



WECF | Women in Europe for a Common Future

Women Civil Society Leaders Report on Women's Concrete Actions on Climate Change Linking Strong Climate Solutions with Gender Equality

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Warsaw, Poland: A diverse group of seven women leaders from civil society called for urgent and concrete action on climate solutions and for linking these solutions with gender equality at the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP 19) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Sabine Bock, Climate and Energy Director for Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) the organizer of the event, called on the government parties at COP 19:

"You need to leave your differences behind and to focus on making progress towards an international agreement that maximizes our response to climate change while safeguarding human rights."

Bock called for a paradigm shift from profit-driven development to social and ecological transformation that also ensures gender equitable outcomes and congratulated the COP for putting gender on the agenda during the first week of the COP.

Teresita Vistro of the Philippines representing National Federation of Women Farmers, and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) said that women and men experience climate change differently.

Vistro said: *"Gender inequality worsens women's coping capacity. This has been clearly shown in the recent Haiyan tragedy in the Philippines. The worst affected area is Eastern Visayas.. Accounts that we get from the ground, estimate that more women and children died as they are the ones in the communities together with children and older people. So that when the storm surge accompanied by tidal waves lashed their communities, they were not able to get out of their homes, and drowned."*

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She said that Haiyan has underscored the need for women to be at the center of disaster preparedness plans and in building resilience of communities. She noted that women have knowledge of potential solutions but are not being included.

“The government sees the men as the head of households and therefore they are the ones consulted.”

“The indigenous women that we organize, they have traditional ways of predicting an impending storm; their accounts say that when a certain species of bird flies in droves for days, that signals that a storm is coming. Seeing this, women start preparing their homes, storing food to sustain them in the duration of the storm. WHO CAN SAY THIS IS NOT SCIENCE? They have been in possession of this knowledge and have been guiding their lives for hundreds of years.”

“It is heartening to note in the various negotiations particularly from African countries echoing the importance of traditional knowledge of women, indigenous and local communities but unfortunately these are still voices in the wilderness in this COP.”

Isis Alvarez representing the Global Forest Coalition from Colombia called on the forum to focus on socially-just and sound forest policies that allow women to have a more active involvement in the way they manage their forests sustainably. **Alvarez said:**

“Forest dependent people's; Indigenous peoples, peasants, pastoralists and especially women often carry the main burden of trade-offs and offset approaches such as REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation).” She continued:

“Women are seldom involved in these projects both as participants in decision-making from [these] payment schemes that allow polluters to continue with 'business as usual,'”

Kalyani Raj came to COP 19 as a part of a WECF women leaders training program. Representing the All India Women's Conference. **According to Raj,**

“most rural women [in India] have traditional knowledge of climate adaption passed on from generations. They are imbedded in their way of life as a means of survival.

“Devices like solar lanterns and solar cookers are viewed by women as efficient alternate energy resources and ideally these can be upscaled to complement traditional knowledge to work out effective mitigation and adaption strategies.”

“Another reason we emphasize gender equality is that, in the context of India, it has been observed that in any post disaster displaced population 4% of women are pregnant of which 15% experience obstetrics complications that risk their lives. We therefore definitely need a gender sensitive climate policy at all levels.”

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Emilia Reyes attended COP 19 as both a civil society representative from Equidad de Genero and as a member of the Mexican Delegation. **Reyes** noted that the parties to COP 19 took a step forward in favour of gender equality under the home of the UNFCCC.

“An agreed document under the SBI (item 19) has set a concrete floor on which we will stand in the years to follow to take substantive action to institutionalize the gender perspective.” said Reyes.

It is a positive point of entry, since Parties proposed a number of ways in which gender balance, gender sensitive climate policies and the effective participation of women could be strengthened under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol.”

“In the years to come we are sure that the Convention will do its best efforts to support what Parties agree in the use of existing methodologies and the development of new ones. Mexico has a strong legal and instrumental framework in that line, so we would be happy to share our best practices in the process.

She noted that a two-year work program could be a good start towards an on-going platform under the Convention. **Reyes concluded:** *“A solid process to substantive gender equality has already started, and Mexico will bring its best efforts to support it.”*

Ulrike Röhr of GenderCC/LIFE e.V. of Germany is a veteran of the UNFCCC process having participated in women’s activities at the COPs since COP 1 in Berlin in 1995.

From the perspective of a long view, Röhr said: *“We have seen lots of progress made [at the UNFCCC] in recent years on gender equality. The Gender Decision and the in-session-workshop on gender and climate change provide us with the ground, and seeds for gender equality have been sown. On the other hand, a lot still has to be done.”*

Röhr continued: *“Our sectoral gender and climate change experts can help to answer the questions what gender sensitive mitigation means, or how to collect data, and which data to collect, in order to meaningfully report on progress (and failures).”*

Röhr also said that men who are capable of and willing to challenge their own societal roles are urgently needed to engage in the gender debates and she called for the introduction and funding of a gender expert in the Secretariat of the UNFCCC secretariat.

“We call upon parties [to the UNFCCC] for additional funding for a supplementary budget earmarked to increase gender capacity in the Secretariat.”

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The final speaker of the group, **Osprey Orielle Lake** of the International Women's Earth and Climate Initiative in the US reported on the International Women's Summit on Climate Change and Sustainability Solutions that took place in New York in September of this year where 100 women leaders from 40+ countries met for three and one half days of deliberations.

The Summit brought together policy-makers, grassroots, Indigenous and business women leaders including Dr. Jane Goodall, Dr. Vandana Shiva, Hon. Mary Robinson, and the Hon. Marina Silva. Indigenous leaders from the forests of Congo and the Amazon also joined with others to create an action agenda to address root causes of and outline real solutions to climate change

that will be released early in 2014 as a part of a *Women's Climate Action Agenda*.

The delegates to the Summit also drafted and released a Declaration calling for urgent action on climate change.

Lake explained: *"Among our key concerns, we are calling for climate justice and for new economic indicators. It is no longer tolerable to continue business as usual. Women are demanding transformational leadership to address urgent action at the level that nature and science are telling us is needed. Nature is not waiting for governments to debate and women are not waiting to take action. Women's voices must be heard."*

Lake continued: *"The Summit Declaration Statement is founded on a rights based approach including Rights of Women, Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Rights of Nature and Rights of Future Generations."*

Ulrike Röhr of GenderCC/LIFE e.V. of Germany closed the press conference on a cautionary note: *"Despite progress that has been made on gender in the UNFCCC, the negotiations remain stagnant. You cannot mainstream gender concerns into a zero outcome. We need negotiators to walk the talk on gender AND climate change!"*

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