



When typhoon Ketsana hit Manila last September 2009 and left hundreds dead and hundreds of thousands more homeless, some pundits said that the storm was a great equaliser, affecting both the rich and the poor. When we notice that summer is too early and too long, we assume that we all feel the burning sensation on our skin when we venture outside. We sense that the world is changing.

But there are bigger and finer differences in the way the world changes and the way people experience these changes, especially when one asks the questions: Who could run and climb much faster to higher grounds? Whose houses were washed away or buried first? Who loses a livelihood and becomes further indebted? Who are sick and dying? Who are parched and hungry? Who pays and prays the hardest? And ultimately, who are to be blamed and who must indeed pay?

This issue of *Women in Action*, “Women in a Weary World: Climate Change and Women in the Global South” surfaces the linkages between gender and climate change, whose impact is not only differentiated across geographical location but also hinges on the intersectionality of subjectivities and identities such as class, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, age, gender and sexuality. It provides a space for affected grassroots women from various parts of the world to share their stories of struggle in locales whose environment has been seriously damaged by government neglect, corporate greed, military ambitions and other fundamentalist forces.

Hence the magazine features the stories of women who have found it even more difficult to fetch water and provide food for their families, especially those who have been living around the Niger Delta, in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Kenya and other parts of East Africa and Nepal as well as in ancestral domains. We see how women negotiate their multiple identities as well as relationships within the communities and with the surrounding environment itself, on the one hand and the trying contexts of displacement and resettlement, on the other hand. Similarly, Pakistani and Liberian women share their struggles in simultaneously dealing with the drying water sources and security threats posed by conflicts. We also learn why the changing fortunes of women climate refugees in Bangladesh are not only economic but personal and political.

But women do not merely constitute a marginalised sector. They are key in addressing this climate crisis. This *WIA* issue highlights women’s coping strategies and political involvement, from reducing one’s food intake to leading the rallies against pesticides, oil exploration, coal power plants, dump sites and carbon trading to popularly communicating the urgency of climate change as a global issue. Moreover, it reinforces that solutions to climate change necessitate a rethinking and reconfiguration of all sites of power from the household and community to governments and international bodies.

“Women in a Weary World: Climate Change and Women in the Global South” likewise offers a range of feminist analyses based on the lived experiences of women and their bodies as well as their agencies – including those that they ought to have and could possibly have – to make decisions for themselves, their families and communities. The magazine revisits ecofeminism, feminist political ecology, reproductive justice and sexual rights, among others and their operation in the climate change debates. Finally, this *WIA* issue aims to strengthen the participation of women, especially those from the South in the very political process that is expected to largely influence a global response to climate change in the critical years ahead.

We thank all those who shared their stories, reflections and critiques. We thank Titi Soentoro of NGO Forum on the ADB and Gender CC – Women for Climate Justice, Lidy Nacpil of Jubilee South, Esperanza Santos of World March of Women, Luz Maria Martinez of Isis International, as well as Gender CC – Women for Climate Justice and Climate Justice Now! Network for sharing with us their sharp insights and linking us with their networks.

Cai Yiping
Cai Yiping
 Editor-in-Chief



“We know that gender issues are important. Don’t worry, we will include it the discussion. But right now, we have other priorities, more urgent issues.”

This was the response of a delegate during the climate talks in early October 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was a response that smacked of ignorance, common among the majority of decision makers of the climate regime. It also showed that the climate solutions that were being negotiated in restricted meeting rooms did not have people at the core.

This ignorance indeed goes right through the power-holders. Former United Nations General Secretary General Kofi Annan, for instance, said of the women’s situation in the tsunami aftermath in Indonesia: “...there are no different tsunami impacts between men and women.” But the realities on the ground tell an entirely different story.

Tsunami-affected women in Aceh could hardly decide on the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, even though more women perished and even though those who survived carry heavier burdens, including the likelihood to experience sexual abuse. Pakistani women are similarly experiencing difficulty in accessing health services after a devastating earthquake. And as if adding insult to injury, international financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank further plunge women into greater subordination, discrimination and exploitation, with their projects that they insist in the name of “development.”

Gender roles and sexualities are among the main reasons behind the peculiar realities and experiences of women in times of disasters and other crisis. In many cases, such realities and experiences include injustices that are based on gender and sexuality, with violence against women, discrimination, stereotyping and subordination.

The extent of these injustices also relies on factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion and citizenship.

The climate change debates may become yet another process, where women would be deprived of meaningful participation and ultimately, better chances to cope and survive with the drastic changes in the environment, aside from the already existing political, economic, social and cultural inequalities. Unless power-holders break free particularly from deliberate ignorance, start regarding this earth as commons and listen to women as equal stakeholders of communities, we would never redeem the earth from greater disasters and ourselves from sheer stupidity.



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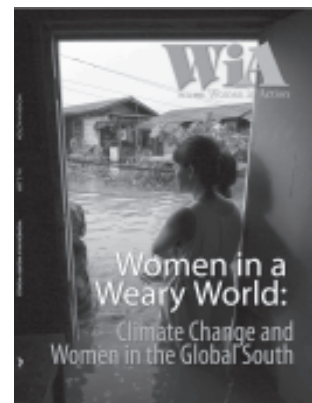
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Portal of Portents and Possibilities
Although the Philippines is so used to typhoons, no one realised the strength of Ketsana until it flooded more than 80 per cent of Metro Manila, left over 300 dead and nearly half a million displaced in September 2009. Days later, Ketsana also lashed Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Indeed it led to a period of mourning. But it was also an opportunity to exact accountabilities and rethink the kind of future we really want.

Photo courtesy of Aldrich Lim



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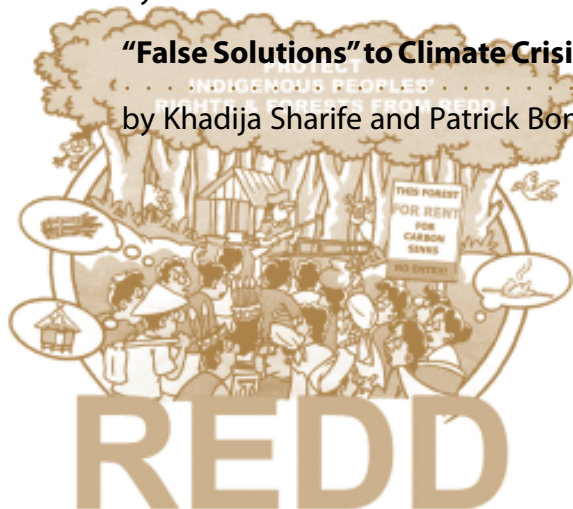
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