

# THE UNITED NATIONS' APPROACH TO WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

**T**he United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has established a global **Women, Environment and Development Programme (WED)** which aims to give poor women in the developing world the support they need to establish sustainable relationships with environment. WED was established in 1990 to promote integration of women and development concerns in the global environment debate.

The WED programme aims to give women:

- ★ the means to farm more productively;
- ★ the knowledge and technologies to use and manage resources more efficiently;
- ★ the financial support necessary to act in their own self interest and in the interest of environmental sustainability; and
- ★ an effective voice in environmental decision making and the issues which impact on sustainable development.

Unifem's WED programme recognizes the powerful vested interest which women have in

the environment and helps to develop their potential both as producers and managers of natural resources.

The following projects are among those supported by UNIFEM's Women, Environment and Development action programme in keeping with the UNCED strategy for the 21st Century Agenda 21:

• In Mali, previously unemployed female university graduates received training, equipment and credit in 1988 to establish a waste disposal business in the capital city, Bamako. The business has prospered and currently provides garbage removal services for 18,000 residents.

• In 12 drought prone villages of Rajasthan, India, 500 village women have been encouraged to plant and harvest mulberry trees. The trees provide natural fencing and help anchor the soil against erosion but they also provide the women with income. The trees are regularly pruned to maintain a leafy shrublike shape and the cuttings are used for fuel. The berries are sweet and nutritious for human consumption while the leaves provide fodder for poultry and cattle as well as food for silkworms which

the women also raise (sericulture).

• In the community of Al-Habeel, Yemen, women have been shown how to construct biodigesters which produce gas for their cooking stoves and ovens. This basic biogas technology has spared nearby forests which previously supplied about 85 percent of Al-Habeel's energy and has relieved the women of the need to collect firewood for about three hours a day.

• In the northern Mexican country of Tempoal, women have been trained as mechanics to build hand operated water pumps. The project has grown from workshop to factory scale employing 250 women in the production of 5,000 units a year. The availability of low cost handpumps has greatly reduced the hours which many thousands of poor Mexican women spend collecting and carting water each day, while improving water quality and the health of those who drink it.

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