

Highlights of Mary Robinson's remarks at the Early Action Investment Platform on Climate-Smart Agriculture for Africa

COP 17, Durban, 7 December 2011

Mary Robinson pleads for policy makers to consider gender and women in making the connection between climate change and food security: "if you do, you will reach more than half the population of the world".

Climate smart agriculture has to deliver for the women who are responsible for 80-90% of food production in Sub-Saharan Africa. While this may seem obvious, we really need to learn from the mistakes of the past where support for farmers has been gender blind and, as a result, less effective.

Climate smart agriculture has to be gender responsive. Women are both particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as well as being particularly resourceful and creative in coping and finding solutions.

We must make sure that climate smart agriculture embodies and enables gender equity, protects both vulnerable women and men and provides equal opportunity to benefit from new technologies and farming techniques. Innovations and progress on practical tools for climate smart agriculture are emerging but knowledge gaps remain and more research is needed. We must support women with the energy and technology solutions they need to adopt irrigation, for example, and with the skills and tools required to increase productivity.

Earlier today, MRFCJ co-hosted a high level event with the Government of South Africa entitled "Forward looking strategies – women and climate change: Durban and beyond". This meeting convened women Ministers, deputy Ministers, negotiators, key civil society figures and senior women leaders to discuss a human-centred approach to climate change. The meeting was attended by women leaders of the Troika+, an organic, flexible platform of women leaders which was established at COP 16 in Cancun. An important theme that emerged again and again during the meeting was the issue of agriculture and food security.

Women play a central role in feeding the world – it is one of our maternal responsibilities. We must continue to advocate for a focus on women farmers to enable them to produce more and reap the benefits of climate smart agriculture. It is obvious that we will only be able to feed 9 billion people in 2050 if we are maximising and valuing the skills and knowledge of women farmers.

Achieving food security and climate justice is possible. Climate change is making a bad situation worse but if we believe that solving the problem of hunger and food security is a priority, a question of justice and fairness, then it is not beyond our power to resolve it.