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## Gender Is No Distraction in Climate Change Talks

### Lynette Corporal interviews women's rights activist CATE OWREN

BANGKOK, Sep 29 (IPS) - As the countdown to the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit draws to a close, gender and climate change advocates are doubling their efforts to make sure that 23 gender-related paragraphs in the negotiating text will make it to the new treaty that will be hammered out in December.

At the ongoing 12-day Bangkok Climate Change Talks, which opened Monday and the latest round in a series of global discussions leading to the Copenhagen conference, the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) is keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings.

**Women's Environment and Development Organisation** sustainable development programme coordinator **Cate Owren** explains the GGCA's stand and its next steps toward ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed into climate change policies.

**IPS:** What has been the most challenging part of the negotiation process so far, particularly where it concerns the 23 paragraphs relating to gender?

**CATE OWREN:** Climate change has been very much categorised as a strictly environmental and business issue. The Kyoto Protocol deals with emissions productions, with the commitments of industrialised countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In that context, it's a bit more complicated. We certainly think a gender aspect exists there, but it's a bit more complicated for all parties to grasp onto the connection of gender.

Still, we are very optimistic because parties understand the gender components much more and no longer think of them as a distraction.

**IPS:** Will this openness to the issue by the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) translate to support then?

What kind of support do you expect to see in Copenhagen?

**CO:** It's a party-driven process, so as much as we, as observers, can submit text, it doesn't mean that much. The message has to come from the parties.

In the first half of the year, we saw a good number of parties submit the language necessary to secure the paragraphs in the negotiating text. As in past negotiations, we need written submissions and interventions on the floor and for parties to take the microphone and mention 'gender'.

**IPS:** What lessons have you and your alliance learned from past climate change talks? What were the mistakes, if any, of past negotiations that advocates would do well not to repeat?

**CO:** The GGCA, as an advocacy team, are very careful to work with parties based on their positions and their priorities. We try to work with parties as technical advisers. It's very important for us that the negotiations continue. We want to find solutions and help to find solutions that can make the policy and project implementation more effective.

It's widely accepted that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development. If climate change negotiations are in a vacuum, if they're not taking into account the best practices and lessons of sustainable development, then we fear all our work will be in vain.

**IPS:** Do you see a pattern in the existing system that keeps you from introducing gender sensitivity on issues of climate change?

**CO:** Up until this year, the climate change negotiations were a bit of an anomaly, and it was very hard as an NGO, as an IGO, even for other UN agencies to work with the UNFCCC, which was such a specialised, specific agency. It really kind of pigeonholed us in the environment issue and business or economic issue.

I do think it has shifted, and this is one of the reasons why the GGCA was formed. We came together because we needed to be a united front when it comes to climate change negotiations. We knew Copenhagen was a milestone.

The alliance has been a very fruitful model, and we've seen a lot of progress in the last nine months.

**IPS:** Are you satisfied with available research data on gender and climate change?

**CO:** There's always a need for more data although there has been a growing amount of data on disaster risk reduction and natural disasters. We need specific research about the impacts of climate change on specific groups, particularly on those most vulnerable, including women.

We can ask for data or research, but unless it really has a gender perspective, unless there's a true analysis in that research, then we still sort of repeat our mistakes of having generalised information. We don't actually know who is receiving funds or if women are able to access pertinent information in the same way that men are, for instance.

**IPS:** Will this lack of data or research material weaken the GGCA's position in the final phase of the negotiations?

**CO:** I don't think so. I think there's enough proof that the impacts of climate change are being felt and those most vulnerable are those most urgently affected.

There was one study, for example, by the London School of Economics about a year and a half ago, that found a direct relationship between the deaths of women and men in times of disaster. In societies where women and men were less equal, more women died. The opposite was also true in countries where there was more gender equality; there was an equal number of deaths among men and women.

(END/2009)