



Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice

Meeting note on COP 16 side-event

Women's Leadership on Climate Change Justice and the Grassroots Perspective

Saturday 4 December 2010 - 20:15-21:45 - Jaguar Room, Cancúnmesse
COP 16, Cancún, Mexico

Co-organizers:

The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice

www.mrfcj.org

The Green Belt Movement

www.greenbeltmovement.org

Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative

www.realizingrights.org

The Nobel Women's Initiative

www.nobelwomensinitiative.org

The Climate Wise Women

www.climatewisewomen.org

Moderator:

Lorena Aguilar, Senior Gender Advisor for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Panel Speakers:

- Mary Robinson, President of The Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice, founder and President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, and formerly President of Ireland (1990-97) and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002).
- Constance Okollet, Chairperson of Osukuru United Women's Network, Uganda and founding member of Climate Wise Women
- Francesca de Gasparis, Director of the Green Belt Movement – Europe

A video recorded endorsement of the event was provided by Wangari Maathai, Green Belt Movement founder and Nobel Peace Laureate.

Respondents:

- Ursula Rakova, Executive Director of Tulele Peisa: Sailing the Waves on Our Own, Carteret Islands, Papua New Guinea
- Natalia Greene, Political Program Coordinator of Fundacion Pachamama, Ecuador

- Peter Ndunda, Geographical Information System (GIS) Specialist with Green Belt Movement, Kenya.

The co-organised side-event drew a large and enthusiastic audience of 80-100 people, especially considering its allocated time-slot last thing on Saturday evening. Panellists, respondents and the audience discussed strategies for women's participation in decision-making on climate change. They explored issues including impacts, adaptation, mitigation and emissions levels, lessons from the grassroots on REDD+, climate justice, local solutions, ensuring funds reach local communities, protecting indigenous rights, educational tools for awareness-raising, the responsibilities of taking leadership, and the need to recognise women's rights.

Detail and quotes from presentations and discussions during the event:

Moderator **Lorena Aguilar** set the scene and referred to the relatively low level of female participation as delegates in the UNFCCC. Noting that as recently as 2006 no Heads of Delegation were women, that has now begun to change, with greater representation and a number of women in leadership positions.

A video message from **Wangari Maathai** was recorded specifically for the event.

- “It is extremely important for the United Nations and governments at the national levels to ensure that the voices of women are heard. It is no longer possible to say we do not have qualified women, we do have a lot of qualified women who should be invited to the table.”
- Challenge those who claim that climate change is not happening or is not serious.
- It is not easy to convince those who are comfortable and those who are not directly impacted negatively by climate change. We need not just more commitments but also to start seeing resources flowing to organizations who are "ready for REDD."
- There must be support for the UN process.

Francesca de Gasparis

- What REDD means for the Green Belt Movement is protection of standing indigenous forests, and reducing deforestation.
- Must “de-jargon” language to become more accessible rather than getting “lost in a forest of acronyms.” Rather than needing to become an expert to understand it, women’s leadership can help to break down this exclusive club of experts.
- Talking about forests only in terms of CO2 takes away the true value of a forest and the wealth of knowledge that a community holds about living in or near a forest. The ecosystem services that the forests provide are recognized by traditional knowledge.
- We need to think about the measurement of success in tackling climate change. If the measurement is solely in terms of CO2 reductions, these functions and services provided by the forests are not recognized.
- "REDD+ allows us to change our behavior and value forests for what they are"
- A ‘carbon market’ is business as usual, and minimizes the value of forests. For REDD to work to protect forests and their people, we need governance, biodiversity, and rights for forest peoples.
- “Biodiversity is the real bank if you're talking about saving our futures.”
- Free Prior and Informed Consent is needed.
- For this to work, need women to have a seat at the table. We need to approach REDD in a way that reflects our society, where women make up over 50% of society, but remain shut out of

most of the negotiations.

- Education is vital, using tree-planting as an entry point, and allows communities to understand the links between poverty, the environment and sustainable livelihoods. It was for this approach that Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- "Build resilient systems that have as their center the empowerment of women."
- We know what needs to be done, now we need to open up the decision-making fora to include women.
- "The knowledge and voices of women must be heard to create a sustainable future for generations to come. "

Constance Okollet

- Described her community's experience with flooding and its destruction of lives, homes and agriculture in Tororo district in Uganda. When the floods came in 2007, the villagers had to leave their homes and leave everything behind. Some people died. The community looked for an explanation: "We were asking God, why are you punishing us?"
- When she returned to the village, her house was still mainly intact, while many neighbours' homes had been washed away, so at one point she had a new "family" of 29 people living with her. "At times we could sit and cry, at times we could sit and laugh."
- When food was scarce, the women wouldn't eat but gave food to their husbands and children. During the floods, children died.
- In 2009, heavy rains came again and washed away homes and crops. "We have nothing in the granary because the granary was washed away by the rain." From December 2009 until September 2010, they could not return to their homes. A neighbouring district had mudslides, the first of which covered three villages, including homes and schools.
- Oxfam came to provide assistance to the village and through awareness-raising programmes she learned about climate change for the first time. She cried when she learned that "rich countries over-polluting" was the cause of the destructive rain and flooding.
- "We said we shouldn't cry, this is climate change, it has come."
- The community started educating and sensitising the villagers on how they could cope. They asked government and polluters to visit. They went to schools to educate the children about climate change, as the youth are future leaders, future "Ministers and Presidents." They talked about what was happening, that people were dying because of the rains.
- Clear links between poverty and the effects of climate change. While some people were rich and some poor, the area was not wealthy. "In my village, most people use moonlight to have their supper."
- People are getting poorer. The villagers used to meet their needs in the village, but they had seen many changes due to climate and flooding. The levels of poverty were increasing, and the villagers could not afford what they had before.
- The villagers had relied on agriculture, but it was no longer enough. They felt they were gambling, eating the seeds they needed for the following year, planting and harvesting quickly in fear of when the next heavy rains might arrive. They used to know their seasons, but no longer.
- At a global level, she saw very small amounts of money from initiatives such as the Adaptation Fund actually reached NGOs on the ground.
- "I've come to COP 16 to tell the world leaders, to tell the polluters to stop polluting."

Mary Robinson

- No need to lecture the audience on climate justice, but it is unconscionable that we don't hear more about it, and that there are still deniers of climate change.
- Importance of REDD and that it could be an element of being close to the earth in a real way.
- Recognized the work of the partners in organizing the side event, including the Green Belt Movement, the Nobel Women's Initiative, her new Foundation, the human rights organisation Realizing Rights that she had led for many years, and particularly the Climate Wise Women, whose voices are so important in this debate.
- "This is the biggest human rights issue of the 21st century." Climate change is also a huge development issue.
- Climate change is not just a challenge, but an opportunity for new values and a new approach: "A better way of living with the earth to nourish us and our children and our children's children."
- Thousands of people are in Cancún to reaffirm the process of the UNFCCC, and agree the building blocks to move forward. It is important that a real sense of climate justice and a strong gender perspective are brought to COP 16.
- We can all do better, and do more, by working ever more closely together. The Foundation has been working to build a network on climate justice and gender, and to keep that network active. They are also linking to women Ministers, and she encouraged the audience to bring their perspectives to a high-level event to be held a couple of days later, which would bring together senior leaders.
- In 2010, there is an unprecedented number of women holding senior international positions on climate, including Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC; Patricia Espinosa, President of COP 16, Margaret Mukahanana-Sangarwe, Chairperson of the UNFCCC AWG-LCA, and Connie Hedegaard, EU Commissioner for Climate Action.
- Recent analysis by WEDO, building on work by GenderCC, indicates that around 30% of the negotiating delegates at COP 16 are women.
- We as gender advocates haven't organized enough yet, and haven't ensured that our agenda had been put forward in a mainstreamed way.
- "So far there is no gender perspective in the climate change funding discussion." This is a priority for change.
- Ensure transparency and accountability. Safeguards have to ensure a gender dimension.
- "We need gender to be integrated into all dimensions of climate change policy."
- At the same time, the poorest and the poor have a right to development. That right has to be assured, with increasing access to clean energy and technology, such as mobile phones.
- Climate change is a human rights and development challenge, but it is also about justice. We must work harder to bring justice to women such as Constance Okollet and Ursula Rakova, and to amplify the voices of these Climate Wise Women and others like them.

At the event, Mary Robinson released a **Statement on Women's Leadership** in which she stated:

"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."

As a respondent, **Ursula Rakova** spoke of her experiences coming from a community directly affected by climate change.

- She had quit her job to work for the last five years to relocate 1700 people from their homes on the Carteret Islands, part of the Bougainville autonomous district in Papua New Guinea. They had no choice but to move.
- “What is climate justice in this regard and how do we respond to it?” Their answer: “We got organized.” They have a plan that is culturally and economically sensitive, in order to sustain their lives and culture.
- “We suffer from the tyranny of distance. We are 86 km in the open ocean from Bougainville. Often we are not even shown on the map, often we are out of sight and out of mind. It is climate change that is out of the eyes of polluters.”
- She noted that official funds to help the islanders have been 'parked' somewhere since 2007.
- “The reason I am here is to bring the issue of my island people to the world leaders. We think climate change is real and is already affecting my people.”
- Need to cut emissions by 40% by 2020, and to limit CO2 to 350 parts per million.
- We need to work as a global community, and mitigation and adaptation funds need to reach communities.
- She asked “Why are women's rights still being denied?” and applauded Wangari Maathai’s words on this topic. Ask government leaders to give a voice in support of women.

Natalia Greene as a respondent emphasized that efforts to address to climate change need to be both rights oriented and people oriented.

- Indigenous people and women are the most vulnerable, and so indigenous women are doubly affected.
- Communities cannot fight oil companies, so awareness has to change.
- “In our experience, women's empowerment has been crucial to preserve a stronger relationship with nature.”
- She complimented the Green Belt Movement on their effective use of tree-planting as an entry point to educate people and allow them to regain a connection to nature.
- Once “awake” people realize that nature is a subject of rights, and not something people should exploit. She invited the audience to join the recently formed Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.
- “How do you fill that gap in that inaccessible forest?” By seeing it as injustice, as a justice issue. The rights of nature is an idea whose time has come.

Peter Ndunda’s response focussed on using the Geographical Information System (GIS) as an educational tool on climate change.

- His technical perspective presented a video animation showing the location of Green Belt Movement tree nurseries in Kenya. It also indicated five water catchment areas which supply 95% of the area’s water.
- Using these tools can show people what is happening.
- While the science of climate change tells us that the glaciers are melting, these technical approaches can demonstrate these changes to people in a compelling way. At the same time, the tree nurseries provide a forum for education.

- “If we do not support the local grassroots communities, inform them and provide them with information, how can we expect them to participate and show leadership?”

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Executive Director of Tebtebba in The Philippines was delayed at the on-going negotiations and unfortunately could not attend as anticipated as a respondent.

Questions and Answers

During the discussion, questions were asked by a number of key gender advocates and representatives of women’s organisations present in the audience.

- A key issue was recognition of women’s rights. This was particularly emphasized in relation to REDD, where there is no mention of CEDAW. There is also a need to broaden the discussion beyond forests.
- Constance remarked that people "used to think a woman cannot do something, they think a woman is for the kitchen and the garden. But we are also equal and can do something."
- There is a need to link climate justice, indigenous rights, human rights and environment, and have a deeper sense of values. It's also important to link and reinforce good practices.
- Need to help people find their voices, and find their solutions, in a culturally sensitive way.

Lorena Aguilar brought together the discussion, emphasizing the importance of alliances. She noted the need to include CEDAW and broader recognition of women’s rights in the climate change discourse, and in particular that there is a tremendous lack of inclusion of gender or women’s rights in climate financing mechanisms. Women are agents of change, including in these challenging times. There is a need to transform unequal societies and relationships.

Mary Robinson summed up the key messages from the event, emphasizing that women with responsibilities at Ministerial, European Commission and UNFCCC levels must link with women's voices on the ground. A gender and climate justice approach is needed within all the 'building blocks' of negotiations – such as REDD+, the Climate Fund, adaptation and mitigation. The poorest must be at the centre of discussions and there must be a justice dimension. The profligate building of growth on carbon is having a polluting effect and the polluter must pay. COP 16 must re-energize the UNFCCC process as the only process where the voices of grassroots women, small island states and indigenous peoples are heard. Mary concluded: "We have not only an opportunity for leadership, we have the responsibility of leadership."

The event was followed by a networking reception. More information on the event can be found at the co-organizers' websites listed above.