

# Interfacing Women Participation and Community Environmental Education: A Step towards Education for Sustainable Development

Manuku Mukoni (Corresponding author)

Gender Studies Department, Midlands State University

P. Bag 9055 Gweru, Zimbabwe

E-mail: mukonim@msu.ac.zw

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## Abstract

The goal of the paper was to contribute to the education for sustainable development discourse by arguing that at the interface of community environmental education, an initiative subsumed under education for sustainable development and education for sustainable development lie women. A literal analysis of available literature was done through the framework of education for sustainable development to argue for the need to interface women participation with community environmental education. The paper also shows that akin to education for sustainable development frameworks are the processes of collaboration and dialogue, engagement of the whole system including the marginalized and silenced voices.

**Keywords:** Environmental education, community environmental education, sustainable development, participation

## 1. Introduction

In the 2002 World Summit in Johannesburg, the international community reaffirmed that society, environment and economy are three pillars of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2004) and discourse on the importance of education in achieving environment and developmental issues, the United Nations adapted 2005 to 2014 as a United Nations Decade of education for sustainable development. The aim of this decade included an integration of values, principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This was meant to move society towards environmental integrity, economic viability and creation of a social just society. This paper speaks to the making of social justice, a

priority in environmental education and sustainable development. The paper seeks to argue why social justice in the form of equal participation of women in community environmental education can be viewed as a move towards education for sustainable development. The International community has pushed the adoption of public awareness and training as one form of education through which education for sustainable development can be practiced. This includes non-formal forms of education like community environmental education that is discussed in this paper. Using the analytic framework of education for sustainable development principles and processes, this paper will argue for the inclusion of women in community environmental education as a step towards attaining education for sustainable development. To put the discussion into perspective the paper will look at the background to the women and environment discourse and the research lacuna in extant literature. This would be followed by an outline of the theoretical framework that will be adopted in gleaning the intersectionality of women participation in community environmental education with education for sustainable development. To put forward the argument the paper proceeds as follows. First, effort will be made to unpack the principles and processes of education for sustainable development as the framework adopted as a lens to argue for the inclusion of women in community environmental education. Second, in order to contextualize the argument the paper will provide a literary account of the links between women and education for sustainable development. Continuing the argument the paper will highlight the benefits that could be accrued by increased participation of women in community environmental education that are allied to education for sustainable development.

## **2. Background**

Participation is a general goal of environmental education (UNESCO, 1978) and education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2005). The concept of women participation in environmental education especially in community environment has long been recognized at the international community. The Rio declaration through its principle 20, recognizes the importance of women in environment and development issues (UNEP, 1992c). While Agenda 21, chapter 24 also calls for a global action for women towards sustainable development policy and management oriented recommendations that strengthen the role of women in sustainable development and to eliminate obstacles to their equal and beneficial participation. Agenda 21: 145 also makes reference to strengthening the role and position of women as one of nine major groups in sustainable development (UNEP, 1992a). Critical area K of the Beijing platform of action also asserts that human beings are at the centre of concern of sustainable development and women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and natural resource management.

Parallel to the development of women and sustainable development discourse as it relates to the environment, were debates on the role that the education can play in bringing about sustainable development. As society began to realize that for sustainable development to be achieved, there is need for a critical mass of people, who reflect upon the environment and social consequences of their actions, people who are able to work towards sustainable development, hence making education, the vehicle through which this knowledgeable citizenry can be enlisted. It was through this realization that education for sustainable

development crystallized to respond to the call by international community to actively pursue sustainable development through education. In support of this call Ekosse (2009) argues that the key to the guarantioiship of sustainability is education. Due to the urgent need to build a citizenry that work toward sustainability and is committed to sustainable development, Agenda 21, the blue print for sustainable development recognized 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 the environment and development issues (UNEP, 1992a). The chapter also recognizes the participation of women alongside other groups like youth, the indigenous people among others are essential in its implementation (United Nations, 1992).This chapter advocated for sustainable education to be offered in various settings, including the formally, informally and non-formally, bringing in community environmental education which is a form of environmental education that happens outside the school context in the communities. It is important, to note however that environmental education research has tended to sideline community environmental education (Ardoin, Clark, & Kelsey, 2012). Indeed (Krasny & Dillon, 2012; Stevenson & Dillon, 2010; Waktola, 2009; Scott, 2009) have argued that there is need for a shift of focus in environmental education research from curriculum in the formal to non-formal community environmental education. It is also important to note that participation of women in environmental education (Gough, 1999) is largely neglected. It is against this debate that this paper is motivated and seeks to make a contribution to the debate by showing how interfacing women participation and community environmental education can be counted as a step towards education for sustainable development.

### **3. Unpacking the Concept Education for Sustainable Development**

Education for sustainable development is an emerging but dynamic concept that encompasses a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future (Pigozzi, 2003). The aim is not only to understand the issues of sustainable development but also the cope with and act upon the interdisciplinary of the issue. It is more of an information driven and participatory concept that encourages educators and learners to interact and dialogue about environmental issues which should range from political, social and economic dimensions of the environment. This type of education is meant to foster learning that emerges from experiences and creativity.it is a type of education meant to change the quality of life for many people. It is that type of education aimed at ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values and lifestyle changes required for a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2004, 2005).

### **4. Education for Sustainable Development as a Theoretical Framework for the Paper**

Education for sustainable development, the lens through which this paper is founded strongly promotes gender and other forms of equity and social justice in education processes (UNESCO, 2005). Given the heightened sociological risks there is need to open and expand participation of women in community environmental education so as to realize sustainable development.

According to Tilbury (2011), education for sustainable development principles and process call for collaboration and dialogue. This framework therefore emphasizes social justice in a way, which will see men and women working in synergy to achieve sustainable development through equal participation in community environmental education. Women and men must have an equal stake in the education that is offered in communities about the environment. Women also need the skills for adaption and mitigation against climate change as studies have indicated that sidelining women in such spaces increases their vulnerability to environmental disasters. It is women's human right therefore to be fully engaged in community environment education.

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 marginalized voices and utilizing diversity, Thus implying that increasing participation of women, a group that has been historically silenced especially from public spheres like community gatherings will be a step towards the attainment of education for sustainable development, thus, bringing the discussion to the link between participation of women and education for sustainable development.

## **6. Women Participation in Community Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development: The Interface**

Research has established that sustainable developments that do not promote full participation and empowerment of women and girls will not succeed (UNDP, 2012) yet available research suggest that such participation is low particularly among rural women (Dankelman, 2012). This section of the paper would therefore highlights education for sustainable development linked benefits that can be accrued by facilitating participation of women. James (1994) notes that development in Africa is inconceivable without the active participation of women. Gender equality is also viewed as prerequisite to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (Shumba et al., 2008; Unterhalter, 2007) hence inclusion of women in community environmental education is likely to promote sustainable development.

Franz-Balsen and Mat Isah (2009) in Wals and Keift (2010), point out that sustainability issues should be discussed at the grassroots level and not only at the decision making level (usually made up of men). They go on to argue that women are more influential when it comes to educating and instilling awareness on sustainable development to the young and even the whole family. According to these authors they argue that to get environment and sustainability issues across, it might therefore be more effective if this is done through women thus supporting the argument that women should be active participants in community environment education if education for sustainable development is to be achieved.

Anderson (2010) concurs with Franz-Balsen and Mat Isah (2009) by arguing that the World Bank and centre for Global development have realized that educating girls and women is one of the best ways of ensuring that communities are better able to adopt and thus be less vulnerable to extreme weather events and climate change, which is one of the goals of education for sustainable development to make individuals to be more engaged in matters relating to more sustainable futures.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper has argued that increasing women's participation in community environmental education can be recounted as a major stride towards education for sustainable development as it resonates with much of the principles and processes of education for sustainable development, which include recognition of marginalized voices, education for all, collaboration, dialogue, gender equality, social justice among others.

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