Dear EarthTalk: I heard about a group called the Women's Earth Alliance that works on environmental projects in many parts of the world. What kinds of projects? -- *Judy Stack, Barre, VT*

The Women's Earth Alliance (WEA) supports community groups around the world that work at the intersection of women's rights and the environment. A project of the Berkeley, California-based David Brower Center, WEA partners with local women-led community groups engaged in finding solutions to vexing environmental problems. WEA helps women secure their rights and safety and remove barriers to full participation in society by supporting them in addressing the environmental issues impacting their lives. By bringing women's leadership to these critical environmental issues, WEA helps bring vital voices, perspectives and participation to addressing the greatest and most basic challenges of our time.

The idea for WEA emerged from a 2006 meeting in Mexico City where 30 women leaders from 26 countries gathered to address how women can do more to address today's environmental challenges. WEA offers training and resources around issues of water, land, food and climate change, operating on the guiding principle that "when women thrive, communities, the environment and future generations thrive."

Of utmost importance to WEA is securing women's access to basic resources (food, land and water) so they can enjoy economic, social and political security. Since women in many societies are responsible for the management of food and water, the group reports, they can "experience both the unequal burden of work to secure and prepare the family's food and water as well as the vulnerability which results from traditional gender roles at home and gender discrimination in society." Women also tend to be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, says WEA: "Women in underserved communities find themselves on the front lines of climate impacts, often witnessing their water sources and traditional land bases shift or disappear because of a dangerous mix of changing temperatures and structural inequalities."

Currently WEA focuses on three geographic areas: India, North America and Africa. Its India Program supports small and emerging women's groups that are promoting food sovereignty, traditional knowledge and advocating for the rights of women farmers. The group's trainings, advocacy and movement building have enabled thousands of poor Indian women to become environmental leaders in their communities.

In North America, WEA links pro bono legal, policy and business advocates across the continent with Indigenous women leading environmental campaigns. "Through rapid response advocacy, long-term policy working groups, trainings and delegations, WEA's innovative advocacy partnerships protect sacred sites, promote energy justice, and ensure environmental health on Indigenous lands," the group reports.

And in Africa, WEA partnered with Crabgrass, a California-based human rights group, to create the Global Women's Water Initiative (GWWI) that provides training to help people implement water related strategies to improve their communities' health, self reliance and resilience to climate change. With GWWI, WEA and Crabgrass are building a cadre of advanced female trainers skilled in applying holistic solutions with appropriate technology to environmental problems regarding water, sanitation and hygiene.

CONTACTS: WEA, www.womensearthalliance.org ; Crabgrass, www.crabgrassusa.org .

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