ABSTRACT. This description of the quality of life today for women begins with information on indicators such as income, population, refugees, percent women in political office or boardrooms. The goal for civil society is defined as the survival of the Earth without which other concerns are tangential. The key to effective policies is to measure the cause and effects of environmental degradation and find ways to provide feedback to the decision-makers and ourselves to change behavior. Better quality of life for women means improvement for children and men too. Groups such as Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and coalitions, e.g., Earth Summit Watch, Beijing Watch, provide feedback on progress made from United Nations summits and bodies such as the World Bank. Both current economic policies and military actions harm life on Earth. The abilities of women are needed at all levels to effect change and "dance with the universe". Useful resources and organizations are listed in appendix.

To examine the quality of life for women I will begin with some facts on the present situation. Although women are 52% of the population in Canada, they are 49% of the globally and are on the decrease due to selective abortions, poor nutrition, discrimination and violence. Of the world's 1.3 poorest billion people 70% are female. Women are the majority of refugees, of illiterates, of handicapped and of victims of war. Women perform about 60% of the world's work but earn only 1% of the world's income. In spite of the advances of women in universities and businesses only one percent of executives in corporate and financial boardrooms are female. These social indicators speak dramatically of women's lack of power.

Related to this situation is the fact that 10% of seats in national parliaments are occupied by women, a decrease of 4 1/2% from 1988. Only Bangladesh has reserved places (30%) in its parliament for women although other countries such as Sweden and Norway have higher percentages and the world's best child and welfare legislation. Coincidence? I think not.

It is not useful to give a litany of complaints. That can only lead to despair, a feeling which cannot give us the energy or guidance we need.

Instead I want to define what our goal is and how we can get there. Even if we grew more food, democratized our political systems, limited population, cleaned up our water, land and air, ended armed conflict and learned to live at peace — the steps most necessary for the human race — even if we did all that and did not fully preserve our home, this Earth, then, no matter how good our quality of life for a few more years, we would still not survive as a species. This is obvious yet we continue to act in defiance or contradiction to this new bottom line. Of necessity, survival of the Earth is our goal.

It would help if the necessary courses of action were clear. Because our understanding of the webs of nature are incomplete, to say the least, our actions are sporadic and tentative. At each step we must pause to ask, If this action is taken will it make the problem better or worse in the long run? This run, we are advised, should be seven generations.

One of the most powerful and inspired books on this topic was Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). We are slow learners, the frogs and the butterflies are now almost silent and invisible.

The very silence calls for closing a feedback loop. Our actions have consequences, some from nature, some as a result of citizen protest and initiatives. It is the process of evaluation so as to indicate and bring about the necessary feedback that I would like to investigate.

At a family level the feedback loop is most visible when a baby is fed and loved and smiles back at you and you continue to love it. It’s a reaction few can resist. Good work gives good results; it makes us feel good.

Let’s apply this concept to CO₂ emissions. The more cars we drive, the more smog and acid rain are produced, the more trees die. We can and do react by organizing to plant more trees to sequester CO₂ and by limiting CO₂ emissions with fuel efficient cars — negative feedback. Or we could react by installing more air-conditioners — positive feedback. One reaction will help, the other will make matters worse. More difficult are the actions of ending the advertising of cars, delinking cars with machismo ego trips and ostentatious consumerism. With a broader perspective we could help preserve rainforests by not eating meat. We could reorganize our cities so that private cars are not as necessary.