

## **Gender and Climate Change at Copenhagen COP-15: WEDO's Perspective on a History-making Year**

*Women have been engaged in the climate change debate since it began, but in 2009, a historic level of attention focused on the intersection between gender equality and a changing climate. More women than ever before participated in the climate negotiations and, for the first time, gender equality and equity were addressed specifically in those negotiations, as well as in other global and national fora. This year, WEDO will continue to advocate for integration of a gender perspective into the anticipated legally binding outcome of COP-16 and to influence implementation activities around the globe to advance gender equality and promote women's rights and resilience.*

### **The lead-up to Copenhagen**

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992 as the major global framework to address climate change, one of the world's gravest problems. The UNFCCC and its binding 1997 Kyoto Protocol (KP), primarily focused on emissions reductions, both ignored the social aspects of climate change impacts and solutions. In 2007, the UNFCCC 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP) produced the Bali Action Plan (BAP), a two-year process by which every major component of climate change was to be addressed: a shared vision for long-term cooperative action as well as enhanced action on mitigation, adaptation, technology development and transfer, capacity building and finance. The comprehensive BAP process offered a prime opportunity for the global community to shift its focus on climate change – recognizing it as more than a strictly environmental or economic issue – and advocates quickly mobilized around pressing social issues. As gender equality is a prerequisite for both sustainable development and poverty eradication – both principles of the UNFCCC and pillars of the BAP – it became an integral component to moving discussions forward toward a comprehensive and just outcome of climate change negotiations. WEDO, an organization founded around the Earth Summit, when the UNFCCC began, has been partnering with and coordinating advocates from every region of the world to influence this process.

### **Copenhagen reflections – from a gender perspective**

COP-15 did not result in a comprehensive agreed outcome – a major disappointment to advocates and Parties alike, a setback for international decision-making processes and, most importantly, a threat to those communities already feeling the brunt of climate change. The negotiating period has now been extended through 2010 so that Parties can continue to work on every aspect of the BAP, as well as integrate other components such as the mitigation mechanisms under the KP, aiming to culminate in a COP-16 agreement.

#### *Copenhagen Accord*

Far from a comprehensive, binding agreement, the *Copenhagen Accord*, a sparse 12-paragraph document with few details, was produced as a COP-15 output. It was composed by 26 Parties and introduced on 18 December 2009, the last day of the climate negotiations. The *Copenhagen Accord* is controversial; it makes promises but lacks legally binding commitments and, as it was not negotiated or debated by all of the 194 parties to the UNFCCC, many Parties and Observers question its viability. As of 31 January, the deadline for Parties to associate themselves with the *Accord*, less than 60 countries have provided the necessary information. The 12 points of the *Accord* only vaguely reflect the BAP's comprehensive components; they contain a meager emissions target, optional pledges to finance adaptation and mitigation projects lacking a mechanism to manage the pledges, and the *Accord* in no way includes the social language, much less the gender equality texts, which had become common to the climate talks throughout the year.

### *Gender Equality Texts*

There is good news, however. While Parties struggled to come to agreement on any one of the BAP areas, history was made in another way: support for gender equality language increased exponentially and, for the first time, various gender-sensitive texts were incorporated into negotiating documents, peaking at 40+. The numbers of gender texts decreased along with the size of the drafts as negotiations intensified, but the scope and substance of the references remained strong. Support for gender equality principles did not waver in Copenhagen; advocates found allies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Small Island Developing States, the Arab League and the industrialized countries, notably the Nordic States, ultimately securing 8 strong references in the draft decisions proposed to the COP for its consideration and adoption. These texts noted women's acute vulnerability but also emphasized the importance of a gender perspective and equitable participation of women and men at all stages of addressing climate change causes and impacts.

### *Women's Participation*

Not only did gender texts increase, but so did women's participation. In Copenhagen, women comprised about 30% of registered country delegates, the largest percentage of women attending a COP meeting on record. The UNFCCC also recognized the provisional status of a Women and Gender Constituency<sup>1</sup>, providing the formal space for civil society actors to contribute to the debate and strengthen gender positions in the UNFCCC processes. The downside, to put it mildly, was the extremely restricted access to the conference venue to all COP registrants – mostly affecting NGOs. As WEDO firmly believes in stakeholder participation and the importance of the Agenda 21 major groups, we will be working with the Constituency on identifying opportunities for meaningful participation of women.

### *Women's Leadership*

The year saw numerous women delegates chairing working groups, contact groups and plenary sessions, a notable change from past years. Female Presidents and high-level officials, such as US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Finnish President Tarja Halonen, joined side events such as WEDO's to discuss gender and climate change and champion the language included in the negotiating texts. Margaret Mukahanana-Sangarwe of Zimbabwe was named new Chair of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) – the body tasked with addressing all aspects of the BAP.

### **Beyond Copenhagen – a call for action**

While Copenhagen was not what many expected it to be, nor what it should have been, all hope is not lost. Countries continue to work with the draft decisions to develop a binding post-2012 agreement for COP-16 in December 2010. But the work cannot wait until December; the first official meeting is scheduled for April and the negotiations are expected to be rigorous throughout the year. Advocates must not falter in efforts to ensure a gender perspective to the climate change debate, and WEDO is keeping the momentum going by continuing to work with Parties and civil society alike. Preparing to launch a 2010 advocacy team, representing various regions and expertise, WEDO and partners will continue to serve as technical advisors to negotiators and liaise with NGO and other stakeholders. WEDO also supports governments in implementing their national adaptation plans and incorporating gender and climate change into development strategies and actions. In the face of a changing climate, WEDO is more committed than ever to meeting our goal of a just, equitable and gender-responsive global climate change framework. WEDO will continue leading and improving upon advocacy and research efforts already under way, in an effort to improve the lives of women and men the world over.

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<sup>1</sup> The Constituency is comprised of women and gender organizations who are official Observers to the UNFCCC, including GenderCC, LIFE e.v., ENERGIA via ETC, WECF, PAI and WEDO.