



Women's Environment & Development Organization

For a just world that promotes and protects human rights, gender equality and the integrity of the environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Staking claim to our future

RIO DE JANEIRO (JUNE 13)- It is now the final countdown to Rio+20, the Conference on Sustainable Development, taking place next week in Rio de Janeiro. Over 20,000 people are expected to convene, with government delegates tasked to negotiate the sustainability, equity and viability – really, the *possibility* – of the future. It is an opportunity that cannot slip by, the importance of which cannot be overstated.

WEDO, a proud part of the Women's Major Group facilitated by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Voices of African Mothers (VAM) and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and in partnership with hundreds of women's organizations and networks the world over, has joined its voice with women, gender equality champions and human rights activists around the globe to insist on an ambitious outcome of Rio+20 that reflects not only the urgency of the current global crises, including of food, fuel and climate, but the commitment to finding, funding and implementing solutions.

"There is literally no more time to waste," according to Eleanor Blomstrom, WEDO's Program Coordinator and Rio+20 focal point, on Monday. **"We get on a plane tonight to Rio, and when we land there, I hope we feel the momentum in the streets. This is one of the most important conferences in my lifetime – and in my daughter's."**

Governments have met now several times in New York for preparatory rounds of informal negotiations. Wide divergences still exist, and too much content in a massive negotiating document – optimistically if not very realistically entitled *The Future We Want* – will not last through the next days. The gender equality and women's rights language is among that in the most precarious position – and WEDO and partners are fighting to keep it intact.

"The blueprint for sustainable development, imperfect as it may have been, was established twenty years ago – and it included an unprecedented understanding and reflection of women's and gender equality concerns," said WEDO Executive Director Cate Owren. **"Our first goal going into Rio+20 is to urge ambition toward a strong overall outcome that goes beyond mere promises and commits action. But a close second is to protect that gender language our predecessors secured. In other words, we intend to build on that important foundation and not tolerate a roll-back of time, or a roll-back of rights."**

Support from widespread high-level leadership and the persistence of civil society voices has so far safeguarded language related to women's priority issues in a two-fold manner: first, that realizing gender equality is a critical cross-cutting issue that needs to inform action on all other aspects of sustainable development, and second, that women, as they remain disproportionately marginalized and disadvantaged, still need special attention. In areas such as climate change, forests, land tenure, jobs and a social protection floor, women's specific needs and capacity must be taken into consideration in planning, programming and funding.

In fact, strictly counting the text references, negotiators have included gender and women's issues more than fifty times over nearly 30 paragraphs – devoting an entire subsection to gender equality, as well. This is momentum that WEDO and others are committed to sustaining; the Women's Major Group, including dozens of women's organizations, networks and activists, will continue to strategize, mobilize and lobby daily to ensure the most critical texts remain through every incarnation of the document over the next two weeks.

And if the outcome document becomes too watered down? **"It is hard to say what we will do,"** says Blomstrom frankly. **"All of us, all stakeholders in this process, want to see a strong outcome. But are a few words on gender equality going to save an otherwise worthless document? Absolutely not. That is not at all the point of our years of work on this."**

Regardless of the outcome of Rio+20 next week, WEDO is committed to celebrating real progress toward gender equality and sustainability so far, embracing the momentum and power of women's organizing, and not delaying in looking ahead to the post-2015 development debate. Women's organizing for a healthy and peaceful planet, catalyzed at the Earth Summit in 1992, must continue to influence the sustainable development framework – and that in turn must shape the post-2015 paradigm and plan.

"When in doubt, we keep the words of our founder, the inimitable Bella Abzug, close at hand," says Owren: **"Change is not about simply mainstreaming women. It's not about women joining the polluted stream. It's about cleaning the stream, changing stagnant pools into fresh, flowing waters.' That's a well-known favorite. And then there's my favorite: 'no one ever said it would be easy'."**

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WEDO at Rio+20

KEY EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Celebrating Women's Leadership in Sustainable Development (Cocktail Reception Event)

Wednesday, 20 June 2012—Ecosystem Pavilion

Organized by WEDO, GGCA and IUCN, this special event will celebrate women and gender equality champions with a ceremony to showcase important advancements made. Dedicated to the memory of **Marie Aminata Khan** of the CBD Secretariat, this event will recognize 10 leaders for their work in the last 10 years. Awardees will represent diverse regions as well as levels of engagement, bringing voices together from the grassroots and highest national and international political levels. [Click here to download the invitation.](#)

WEDO's 20th Anniversary Publication Launch

Wednesday, 20 June 2012—Ecosystem Pavilion

In the spirit of celebrating momentum and milestones, WEDO will launch a publication on the anniversary of its founding, 20 years earlier around the 1992 Earth Summit, highlighting key moments in our history. WEDO will be remembering this history from June 13th – June 23rd at <http://www.wedo.org/wedo-20>; and through Twitter #WEDO20plus!

Partnership Forum: Advancing Gender Equality and Sustainability (Jobs Info-sharing thematic hub)

Thursday, 21 June 2012, 10:00am-1:00pm -- Rio Centro

An interactive learning and networking space, the Jobs hub will share overview information and case studies of effective partnerships that both create new livelihood opportunities, as well as empower women and aim to

address the gendered 'green job' gap. Examples will span North and South, urban and rural, and formal and informal sectors. [Click here](#) for more information.

Be Heard! Be Published! Taking women's stories & recommendations to Rio+20

In partnership with WEDO, [World Pulse](#) has collected 50+ personal stories outlining women's experiences and recommendations on sustainable and equitable development for presentation at the Rio +20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. [Click here](#) for a full summary and links to each of the stories.

OTHER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Women's Caucus

Daily, 3-4pm – Rio Centro T-3

Organized by the Women's Major Group and open to all women and men working toward action on gender-related aspects of sustainable development.

Women's Resistance and Resilience

Friday, 15 June 2012, 9:30am-11:00am -- Rio Centro, T-9

Official Side Event of the Women's Major Group.

Women's Networking for Sustainability: Celebrating the Past & Envisioning the Future at Rio+20

Saturday, 16 June 2012, 9:00am-6:30pm – Sinal Do Vale Retreat Center

Van pick-up at 9:00am at Gandhi Statue at Rua do Passeio (close to Metro Station - Cinelandia Square.) Van with leave Center at 6:30pm and drop off at Gandhi Statue. RSVP: jenniferkagan@vcdenver.edu

Launch of Gender & Sustainable Development Commitments

Wednesday, 20 June 2012, 3:00pm- 4:45pm – UNEP Pavilion

Organized by NWMLE, UNEP, IUCN, WECF, WEDO and others.

Women's Major Group Rio+20 Best Practice Awards Ceremony

Thursday, 21 June 2012, 3:00pm-5:00pm -- Rio Centro, T-1

WMG, with NWMLE and GIZ

For a full listing of the 40+ events that members of the Women's Major Group are organizing and participating in, events from members of the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) as well as events which focus on women and gender, at RioCentro, the People's Summit and elsewhere, [click here](#).

OUR NEWS & CONTACTS

Follow the WEDO team in Rio on Twitter at [@WEDO_worldwide](#), [Facebook](#) & at www.wedo.org. Use the hashtags #WomenRio and #WEDO20plus. For a full list of the RIO WEDO team bios and contacts, [click here](#).

The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), a women's global advocacy organization, was founded in 1991 on the eve of the Earth Summit (UNCED) by U.S. Congresswoman Bella Abzug and a visionary international committee including Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai. WEDO's mission is to ensure that women's rights; social, economic and environmental justice; and sustainable development principles – as well as the linkages between them – are at the heart of global and national policies, programs and practices. It allies with a wide range of partners, from government Ministries, to environmental international NGOs, to grassroots women's networks. www.wedo.org