

Are women better guardians of natural resources?

MIZAN R KHAN and C EMDAD HAQUE

ALTHOUGH the notion of women being better 'husbands' than their counterparts may seem strange to many men at first, there are solid justifications for this. It is well-known that the root of the word 'husband' is the word 'husbandry', which means taking care of someone or something. Thus, the literal meaning of husband is 'caretaker'. Women continue to play the main role of taking care of the household in most societies – doing all the traditional chores such as taking care of the husbands and children, cooking, washing, cleaning, etc. However, in recent decades, women have stepped into acquiring the main instrument of power at every level – earning money through different forms of gainful employment, although globally, women are paid about half the amount earned by men. What makes them better husbands is reflected in the fact that about 80 cents of a dollar earned by women are invested in family welfare compared to only 30 cents earned by men. In such a discourse, empowerment of women has been a just cause and it continues to remain a prominent global development agenda.

The rapidly changing income or material dimension of power in the household is evident particularly in case of the rural poor. Bangladesh is the living example of promoting women's empowerment through many governmental and non-governmental activities. Microfinance activities figure prominently among them. Many studies have shown that women are better loan repayments than men. As a result, rural women have become the focus of microfinance activities. A recent study published in the *Applied Economics Letters* has revealed that an increase in the proportion of women accessing microfinance by just 15 percent could potentially reduce gender inequality, as measured by the Global Inequality Index, by half in the developing countries. Similarly, poor women accessing income generating activities can help address gender inequality; women working in the garment indus-



A woman worker removing weeds from a mustard field at Poila village in Tangail Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

try in Bangladesh are exemplary in such a case. Cultural characteristics also play a role, such as less time for household chores and freedom to work outside their homes.

However, microfinance did not pay much attention to engaging women in nurturing nature and natural resource-based activities, although women are traditionally linked more to surrounding natural resources for their basic needs, such as fuelwood or water collection. In the past, women did not have much access and control over these resources. Some years ago, a project on Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh (BEGCB) funded by Global Affairs Canada (formerly CIDA) under the University Partnership for Capacity Development programme and implemented by the University of Manitoba, North South University, BRAC University and an NGO, Centre for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), was undertaken. The BEGCB project had an element, carried out by CNRS, of promoting sustainable natural resource management (NRM) through microfinance activities of rural

women in *haor* areas of Moulvibazar and Sylhet. It was found that an unrealised potential of synergy between microfinance operations and NRM programme exists in natural resource-rich areas. Looking for ways in which this potential of women's empowerment and simultaneously nurturing nature could be realised was the central focus of this project component.

For the last few decades millions of small-scale activities undertaken by micro-lenders synergistically had a huge impact on the environment. With such a goal, the CNRS's microfinance component of the project attempted to address several challenges: How can microfinance be used to foster 'green' micro-enterprises that enhance rather than degrade local resources? What are the ways in which one could evaluate whether women-focused activities can provide livelihood improvement without undermining the resource base on which they depend? One of the proposed approaches was to look at the fit between microfinance operations by rural women and ecosystem services. Such questions have been addressed by

the teams of the partnered university students, faculty and the CNRS staff.

The outcomes of this component were quite encouraging. Women members of the mobilised groups proved as better 'husbands' of local resources, establishing a culture of their sustainable use, while conserving and improving the quality and quantity of local natural resources. This experience established the practice of 'greening of microfinance', according to a report on MURI, published by MIT. Field research of few small-scale activities undertaken by Shahidullah and Haque during 2012-2014 revealed that majority of such enterprises are not only sustainable and comply with current ecological standards, but also contribute to generating a number of vital ecosystem services. They also simultaneously maintain reasonably high profit margins, to ensure long-term economic viability. These findings indicate that micro-enterprises, given environmental guidance by developmental NGOs, especially NGO-MFIs, have the potential to make significant ecological contributions and enhance livelihood resilience against the impacts of climate change. Another study by the same

authors compared the ecological outcomes of green microfinance-assisted enterprises and traditional microcredit-assisted enterprises and measured their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Cool Farm Tool software was used to quantify GHGs. Comparison in a designed experiment shows that micro-enterprises employing green strategies emit less GHGs than the ones with traditional strategies. The research revealed that the microfinance-based greening interventions help ensure ecological outcomes for micro-enterprises; thus the combination of the embedded economic and social elements of the classic microfinance model with the new ecological elements supports sustainability. This bottom-up, community-based approach needs pumping internationally, as well as by the government and civil society groups and NGOs.

In addition, under the BEGCB project activities, local women used the natural nutrients and fertilisers for growing vegetables, which maintained the traditional, pleasing age-old taste of produced crops and vegetables, unlike chemical fertiliser-based production and culture fisheries. The latter process increased biomass but with no taste or flavour. Further, one of the ways of sustainable use of renewable resources was found out to be the implementation of the livelihood diversification options away from those resources; for example, a time-off by the fishers from fisheries during the spawning season. Numerous such options were suggested by the local women members of the project community. The result was impressive: both the quality of fisheries in terms of diversity and their quantity kept increasing, the benefits of which local communities now enjoy – the husbandry of nature is being taken care of by the local women and their networked organisations. Who then are better 'husbands' of households, nature and its resources? The womenfolk.

Mizan R Khan is Professor, Department of Environmental Science and Management, North South University, Bangladesh. C Emdad Haque is Professor, Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, Canada.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

A more dangerous globalism

JEREMY ADELMAN and ANNE-LAURE DELATTE

"AMERICA first," thumps Donald Trump. "Britain first," say the advocates of Brexit. "France first," crows Marine Le Pen and her National Front. "Russia first," proclaims Vladimir Putin's Kremlin. With so much emphasis on national sovereignty nowadays, globalisation appears doomed.

It's not. The struggle playing out today is not one of globalism versus anti-globalism. Rather, the world is poised between two models of integration: one is multilateral and internationalist; the other is bilateral and imperialist. Throughout the modern age, the world has seasawed between them.

Since 1945, internationalists have had the upper hand. They advocate cooperation and multilateral institutions to promote global public goods like peace, security, financial stability, and environmental sustainability. There is a model that constrains national sovereignty by binding states to shared norms, conventions, and treaties.

The year 2016 tipped the scales toward bilateralists, who regard national sovereignty as an end in itself. The fewer external constraints, the better: peace and security result from a balance of great powers. There is a model that favours the strong and punishes the weak, and that rewards competitors at the

expense of cooperators.

For most of the nineteenth century, integration was a hybrid of internationalism and imperialism. Free trade became gospel, mass migration was welcomed, and countries embraced new global norms, like the First Geneva Convention, concluded in 1864 to cover the treatment of the sick and wounded on the battlefield. Globalisers could also be bullies: the 1842 Treaty of Nanking between Britain and China subordinated the Middle Kingdom to the West. And bilateral imperialism's ugliest face was reflected in Europeans' carve-up of Africa into exclusive possessions.

In the most horrific period in human history, bilateralism had the upper hand. Between 1914 and 1945, the pursuit of national grandeur led to ruinous economic rivalry and mass violence. The Wall Street crash of 1929 kicked the legs out from under a struggling international order. Country after country turned inward; by 1933, world trade collapsed to one-third its 1929 level.

Fueled by racism and fears of overcrowding, globalism turned predatory: powerful countries imposed uneven trade pacts on neighbours and partners, or simply overran them. Japan set its sights on Manchuria in 1931 to create a puppet state, and invaded China in 1937. The Soviets dealt with Russian bor-



A journalist holds up a poster featuring portraits of President Vladimir Putin, France's National Front leader Marine Le Pen and President Donald Trump.

PAVEL GOLOVKIN/AP PHOTO

derlands in the same spirit. The Nazis forced treaties on weaker neighbours and seized others, then sought to depopulate Slavic lands to make way for Teutonic settlers.

The brutality of bilateralism prompted US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to draft the Atlantic Charter in 1941. A blueprint for a post-war order, it declared that freedom was the cornerstone of peace and that bilateralism had to be curbed. No more grabbing. No more tariff bullying. Freedom of the seas.

What came of the Allies' victory in World War II and the Atlantic Charter was a Global New Deal: by agreeing to play by international rules and institutions, countries could participate in the post-war bonanza. European integration was at the core of this experiment in multilateral globalism; with Franco-German reconciliation, Europe, a chronic conflict zone, became a region of exemplary cooperators.

Restraining national sovereignty allowed global trade, investment, and migration to buoy post-war prosper-

ity. Billions escaped poverty. Relative peace was maintained.

But the Global New Deal seems to have run its course. For too many people, the world became messy, risky, stultifying, and threatening – the opposite of what the Atlantic Charter envisioned. After 1980, global integration was accompanied by rising domestic inequality. While the horizon of opportunities widened for educated cosmopolitans in big cities, the bonds between citizens weakened as national social contracts were dismantled.

As the blurring of global divides deepened domestic cleavages, the stage was set for bilateralists to come storming back. In the wings, leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin yearned for a return to a world of muscular sovereignty, unrestrained by multilateral niceties. They now have more company in key countries.

Two days after his inauguration, Trump announced that the US would have "another chance" to seize Iraqi oil. He then withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and vowed to re-negotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. The future of the hard-won Paris climate agreement is now in doubt. Charges of currency manipulation and threats of protectionist measures have intensified. With the UK, which gave the world free trade in the 1840s, having now decided to go it alone, the old Atlantic Charter

allies are putting national sovereignty ahead of global public goods.

Now the global spotlight turns to France and its looming presidential election. At stake is the sputtering Franco-German engine that has driven European integration and kept it at the centre of the post-war multilateral system. A victory for Le Pen in early May would spell the end of the EU, leaving German Chancellor Angela Merkel as the final pillar of a crumbling world order. The country most refurbished by post-1945 internationalism would be its last bastion, surrounded by bilateralists in France, the UK, and Russia, with its main patron, the US, in the hands of nativists.

Imagine the scene a few weeks after a Le Pen victory, when the G7 leaders gather in a gilded hotel in Taormina, Sicily. The US and Canada are feuding over NAFTA. The UK is squabbling with France and Germany over Brexit. Japan is reeling from the demise of the TPP. And, as they turn their backs on global commitments, refugees, drowning by the boatload in the surrounding sea, provide an epitaph for a bygone era.

Jeremy Adelman is Director of the Global History Lab at Princeton University. Anne-Laure Delatte is a research scholar at the National Center for Scientific Research of France, EconomiX, affiliated at OFCE, and a visiting lecturer at Princeton University.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2017. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

QUOTABLE Quote

RONALD REAGAN
American politician and actor; 40th President of the United States.

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Canning needs
- 5 Cube face
- 11 One of the Baldwins
- 12 Sell
- 13 One and the other
- 14 Give a new title to
- 15 Vast expanse
- 16 Name of 12 popes
- 17 Pol's concern
- 19 Daiquiri ingredient
- 22 Like urban areas
- 24 Act part
- 26 At any time
- 27 Singer Redding
- 28 Grows weary
- 30 Anger
- 31 Spots on TV
- 32 Uniform material

DOWN

- 1 Pokes roughly
- 2 Lotion additive
- 3 Lawyer's fees
- 4 Univ. or acad.
- 5 Parsley serving
- 6 Lines
- 7 Fancy planters
- 8 Gardner of movies
- 9 "Losing My Religion" band
- 10 Pupil's place
- 16 Spot to jot
- 18 Just
- 19 Merchants
- 20 Mile or meter
- 21 Screen
- 22 Letter after epsilon
- 23 "Ars Amatoria" poet
- 25 Bottle plug
- 29 Slopes topper
- 30 Simple card game
- 33 Boot parts
- 34 Undiluted
- 36 Symmetry line
- 37 ERA or RBI
- 38 Powerful people
- 39 Tennis need
- 40 Expected
- 41 Catch some z's

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PELF WEAVE
AXELS EATEN
PUTUPAFRONT
EDSANTNEE
REGARDSEER
DOVERERRS
ADOBE
SACSMETAL
ARUTERODED
MTSODEACE
PUTUPAFIGHT
AROSETRIER
NOMANSORE