

Why Climate Change is a Woman's Problem

by Nina Somera

On October 2009, members of the broad coalition, Women for Climate Justice (GenderCC) reiterated the need to include women more comprehensively in the outcome documents of the ongoing meetings on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

As Felicia Davis of GenderCC-USA asserted, "It is time for the women to be recognised as equal partners. There can't be climate solutions without women's empowerment." Moreover, Titi Soentoro of NGO Forum on the ADB stressed UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's previous statements on the importance of women's role on this process. "That was a very important message, that we hope all the delegations will reflect. As of now, [the mentions of] women are fragmented and they still risk disappearing with the cleaning of the texts," she remarked.

The Women's Caucus, a broader group composed of women's rights advocates from the governments and civil society organisations such as GenderCC are pursuing the inclusion of the following language in the Shared Vision, which serves as the outcome document's preamble:

"The full integration of gender perspectives is essential to effective action on all aspects of climate change, adaptation, mitigation,

technology sharing, financing, and capacity building. UNFCCC processes must ensure compliance with existing women's rights standards and best practice as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 [Women and Peace-Building]. The advancement of women, their leadership and meaningful participation and engagement as stakeholders in all climate related processes and implementation must be guaranteed."

Asked by reporters how exactly women are affected by climate change, Ana Pinto of the Centre for Organisation Research and Education (CORE) emphatically responded: "It is a problem for women because we provide for the entire community including men. When women are demanding that our voices be heard, we are not doing this for ourselves but for the community we take care of. So we are asking on behalf of the world."





“If the children are born with asthma, women take care of them. Men can run away, migrate for work. Of course they are not happy with it. Very often they do not send money back home. But women have to stay to care for the children, the sick and the elderly,” she further pointed out.

Soentoro, who worked in Aceh, where 77 per cent of those who perished in the Tsunami were women also cited the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and children. “Underwear, milk for breastfeeding mothers, separate bathroom and others are the basic needs for women but governments do not think about them. Women also have specific thoughts and solutions, their own imagination of the world.”

Gotelind Alber of GenderCC likewise stated that women are hardest hit by carbon-trading mechanisms. “They have been harmful to local communities for example in landfills. Women also do not have access to markets,” she said.

In a dialogue with UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer, members of the Women’s Caucus raise the miniscule attention given to women and gender issues on the

working documents. De Boer suggested that a more practical approach can be adopted, citing as example the proceeds for women’s projects under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). “Make sure that you get it essentially than some sentences in the preamble. Build on practical things,” he said.

De Boer has helped enable the participation of women as a “possible constituency” in the Bangkok meetings. He initially expressed skepticism over the inclusion of women and gender in the Shared Vision. When pressed further by Davis, who cited the mere mention of women among vulnerable groups and women as constituting half of the world’s population, de Boer remarked, “Maybe I have become cynical over the years.”

During the press conference, the “Declaration of Women in Asia on Climate Change” were distributed. Created by over 70 women from indigenous peoples (IPs), peasants, fisherfolk, labour and other sectors in the feminist and social movements, the Declaration reiterated among others: free, prior and informed consent from IPs on development projects, equal rights on security of land tenure, opposition against carbon market-based solutions and privatisation of water, and the recognition of historical and ecological debt.

