



Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice

Statement on Women's Leadership on Climate Justice

Mary Robinson

Climate change is one of most urgent and serious environmental, economic, political, social and humanitarian issues of our time. Yet there is an atmosphere of minimal expectations and low hopes for the outcomes of the international climate negotiations, the COP16 meeting, currently taking place in Cancún, Mexico. Perhaps this is in part due to the unrealistic expectations and therefore inevitable disappointment of COP15 in Copenhagen last year.

But we must take steps to tackle climate change on a worldwide basis and secure climate justice for all. Climate justice integrates human rights and sustainable development and shares the benefits and burdens of climate change equitably, while safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable. If as a global community we hope to respond to this immense challenge, women leaders must play a greater role in innovating, deciding and implementing the solutions that are so urgently required.

Global inequities mean that not everyone is equally able to participate in international decision-making processes, to reduce emissions or to cope with the effects of climate change. A climate justice approach will amplify the voices of those people who have done least to cause climate change, but who are affected most severely by it. They include the citizens of island states and vulnerable countries fighting for their very survival; indigenous communities whose lands and resources are under threat; women farmers feeding their families and growing much of the world's food. And it includes the poorest and most marginalized people world-wide who already suffer most from poverty, hunger, ill-health and injustice.

Many inspiring women are already leading as powerful agents of change in communities, countries and international agencies working on climate, but they remain under-represented in national and global decision-making. In particular, the voices of women from the global South are seldom heard. Their vast expertise and knowledge are largely missing from international discussions. Any fair and equitable approach to climate change solutions must involve women alongside men in every stage of climate policy-making.

We know that women in the global South make up the majority of the world's poorest people, and are also among those worst affected by the current and imminent impacts of climate change. We also know that men and women contribute to and are affected by climate change in different ways, as the demands made on them by family and community vary. Given existing gender inequalities and development gaps, climate change ultimately places a greater burden on women. As a result, climate justice incorporates a strong gender perspective.

Such gender inequities have motivated many women leaders to take action. Determined work by individuals and women's organisations around the world has achieved significant progress in ensuring gender-sensitive language is included in the negotiating texts under discussion at the UNFCCC climate talks. It's vital that these gains are not rolled back, and that the importance of gender is accepted in key areas where it remains lacking, particularly mitigation and financing.

At the same time, women's leadership is needed to integrate climate justice into the entire range of climate issues on the COP16 agenda, such as adaptation, technology transfer, forests, capacity building, and national planning for both developed and developing countries. It seems likely that the outcomes of COP16 will emphasize processes, monitoring and mechanisms in specific areas – most notably a dedicated climate change fund - that will guide both short term action and any future international agreement. Women leaders must play an active role to ensure that climate justice shapes these building blocks of future agreements.

Low expectations must not be allowed to push negotiations towards implementing approaches that lack transparency and accountability, have insufficient input from civil society, or inadequate safeguards. Instead, COP16 outcomes must guide the international community down a path that promotes and protects the needs of the most vulnerable – whether they are individuals, communities or vulnerable countries.

Climate justice, underpinned by its emphasis on gender, can motivate strong, fair and effective action on every aspect of climate change. Women leaders at all levels advocating for climate justice can help achieve real progress in Cancún. Rather than retreating into cynicism and inaction, at COP16 we can move forward towards the world we need for our children's future.

Released: 2 December 2010 at COP 16, Cancún, Mexico

The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice
Trinity College, 6 South Leinster Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Telephone: +353 (0) 1 6618427 Email: info@mrfcj.org Website: www.mrfcj.org