

# WHY WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE

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Over the last few centuries, our minds, our lives, our food have been dominated by a paradigm of knowledge, which discounts relationships, in nature, and between nature and humans. Not observing connections and relations, this paradigm generates technologies that disrupt ecological processes, tear apart ecosystems and living organisms and do all this in the name of 'growth' and 'improvement'.

The rise of a mechanistic science to its current status is linked to the domination and marginalization of women as holders of knowledge. The three centuries of marginalization of women's traditional knowledge needs to be corrected. The correction of this historical injustice is vital for gender justice and women's empowerment.

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There are several key characteristics of women's traditional knowledge that make it important for our future:

- It is holistic, not reductionist.
- It is experientially rooted, not abstract and disconnected.
- It is inspired by maximizing the common good, not private profit.
- It is a common heritage, collective and cumulative, not private property covered by patents and intellectual property rights.
- It is based on diversity and multiplicity, not on the 'monoculture of the mind' and one dimensionality.
- It is knowledge for life, from life, not knowledge that is anti-life, short term and non-sustainable.



*Women's traditional knowledge is vital not just for women's equality but for planetary health and humanity's survival.*





A woman in the Himalayan foothills ties a sacred thread on a tree, pledging to contribute to community forest conservation.

### Holistic Knowledge

Nature is a web of life. To know it involves knowledge of the strands of the web, the interconnections, and the relationships. Modern reductionist science breaks down a whole into its parts, studies the parts and never understands how the part relates to the whole. Women's traditional knowledge is based on knowing the whole.

### Experimental Knowledge

Women's traditional knowledge has evolved through practice, through experience. It is grounded and tested through life. Women's expertise differs from the abstract knowledge of today's 'experts' – the financial experts of Wall Street who have brought down the world's economy through their abstract concepts of derivatives and collateral debt obligations, or the biotechnology experts who are unscrambling the fragile tree of life.

### Knowledge for the common good

Women's traditional knowledge is aimed at maximizing the common good, not private gain. Women's knowledge of healing heals the whole unlike the pharmaceutical industry, which treats symptoms, or parts with the aim of maximizing profits, not health.

### Knowledge as Commons

Women's traditional knowledge is a shared heritage. It is not patented. Women have shared their knowledge of Neem as a pest control agent. W.R. Grace and USDA patented this knowledge and Navdanya/RFSTE had to fight for 11 years to bring the knowledge back to the commons. Women's knowledge of biodiversity is a commons. It is not 'enclosed' by 'intellectual property'.

### Diversity as a way of knowing

In contrast to the 'monocultures of the mind' that dominate the contemporary ecological and intellectual landscape, women's ways of knowing are based on diversity, pluralism and multiplicity.

### The real life sciences

It is not based on the anti-life urge of the destructive sciences like genetic engineering, which create 'terminator seeds' and call themselves 'life sciences'.

*Women's traditional knowledge is the basis of the real life sciences because it grows from life and nourishes life.*