

FOREWORD

Most women in Africa are directly dependent on their local environment and sustainable natural systems for their own and their families survival. They spend the greater part of their time tending, gathering, conserving and using natural resources. As daily managers of the living environment they are experienced in the management of agriculture and food production, fisheries, forests, soil, energy and water resources.

Women have developed skills in conservation which are built into their traditional subsistence activities. At the local level, cooperative action taken by women demonstrate that by sharing their knowledge and experience they can improve the environment and also promote sustainable development. They can improve on their performance as managers of the environment if they are given access to education and training and the opportunity to participate in decision-making. At the same time, environmental management and sustainable development can be enhanced if extension workers and decision-makers make more use of women's knowledge and experience in effective resource management.

The critical role played by women in environmental management and sustainable development has been highlighted at major Commonwealth and UN meetings in the nineties. Meetings of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs have urged governments to provide greater support to enable women to use and share their knowledge, experience and traditional skills on environmental issues, and to gain new ones as a result of appropriate training. In their report "Sustainable Development - An Imperative for Environmental Protection", the Expert Group on Environmental Concerns and the Commonwealth, reiterated the importance of training women to support their work for sustainable development and recommended that special attention be given to providing women with education and training. In Agenda 21, the Earth Summit Programme of Action on Environment and Development, governments agreed that it was essential to mainstream the concerns of women throughout sectoral and cross-sectoral areas for action. Commonwealth Heads of Government have urged governments to ensure that immediate action is taken towards implementation of Agenda 21, especially the Chapter focusing on "Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development". The UN Fourth World Conference on Women also urged governments to involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels and to facilitate and increase their access to information and education.

This manual for the Africa region was published in 1992 under the title Women, Conservation and Agriculture. It was the first of four manuals which have now been developed to form part of a pan-Commonwealth training module on Women and Natural Resource Management. The manual, which has already been used extensively throughout the Africa region and beyond, has now been reprinted under the new title Women and Natural Resource Management for this reason. Other elements of the pan-Commonwealth training module are the manuals for the Asia, Caribbean and South Pacific regions, an overview paper on the issues and strategies for promoting women in environmental management and sustainable development internationally and a video on the Macusi Amerindian women of the Iwokrama Rainforest in Guyana. We hope that this manual and the other elements of the module will enable trainers and extension workers to address gender issues in natural resource management effectively and increase women's participation in environmental decision-making.

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