closest urban center to look for work, but women and children have less possibility of escape. They will be left to deal with the depleted resource; working harder to eke out food crops, or traveling farther to collect water or firewood. Often they make the degraded environment worse in their efforts to survive, until eventually they too are forced to leave, following their husbands. Most often they end up living a periphery existence in an urban slum.

Since the 70s I have made strenuous efforts to show this direct linkage between women's livelihoods and the state of the environment. I feel committed to the efforts of CARE - to highlight the link in this publication. Back in the 1990s, CARE worked consistently with the Green Belt Movement, helping

us to pass on the message and plant trees where it mattered, recognizing this critical link—and its potential solutions.

Then, as now, I pointed out that if we destroy our forests, we affect our climate. This means less rainfall, less water in our rivers, more topsoil washing off the land, reduced agricultural production and more frequent droughts. The seven case studies in this publication clearly illustrate the connection between environmental conditions and human well-being, and particularly the well-being of women.

For too long we have taken our precious natural resources for granted, and chosen to ignore this close interconnection. It is easy to see why. Degradation is a slow process. Rivers don't empty overnight. Their levels fall slowly over a period of time. We become used to this decline, and stop acknowledging the long-term impact of our actions on the environment and on the lives of rural women. It is critical that people become conscious of their impact. The Tanzania case study clearly shows how women are impacted when forests are destroyed.

Equally important is that lawmakers accept their responsibilities as managers. Too often, as in the Uganda case study, corporations move into an area and seriously damage the environment in the interest of their own short-term goals, exploiting the resources they find, unconcerned about consequences on local communities and future generations.

Governments must ensure that there are adequate laws to protect the environment and the environmental rights of the poor, and that these laws are adhered to. If the African Union (AU) and its member states would stop seeing natural resource management as an irritating side issue, and instead allocate greater resources to the environment, the impact would be dramatic.

It is happening slowly. In Nairobi we used to cut trees to lay concrete. Now we take up concrete to plant trees. The Town Clerk is engaged in an extensive planting program that can help offset the carbon burden of so many vehicles on the road. If you think that 10 years ago, I was stopped from planting trees in Uhuru Park at Freedom Corner because we were told thieves would hide behind them, you can see how far we have come in our understanding.

Most recently, the British Government pledged £50 million to protect the Congo basin rainforest, the second largest in the world, from destruction. This type of commitment on behalf of governments is critical in ensuring that local people's livelihoods and rights are protected while helping them to better manage the forests and develop livelihoods that promote forest conservation.

But we need more than this. Environmental science must be a compulsory primary and secondary school subject. Many universities offer degrees in Forestry or Natural Resource Management, but environmental issues must be taught earlier because many people drop out of school before reaching the tertiary level. We need all African children to grow up with environmental knowledge, so they can better manage our resources.

Rural African women would benefit most from such a policy. In Burundi, where land is severely degraded, information on soil conservation can begin to reverse this trend. In Ghana, education towards a rights based approach has inspired women to protect their land from unscrupulous logging. In Zimbabwe, correct training and irrigation techniques have dramatically altered livelihoods in a water-starved area. In the pastoralist areas of Southern Ethiopia, knowledge about bush clearing techniques paired with emergency preparedness measures is helping communities cope with the challenges posed by an increasingly arid environment.

In all the case studies that follow it is clear that educating those who work most closely with the land – especially women - will greatly benefit the environment. Sound practice will help them support their families and prevent the impoverishment of both our people and their environment.

We all use the environment every single day. We all depend on it without even realizing how central it is to our lives. But it is not limitless. It can come to an end. We must protect our land, our water supplies and our local forests. We must recognize who the true soldiers in this battle are if we are to save our planet.

Professor Wangari Maathai, M.P., is the founder of the Green Belt Movement and the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2004

WOMEN STRUGGLE TO COMBAT SOIL DEGRADATION

By Shalini Gidoomal, Writer

A small hilly country sandwiched between Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania in the Great Lakes region, Burundi has the lowest rate of urbanization in the world, with just over 2 percent of its population living in towns. The bulk of the rest of its 6.3 million inhabitants are mainly subsistence farmers, carpeting the rolling hills and marshlands of the country with a patchwork of small fields. Sixty percent of Burundi's land mass is under heavy cultivation. Due to one of the highest population densities in Africa, an average of 440 people per square km, land use is intense and very few areas of the forest that once covered much of the landscape remain.

Years of internal conflict have served to push Burundian life expectancy from 51 years pre-conflict to 39 years in 2004. More than 300,000 people were killed and a million displaced in 13 years of civil war. It also led to reduced self-sufficiency in food production. Women or minors who now head many households have little access to non-agricultural resources. They are trapped, barely surviving on infertile land that is subject to the world's increasingly variable climate conditions.

Katrina Gakobwa's small piece of land can no longer feed all her family members

The Problem

The lush green leaves of the banana plants contained in the small plot farmed by 57-year-old Katarina Gakobwa belie the problems she currently faces on a daily basis to get her dependents fed. She gestures towards the small collection of beans (maragwe) laid out to dry on a well-used mat outside her small mud brick house. It is all she has been able to harvest for herself and her six dependents to eat for that day. The amount is barely enough for two people.

Katarina has worked this one-acre plot since she married and moved to the area in Ruhanza Colline in Giheta Commune, Gitega province, over 30 years ago. Traditionally she grew cassava, potatoes, beans, peanuts and some maize and she harvested mango and avocado from her plot. For 16 of those years, since 1991, she tilled it by herself. Her husband, who is widely regarded as a sorcerer in the area, moved in with another woman, leaving her with seven mouths to feed alone.

At that time yields from the plot were not only sufficient for her to feed her children, but also to sell some of the crop at market, a situation consistent with an International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) report that indicates that most African crop yields remained largely steady between 1981 and 1995. Burundi had the further advantage of sitting at the headwaters of the Nile and Congo rivers and having immensely fertile red soil. When Katrina's husband would visit her mud brick house each year to demand the profit from the land, she was able to provide some. The plot still belonged to him - women are rarely able to own land in Burundi.

As years passed, further tragedy struck. Katarina lost three of her children, and she took in two grandchildren from one daughter who died. Additionally, her husband, on his annual return visits home deposited two additional kids from another woman at the house. And a stepson – also sired by her husband came daily to the house to be fed, selling the food he grew in his own field for profit, but relying on Katarina for his own sustenance.

The exhausted soil of her plot yielded fewer crops each season, and this new family of six frequently went without. Research indicates that over a period of 10 years, soil nutrient loss (phosphates, nitrogen and potassium) has been severe in Burundi as subsistence farmers cannot afford to purchase fertilizer for domestic crops and are unable to rest their fields for a season. Since soil nutrient gains in Africa largely come about through mineral fertilizer application and nitrogen fixation (tree planting), the absence of these activities led to a negative nutrient balance. Between 1993-95 Burundi experienced a nutrient depletion of 100kgs

per hectare, the second highest in Africa after its neighbor Rwanda.

"Sometimes my husband would turn up demanding money only to see the children almost dying of hunger," explained Katarina. "He has stopped asking now, but he also does nothing to help us." She adds that eating more than one meal a day has become a luxury for the family.

In desperation, she began cultivating for other people with larger plots, being paid in beans and cassava, which she used to feed her own family. Once, when she was ill and didn't have the strength to work, she rented out her plot to others to farm, using the money earned to buy supplies in the market. She now does this every year during the rainy season. Plot subcontracting is a common African indicator of continuing food insecurity.

The declining yield from the soil on her plot dramatically increased in 2007, to a situation identified by the World Food Programme (WFP) as one of 'food crisis.' Almost denuded of trees, the unusual season of torrential rain that followed a protracted period of drought combined with cassava blight, meant the already degraded fields yielded virtually nothing. This has had a devastating effect on a quarter of Burundi's population and led to an appeal by WFP in January 2007 for funds to deliver food aid to around two million in the north and center of the country. Katarina is one of those affected. "Bad, heavy rain washed away the bananas and peanuts, and my cassava has died from disease. The floods have taken all my other crops this year. When we get rain this strong, it takes all the good soil off the top of the land and it destroys everything we planted," she said. "We saw floods in the past but we could still secure our crops. This is no longer the case."

The Response

The IFPRI report on 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture and the Environment indicates that Burundi crop production has declined steadily since 1995, and the application of fertilizer is no longer enough to offset nutrient depletion. It stresses that deteriorating agricultural productivity can seriously undermine the foundations of sustainable economic growth. African farmers will not be able to support growing populations on degraded land, the report continues, without interventions that include fertilizers, soil conservation, tree planting and careful management of land.

Katarina has participated in a number of CARE training programs geared towards teaching better agricultural management. She has learnt to use animal fertilizers, create compost, plant seeds in rows, and to improve and protect her plot by participating in a tree planting exercise. The initiative is a start in the attempt to reverse a deforestation process that saw 61 percent of Burundi's forests disappear between 1990 and 2000. Only 3 percent remains today.

Katarina was active in setting up the community nursery for tree seedlings, watering the young plants and helping to transfer the young trees onto community plots. She has also followed advice to plant napier grass and grevillea and calliandra trees on her own plot to help its fertility with nitrogen fixing, and prevent the erosion that has led to degraded ecosystems countrywide and increased siltation of Lake Tanganyika. Katarina is also hoping in the long term that she will be able to sell the wood, and use the funds to support herself and her family.

"I feel the tree project protects my land, and also helps us with cooking fuel and building materials, which are hard to find," she said. "If we are caught cutting government trees, we risk being fined or punished."

The tree project, she feels, has also improved communal relations, in so doing addressing a national reluctance to work together. Years of internal conflict have stoked suspicion between neighbors, and the project makes small inroads into this issue, as association members plant and look after the tree seedlings in a community nursery.

While these initiatives point to a more promising future, the precariousness of Katarina's situation is clear. Dependent on the vagaries of her depleted land and the weather, she will need assistance to survive the 'lean season' and to plan for the next harvest. She is hoping to receive seed to plant for the coming year, but as she points out, "we are so hungry that if we have nothing to eat, we will eat the seeds we've been given to feed ourselves in the coming year."

ETHIOPIA

THE PLIGHT OF THE PASTORALISTS

By Beatrice M. Spadacini, Media and Communications for East and Central Africa

Pastoralists are nomadic people whose livelihood depends on the well-being of their livestock. Living in dry, remote areas, their dependence on the surrounding ecosystem means they are directly affected by the diverse impacts of climate change. Ethiopia is a landlocked country in the northeast Africa region known as the Horn of Africa, which has one of the largest remaining pastoralist populations in the world. Bordered by Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya and Sudan, Ethiopia is home to more than 77 million people, 80 percent of whom derive their living from the land. In southern Ethiopia, Borana zone is an important pastoral area with a population of approximately 1.7 million people, the majority of whom are Muslim.

The Borana, like other pastoralist communities in east Africa, live in a semi-arid to arid environment, characterized by erratic rainfall, recurring drought and increasing land problems due to immigration from neighboring densely populated areas. With shorter periods between droughts —cycles that used to happen every 10 years now occur approximately every four to five years — the Borana pastoralists have become increasingly vulnerable to chronic poverty and food insecurity. This trend has been exacerbated by local and cross-border conflicts among different pastoralist groups, a result of competition for resources, recurrent changes of district boundaries and local politics.

Like most pastoralist societies that have historically lived in a harsh ecological environment, the Borana are a resilient people with an array of coping mechanisms that have enabled them to adapt to climatic perturbations, such as drought and floods, throughout the centuries. These strategies have included herd mobility over vast areas in search of pasture and water, livestock diversification to minimize the risk of disease and mortality, well-defined social customs for resolving inter-clan disputes, and the redistribution of livestock assets from the rich to poor.

The Borana way of life is not just threatened by recurrent droughts and environmental degradation due to climate change. Population increases, unfavorable government policies that privatize or reallocate pastoral land, inadequate institutional representation at the national level and an

increased reliance on largely unfavorable market systems for meeting basic dietary and household needs are some of the challenges they now face.

In all pastoral societies, including the Borana, it is women who are often engaged in activities to support and supplement family income. However, in the current context, women's capacity to do so is constrained since their workload for the day-to-day activities has dramatically increased. This means that pastoralist women have less opportunities to diversify or maximize their livelihoods.

The Problem

"Our lives depend on our animals and the breeding season for our livestock depends on the rain. If it rains a lot we have a good life, otherwise we suffer," explains Kebele Galima, a 35-year-old woman and mother of eight children from Yabello town in the Borana zone in the Oromia Region of Southern Ethiopia. The town is situated approximately 200 kilometers from the Kenyan border. "We use our livestock to produce milk and butter, which we sell at the market to buy items such as soap, sugar, maize and clothes."

Galima explains that when she was a little girl there was plenty of water, rain and pasture. Things are different nowadays. "I remember that a single cow could support an entire family. Now the grass is no good and the animals are weak. When I was young, we only needed livestock but now we need maize because the milk production from our animals is low, and we cannot live off it, let alone have enough to sell for profit."

Kabele Galima is a pastoralist woman in the Borana region of southern Ethiopia

The frequent drought spells have often led to a scarcity of water, a result that has had a direct impact on the lives of women like Galima. Lack of water is a constraint to livestock production in most parts of the southern rangelands, while fodder for livestock, especially for sheep and cattle, is a problem in the dry season. To make matters worse, projections for climate change suggest that this situation is likely to exacerbate, further straining already vulnerable populations.

Galima and her community live in areas of scrub savannah interspersed with acacia species and open grassland. One of the environmental problems that Galima faces is the invasion of thorny acacia varieties of bush, a factor that reduces available grazing land for her livestock. It restricts mobility of the herds and provides a camouflage for hyenas and other predators. The woody, thorny acacia bush also competes with grass species, thus further reducing range production.

Pastoralist women are often responsible for finding fodder for their animals

"The areas available for pasture have shrunk because of these bushes," says Galima. "When pasture is limited, my livestock get weak and my life worsens. I have to walk further away to look for grazing land. Women are responsible for collecting hay for the weaker animals and we must travel great distances for this. When I fetch water and harvest hay, I have to pass through this bush and my clothes are ripped and torn by the thorns."

The community attributes the vast encroachment of bush to the ban on bush burning during the Derg regime, when Mengistu ruled over Ethiopia in the 70s and 80s. Besides improving rangeland productivity, bush burning was used as a means of livestock pest management. Without it, tick infestation has increased, a phenomenon that has led to more incidences of mastitis in cows, and thus a reduction in milk production.

With meager equipment and widespread coverage, it has been challenging to control bush encroachment in the past decade. "There is still a lot of misunderstanding among the Boranas about what can be burned and what cannot," explains Belachew Deneke, CARE Project Manager in the Borana Zone. "What we practice today, in cooperation with the local authorities and communities, is managed burning. We spare any bushes that have a useful value, relying on local knowledge to inform our bush clearing practices."

The impact of reduced land productivity on livestock has direct implications on household food security, as it is women and girls who acquire and control milk and butter. If these aren't produced, there is a direct negative consequence on gender-based empowerment as women will not be able to control any source of income and will have fewer possibilities of interactions with other people and communities through the marketplace.

The Response

In an effort to support pastoralists to improve their livelihood and maintain assets during drought cycles, CARE is implementing a program called *Enhancing Afar and Borana Livelihoods Effort* (ENABLE), a two-year project that is part of the United States Agency for International Development's *Pastoralist Livelihood Initiative*. The two main objectives of this program are to improve pastoralist resilience to predictable emergencies, and to increase the local capacity of both traditional and government institutions to respond to such situations.

Because bush encroachment is perceived by the communities to be one of their main problems, CARE

is focusing some of its activities on improving the management of community rangelands. This is done by training local organizations on how to clear bush and undertake controlled burning. Community members are mobilized to work together for a fee and given advice on which tree to cut and what to burn in order to improve the expansion and productivity of forage and fodder species as well as reduce the occurrence of invasive weeds.

"It is up to the Government and organizations like CARE to give us the tools needed for bush clearing and to teach us how to manage encroachment. There must be a continuous conversation with communities on bush awareness to address this problem," explains Galima as she points to a 20-hectare area of land that has been cleared of the thorny and unproductive bush.

Removing the invasive bush means that the land will generate grass for pasture and that herds of animals will be able to move more freely, thus enabling the pastoralists to use the range resources more efficiently and better manage risks when there are water shortages and dry spells.

Communities earn cash payments for clearing the land of the thorny bush and collectively get to decide how best to spend the funds. CARE's experience has been that these funds are spent on community development needs, including the construction of schools and providing assistance to the most vulnerable households. The model promotes community responsibility for bush clearing, along with maintenance of the cleared sites, and also provides an injection of funds into the community to support programs beneficial to the community as a whole.

Resource-based conflict in Borana is increasing due to agricultural encroachment and land grabbing, resulting in ever-shrinking resource availability. Violations of traditional resource-use rules and regulations are endangering historical resource management mechanisms, and undermining the already tenuous authority of customary institutions that have played this management role. "Because of conflict, we are obliged to move more frequently even when we find water and pasture for our livestock. Day and night we live in fear and our trading is hampered by conflict because the demand for certain products is less as it depends on who is fighting whom" explains Galima.

Community leaders say that sometimes conflict is also spurred by sudden changes in the administrative allocation of land. Galima recounts that the most recent fighting erupted between the Guji and the Gabre tribes when the government attempted to change some of the local administrative boundaries, a move that would have reallocated resources. During the fighting more than 10,000 people were displaced, and in some cases schools and health clinics were destroyed. Though CARE is not intervening in politically-induced conflict, it does get involved in resource based conflicts by working directly with clan elders and strengthening traditional mechanisms for peace and reconciliation.

Galima's mother remembers the days when there was plenty of water, rain and plenty of pasture

GHANA

WOMEN TAKE ON BIG LOGGING COMPANIES

By Jessica Lehman, former CARE intern

Formed from the merger of the British colony of the Gold Coast and Togoland trust territory, Ghana in 1957 became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain its independence. Well endowed with natural resources, Ghana has roughly twice the per capita output of the poorest countries in West Africa. Even so, Ghana remains heavily dependent on international financial and technical assistance. Gold, timber from natural forests, and cocoa production are major sources of foreign exchange. Yet as it celebrates 50 years of independence, twenty-seven percent of Ghana's 21 million strong population live below the $1 a day threshold.

The rural population depends heavily on natural resources for their everyday livelihoods. In Ghana, women contribute substantially to the economic development of the country. They form an estimated 52 percent of the agriculture labor force and produce 70 percent of the food crops. Women also constitute 90 percent of the labor force in the marketing of farm produce and are beginning to make inroads into growth of cash crops.

Exploitation of natural forests and clearing of forest for agriculture has resulted in the forest cover reducing from 66 percent of the land area in 1900 to 27 percent in 2000. Just in the ten years from 1990 to 2000 forest cover was reduced by 16 percent. These forests contain timber species that are amongst the most valuable in the world. Most of this valuable timber is on community land but despite government policy that requires timber companies to share the proceeds of timber harvesting with local communities this rarely happens. Women are particularly vulnerable to this exploitation as they often lack the same recognition as men, and are therefore an easy target for unscrupulous individuals and corporate interests.

The Problem

In 2004, Ama Ntowaa, a confident petite woman with an infectious smile, courageously laid down in front of a bulldozer to stop a logging company from hauling away trees from her farm, without paying compensation for the cocoa crops destroyed in the process of logging. The 56-year-old year widow, who supports her six children on the six-acre cocoa farm, an hour and 20 minutes outside Tarkwa in a small village called Bekoto, Western Ghana, refused to allow the cut trees to be removed from her land.

"You have to kill me first before you can take the logs away," Ama said. Her courage and determination caused the chief to abandon the logs.

Ama has farmed her land for many years. She grows cocoa and colanuts as cash crops, and feeds her family with own rice, cassava, plantains, eggs and snails. She also keeps a few goats and fowl and in this way she makes a sufficient living for herself. Her problems began in 2002 when the chief of her area made a deal with logging companies to sell timber trees, which were planted, maintained and nurtured on local farmers' lands. Ama's plot contained indigenous mahogany and teak trees. Looking for personal profit, the chief destroyed one-third of an acre of her farm when he built a road through it without Ama's permission, and illegally logged and sold the timber trees she had grown on her land. Although the chief said he would pay Ama $50 in compensation and give her seedlings to replant the destroyed cocoa crops, he has yet to follow this statement through with action.

Ama Ntowaa used her advocacy skills to fight big logging companies

Ama's problems with the chief and the logging companies continued. In 2004, the chief returned to her farm to log more trees without consulting or seeking her approval. He felled the trees on Ama's farm when she was not at around, but when he returned to collect the logs, Ama refused to let him take them. With remarkable courage, Ama lay down in front of the bulldozer to prevent them from removing the timber from her land.

The Response

Ama used her awareness about human rights to save her cocoa farm from logging companies. It is based both on the substantive right to a source of livelihood, and the more specific procedural rights enshrined in the forest policy.

After the first logging incident, Ama participated in CARE's community awareness creation programmes on forest stakeholders' rights and responsibilities in resource management. It helped her to better understand her rights, and to seek help against the chief and the logging companies. From CARE, Ama learned that she has fundamental rights and that she can assert these rights – such as the right to refuse the logging of timber trees from her farm, and to demand just compensation if her crops are destroyed in the process.

Using this information, Ama led fifteen other farmers, whose crops were also destroyed through illegal logging activities, to Ghana's Forest Service Division (FSD) to complain about the chief's actions. The FSD told the chief that the farmers needed compensation before the logging companies could collect the felled trees. Ama estimates she has already lost $1200 in income.

Ama continues to fight with the chief and the logging companies, but now is better equipped to tackle problems with the knowledge she gained from CARE. When the logging companies attempted to forcefully take away part of her land in 2006 to plant

Ama Ntowaa

timber trees, (with no benefits from the trees going to her), Ama refused their request, stating that there were no laws that compelled her to give away her land. Faced with her opposition and knowledge of her rights, the logging companies left her land alone and moved on.

While she waits for compensation, Ama says she is "determined to face the chief" if he tries to take her land away again. Ama's extraordinary courage received international attention in 2004 when the BBC has covered her story. With her strength and knowledge of her rights, Ama remains optimistic that she will keep the chief and logging companies from destroying her cocoa trees. With CARE's support, Ama and others confronted with similar situations have been able to use a rights-based approach to successfully take on timber companies.

The marginalization of women through cultural norms that discriminate against them, as well as a lack of access to secure livelihoods and basic necessities are part of the issues that entrench rural women in poverty. Traditional cultural practices hinder women's development, because these customs give men negotiating and decision-making power and limit women's ability to accumulate social power and economic assets.

Furthermore, the majority of women in Ghana are not aware of their rights. Working with national NGO partners, CARE has been able to empower women like Ama, by enabling them to stand for their rights and advocate for increased access to services and resources they depend on for their livelihoods. CARE aims to reduce gender discrimination by taking specific actions to end harmful traditional practices. Using community based solutions such as facilitating the creation of platforms for women to discuss their concerns, and educating men on the role and contributions of women to society has contributed to slowly changing the current situation.

HOW LAND SCARCITY IS ERODING WOMEN'S RIGHTS:

The Case of Female Seclusion

By Marianne Haahr, Program Officer, CARE Denmark

At the crossroads of North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, landlocked Niger is bordered by Algeria, Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria and Chad. This confluence of Arab, Berber, and Sahelian culture makes it a country where people of very different origins live together. But they all share a common plight: Niger has the world's highest fertility rate, with every women giving birth to an average of seven children. Its estimated population of about 12 million is rapidly increasing in a land where some 60 percent of the country, particularly the north, is desert. Less than 3 percent of its land is arable and most people are largely squeezed into the more fertile southern areas.

Maradi region in the south is densely populated at around 200 people per square kilometers, and accounts for a significant share of the high birth rate. Only 10 percent of the overall surface area in the region is suitable for agriculture, and pressure on this land continues to grow. Increasingly, young men move across the border into Kano Province of northern Nigeria - a major market for crops and livestock - working and trading to earn money to support their families. It is here that they meet a more restrictive interpretation of Islam, which promotes seclusion, thereby providing a short-term solution to the land access problem, by limiting the mobility of their female partners.

Because women have no inheritance rights and land is scarce, Halima has been confined to her home

Halima, her co-wife, and their children

The Problem

Seclusion or *Kulben* as it's called in the Hausa language of Niger is the practice of confining a married woman to the household, only allowing her to enter into public areas after dark, when escorted by her husband or a male relative. The majority of households in Niger are too poor to practice seclusion all-year round and instead do so seasonally, confining women only in the dry season when female labour is no longer needed outside the household. The source of seclusion is religious, and it is only recommended if the man can provide for the household. It has therefore traditionally been seen as a sign of wealth in Niger, with mobile women often being poor, divorced or widowed.

However in the past couple of years, a different type of seclusion has begun to emerge in southern Niger, a poverty-related seclusion, not rooted in religion but in the pressure on natural resources, especially on land.

Under the existing tenure system, *Gandu*, the largest piece of family land, is managed by the household head, and *Gamana*, a smaller slice of the father's *Gandu* is given to male children when they reach the age of 15. It provides a source of income for non-food related needs. The customary system has no female inheritance rights, therefore girls are not granted *Gamana*. In any event most females are already married by the age of 15, and can only access a Gamana if their husband permits it. Even then the land is not given, but merely lent, and must be returned if the couple divorces - a common occurrence in Niger.

In the village of Gangara, just 20 kilometres north of the Nigerian border in the region of Maradi, Halima, 26, has been married for eight years to her cousin Zayanou. A co-wife, she was not granted a *Gamana* after marriage. Unlike most women her age, she only has one child and is pregnant with her second. Her husband's two hectares are still not sufficient – even in the good years - to feed the household of two wives and a large number of children. So he, like many other men, trades in Nigeria to supplement his income.

Through his exposure to the form of *Kulben* practiced in Kano, Zayanou has opted to keep Halima confined to the house. He argues that as head of the household he must protect her, which means making all the financial decisions on her behalf. Not only has he refused to give her a *Gamana*, but she has never even seen her husband's land and has no idea of its location. As she explains,"I don't know where the fields are. I see my husband go and return from working the land during the rainy season, but I don't know where it is. I have never been there."

Only a generation earlier, Halima's mother was given a *Gamana* and continues to work the field herself. This gives her greater mobility and a proper income of her own, unlike the younger generation, who are increasingly confined to their marital compound.

The practice of *Kulben* leaves women completely dependent on their spouses for all provisions, not to mention vulnerable if they are ever divorced. Halima cannot move freely to create and manage her own income stream like her mother did at her age. Instead, she rarely goes out. Her husband pays for firewood to be collected and brought directly to her house. Another man visits all the households in the village and sells them water. On special occasions, such as marriages or baptisms, Zayanou will represent the family. Sometimes Halima assists, but she has a curfew and is always escorted back by her husband. During these movements she wears the hijab, as it is deemed more decent than the regular scarf she uses inside the compound. Through the scarf it is possible to see that she's pregnant, whereas the hijab covers her entire body.

There are few forms of income generation available to a woman in *Kulben* like Halima. Livestock is her only option for earning money, as her daughter is too small to walk around selling cakes or other foods for her. As her bride wealth, Halima received three sheep. In eight years she has managed to increase her stock by buying and selling as the animals reproduce. The animals, which are kept with her parents, are sold when she is in need of money. She now has two cows, three goats and three sheep and is saving the larger animals for her daughter's wedding. Recently, some of her livestock were used to make an important purchase.

"I have a field of my own, which I bought from an uncle," she reveals, an unusual practice in a region where women rarely own land. This should secure Halima's future should she ever divorce. However, just as she doesn't know the location of her husband's fields, she has never seen her own plot. She doesn't know how much she paid, and has no paperwork to prove that she owns it.

Due to her secluded state, it was her husband who physically went to the market to sell Halima's sheep, directly paying her uncle for the land. Halima says she then granted her brother the right to cultivate it for free and he keeps any surplus crops from the plot. In effect she's seen nothing from her 'investment'.

The Response

For CARE Niger the increased tendency to practice female seclusion, as an effort to manage the problem of land scarcity, is a worrisome practice that requires careful and well thought out interventions. The initial responses centred on supporting the practical needs of secluded women through village savings and loans schemes. Women were mobilized to use their own collective resources to generate income for themselves and their children, without being dependent on farmlands and their husbands.

The more recent interventions have shifted to a greater focus on the women's strategic needs, while maintaining the micro credit work. Women are encouraged by 'barefoot lawyers' funded by CARE to try to keep land as an asset in case of divorce. A man can easily divest himself of a wife in Niger; it only requires an announcement in the presence of three witnesses. The divorced woman will then have to return to the parents' compound. Lawyers visit the women and hold sessions on the importance of having a piece of paper recognising a land entitlement. However, Halima sees this as a betrayal of her husband and his family, and, at present, isn't willing to legally formalise her ownership of the land.

Islam, however, does grant inheritance rights to women, entitling them to half the inheritance of the man. More and more women are therefore starting to draw upon religious law when parental inheritance is to be divided amongst siblings. Typically, however, married women live far away from where they grew up, making the actual use of and access to inherited land difficult. They seldom have a formal land title, and if the land is disputed, proving ownership to local authorities is problematic, particularly if the woman has not been seen cultivating the land. Even though she lives in her birth village, the increased practice of seclusion means that Halima, and many women like her, don't cultivate their own plots, thus enabling men to have greater control over land resources.

CARE's work in this area is more and more tied to its involvement at the national level in advocating for approval of the 10-year old draft Family Code. It has stalled since 1993, as religious organisations are blocking it. The Code recognises equal inheritance rights for men and women and would go a long way in promoting women's rights, increasing their financial freedom, and ensuring equal access to land.

TANZANIA

FIGHTING THEFT AND DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY FORESTS

By Pauline Dolan, Consultant

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world, with half of its 35 million inhabitants living below the poverty line. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, employing 90 pecent of the workforce, and livelihoods are closely tied to the natural resource base. Due to a relatively low population density (41 people per square kilometer) and a historical emphasis on conservation, 38 percent of Tanzania's 3,402 square kilometers is still covered in forest and woodland, and 40 percent of total land mass falls within protected areas, including habitat for numerous unique plant and animal species.

Two hundred kilometers west of Dar es Salaam, the rugged, forest-covered Uluguru mountains rise 2,600 meters from the plains, forming part of one of the world's most important biodiversity "hotspots". This area is home to a matrilineal tribe called the Waluguru, who for over 300 years, have made their livelihoods cultivating the steep Uluguru foothills. The area's extensive forests also provide essential water catchment for approximately three million people of the greater Dar es Salaam and Morogoro municipal areas. And there are 15 catchment forest reserves (as well as several additional community forest reserves) throughout the Ulugurus, aimed at protecting these significant resources.

However, population density in the area is high, exceeding 200 people per square kilometer in some areas; and local governance is weak. As farmers expand agricultural frontiers to maintain food supply and illegal logging continues, forest resources are lost. Dwindling forests are increasing the hardship and workload of the poor, particularly women, and threaten national and global biodiversity interests.

The Problem

Venesta Kibuwa is a 39-year-old Luguru mother of five. She and her three youngest children live together in Nyandira, a village of approximately 3,000 people situated in a relatively low altitude area (approximately 1650 m. high), amongst the steep, sparsely covered foothills of the southern Ulugurus. Since Venesta lost her husband eight years ago, she is the sole breadwinner in her household and engages in diverse livelihood activities, including growing tomatoes, cabbage, beans, and corn; raising and selling chickens and eggs; and working as a teacher for farmers' groups.

In Nyandira, people are highly dependent on forests for their livelihoods. Trees provide fuelwood, building poles, stakes for cultivating creeping crops such as beans, and stability for agricultural soils on steep terrain. Yet, the forests in and around Nyandira are in rapid decline. Deforestation has affected every aspect of Venesta's life, starting with her physical health. She spends three hours every couple of days climbing the hills outside her house searching for firewood, and carrying up to 30 kilograms of wood at a time on her head. One day as Venesta was descending a steep, muddy slope with a heavy load of firewood on her head, she slipped and fell, re-opening an incision from a recent surgery and injuring herself so badly that she couldn't tend her crops for several days. At the age of 39 she suffers chronic back and neck pain from the heavy loads she carries. Her only alternative is to buy firewood, and at approximately 1,000 Tanzanian shillings (almost US$1) per load; this is too expensive.

Deforestation in mountain areas has resulted in soil erosion and declining crop productivity

Deforestation has also reduced Venesta's effectiveness as a farmer. "We can't get the stakes for cultivating our beans, so we now get less harvest out of the planted area." Furthermore, in Nyandira, where most farming takes place on the side of steep hills, reduction in tree cover is linked to soil erosion and declining crop production. "Because we have no trees, when the rain falls we get topsoil coming down. The land is now open," Venesta explains. Her family has become poorer. "In the past, we farmed just one plot of land, and got enough from it. Now we have to farm five plots of land and still cannot get enough from it. Children have to go look for other income like being hired to farm others' lands. Sometimes they don't go to school as they have to help with the farming."

In the past, the area was widely forested, and the community respected the no cutting policy in the nearby Nyamiduma community forest reserve. In 1985 local government officials illegally sold a timber company the rights to cut logs in the reserve, leading to the beginning of rapid forest decline. After the leaders allowed outsiders to start cutting, the local people followed suit, and deforestation has continued until today.

In 1995 Venesta became a member of the Village Environment Committee, and an activist for forest protection and soil conservation. In 2002, after learning that village leaders had once again illegally allowed loggers to cut in the village reserve, she could not remain quiet. Using advocacy skills and

Venesta Kibuwa, an environmental activist, is the sole bread winner in her household. Her livelihood depends on the forest.

rights awareness she had learned from a local women's lawyers association, Venesta raised the issue repeatedly and publicly. During community meetings she asked leaders why they were illegally selling the community's trees. In 2004, Venesta was removed from the committee. To Venesta, the root causes of deforestation in Nyandira are obvious: "Fighting deforestation depends on the leaders' capacity. A strong leadership means tree cutting can be controlled. If it is weak, then that will contribute to the decline in our forest. The problem is, if you try to advise the leaders about rights, they take you out of the group."

The Response

In 1993 the Uluguru Mountains Agriculture Development Project (UMADEP), a partner of CARE in the Uluguru Mountain Environmental Management and Conservation Project, began work in Nyandira to help communities and the government address deforestation and soil erosion. UMADEP trained Venesta and others in farming, marketing, and agroforestry technologies. She is given a stipend and transport to visit and learn from farmers in other districts and to extend her new knowledge and experience to farmers in Nyandira. Additionally, the project has helped farmers organize into groups for agriculture, tree planting and soil conservation activities.

Venesta believes the strategies are working. "Farmers in groups are more motivated than others. They have planted a lot of trees in their farms and homesteads. This area outside was totally exhausted, but after planting trees five years ago, some leaves fell and decomposed and now the maize is healthier."

The project engages local leaders through awareness raising and training in natural resources stewardship, conservation issues and agricultural technologies. Venesta says that previously "participation of leaders was very weak. Now they are more engaged in conservation issues."

In 2006, the Nyandira authorities passed a by-law that all people in the village must plant trees. To facilitate local tree planting efforts, and to supplement her income, Venesta has begun a tree nursery at her house, growing 'Grevillea' seedlings, a tree used for agro-forestry and firewood purposes. She plans to sell the seedlings for 100 Tanzania shillings (US 10 cents) each.

Venesta still believes in and promotes community action to overcome environmental degradation. She states that, "the lack of accountability of community leaders is the biggest problem and the community needs to agree together. If the community complains, then it is easier for the Government to remove the corrupt leaders."

NATIONAL POLICY THREATENS ECOLOGY AND LIVELIHOODS

By a Consultant

A lush, landlocked country in East Africa, Uganda shares a border with Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. With a total population of 28 million it is estimated that 9 million Ugandans live on less than $1 a day, with most households depending on subsistence agriculture. 52 percent of the Ugandan national budget comes from donor funds. According to IMF statistics in 2004, Uganda's GDP per-capita reached $300, a much higher level than in the 1980's but still at half the Sub-Saharan African average income of $600 per year.

Uganda has long been facing a deforestation crisis. Only 40 years ago natural forests covered over 40 percent of the country. Recent studies indicate that forest cover is now reduced to 20 percent and in the past fifteen years Ugandan deforestation rates have accelerated to 2.2 percent per year, making them one of the highest in the world.

The Government has been encouraging this trend. In recent years, it has proposed change of land use (degazettment) for over eleven municipal forest reserves, arguing that to give the areas to corporations would spur industrial and agricultural development. Intervening personally in two disputes - one in Mabira Forest Reserve and the other on Bugala Island in Lake Victoria – the Government has argued that, despite the detrimental effect of wholesale demolition of these forests, the country urgently needs such projects to bring a better quality of life to Ugandans.

This Government line ignores the grave ecological consequences that destruction of Uganda's indigenous forests is likely to have. Drought and flood cycles, loss of hundreds of rare species, soil erosion, and a further reduction in the health and water volume of Lake Victoria is the inevitable result of removing this crucial buffer against pollution. Furthermore, the degazettment of natural forests for commercial agriculture stands in stark contrast to the spirit of the new forest policy, which provides for increased benefits to local communities and more secure rights of these benefits.

Nakuyima Florence Batange lost her livelihood to a commercial sugar company in 2002

The Problem

Nakayima Florence Batange lost everything in 2002 when a large commercial sugar company mowed down the Butamira Forest Reserve in, Jinja district, to extend their Kakira plantation. The 1250-hectare forest, the largest in the area at a size of nearly 3000 football pitches, was completely destroyed. The 45-year-old mother of 10 from Buwabuzi village explains:

"I used to cut logs for firewood and sell them in the Iziru trading center close by. It provided a good living – enough money for school fees," she explained. "We collected herbs from the forest for medicines and interspersed crops in the 700 hectares that was planted and managed by the community, so we had enough food for everyone."

These resources are no longer available to the various local communities surrounding the ex-forest. About 80 percent of the local people who depended on the forest were women. Loss of this habitat has removed all forms of sustainable income generation for them. The piggery, cattle and goat rearing projects were forced to close due to lack of water and grazing. Crafts and mat weaving items that were sold in Jinja 20 kilometers away, ceased to be produced because of no access to raw materials. Brick prices trebled due to severe shortages of firewood for baking bricks. Snakes and wild animals migrated into the villages

when the forest was cut down. Pollutant sugar cane dust now covers the area.

"We tried to continue at least to use the old streams for water," said Florence, "I took my goats there once to graze on what little ground was left. But Kakira confiscated the animals and never returned them. I hear they were subsequently eaten by their staff." No compensation was offered.

"Now there is no forest, but we women still have the responsibility of feeding our families. Even though we are ready to work, it is almost impossible to support our households."

As she gathers leftover sugar cane waste to use for cooking, Florence, says that she can only make food that can be cooked quickly. The sugar cane remnants burn fast, making preparation of more nutritious beans impossible – she simply cannot collect enough husks to feed the fire. But there are other more pressing issues for her. Three of her children have been forced to drop out of secondary school, as she and her husband no longer have the funds to pay the $20 per term fees. Their previous income, made from collecting and selling firewood, had been sufficient to cover education costs. Now students idle away their time in the village, their parents too poor to fund their education.

The removal of the forest in Butamira was mired in controversy and intimidation. In 1998, the Kakira Sugar Planatation applied for and received a permit that was in direct contravention of the 1964 Forest Act, and which allowed them to convert the forest to sugar cane. They promptly cleared 700 hectares. Protest and action by the hastily formed Butamira Environmental Pressure Group (BEPG) led to the permit being reversed, and the communities replanted in 2000 after acquiring permits to use and maintain the forest themselves.

But despite petitions, rigorous legal scrutiny and support by ACODE, an advocacy NGO, who helped the community to win a court case against the government for the irregular allocation, the local community ultimately lost the forest to Kakira Sugar Works, (who promised to pay the government $5million in taxes).

The consequences have been disastrous. "Kakira says they give us jobs, but in fact only allows us occasional casual work weeding the plantation," explains Budugo Ashiraf Secretary of BEPG. "Some people around here agreed to grow sugar cane on their land for Kakira, but were only paid around $300 a year per five acres of sugar cane grown. After taking a high interest loan from Kakira for buying their seed, fertilizer and rent their equipment for harvesting, we would often be in debt. And there is no space left in our fields to grow food. When we try to get out of these punitive contracts we are fined by the company."

The community members now live in fear of the land they live on being taken away. A Quit Notice giving all villages surrounding the new plantation 60 days to leave was recently issued by the Kakira Plantation. The association is unsure of its validity, but weakened by persistent government intimidation that led to their numbers falling from 1568 to 648 in the last two years, is concerned it will be powerless to protest properly. Even during CARE's visit, a government official in plain clothes arrived at the meeting on hearing of our presence. He made it just in time to hear a group member describe how he had been arrested, beaten and jailed five times during their fight to save the forest.

Meanwhile, the Ugandan Government continues to attempt to give land away in the "public" interest to powerful corporations. A new controversy has sprung up over the proposed donation of 7100 hectares, a third of Mabira forest, to yet another group of Ugandan investors – the Sugar Corporation of Uganda - SCOUL.

Mabira forest reserve is located 52kms on the Kampala - Jinja highway. It covers 29,964 hectares of tropical moist forest and forms a significant part of the River Nile catchment area. According to Uganda's National Forest Authority (NFA), the plan to log Mabira reserve endangers 312 species of trees, 287 species of birds and 199 species of butterfly. Nine species found only in Mabira and nearby forests risk becoming extinct. The forest absorbs pollution in an industrial area, stores millions of tons of carbon dioxide, and helps maintain central Uganda's wet climate.

For communities living around Mabira, the results of deforestation would be similar to Butamira. The forest is a major source of livelihood for more than one million people who depend on it for water, firewood, honey, mushrooms, and as a source of raw materials for making baskets and mats.

The Response

In 2006, with the help of CARE's local partners BUCODO and ACODE; in collaboration with other NGOs including Nature Uganda, the communities around Mabira have mobilized into the Mabira Forest Integrated Community Organization (MAFICO). They sent a collective message to local leaders to resist the degazettment, and organized a demonstration along the busy Kampala-Jinja highway.

"For about 20 minutes, we held placards along road before police in full riot gear with tear gas and artillery forced us back into the forest. We continued inside at Najjembe," said Juliet Kabali, head of MAFICO. Over 2000 forest dwellers attended the protest. It has been a tough task to mobilize support. The Government lobbied hard with local leaders to support its line, promising favors in return for acceptance of the sugar plantation. Intimidation was rife; National Forest Authority (NFA) workers were beaten and some seriously injured. When area councilors refused to meet MAFICO members, they tracked the local leaders down to the pubs. "We

Sugar plantations are replacing forests in many parts of Uganda

pushed our case as they sat drinking after work," said Juliet, "we spoke in churches, we went on radio talk shows and threatened to sue government, and we wrote articles in the vernacular press." This fierce protest led to a reversal in government attitude and a reluctant climb-down in February 2007. However, within a month, there has been another reversal as the Cabinet has re-endorsed the giveaway. Nevertheless, Parliament may still block the action. The future of the forest hangs in the balance.

Activists explain that, contrary to the Government's claims, the favored sugar cane plantations don't particularly help the Ugandan economy. Agriculture is responsible for more than 80 percent of employment, but only 31 percent of its revenue, while tourism generates nearly half of its income despite employing only 13 percent of its workers. Boosting the service sector would not only generate more funds, but it would preserve valuable primary forests.

"In 1986 the Government preached that it is wrong to practice agriculture in forests reserves and asked people to leave - which they did," said Madira Davidson of BUCODO. "Restocking forests that were ruined in earlier regimes began anew. Our forests have matured substantially in 20 years."

Estimates by the National Forest Authority now put the forest value proposed for giveaway at Mabira at $355,625,568 in both trees and carbon fixing. That's a lot to give away to a single organization in exchange for the promise of a few low paid jobs and some tax payments.

Local activists mobilize to protect forest reserves against corporate interests

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WOMEN FARMERS

By Tafadzwa Choto, Information Officer, CARE Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country bordering South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique. The total population is estimated to be around 13 million, with over 75 percent of people residing on marginal land called the 'communal areas'. These areas have the lowest rainfall in the country, sandy soils with low fertility, low moisture holding capacity, and comprise 60 percent of the total area of Zimbabwe. The country's rainfall pattern can best be described as erratic, unreliable and insufficient, with the majority of wet seasons punctuated by mid-season droughts. Only 37 percent of the country receives adequate rainfall for agriculture. Recurring droughts, logging and floods caused by cyclones, together with mismanagement of meager water resources, has led to increased soil erosion, deforestation and land degradation.

Immediately after independence in 1980 the Zimbabwean government, in collaboration with donors, embarked on a restructuring program that included building dams in rural areas. Approximately 600 small to medium sized dams with an average capacity of 1,000,000 cubic meters were constructed, mainly in southern Zimbabwe to trap and conserve surface water run-off in shallow reservoirs. Unfortunately, most of these dams failed to meet community needs due to structural defects developed within years of construction.

The Problem

Susan Paradza doesn't talk about environmental problems as such. Instead, she speaks about the lack of water in her community and the changes forced upon her and her family.

"There was no maize meal, even the small grains like sorghum were nowhere to be seen and most families, including mine, could only afford one meal a day," Susan says, describing the effects of water shortage. "There was an increase in disease because people were drinking dirty water and eating unhealthy foods. Some used to fight with wild animals for fruit, and our livestock was dying from starvation."

The recently built Nyiamai Dam enables communities to better manage the supply of water and irrigation of small farms

Thirty-eight year old Susan lives in Chivi with her husband Makasi and their four children. In Zimbabwe, women make up 75 percent of the person power in agriculture and their livelihoods depend almost exclusively on natural resources. Her main income comes from the proceeds she gets from her garden, her orchard, and through a micro-finance project in which she participates. With a good harvest, Susan and her neighbors earn enough money to invest in their farms and increase productivity for the next season. They can also use the income to buy food, clothes, or to pay school fees and medical expenses. If it is an exceptionally good season, they can even buy assets like cows, a scotch cart or a plough.

Since the water has dried up, the farming culture in Susan's community has changed dramatically. Droughts and the occasional cyclone that plagued the region in the 1990s forced people to address the impact of a new climate in the area. Exacerbating the problem, the dams that were built in the 1980s were dilapidated and most no longer held water. With limited resources for irrigation, many people found themselves constantly waiting for the rainy season or suffering through floods that destroyed crops and devastated the landscape.

"At one time we used to spend hours walking long distances in search of water and in most cases with a baby on your backs," explains Susan. "Because you have spent more time collecting water, you end up working longer hours in a day to do the other household chores."

The Response

CARE has partnered with the Chivi district to address the problems associated with the impact of climate change and to help community members adapt. CARE trained farmers in better crop techniques and assisted in rebuilding a dam that was damaged in the late 1990s.

Susan Paradza's plot has been adversely affected by lack of water in her community

Initially completed in 1999, Nyimai dam was breached in 2000 during Cyclone Eline. To repair it, men and women worked together - with women carrying stones, mixing cement and sand, and cooking. Absence from this project without a valid excuse resulted in a fine. "The rehabilitation of the dam only took one month," said Susan, with evident pride at the work her community did. Residents were also trained on dam repairs to ensure they could maintain the vital structure. She also stressed that previously women's productive contribution was often marginalized in discussions, but during reconstruction, they were taken seriously.

After the dam was fixed, CARE helped the community use the water in the repaired structure to establish an irrigation system to nourish their crops. Susan is now the chairperson of the Nyimai Dam Project committee. Most members of the project are women, who are family heads as a result of the death of their husbands, mainly from the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Susan says the dam has created major improvements in the district. "In the gardens that we established, we grow tomatoes, sweet cabbage, rape, onions, green mealies, covo, carrots, beans, and this year we started growing wheat. These vegetables are mainly for household consumption, but we also sell a few for income generation purposes."

Susan says that the community has now established runoff orchards to grow oranges, mangoes, peaches, and bananas. "Because of financial constraints, we are unable to buy fertilizer and we use organic methods such as composting and manure for improving soil fertility," she added. Nyimai community garden came first in the Zim-plough competition in 2005 in Masvingo province and second nationally.

Since CARE helped the community learn to better manage their scarce water resources and to use modified farming techniques, Susan has seen a vast improvement in the life of her family. Her income has increased, allowing her to buy a goat and essential items for her home. Most importantly, Susan managed to pay for her children's education and has even sent her eldest son to study at the Advanced Level - or A-level - at a boarding school. "I only went as far as grade seven and my parents could not afford to send me to secondary school," Susan says. "I got married at the age 18. Sending my son to a boarding school for his A-level is a dream come true."

This has been a successful project but the community has met challenges along the way. The greatest one is delivering water to individual plots. "We mainly use the bucket system for bringing water to the gardens from the troughs. This is heavy work. Carrying heavy buckets full of water on top of your head causes headaches and back aches. We are however working towards procuring hose pipes to lessen the amount of work involved."

Susan also highlighted that although women work these gardens, legally the land is in their husbands' names. She says this is a problem, especially if the husbands die. "One of our group members was chased away from her matrimonial home, and the garden was taken away from her and given to the husband's brother. The woman is now destitute, living in the resettled communal areas," explains Susan. She added that when they sought assistance from the chief, they were told that no woman owns land in her husband's village. It is against the law, the Chief said, and is also taboo for a *mutorwa* to own land. (*Mutorwa* means 'foreigner' a term used by the husband's relatives to refer to his new wife.) Susan believes that social support networks should be established as a fallback for women so that they will be less dependent on male relatives and will have a stronger bargaining position.

Susan also thinks that the irrigation project should spread to arable lands, "For most of us this is our only source of livelihood. We need to irrigate our maize, sorghum, rapoko etc. We now know a lot about land and water management strategies for protecting and sustaining the land. We can apply this knowledge in the bigger fields. Susan is confident that with bigger areas being irrigated, most women can also venture into cash crops - an area mainly dominated and controlled by men. She also emphasizes that the issue of land ownership must be promptly addressed or women will continue to be held back by traditional practices and remain dependent on men.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA OF THE POOR

By Phil Franks, CARE Poverty and Environment Advisor

The seven case studies presented in this publication illustrate how environmental problems directly impact the lives of the rural poor in Africa and specifically the lives of women. We focus on women because the negative outcomes of the loss and/or degradation of environmental resources very often fall most heavily on women, thus adding to their responsibilities and multiple roles in families and communities. However, in many situations women also hold the key to solving these problems.

As illustrated by the case studies, the solutions to environmental problems are as much social and political as technical. In rising to this challenge women are learning new skills. More fundamentally, they are empowering themselves to have greater influence over decision-making in their society, the benefits of which go far beyond the environmental arena. Action must come from the entire community and must be backed by policy reform, but in many cases women are proving to be the primary agents of change, bringing environmental concerns to the attention of society in a unique and powerful way.

Towards a Pro-Poor Agenda

Environmental concerns have often been perceived as a preoccupation of the relatively wealthy. The case studies in this publication dispel this misconception and illustrate an environmental agenda of the poor that is critical to the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty. Collectively the seven case studies address three different types of environmental resources: land, forests and water. Although the specific problems described in the case studies are different, the root causes have much in common.

Land

Three of the case studies (Burundi, Niger, Ethiopia) focus on access to, and productivity of, agricultural and grazing land. The problems with land degradation in Africa have been widely documented, and even during the colonial era the situation was frequently described as an impending crisis. Now the crisis is no longer 'impending'. It is here to stay unless we do something to counter it. In terms of crop production, the Burundi case illustrates the crisis at its worst. Soil exhaustion, from continuous cropping without nutrient inputs and associated crop disease, has led to a substantial reduction in crop yields. Studies in neighboring Rwanda show a 20 percent decline over the last 20 years on average.

The crisis facing pastoralists in Africa is just as serious. However, while the frequent droughts in pastoralist areas have brought the plight of the pastoralists into the news headlines, the media coverage rarely highlights the environmental factors that contribute to these frequent crises. The Ethiopian case focuses on loss of grazing lands due to the invasion of a thorny bush that destroys the grazing. There is also the steady degradation of grazing lands due to over grazing and drought, which is frequently an irreversible trend since there is a change in grass type to more hardy but less nutritious species.

In all three countries the problems of environmental degradation are compounded by increasing land scarcity as rural populations grow, and productive farming and grazing land is lost to catastrophic erosion (Burundi), desertification (Niger, Ethiopia), and reallocation to large-scale commercial agriculture (Ethiopia). Land degradation affects wealthy and poor alike, but the increasing scarcity of land disproportionately impacts the poorest of the poor because they have the weakest voice in the political struggle for access to land.

Forests

Over 90 percent of the world's poorest people depend to a significant extent on the use of natural forests and woodlands. The case studies from Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania illustrate a situation of very high dependency where communities live adjacent to natural forests with high value resources (including timber). In such communities it is women and other vulnerable groups that have fewer natural assets to provide alternatives that are most dependent on forest resources.

The grabbing of such resources by the wealthy and powerful is a problem across Africa. In Tanzania the issue is the failure of government to protect a national asset from individual profiteering. However, in Ghana, the issue is one of institutionalized grabbing of timber resources by commercial companies without adequate compensation to local communities.

In Ghana, as in many countries in Africa, valuable timber resources are the property of the State. Should the poor accept this denial of their customary rights to land and forest resources? Either way, rural communities must question the whole model of industrial scale timber harvesting in Africa, which is based on the premise that this is a key driver of economic growth that eventually trickles down to the

rural poor. In reality, the trickle down doesn't happen as the benefits often remain with the powerful groups who control the industry.

In Uganda the issue is more about the productive land on which the forest sits. The case study describes a long history of grabbing of forest land by large-scale commercial enterprises. Also very common in other African countries (e.g. Kenya) this is once again justified on the grounds that large scale commercial enterprise (in this case agriculture) is essential for the national economic growth that is needed to fund poverty reduction. While this may be true in theory, the reality as we see in Ghana is often very different. Worse, not only are the wealthy winners failing to share their profits but, as the Ghana story clearly illustrates, the losers are many and are amongst the poorest members of society.

Water

Although only one of the case studies (Zimbabwe) focuses on water, the issue of water shortages features in many of the case studies. Across Africa, rainfall is becoming more erratic and in many areas it is declining. In Zimbabwe, as in other countries in southern Africa, it is now becoming apparent that this is partly due to climate change. But as described in the Tanzania case study, more localized environmental degradation is also a crucial factor, notably the loss of forests that enhance local rainfall and act as a sponge – soaking up water when it rains heavily and releasing it during low rainfall periods.

Most water projects—ensuring domestic water supplies or setting up irrigation schemes—have focused on the hardware and associated management arrangements needed to convey water from its source to the users. Regardless of where the water is sourced, it is now becoming clear that we can no longer assume an unlimited supply. Water shortage (exacerbated by climate change) is now recognized as one of the biggest problems of our time. This concern is not limited to developing countries but, as is so often the case, it is the poor who will suffer the most.

Root Causes

So why do poor rural communities and women in particular, continue to face environmental problems? Why, even though technical solutions exist, is so little being done? To understand this, it is critical to look at the root causes of both poverty and environmental degradation. Specifically, we need to focus on issues of governance (the exercise of power and responsibility in the management of public affairs), and social exclusion (certain groups being excluded from participating in the normal activities of their society).

Fundamentally, there is a problem with how the environmental agenda itself is regarded by development experts. Environment has long been considered a preoccupation of the wealthy. So labeling the environmental concerns of the poor as "environmental issues" condemns them to the margins of the development agenda as politicians, agencies and donors consider interventions in other sectors (e.g. health and education) more relevant to the fight against poverty.

However, this is now changing. Many factors have contributed to this change but two in particular stand out as having transformed the way decision-makers look at environmental issues: 1) climate change and its profound implications for developing countries; and 2) the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the recently completed report of the state of the planet's natural resource base.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concludes that environmental degradation is a major obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and 2015 targets, including targets on hunger (goal #1), child mortality (goal #4), disease (goal #6) and water supply (goal #7). For too long the global environmental agenda has been dominated by the interests of the developed countries but at last politicians are waking up to the fact that addressing the environmental problems of the developing world, and in particular the problems of the poor and marginalized who are so often most affected, is fundamental to the fight against poverty.

While many countries are making considerable progress in adopting new laws and policies that strengthen environmental rights, and land and other natural resource property rights, less progress has been made in implementing them. The obstacles are often more related to politics and economics than technical in nature.

In resource-rich areas, control over natural resources defines power relationships, as in the Uganda and Ghana case studies. In resource poor areas (as in the Zimbabwe, Burundi, Niger and Ethiopia case studies), where the stakes are much lower, the issue is the exact opposite – lack of interest amongst politicians and others able to address these issues. But in both situations the common problem is the inability of poor and marginalized groups to influence decision-making, in other words, their lack of voice. Perhaps this is most acute in the case of pastoralists who are regarded in many countries as second-class citizens and as such, systematically excluded from decision-making processes.

In some cases the lack of voice of marginalized groups, and women in particular, may actually be reinforced by traditional social norms. In Ghana, the traditional system of chieftainship maintains the exclusion of women from decision-making. In Niger, the spread of traditional Islamic values from Nigeria is one of the reasons why women appear to be facing increasing seclusion and loss of property rights. The reality is that traditional norms and forms of justice are not always fair.

CARE's Response

If we take a human rights perspective, the environmental problems faced by poor and marginalized groups are manifestations of environmental injustice. The case studies make it clear that addressing, and at least partially solving these problems, is a precondition for achieving social justice and the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty.

Responding to these problems requires action at multiple levels In all seven case studies, CARE and its partners have supported practical interventions to reduce negative impacts on human well-being and increase the benefits that can be derived from the sustainable use of natural resources. Interventions that deliver rapid and tangible benefits are the entry point but are not sufficient. Action to address the root causes of poverty and environmental degradation is also necessary.

In Ghana, women are being provided with information on their rights, advocacy skills and opportunities to share their experiences. In Uganda, local communities are being assisted to form an association to more effectively represent their interests and access legal advice from experienced environmental lawyers. In Niger, legal advice is being provided by local "barefoot lawyers".

Development agencies must continue to seek rapid and tangible impact, but more emphasis must be given to measures such as these that empower women and other marginalized groups to become their own agents of change.

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