



In making the links for sustainable development: Why community environmental education needs women?

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Abstract

The paper speaks across the divide between community environmental education and women to argue from the standpoint of feminist political ecology, environmental and social justice discourses for a more enabling reading into the importance of women in environmental education. It brings attention to the fact that without women taking an active part in environmental education, it will be impossible to achieve any form of sustainable development. The paper also shows that a pre-requisite to achieving sustainable development is the development of women's personal and coping capability through increased knowledge and skills about environmental issues. The paper is undergird by the feminist political ecology theory as the theoretical framework with the Gender, Environment and Development (G.E.D) approach as a tool of analysis to expose the links between women, environmental education and sustainable development. The paper is based on literature review to make a case for the greater facilitative role of women in sustainable development that can only be realized if environmental education initiatives are designed in such a way that they mediate the problems of access and equity so that women are equally incorporated.

Keywords: Sustainable development; Environmental education; community environmental education; women

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1. Background

It was in the 1985 world conference to review and appraise the achievement of the UN decade for women in Nairobi when for the first time in history that reference was made to the environment as it relates to women and their households. Principle 20 of the Rio declaration on the environment and development highlights the importance of women in environmental issues but study after study continue to reveal that women's role in environmental management and issues is underplayed. Research has shown that women's interests and needs are not always taken into account (Mamphela, 2004, Momsen, 2004). Kasama (2008) reports that, it has been observed that technological changes and instruments that are being proposed to mitigate the impact of climate change are gender discriminatory and may negatively affect females or bypass them. Three years later the same sentiments were raised by Misiaszek (2011) who argues that the majority of climate change adaptations strategies currently do not incorporate a gender perspective. Available Literature shows that women continue to be marginalized in the environmental issues (Khaledi et al., 2012; Dankelman, 2012; Mwangi et al., 2011; Kraub, 2011).

Depriving women access to community environmental education for example simultaneously denies them the opportunity to develop related skills and knowledge and reduces their ability to contribute to a reflexive review of society which subsequently increases their vulnerability to environmental risks thereby exacerbating poverty. Women make up the majority of the world population; hence by excluding women in environmental education would imply lack of knowledge and skills for a large mass of people thus likely to pose challenges for sustainable development. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to contribute to the discourse by showing why environmental education especially community environmental education needs women. This will be gleaned through an analysis of literature through the lens of feminist political ecology. The paper adopts the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)'s definition of development as the creating and supporting processes through which human beings are able to realize their full potential. (SIDA, 2005) and Insanally (2003)'s observation that development without equity is incomplete and ultimately, unsustainable The paper will show that although challenges faced by women are shifting due to environmental changes they are not abating. This causes the collapse of the survival strategies and networks that women have always depended on in response to environmental change and the associated disasters, thereby arguing for the need for personal capability development of women which can be thwarted by lack of information, skills and confidence.

2. Theoretical framework

Feminist political ecology draws from political ecology philosophy to examine the nature-society nexus with gender inequality as an organizing factor. Political ecology highlight the relationship between environmental degradation and conservation, the neoliberalization of nature, capitalist accumulation and expansion, dispossession, history, politics and economic structures that benefit from destructive exploitative, extractive, human economics and societies. This area of inquiry would agree that the most impacted are the world's poor the majority of whom are women.

Feminist political ecology takes the analysis a step further by considering gender dimensions of the issues (Rocheleau et al., 1996). Feminist political ecology uses gender relations to explain the link between women and the environment (Rocheleau, 1995). The theory focuses on how gender structures access and control of resources, access to particular types of knowledge, space and social political processes including access to environmental knowledge, sciences and technology (Dankelman, 2003). As the theory focuses on gender relations it will be used as a theoretical framework in conjunction with the Gender, environment and development (G.E.D) approach as the tool of analysis for this study.

Feminist political ecologists advocates that for gender to be considered in environmental analysis, attention needs to be paid to gender differences in knowledge, rights, access, control and organizations vis-avis the environment (Sultana, 2006). Borrowing from this argument, this paper will be structured around these themes to show why community environmental education needs women but before that an attempt is made in the following section to define key terms.

2.1. Understanding environmental education

Environmental education is the process of developing a world population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems by cultivating attitudes, motivations, knowledge, commitment and skills to work individually and collectively towards solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones (UNESCO, 1978). Environmental education activities to be analysed in this study are taking place in community contexts outside the formal school context, hence they are referred to as community environmental education (CEE).

3. Methodology

Paper is based on a literature review. Gender, environment and development discourse is not only concerned with women but the social construction of gendered assignment of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations of men and women in relation to the environment (Dankelman, 2002). Women are excluded from environmental issues and policies when they have the potential to make a large contribution to the solution of environmental crisis. Women also bear the highest brunt of environmental crisis because of their role in providing water and energy at family and community levels. The practical relationship between women and physical environment must therefore be made visible. The G.E.D tool explains the impact of environment on men and women and how women and men affect that environment through their gendered activities. G.E.D also highlights the need for participation of males and females in environmental issues since their livelihood and food security are tied to the environment. The G.E.D approach is used in conjunction with feminist political ecology as a theoretical framework to analyze extant literature to justify why and how participation of women in community environmental education is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

4. Making the links for sustainable development: Women and community environmental education

This section will be organized around the three themes that make up the feminist political ecology theory, the theoretical lens that underscore this paper to argue for the recognition of the role of women in community environmental education.

4.1. Gendered knowledge

Integration of women in community environmental education will not only enhance their capabilities to survive in the changing contexts of environmental problem but also boast the knowledge of community environmental education by bringing in indigenous knowledge because research after research has shown that women are more knowledgeable about traditional environmental education (Jewitt, 2002, Howard, 2003, Momsen, 2007). Bringing in women into environmental education is also vital for food security and prevention of environmental change. Kraub (2011) acknowledged that environmental change and food security issues are not gender neutral. Men and women are affected differently by environmental change and food security. This is because men and women have differential resources for protection like land, inputs, capital, and technological knowledge (knowledge and information). Concurring with Momsen (2004), Kraub (2011) goes on to argue that women's knowledge and experience, food security strategies often remain untapped thereby reducing their survival chances during climate and environmental change related natural disasters. It is against such observation that this paper argues that environmental education to achieve its goals and efforts there is need to tap into women's knowledge and experiences as literature demonstrate that they are a resourceful and valuable resource in the fight against environmental change (Kraub, 2011; Momsen, 2004). Excluding women would at the same time compromise the knowledge disseminated through the banner of community environmental education as well as increasing women's vulnerability to environmental risks thereby holding back or posing challenges for sustainable development (Mukoni, 2013). Chandler and Wane (2002) note that reconceptualising and resituating indigenous women as resource managers is central to transform alternative policies to development. This is crucial as environmental issues have become a right for each human being as the ensuing section reveals.

4.2. Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities

Participation of women in community environmental education is no longer a privilege but a right. Given the heightened ecological risks facing the world today, participation of women in community environmental education is their right. They have the right to access and be well informed about the risks and how they can be alleviated. Women have long been recognized as valuable resources in the achievement of sustainable development (Braidotti et al., 1994). They have long been viewed as efficient environmental managers due to their special empathetic and nurturing capacities (Agarwal, 1997). Women therefore need to take an active part in community environmental education, because research has established that the effects of impoverished environmental quality does not ripple through community on an equal way across gender lines,

race and age and vulnerability and moreso, environmental changes and abilities to cope with or compensate for environmental change is gendered contends (UNEP, 2008; Agostino, 2010) that women are unable to mitigate and adapt to the problems caused by climate change because they have limited access to resources and services. It is in this realization that this paper argues that community environmental education real needs women. As a group that has been subordinated by the patriarchal dividend, it means environmental education knowledge disseminated through men is not likely to trickle down to women as knowledge is one of the strategies that are used to sustain the patriarchal dividend thereby enabling men to cling onto power. To avoid short changing these women in terms of environmental knowledge this paper advocates for their full and active participation.

Sengondo in Dankelman (2002) note that men and women have different needs for and use of natural resources hence both should have access and should equally participate in environmental issues. The natural environment is crucial for both genders and for food security. Both men and women should conserve the integrity and diversity of nature to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecological sustainable (Aguilar in Dankelman, 2002). To enlist this community environmental education becomes the ideal mode for cultivating the attitudes, motivations, commitments and skills needed for both men and women to have an equal share in environmental knowledge and practice. This paper however observes that this cannot be realized if women continue to be relegated to the margins in community environmental education issues especially at the wake of gendered environments.

4.3. Gendered environment

Research has also shown that 60-80% of households in the rural areas are being managed by women on a daily basis. Women exploit the environment for sustainability of households. Mogotsi et al. (2011), acknowledge that women are responsible for 70-80% of household production in sub Sahara Africa, faced with climate changes that threaten food security by reducing crop yield means women who are the main food producers became the best candidates for environmental education. They need the knowledge and skills of environmental education to continue with this role despite changing environments. Coping and mitigation strategies need to be conveyed to these women. This view is supported by Ericksen et al. (2009), who noted that women are left out in issues of climate change and environmental management and modern food mitigation measures. Women also make the larger part of the rural folk as men relocate more than women into towns and neighboring countries to seek for greener pastures. This leaves a large group of women with livelihoods that are tied to the environment through agriculture; hence environmental education initiatives must include women if they are to remain active in this sector of production.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The article has argued for the need to include women in community environment education as a way of moving towards sustainable development. This review was motivated by the prevalence of literature on lack of participation of women in environmental issues (Khaledi et al., 2012; Dankelman, 2012; Mwangi et al.,

2011; Kraub, 2011; Ericksen et al., 2009) which are subsumed under community environmental education according to the premise of this paper. By providing a reader on extant literature that reveals that women are not fully accommodated in environmental issues yet ecological sustainability is one of the pillars of sustainable development, the article carves a space for further deliberations and reflexivity by environmental policy planners and implementers of community environmental education by bringing to the fore the advantages that could be accrued by including this group of people in community environmental education (Kraub, 2011; Momsen, 2007, 2004). Sustainable development as elaborated in Agenda 21, the blue print for sustainable development recognises through chapter 36 that education, public awareness and training are critical for sustainable development. It states that education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environment and development issues (UNEP, 1992a). The chapter also recognises that the participation of women alongside the youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, workers, trade unions, farmers, scientific and the technological communities, business and industry are essential in its implementation (United Nations, 1992). The Rio declaration also acknowledges that women have a vital role in environmental management and development and their full participation is essential to achieve sustainable development (UNEP, 1992b). The earth summit in Johannesburg also reaffirmed that society; environment and economy are the three pillars of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2004). The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable development (UNDESD) also endorsed that Education for sustainable development aims to integrate the values, principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning towards environmental integrity, economic viability and a social just society. This paper however notes that as women continue to be side-lined, this objective is far from attainment if not receding.

According to Tilbury (2010), education for sustainable development calls for collaboration and dialogue. Women and men need to work side by side and must have an equal stake when it comes to participation in community environmental education. While Wals and keift (2010), notes that Education for Sustainable Development when interpreted from an emancipatory or transformative learning point of view tends to be preoccupied with bringing in marginalised voices and utilising diversity thus justifying the need for women inclusion in community environmental education.

This paper therefore argues that gendered environmental education practice and participation within community environmental education context is likely to prevent the attainment of any form of sustainable development. The argument being that with heightened socio-ecological risks there is need for renewed attention that emphasises participation of all citizens in environmental education including women. It is also widely accepted that gender equality and female empowerment is central to fulfilling all the eight MDGs (Mamphele, 2004; Shumba et al., 2008; Unterhalter, 2007) which are the underlying pillars of sustainable development. Community environmental education, therefore offers an integrating framework for education and training efforts aimed at implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustainable development at community level.

Sen argues that development consists of 'the expansion of one's capabilities. (Sen in Elliot, 2007, p.142),' Community environmental education has an important role to open up the capabilities of men and women in the communities in the face of the socio ecological risks Community environmental education that is gender-

responsive is necessary so that men and women's capabilities or functioning spaces are expanded through knowledge because discrimination of women in environmental education pose challenges to sustainable development by limiting their substantive freedoms and thereby increasing their vulnerability to environmental degradation hazards. Equal participation of women and men in community environmental further helps to foster some of the abilities that are needed to establish the agency and attitudes that lead to sustainable development, such as valuing of gender equality and social justice. In agreement with ADEA (2006), the paper argues that everything that holds back self-realization of human personal capability, pose significant challenges for the stated goals of sustainable development

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