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(Department of Gender & Women Studies)

Course: Women and Environment (9167/878) • Level: BS/MSc

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Assignment No. 1 (Units 1–5)

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

For Study & Reference

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and then write the assignment in their own words. Copying this guide word for word is not recommended.

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Question 1: The Nature versus Culture Dichotomy and the Marginalisation of Women (20 Marks)

Deconstruct the 'Nature versus Culture' dichotomy discussed in Unit 1. How has the traditional association of women with 'nature' and men with 'culture' contributed to the historical marginalisation of women in environmental decision-making?

Introduction

Few ideas have shaped the relationship between gender and the environment as deeply as the division of the world into two opposed spheres: nature and culture. In much of Western thought, and in many other societies in different forms, nature has stood for the given, the bodily, the emotional and the uncontrolled, while culture has stood for the made, the rational, the ordered and the human achievement that rises above mere biology. Unit 1 shows that this division has never been a neutral description of the world. It has always carried a gender code. Women have been placed on the nature side of the line and men on the culture side, and because culture has been valued above nature, the placement itself has worked as a ranking. To deconstruct this dichotomy means to take it apart: to show that its two terms are not natural facts, that each term depends on the other for its meaning, and that the hierarchy hidden

inside it has had real consequences. The most important of those consequences, for this course, is that women have been pushed to the margins of environmental decision-making even though they are among the most active managers of everyday environments.

What the Dichotomy Claims

The classic statement of the argument is associated with the anthropologist Sherry Ortner, who asked in 1974 whether the universal devaluation of women could be explained by the fact that women are everywhere seen as closer to nature, while men are identified with culture. Every society, she argued, distinguishes between the natural order, which is simply given, and the cultural order, which human beings consciously create in order to control and transform nature. Giving birth, menstruation, breastfeeding and the care of small children tie women's lives visibly to biological processes, so women are read as the representatives of nature inside society. Men, freed from these continuous bodily ties in the traditional division of labour, are cast as the makers of law, technology, religion, art and the state, that is, of culture itself.

Once this pairing is accepted, a whole chain of secondary pairings follows from it, and the chain always points in the same direction. Nature is paired with body, emotion, passivity, reproduction and the private household; culture is paired with mind, reason, activity, production and the public world. Each pair is not merely different but unequal, because in the dominant tradition culture is precisely the project of rising above and mastering nature. To say that a woman is 'closer to nature' therefore sounds like praise of her warmth and fertility, but in practice it ranks her below the man who is said to create, decide and rule.

Table 1: The paired oppositions built into the nature-culture dichotomy

Nature side (coded female)	Culture side (coded male)	Practical effect of the pairing

Body and bodily functions	Mind and abstract reason	Women's judgements are treated as feelings, men's as knowledge
Reproduction and care	Production and creation	Care work is unpaid and invisible; market work is counted and rewarded
Emotion and intuition	Logic and science	Women are excluded from technical and scientific authority
Private household sphere	Public political sphere	Decisions about land, water and forests are taken in forums women do not enter
To be managed and controlled	To manage and control	Both women and nature appear as resources to be administered by others

Deconstructing the Dichotomy

Deconstruction begins by noticing that the two terms are not independent. 'Culture' can only be defined against 'nature', and 'nature' as a separate wilderness only makes sense once human beings imagine themselves standing outside it. The boundary is drawn by thought, not found ready-made in the world. Human beings are themselves part of nature: men also have bodies, are born, fall ill and die, and every cultural achievement, from a ploughed field to a computer, is a rearrangement of natural materials. Equally, women have never only reproduced; in most societies they have been farmers, builders, healers, traders and knowledge holders, that is, makers of culture of the highest order. The historical record therefore contradicts the dichotomy even on its own terms.

A second step in the deconstruction is to ask who benefits from the belief. If women are 'naturally' unsuited to abstraction, machinery and public deliberation, then their exclusion from councils, ministries and markets needs no justification and no one has to take responsibility for it. The dichotomy converts a social arrangement, which could be changed, into a fact of biology, which apparently cannot. Feminist scholars describe this as naturalisation: an ideology that

presents the results of power as the results of nature. A third step is to note that the dichotomy is not applied uniformly. Poor women, rural women and women of subordinated castes, classes and ethnic groups are often placed even 'closer to nature' than privileged women, while elite men monopolise the identity of culture. Gender therefore works together with class and other hierarchies, and any account that speaks of 'women' and 'men' as two uniform blocks misses this layering.

Finally, deconstruction does not simply reverse the ranking and declare nature superior to culture, as some romantic versions of ecofeminism are accused of doing. Reversal keeps the same two boxes and merely changes the sign in front of them. The stronger position is to dissolve the boxes: to recognise human life as simultaneously bodily and cultural, and to value care, reproduction and ecological knowledge as forms of intelligence rather than as instincts. From this position, the question is no longer whether women are nearer to nature, but why societies organised knowledge and authority in a way that devalued the work on which survival depends.

How the Association Marginalised Women in Environmental Decision-Making

The first mechanism was exclusion from property and therefore from the table where decisions are made. In most agrarian societies, land, trees and water sources were formally owned or controlled by men, by male-headed households or by male councils, even where women did most of the work on them. Forestry departments, irrigation bureaucracies and agricultural extension services dealt with the recorded owner, who was almost always male. A woman who collected fuelwood, fodder and medicinal plants from a forest every day could thus have no

legal standing when that forest was reserved, leased or felled, because the system recognised the 'cultural' act of ownership and ignored the 'natural' routine of use.

The second mechanism was the devaluation of women's environmental knowledge. Because women's knowledge was carried in practice, in seed selection, in the memory of which wild foods are safe in a drought year, in the management of home gardens and small livestock, it was classified as custom or instinct rather than expertise. Scientific forestry, commercial agriculture and later development planning privileged codified, credentialed knowledge, which men were far more likely to hold because they had greater access to schooling. Projects consequently failed in predictable ways: plantations of a single commercial species replaced the mixed forests women depended on, wells were sited without consulting the women who carried the water, and improved stoves were designed without the cooks who would use them.

The third mechanism operated through the division between public and private. Environmental decisions were made in panchayats, jirgas, union councils, ministries and project offices, spaces coded as male and public. Women's sphere was defined as the home, and norms of seclusion, mobility and respectable behaviour in many communities made attendance at distant or mixed meetings difficult. Even where women were formally invited, meeting times, venues and procedures were set around men's schedules, and the association of femininity with emotion made it easy to dismiss a woman's intervention as untechnical. Representation, when it came, was often token: a woman seated in a water-user committee without agenda-setting power changes the photograph but not the decision.

The cumulative result is visible in the historical pattern this course documents. Colonial and post-colonial forest policy treated forests as revenue and timber, and the women who

depended on them as encroachers. Post-independence development treated nature as a stock of resources for national growth and women as beneficiaries to be reached through welfare, not as decision-makers. In both eras the same logic held: those identified with culture planned, extracted and decided; those identified with nature, both the forest and the women inside it, were managed. The marginalisation was therefore not an accidental oversight that better manners could have corrected. It was built into the categories through which institutions saw the world.

Conclusion

To conclude, the nature-culture dichotomy is a constructed and hierarchical way of organising thought, not a description of how women and men actually are. By placing women with body, emotion, reproduction and the private sphere, and men with mind, reason, production and the public sphere, it made male authority over land, forests and water appear natural and made women's exclusion appear inevitable. It worked through property rules that recognised owners rather than users, through knowledge systems that recognised credentials rather than experience, and through public institutions arranged around men's lives. Deconstructing it is therefore not an academic exercise alone. Once the pairing is seen as made rather than given, the remedy also becomes clear: secure rights for women over the resources they manage, recognise their ecological knowledge as expertise, and redesign decision-making forums so that women hold real, not token, power. Environmental decisions improve when the people who carry their daily costs are present at the table, and that presence begins with refusing the old idea that women belong to nature while men belong to history.

Question 2: Forest Degradation, Time Poverty and Rural Women (20 Marks)

Examine the gendered impact of forest degradation as outlined in Unit 2. Discuss how the scarcity of fuel wood and fodder specifically increases 'time poverty' for rural women and impacts their socio-economic status.

Introduction

For a rural household, a forest is not scenery. It is the kitchen's fuel supply, the livestock's feeding ground, a pharmacy, a building store and, in a bad season, a famine reserve of wild foods. Unit 2 emphasises that the people who draw on these services most directly are women, because the gender division of labour assigns them the collection of fuelwood and water, the feeding of animals, cooking and the care of the sick. It follows that when a forest degrades, when the near slopes are stripped, the useful species disappear and the remaining trees stand further away each year, the loss does not fall on the household as an undifferentiated unit. It falls first and hardest on the time, bodies and standing of its women. This answer examines that gendered impact, explains how fuelwood and fodder scarcity produce what development literature calls time poverty, and traces the consequences for rural women's socio-economic status.

What Forest Degradation Means on the Ground

Forest degradation means a decline in the quality and productive capacity of a forest even where some tree cover remains: fewer species, loss of regeneration, thinner undergrowth, erosion of the forest floor and disappearance of the particular trees and plants a community actually uses. Its causes, as outlined in the unit, include commercial over-extraction, conversion of forest land to other uses, overgrazing, repeated lopping, fire, and state policies that reserved

forests for revenue while criminalising customary use. Degradation is often more important for women than outright deforestation, because a household may live beside a forest on the map while the fuel species, fodder grasses and leaf litter it needs have already vanished from it. The resource has not disappeared; it has retreated, in distance, in quality and in the effort required to obtain it.

Fuelwood Scarcity and the Lengthening Working Day

In most rural areas of Pakistan and South Asia generally, fuelwood remains a principal cooking and heating fuel, and its collection is overwhelmingly women's and girls' work. When nearby sources are exhausted, three changes follow. First, distance increases: a walk that once took under an hour becomes a journey of several hours to remoter patches, often over difficult terrain. Second, frequency and load change: women carry headloads that commonly weigh as much as a substantial fraction of their own body weight, and as wood becomes scarcer they either make more trips or carry more each time. Third, quality falls: green wood, shrubs, dung and crop residues replace dry hardwood. These substitutes burn poorly, produce more smoke, take longer to cook a meal and require constant tending of the fire, so the time cost continues inside the kitchen after the collection trip has ended.

The health costs travel with the time costs. Carrying heavy loads over years is associated with back, neck and joint damage and with particular risks in pregnancy. Longer journeys increase exposure to harassment and violence on isolated paths, a safety cost rarely counted in forest statistics. Smoke from poor fuels, inhaled daily at close range during cooking, contributes to respiratory illness and eye disease among women and the small children who stay near them. Scarcity therefore taxes the same woman three times: in hours, in bodily wear and in risk.

Fodder Scarcity and Women's Livestock Work

Fodder scarcity follows a parallel path. Rural women are typically responsible for stall-feeding, grazing, watering and cleaning the household's animals, and for processing milk, while livestock themselves are a critical asset: a source of daily food, of cash in emergencies and of a woman's limited independent security. As grazing lands and forest fodder degrade, women spend more hours cutting and carrying grass and leaf fodder from further away, or walking animals to more distant grazing. When fodder cannot be found, animals produce less milk, fall sick more often and must eventually be sold, and each of these outcomes removes income and nutrition that women manage and on which children depend. There is also a cruel feedback: households under fodder stress may lop trees more destructively and graze regeneration harder, deepening the degradation that caused the stress, while the extra labour of coping falls again on women.

Time Poverty: Meaning and Mechanism

Time poverty means lacking enough discretionary time, after necessary paid and unpaid work and personal care, to rest, learn, participate in community life or take up an opportunity. It is distinct from income poverty, although the two reinforce each other, and it is heavily gendered because women's unpaid work is both larger and less postponable: a meal must be cooked and an animal fed today, whereas some male tasks can wait for a season. Forest degradation feeds time poverty through simple arithmetic. Every additional hour spent walking for wood or fodder is an hour subtracted from the fixed total of the day, and it is subtracted from whichever of a woman's other activities is least defended by custom. Rest and sleep go first, then time for her own income work, then attendance at a literacy class, a health visit, a cooperative meeting or a school event for her children. Girls are frequently pulled in to share the collection burden,

so the mother's time poverty is partly relieved by transferring it to the daughter, at the price of the daughter's schooling.

Table 2: How fuelwood and fodder scarcity converts into time poverty (illustrative pattern of a rural woman's day)

Daily task	When resources are nearby	When forests have degraded	What is squeezed out
Fuelwood collection	Short trip combined with other errands	Long journey, heavier load, more trips per week	Rest, own income work
Fodder cutting and animal care	Grass and leaf fodder close to home	Distant cutting or long grazing walks; animals in poorer condition	Time for processing and selling milk and produce
Cooking	Dry wood, quick fire	Poor fuels, constant tending, slower cooking	Attendance at classes, meetings and clinics
Water, care and household work	Fitted around collection trips	Compressed into early morning and late evening	Sleep and personal health care
Daughters' contribution	Occasional help	Regular collection duty	Girls' schooling and study time

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The table is illustrative: exact hours vary by region, season and household, but the direction of change is consistent across the studies the unit draws on. Its important lesson is that environmental decline is experienced inside the household as a reallocation of women's time, and that reallocation is largely invisible to statistics that count only tree cover or household income.

Effects on Socio-Economic Status

The socio-economic consequences follow directly. First, income: a woman with no spare hour cannot expand a kitchen garden, take up piece work, process more milk for sale or reach a better market, so scarcity caps her earnings at the very moment the household most needs them. Some households must begin buying fuel or fodder, converting a formerly free good into

a cash expense and deepening dependence on male-controlled income. Second, education and skills: adult women miss literacy and training programmes scheduled in the hours they are on the path, and girls withdrawn for collection fall behind or leave school, reproducing the disadvantage in the next generation. Third, health and nutrition: when fuel is short, families cook fewer hot meals, boil water less reliably and shift to foods that cook quickly rather than foods that nourish, while the collector's own exhaustion and injuries go untreated because she has neither time nor money for care.

Fourth, status and voice: a woman's standing depends partly on her visible contribution and her presence in collective life. Time-poor women attend fewer meetings of cooperatives, village committees and savings groups, hold fewer offices and are less informed about schemes and rights, so decisions about the very forests in question are taken without them. Their knowledge of local species and seasons, meanwhile, is lost to management. Fifth, asset position: distress sales of livestock, undertaken when fodder fails, strip away the asset women most commonly control, leaving them more dependent and less able to withstand the next shock. Forest degradation thus lowers women's status through a chain, from ecology to hours, from hours to income, schooling and presence, and from absence to powerlessness, which then permits further degradation. Breaking the chain requires acting on several links at once: restoring nearby sources through community forestry and woodlots, promoting fodder planting and stall feeding, spreading fuel-saving stoves and alternative fuels, and formally including women in forest management bodies with authority, not merely attendance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of forest degradation is gendered because the work of provisioning a household from the commons is gendered. Fuelwood and fodder scarcity lengthen journeys, increase loads, worsen the quality of what is collected and consume the hours from which rest, earnings, education and public participation must all be taken. That is time poverty, and it translates steadily into lower income, poorer health, weaker assets and diminished status for rural women, as well as lost schooling for their daughters. Unit 2's central lesson is therefore that forest policy is also, unavoidably, gender policy. A programme that counts surviving trees but ignores the woman's lengthening walk has measured the forest and missed the degradation. Restoring forests close to where women live, reducing the labour of using them and giving women a decisive voice in their management are not welfare additions to environmental policy; they are the policy, judged by where its costs and benefits actually fall.

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Question 3: Urbanisation, Deteriorating Environments and Women's Health and Safety (20 Marks)

Rapid urbanization presents unique environmental challenges for women living in low-income urban settlements. Based on Unit 3, analyze the relationship between deteriorating urban environments and the health and safety of women.

Introduction

Cities promise wages, services and freedom from some of the constraints of village life, and women migrate to them in growing numbers, alone, with families or as the effective heads of households. Yet for the poor, the city that is actually on offer is usually an informal settlement: housing built without permission on marginal land, without secure tenure, piped water,

sewerage, drainage, paved lanes or regular waste collection. Unit 3 directs attention to this gap between the promise and the settlement, and to the fact that its costs are not shared equally. Because women spend more time in and around the home, carry responsibility for water, food, hygiene and care, and move through the city under greater threat to their personal safety, a deteriorating urban environment reaches women's health and security more directly and more continuously than it reaches men's. This answer analyses that relationship through water and sanitation, air and housing conditions, care burdens, livelihood exposures and the geography of safety.

The Setting: Low-Income Settlements and Women's Place in Them

Low-income settlements, called katchi abadis in Pakistan, concentrate environmental hazards. They are frequently sited on the land nobody else wanted: beside drains and industrial effluent channels, on flood-prone low ground, near railway lines, waste dumps and tanneries or workshops discharging untreated waste. Density is extreme, so a single contaminated source or blocked drain affects hundreds of households at once. Tenure insecurity discourages both residents and municipalities from investing, producing a stand-off in which the settlement is permanent in fact and temporary on paper for decades. Women experience this setting with a particular intensity. Their work, paid and unpaid, is centred on the dwelling and its immediate lanes; they queue for water, manage its storage, wash clothes and utensils, dispose of household waste, nurse the sick and supervise children in the same contaminated space in which factories' smoke and drain water circulate. Exposure that for a commuting man is a matter of hours is for many women a condition of the whole day.

Water, Sanitation and Health

The clearest pathway from environment to health runs through water. Where piped supply is absent or intermittent, households depend on communal taps, hand pumps in increasingly contaminated groundwater, tankers or vendors, and women and girls perform the fetching, carrying, storing and rationing. Irregular supply forces storage, storage invites contamination, and contaminated water produces the diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid, hepatitis and skin infections that fill the health burden of poor settlements. Sanitation multiplies the problem. Shared or distant latrines, broken sewers, open defecation at the settlement edge and drains that overflow in the rains expose women to infection, including reproductive and urinary tract infections aggravated by the common practice of delaying toilet use until darkness for the sake of privacy and safety. Menstrual hygiene becomes difficult and humiliating where there is no water, no door that locks and no place to dispose of materials, with consequences for schooling, work attendance and health. When children fall ill from these conditions, as they repeatedly do, the nursing, the clinic journeys and the lost wages fall overwhelmingly on mothers, so the environment harms women's health twice: directly, and again through the care it makes necessary.

Table 3: Environmental deterioration in low-income settlements: pathways to women's health and safety

Environmental problem	Exposure pathway	Effect on women's health and safety
Contaminated, irregular water supply	Fetching, storing and using unsafe water; rationing	Water-borne disease; injury and exhaustion from carrying; time loss
Inadequate toilets and drainage	Distant or shared facilities; delayed use; overflowing drains	Urinary and reproductive infections; risk of harassment and assault, especially at night
Indoor and neighbourhood air pollution	Cooking smoke, burning waste, nearby workshops	Respiratory illness, eye disease; children's illness increasing care

		work
Overcrowded, poorly built housing	Damp, heat, fire and collapse risk; no privacy	Infectious disease spread; stress and mental ill-health; insecurity inside the home
Uncollected waste and stagnant water	Household waste handling; mosquito breeding	Vector-borne disease; added unpaid cleaning and care burden
Dark, unplanned lanes and unsafe transport	Walking to water, toilets, work and services	Harassment and violence; restricted mobility and lost opportunities

Housing, Air and the Body at Home

The dwelling itself is an environmental exposure. One or two rooms housing a large family, built of salvaged materials, poorly ventilated and prone to damp, heat and flooding, provide the conditions in which tuberculosis and other infections spread and in which cooking smoke concentrates. Women cook in these spaces, often with the cheapest available fuels, and are the principal inhalers of the smoke, with infants on their backs or at their feet. Kerosene stoves, exposed wiring and stored fuel in crowded lanes make fire a recurrent catastrophe, and the work of salvaging, nursing and rebuilding after fire or eviction again centres on women. Heat is an under-recognised stress: metal or asbestos roofs turn rooms into ovens in a heatwave, and women, who remain indoors with children and the elderly while also performing physical domestic labour, bear sustained exposure that outdoor workers, for all their hardship, can sometimes interrupt. Mental health belongs in this account as well. Chronic insecurity about eviction, the daily struggle for water, noise, crowding and the impossibility of privacy produce anxiety and exhaustion that health systems rarely record as environmental illness, yet they shape women's well-being as surely as any pathogen.

Work, Mobility and Safety

Safety is the second half of the question, and in deteriorating environments it is inseparable from design. A settlement without street lighting, with latrines and water points placed at its dark edges, with lanes too narrow and unnamed for help to reach, structures the risk of harassment and assault into women's necessary daily journeys. The journeys cannot simply be avoided, because water must be fetched, toilets reached, children escorted and work attended, including domestic work in other people's houses, factory and workshop employment, home-based piece work with glues, dyes and dusts, and waste picking, in which women sort hazardous refuse with bare hands. Each occupation carries its own exposures, and home-based work, often praised as compatible with women's domestic roles, in fact imports industrial hazards into the room where children eat and sleep. Fear itself is a health and development cost even when no assault occurs: women restrict their movements, withdraw from evening classes and better-paid shifts, keep daughters home and decline work that requires travel after dark. The environment thus taxes opportunity through apprehension as well as through injury.

It is important, as Unit 3 suggests, to see the relationship as a system rather than a list. Poor drainage worsens water quality; water scarcity worsens hygiene; illness increases care work; care work reduces income; low income prevents escape to a better settlement; and tenure insecurity blocks improvement at every step. Gender runs through the whole system because the tasks that absorb each shock are assigned to women. Equally, women's organisations in such settlements are frequently the first to map hazards, negotiate with municipalities and maintain communal facilities, which means the population most exposed is also a principal

source of practical knowledge for repair. Policy that treats residents only as victims wastes that capacity.

What an Adequate Response Requires

An adequate response therefore combines upgrading with rights. Regularisation of tenure unlocks investment by both residents and the state. Water and sanitation must be designed with women's actual routines in view: sufficient taps to end queuing, toilets close to homes, lockable, lit and maintained, with provision for menstrual hygiene. Drainage, waste collection, paving and lighting are safety interventions, not cosmetic ones, and women must participate in siting and oversight decisions, because a facility placed where planners think convenient and where women judge unsafe will simply not be used. Health services need outreach into settlements, attention to occupational and reproductive health, and timings compatible with women's work. None of this is technically mysterious; what has been missing is the recognition that the settlement's environment is a women's health issue of the first order.

Conclusion

To conclude, deteriorating urban environments damage women's health and safety through connected pathways: unsafe water and sanitation that women manage and endure, polluted air and hazardous housing in which they spend the working day, care burdens that multiply every environmental illness in the family, occupational exposures in informal work, and a built environment whose darkness and disorder make necessary journeys dangerous. The relationship is intensified by poverty and insecure tenure but organised by gender, because the division of labour places women at the points where environmental failure enters the body and the household. Based on Unit 3, the lesson is that urban environmental policy cannot be

gender-neutral in effect while remaining gender-blind in design. Upgrading low-income settlements, securing tenure and involving women as decision-makers in the services they use daily are the measures that convert the city from a concentrated hazard into the healthier, safer place its poorer women were promised when they arrived.

Question 4: Housing as an Environmental Need — Special Target Groups of Women and Responsive Design (20 Marks)

Unit 4 discusses housing as a fundamental environmental need. Identify the 'special target groups' of women mentioned in the text (such as destitute women or elderly women) and propose housing design features that address their specific security and environmental needs.

Introduction

A house is the environment in which a person spends the largest part of life, and for women, whose paid and unpaid work is so often centred on the home, its quality is decisive for health, safety, dignity and earning capacity. Unit 4 treats housing not as a commodity alone but as a fundamental environmental need: shelter from heat, cold, rain and disease, access to water, sanitation, light and air, security against intrusion and disaster, and a stable base from which to work, raise children and participate in society. The unit also insists that 'women' are not a single category in housing policy. Most housing is designed, financed and allotted as if the normal household were a male-headed family with a regular income. Women who fall outside that picture, because of poverty, age, widowhood, disability or the absence of a male earner, are systematically missed unless policy names them as special target groups and designs for their circumstances. This answer identifies those groups and proposes housing design features that answer their specific security and environmental needs.

Why Women Need Special Attention in Housing

Three structural facts explain the need for targeted provision. First, women are poorer on average, earn less, own less property and have weaker access to credit and formal employment records, so market housing and conventional loan-based schemes pass them by. Second, inheritance practice and social custom frequently leave widows, divorced and separated women without an enforceable claim to the houses they have lived in, and a woman without a male relative to negotiate for her is vulnerable in allotment systems built on household heads. Third, safety has a gender dimension that standard plans ignore: a house that is adequate on paper, in floor area and materials, may still expose its resident to danger through an isolated location, an unlit approach, a toilet outside the dwelling or a door that cannot be secured. Targeted housing policy begins by admitting that equal treatment of unequally placed people reproduces inequality, and that destitute, elderly and otherwise vulnerable women require deliberate priority, subsidy and design attention.

The Special Target Groups

The groups highlighted in the text can be identified as follows. The categories overlap, and a single woman may belong to several at once, which increases rather than reduces her claim on policy.

- Destitute and homeless women: women with no income, assets or family support, including women living on the street, in shelters or in grossly inadequate makeshift dwellings. Their need is for immediate, safe, free or near-free shelter with basic services, from which longer-term housing can follow.

- Widows: women who have lost a husband and, with him, often their income, their claim to his family's house and their social protection. Older widows in particular face eviction pressure from relatives and isolation in housing that was never in their name.
- Divorced, separated and deserted women: women whose marriages have ended without a settlement that provides housing. They frequently return to parental homes where space and welcome are limited, or rent alone in areas where a single woman is stigmatised and unsafe.
- Elderly women: women in old age, often widowed, with declining income, mobility, sight and strength. Their housing need centres on accessibility, safety from falls, proximity to health care and protection from loneliness, neglect and property grabbing.
- Women with disabilities: women whose mobility, sensory or other impairments make standard housing unusable. Steps, narrow doors, inaccessible toilets and distant services convert an ordinary house into a daily obstacle course and deepen dependence.
- Single women and women heads of household: women maintaining families alone, including through male migration, who combine earning and caring roles and need affordable housing near work, schools and transport, with arrangements for children's safety.
- Working women living away from home: students, nurses, teachers, factory and office workers and domestic workers who migrate for employment and need respectable, secure hostel or rental accommodation, without which many are forced into unsafe informal arrangements or must abandon the employment itself.

- Women in disaster- and conflict-affected situations: women displaced by floods, earthquakes or violence, and women in refugee and relief settlements, whose temporary shelter routinely fails standards of privacy, sanitation and protection, sometimes for years.

Design Features: Security Needs

Security in this context means both protection from violence and intrusion and the subjective confidence to use one's home and neighbourhood fully. At the settlement level, targeted housing should be located within existing communities, near services, transport and livelihoods, not on isolated peripheral plots where cheap land tempts planners and danger finds residents. Approaches and lanes need lighting, clear sightlines and addresses that emergency services can reach, and plots should be arranged so neighbours overlook shared spaces, providing natural surveillance without policing. At the dwelling level, the essentials are a strong door with an internal lock, secured windows, boundary arrangements that give privacy without imprisonment, and a telephone or alarm link where feasible. For hostels and shelters, trained women wardens, visitor rules, secure storage and confidential locations in cases of violence are part of the design, not administrative afterthoughts. Toilets and bathing spaces must be inside the dwelling or, in shared facilities, close, lit, lockable from inside and separated, because the journey to sanitation is one of the most documented sites of risk for women and girls. Tenure security is the foundation beneath all of this: a title, allotment or tenancy in the woman's own name, joint titling for married couples, and legal aid against dispossession, because a well-built house from which a widow can be evicted at will is not secure housing.

Design Features: Environmental and Health Needs

The environmental specification of a good house for these groups is not luxurious; it is the disciplined provision of what health requires. Safe water inside or immediately beside the dwelling, a sanitary toilet, drainage that keeps wastewater and floodwater out, and a kitchen arrangement that removes smoke, through ventilation, a chimney or cleaner fuel provision, address the main disease pathways of poor housing. Cross-ventilation, daylight, orientation and materials that moderate heat and cold, and a raised plinth and sound roof in flood- and rain-prone areas, protect residents who spend long hours indoors and, in the case of elderly and sick women, may be unable to leave during extreme weather. Space standards matter in a targeted way: a destitute woman needs a lockable personal space even in shelter provision; a woman head of household needs room to work at home without contaminating living space; multi-generational households need arrangements that give an elderly woman rest and privacy. Electricity for light, study and fans, waste disposal that does not depend on burning or distant dumping, and protection from nearby pollution sources complete the environmental minimum.

Table 4: Special target groups, their key housing needs and responsive design features

Group	Dominant need	Design and provision features
Destitute / homeless women	Immediate safe shelter and route to permanence	Shelter with lockable space, women-only sanitation, meals, health and legal referral; graduated subsidy to rental or allotted housing
Widows	Protection from eviction; affordable permanence	Title or occupancy right in own name; small, manageable, low-cost units near kin and services; legal aid
Divorced / separated women	Independent, respectable, safe living	Self-contained small units or hostels without stigma; secure entry; proximity to work, courts and childcare

Elderly women	Accessibility, safety, care within reach	Ground-floor or lift access, ramps, handrails, non-slip floors, accessible toilet, emergency call, nearby clinic, communal space
Women with disabilities	Usable, independent living	Step-free access, wide doors, adapted kitchen and bathroom, visual/audible signals as needed, accessible transport links
Women heads of household	Affordability plus work and childcare fit	Units near employment and schools, work space separated from living space, safe play area, flexible payment or rent-to-own
Working women away from home	Secure, respectable accommodation	Women's hostels with warden, visitor controls, mess and study facilities, safe transport timings
Displaced women	Privacy and protection in temporary shelter	Partitioned family spaces, lit and lockable women-only sanitation close by, distribution points designed against exploitation

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From Design to Delivery

Design features fail without delivery systems that reach the named groups. Identification must be active: destitute and elderly women do not queue at housing offices with files of documents, so quotas or priority points in public schemes, verification through community and women's organisations, and waivers of documentation and deposit requirements are necessary. Finance must match incomes, through deep subsidy for the destitute, shared-equity and incremental housing for the poor, in which a serviced core house is provided and extended as means allow, and protection against the common failure in which an allotted house is promptly transferred to male relatives or sold under pressure. Participation improves fit at little cost: women residents consulted on layout, sanitation location and shared facilities identify risks and preferences that architects miss, and women's involvement in construction and maintenance builds both skills and oversight. Finally, housing must be bundled with its complements, water,

sanitation, transport, health posts and legal services, because a targeted unit in an unserviced scheme relocates deprivation rather than relieving it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Unit 4's treatment of housing as a fundamental environmental need leads directly to targeted policy. The special target groups, destitute and homeless women, widows, divorced and separated women, elderly women, women with disabilities, women heading households alone, working women living away from home and women displaced by disaster, share a common position: the ordinary market and the ordinary scheme do not reach them, and the ordinary plan does not fit them. Responsive design answers with secure tenure in the woman's name, safe location and construction, sanitation and water arranged around women's real routines, ventilation, drainage and climate protection for health, accessibility for age and disability, and affordability matched to irregular incomes, delivered through active identification, subsidy and participation. A house so designed is more than shelter. For the woman who has been most exposed to her environment, it is the first environment that finally works in her favour.

Question 5: Sustainable Development and Why Women's Integration Is a Prerequisite (20 Marks)

Define 'Sustainable Development' in the context of Unit 5. Critically evaluate why the integration of women into environmental management is considered a prerequisite for achieving the goals of the UN Agenda for sustainable growth.

Introduction

By the time the world's governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, with its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, one lesson of the previous half-century was supposed to have been learned: development that destroys its environmental base, or that advances by leaving half the population behind, does not last. Unit 5 examines sustainable development as a concept and then makes a strong claim, that the integration of women into environmental management is not a desirable extra to that agenda but a prerequisite for it, a condition without which the goals will not be achieved. This answer first defines sustainable development carefully, then evaluates the claim from several sides: the case for it, the evidence and logic that support it, the criticisms that warn against using women as instruments, and the conditions under which integration becomes genuine rather than decorative.

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Defining Sustainable Development

The most widely used definition comes from the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, whose 1987 report Our Common Future defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Two ideas inside the definition deserve emphasis, as the unit notes. The first is needs, with priority for the essential needs of the world's poor, because a development path that ignores present poverty has no moral or practical claim to protect the future. The second is limits, not absolute limits fixed by nature alone, but limits imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. Sustainability is therefore a

relationship among generations, within the present generation, and between society and the ecosystems that support it.

In its developed form the concept rests on three interdependent pillars: economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection. Growth supplies the resources for welfare, but growth that liquidates forests, aquifers and a stable climate consumes the capital on which future welfare depends. Social inclusion matters because excluded populations both suffer environmental damage first and, lacking alternatives, may be driven into damaging practices themselves. Environmental protection matters because ecosystem services, fertile soil, water regulation, pollination, climate stability, underpin every economy whether or not markets price them. The UN Agenda translates this into goals that repeatedly intersect with this course: gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), sustainable cities (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13) and life on land (Goal 15), among others. The goals are declared indivisible, which is a formal way of saying that environmental management cannot be separated from who holds rights, who does the work and who decides.

Why Women's Integration Is Treated as a Prerequisite: The Positive Case

The first argument is about who manages the environment in practice. In rural areas women are primary collectors and managers of water, fuel, fodder and food, cultivators of home gardens and keepers of seed, and in cities they manage household water, waste, energy and health. An environmental programme that does not reach the actual manager of a resource reaches nobody. Irrigation schemes that trained only male title-holders while women performed much of the watering, forestry projects that consulted men about species women

did not use, and stove programmes designed without cooks all illustrate the same failure mode, and the record of such failures is a major source of the prerequisite claim.

The second argument concerns knowledge. Women's daily management generates detailed, place-specific knowledge: of species and seasons, of water sources in drought, of soils, medicinal plants and micro-climates. This knowledge is a working data system for adaptation, particularly to climate change, and it is lost when management bodies exclude its holders. The third argument is about outcomes and stewardship. Where women hold secure rights and organisational roles, studies and programme experience repeatedly associate their participation with better protection of commons, more diverse planting, improved household nutrition and more reliable maintenance of water points and plantations, because the people who depend most directly on a resource have the strongest interest in its continuity. The fourth argument is demographic and intergenerational: women's education and agency are associated with healthier, better-educated children and with household investments in sanitation, clean fuel and schooling, so integrating women multiplies environmental gains across generations. The fifth argument is one of justice, and it stands independently of all efficiency claims: women bear disproportionate environmental costs, as Units 2, 3 and 6 of this course show, and a settlement that continues to impose costs on those it excludes from decisions is not sustainable in any sense that includes the social pillar.

Critical Evaluation: Where the Claim Needs Qualification

A critical evaluation must test the claim, not merely repeat it. The first criticism is instrumentalisation. Much advocacy argues for women's inclusion because it serves growth, conservation or climate targets, in effect recruiting women as efficient environmental

managers for other people's goals. Critics warn of a feminisation of environmental responsibility: women are given trees to plant, water points to maintain and waste to sort, in addition to their existing unpaid work, without land rights, payment, technology or power. Participation measured as attendance can rise while burdens deepen and control stays where it was. On this evidence, integration is a prerequisite only in a specific form: integration into rights, resources and decision-making authority, not integration into labour.

The second criticism concerns essentialism. The claim is sometimes supported by the idea that women are naturally closer to nature and therefore inherently better environmental custodians. Unit 1's deconstruction should make us cautious here. Women are not born conserving; their environmental behaviour follows from their work, their dependence on commons and their exclusion from alternatives. Men placed in the same structural position behave similarly, and women with access to destructive opportunities can use them. Resting the case on feminine nature both flatters and traps women, assigning them permanent unpaid custodianship of the planet. The stronger, non-essentialist case is structural: whoever manages resources daily, holds local knowledge and bears the costs of failure must be inside management. In present societies that description fits women to a large extent, which is a fact about social organisation, not about female essence.

The third qualification is that integration is necessary but not sufficient. Gender-inclusive local management cannot by itself correct industrial pollution, fossil-fuel dependence, insecure national policy or global climate forcing, and celebrating village women's tree planting while leaving those structures untouched can become a way of displacing responsibility downwards. Nor are women a uniform group: class, caste, age and location divide their interests, and elite

women's representation does not automatically serve poor women's needs. The prerequisite claim survives these criticisms, but in a disciplined form. Women's integration is a necessary condition for the UN Agenda's environmental and social goals because the goals concern resources women manage, knowledge women hold and costs women bear; it is not a sufficient condition, and its form determines whether it liberates or merely burdens.

Conditions for Genuine Integration

The practical conditions follow from the critique. Rights come first: land and tree tenure, inheritance enforcement and joint titling, so that women who invest in a resource can rely on enjoying its future yield, which is the very logic of sustainability applied to a household. Resources must follow: credit, extension advice, technology and time-saving infrastructure in water, energy and transport, directed to women as producers and managers rather than only as beneficiaries. Representation must carry authority: reserved places are a start, but agenda-setting, chairing, fund control and technical training convert presence into power. Data must be disaggregated by sex, so that time poverty, exposure and benefit-sharing become visible to planners. Finally, men's roles must change too: care and collection work shared, and male officials and community leaders held responsible for inclusion, so that integration is a reform of institutions and not an additional shift imposed on women.

Conclusion

To conclude, sustainable development, as Unit 5 presents it, is development that meets present needs, above all of the poor, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, by holding economic, social and environmental objectives together. Women's integration into environmental management is considered a prerequisite for the UN Agenda

because the agenda's goals run through resources women manage daily, knowledge women uniquely hold in many settings and costs women disproportionately bear; programmes that bypass women have repeatedly failed on exactly these points. The critical evaluation adds necessary discipline: integration must mean rights, resources and authority, not the unpaid recruitment of women as nature's caretakers, and it must accompany, not replace, structural action on pollution, energy and climate. Judged in that disciplined form, the claim stands. A development path that excludes the managers of its water, food, fuel and care from its decisions is not merely unfair. By the definition itself, sacrificing both present equity and future capacity, it is unsustainable.

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