

Gender and Power in Democracy and Environmental Management in Kenya and Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

Democratisation of societies as well as environmental control and management appear set to become two of the major global challenges of the twenty-first century. These two challenges are most critical in the South. Yet women participation in these development issues, while complex and difficult to measure, has gone largely unaccounted for in development. This paper examines two cases, one in Africa the other in Latin America, with a view to establishing the role of women in democracy and environmental control and management. The first case examines the main factors inhibiting women participation in political leadership among the Maasai community in Kenya while the second looks at the contribution of women in Solanda Housing Settlement in Ecuador to their political empowerment, development and change in gender relations. For the two cases respectively, 100 household heads in Narok town were sampled and desk top research conducted. The paper finds that on the one hand, low women participation in politics is mainly due to inherently discriminatory culture as well as policy imbalances that work against women. On the other hand, the contribution of women around the environmental improvement of their neighbourhood to their political empowerment, development and change in gender relations has provided women with the opportunity to assert their key role in tackling environmental problems. The paper concludes that there is need to review the legal framework to ensure gender balance and that the contribution of women around the environmental improvement of their neighbourhood to their political empowerment, development and change in gender relations need to be recognised. It recommends that a review of the legal framework to ensure gender balance should target Acts of Parliament and gender relations at all levels need to be analysed and reflected in urban environmental policy.

Key words: Democracy, Women, Environmental control, Environmental management