



Women's Environment & Development Organization

Press Conference of the Women and Gender Constituency to the UNFCCC, April 10, 2010

Statement by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), represented by Sandra Freitas

It is a real pleasure to participate in this press conference with the women and gender constituency members and to present WEDO's perspective regarding key achievements that have been made during the last year of negotiation -- achievements on which it will be very important to build this year.

I hope I do not really need to recall why Gender and Climate Change should be addressed simultaneously and at this level, that means at international level, in this multilateral process taking place within the UNFCCC.

Coming from Togo, I experience every day that the impacts of climate change are not gender neutral and are likely to exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Generally, impacts to women will be more severe because of socially constructed gender roles. While men generally are engaged in productive tasks that earn income, women are more responsible for reproductive household activities. Time spent on these activities cuts into education and formal wage opportunities and will worsen as resources become scarcer and weather patterns more unpredictable. It is obvious that these gender roles impact the cycle of poverty.

Where women are not represented in decision-making capacities, their needs are often left unnoticed or unmet -- whether in national government or local development planning. And this lack of women's participation is also obvious in international debate and moreover in this climate change negotiation

But, women are critical to climate change solutions. For decades, even centuries, women have been coping with changing environmental conditions. Some of these coping strategies may translate into adaptation strategies. BUT, swift climate change impacts may reduce the capacity of women to cope with changes.

Thus, women's knowledge, needs and input must be part of decision-making at local, national and international levels. Women need to be in partnerships to offer solutions and develop appropriate technology, credit schemes and training opportunities that will benefit women and by extension the whole community.

Why was Copenhagen held up as THE big moment for gender and climate change?

The UNFCCC was the only Convention among the Rio Conventions and other major agreements with very few social justice components and no gender dimensions. From the adoption of this convention in 1992 to the COP 14 in 2008, all the debates were missing a vital gender component.

Since 2007, WEDO, the GGCA and other partners have been actively engaged in advocacy activity, which associated partners from a wide range of organizations and world regions with the objectives to integrate a gender perspective into the outcome of Copenhagen and in related policy, as well as to build capacity to implement gender-responsive policies and programs.

WEDO works with government delegates to understand their perspective, providing delegates with background information and strategic text suggestions. As a result, allies grew throughout 2009. Gender references in the negotiation text of the AWG LCA began at 0 and reached a peak of 40 in the revised negotiation text in June.

While Copenhagen didn't provide the expected outcome, the COP 15 LCA draft decisions contained 9 references to women and gender.

This alone made 2009 really an historic year for gender and climate change - considering there was no prior recognition of the link by the UNFCCC. The year ended with a complete change proving that so much has been accomplished!

Other accomplishments are: (i) the increase of women participation in the process which had never reached 30% throughout the whole UNFCCC history but hit a high at 35% in BKK, (ii) the increase of women chairing contact groups, (iii) high attendance at gender-themed side events, (iv) the UNFCCC provisional status of Women and Gender Constituency giving more slots for interventions and a deeper participation in formal process.

Despite our pride in these accomplishments, reaching an agreement, hopefully in Cancun remains a challenge requiring better and stronger international cooperation. Gender and women advocates and their allies, understand that momentum must be kept for a real integration of social dimensions, broader participation, inclusiveness, human rights and gender equality, and it is for those fundamental principles that we are calling upon Parties to act.

WEDO will continue leading and improving upon advocacy already under way, in an effort to improve the lives of women and men the world over and reach a just, equitable outcome.