

Summary Report:
“U.S. Climate Change Policy: Why Women Matter”
Women Demand U.S. Action on Climate Change (WDACC) Campaign
Friday, March 14, 2008
Oxfam Conference Room, Washington, DC

I. SUMMARY

On March 14, 2008, in Washington, DC, the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) hosted a launch event entitled “U.S. Climate Change Policy: Why Women Matter” to launch their new campaign, Women Demand U.S. Action on Climate Change (WDACC). Supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) and the Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) North America, and co-sponsored by Oxfam America, InterAction, 1Sky, Feminist Majority, National Organization for Women (NOW), U.S. Climate Action Network (USCAN) and Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC), the event was the first of its kind in an effort to unite women’s and environmental organizations around the issue of climate change. An expert panel discussion was followed by a strategy session, both of which contributed to the preparation of activities and messaging for the WDACC campaign. A wide variety of participants contributed to a very successful event, which built strong momentum for WDACC.

II. INTRODUCTION

Liane Schalatek of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, an important partner of WEDO’s on gender and climate change work both globally and in the WDACC campaign, introduced the mission of HBF, as well as the day’s agenda and the purpose of the gathering. Jessica Bailey of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, also a key contributor to the WDACC campaign, gave a brief introduction to WDACC and to RBF’s work on climate change.

III. PANEL DISCUSSION

The panelists included Gawain Kripke of Oxfam America, WEDO Executive Director June Zeitlin and Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin Barbara Lawton. Gillian Caldwell, the Director of 1Sky, moderated the panel and introduced the topic of climate change, the vulnerability of women to its impacts, and the strength of women as leaders in climate change policy-making.

Kripke provided an overview of the severity and timeliness of the issue of climate change and presented reasons as to why climate change is occurring, as well as why its impacts must be mitigated so urgently. On a PowerPoint presentation, he showed maps of areas most likely to be affected by environmental instabilities. Kripke also addressed the vulnerability of women; he stated that climate change is not “gender

neutral” and that, therefore, mitigation and adaptation strategies should be prepared with a gender perspective. He suggested that the WDACC Campaign should advocate for equitable policies and that women should become leaders in those policy-making processes.

Zeitlin focused more specifically on the vulnerabilities of women to the impacts of climate change, as well as on the role of the United States. As the largest emitter of greenhouse gases per capita, she said, the U.S. must urgently take responsibility as the world’s major superpower. She further noted that U.S. inaction on climate change has global implications, the worst of which affects women in developing countries. While states are beginning to take steps to reduce emissions independently or regionally, the federal government still fails to take action. In her conclusion, Zeitlin outlined recommendations for U.S. policy-makers to mitigate climate change both domestically and globally.

Lt. Gov. Lawton spoke of the climate change legislation she is pushing for in her state of Wisconsin, as well as the harsh resistance to those policies she continually faces. Wisconsin is particularly concerned about preservation issues, she said, most notably because of the pristine waters of the Great Lakes, one of the largest freshwater sources in the world. Lawton drew a parallel between the deterioration of that resource to the impacts of climate change felt around the world, and said that the experiences of women in the Midwest must be tied to those of women in the developing world. Legislators tend not to understand the full implications of climate change, Lawton stated, and few women leaders have engaged in the issues to date. Empowering women leaders to engage in climate change policy-making should be a top priority. Empowering women to run for offices typically held by men would also ensure a gendered perspective to climate negotiations, said Lawton.

The panel presentations were followed by a brief question-and-answer period, during which attendees asked a variety of questions about women’s role in climate change. The audience and panelists engaged in a fruitful discussion on issues such as women and technology and other cross-cutting issues that could be addressed when confronting women and climate change.

IV. STRATEGY SESSION

After a short break, approximately half of the attendees of the panel session participated in a strategic discussion that covered a wide range of issues related to climate change. The discussion began with the overall question, how can we reach women? How can we engage women on the issue of climate change? Many suggestions were made, and the conversation will help to shape the priorities of the WDACC campaign. Certainly many more questions were also raised, and various outstanding issues will continue to be addressed in future discussions, events and campaign activities.

An issue that came up during the strategy session was the lack of women leaders in U.S. climate change policy-making. Several participants expressed a concern that elected officials do not address climate change from a women's perspective. The following were some suggestions:

- Directly involve women from businesses and corporations in the WDACC campaign;
- Analyze Cap and Trade and other market-based climate change “solutions” from a feminist or gendered perspective;
- Use the WDACC campaign as an opportunity for women to put “development” back on the policy-making table;
- Monitor where the money is being allocated in both U.S. and global climate change policies; and finally,
- Engage women in the financing of both mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Another topic of discussion throughout the session was reproductive health and population. Reproductive rights and reproductive justice were raised as being critical in considering women's vulnerability to climate change. It was also noted that women's rights language must be employed to focus on the empowering of women to achieve their human rights, rather than on “population”.

Other critical issues included gender and poverty, gender and racial justice, and technology and environmental justice. As the campaign progresses and builds partnerships across the women's and environmental movements, these are issues that will be further explored.

As the initial question for the strategy session suggested, a concern is how to critically engage women in discussions and actions on climate change. The language used is of particular importance, especially in the merging of various social, economic and environmental movements. Linking women around the world via shared experiences might be one important strategy, and the sharing of stories by women from different parts of the globe could be one way of achieving that. Education on the issues will also be critical—i.e. providing resource materials to women's organizations about environmental issues and, similarly, providing resources to environmental organizations on gender issues. Clear definitions of goals will help campaign partners articulate messages to their particular audiences.

Strategy session participants agreed that the time to act is now, and that the WDACC campaign should focus on broad messages and not delay in deliberating over small details. Women must be urgently engaged to vote on climate issues, and politicians need to hear the message that women are educated on these issues and will vote accordingly. Congress must act for gender equity in climate change policy-making. It was further noted that this campaign should use the presidential elections as an opportunity to strongly advocate for gender equality and action on climate change. A “Sisters of the Planet” conference was suggested to encourage women to become leaders on these issues and perhaps incorporate a strong woman leader as a

spokesperson. Immediately engaging in activities like 1Sky's Mother's Day campaign will fortify the nascent WDACC goals and provide opportunities for action.

V. OUTCOMES OF STRATEGY SESSION AND NEXT STEPS FOR WDACC

The main goals of the WDACC campaign are:

1. Outreach to and education for women's and environmental organizations about the importance of a gender perspective and involving women in U.S. climate change policy-making, and
2. Mobilizing women's organizations to join with environmental and other social justice organizations to advocate for strong U.S. climate change policies with a gender perspective.

WEDO is partnering with CCMC to pair advocacy expertise with media messaging expertise. Initial WDACC activities include creating messages targeted to specific audiences (eg. women's organizations' constituencies). WEDO will be participating in many upcoming conferences and workshops to continue raising awareness around these topics and strengthen partnerships. A new listserv, WDACCUS@googlegroups.com, will help disseminate information and serve as a forum for continued strategizing and sharing of ideas.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The March 14th event was successful, both as the launch of the WDACC Campaign and as an opportunity for various organizations to share ideas, questions and strategies. Two concrete goals for the WDACC campaign emerged, and solid partnerships were formed to shape activities to meet those goals. WEDO is delighted to serve as the main organizer of the campaign and will continue to share updates and progress as the campaign builds momentum. Suggestions, questions or concerns can always be sent to the Campaign Coordinator, Rachel Harris, at Rachel@wedo.org.

VII. “U.S. Climate Change Policy: Why Women Matter” Participant List

Jessica Bailey	Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF)
Liane Schalatek	Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF)
Gillian Caldwell	1Sky
Gawain Kripke	Oxfam America
Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton	State of Wisconsin, USA
June Zeitlin	WEDO
Emily Tynes	CCMC
Ada Aroneanu	1Sky
Pam Sparr	Church World Service (CWS)
Kathy Hall	UN Foundation (UNF)
Tyler Edgar	National Council of Churches (NCC)
Susan Bass	Earth Day Network (EDN)
Caitlin Werrell	EDN
Nancy Tate	League of Women Voters
Zaida Arguedas	League of Women Voters
Shireen Mitchell	Digital Sisters
Melody Drnach	NOW
Thu Cao	InterAction
Suzanne Kindervatter	InterAction
Kim Darter	InterAction
Jacqueline Nolley Echegaray	Moriah Fund
Jessica Arons	Center for American Progress
Laura Schweitzer	American Forests
Mercedes Mack	Jubilee USA
Amy Coen	Population Action International (PAI)
Mark Bryan	PAI
Maria Forster	HBF
David Turnbull	USCAN
Ben Nuckels	Office of Lt. Gov. Lawton
Joelle Maruniak	Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
Liz Carty	Oxfam
Becks Gowland	Oxfam GB
Michelle Quibell	National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Claire Greensfelder	International Forum on Globalization (IFG/ WEZF)
Kim Otis	National Council of Women’s Organizations (NCWO)
Donna Edwards	Arca Foundation
Annie Lipsitz	Arca Foundation
Mary Fridley	WEDO
Rachel Harris	WEDO
Leah Stern*	WEDO

(This list was drafted from the sign-in sheets; if you know someone inadvertently left off, please let us know!)

** Special thanks go to Leah Stern for the preparations that went into this event.*