

A View from the side?

Gendering the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations

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The beginning, at least, looked promising: during the first Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 1), which took place in Berlin in 1995, the International Women's Forum, *Solidarity in the Greenhouse*, attracted 250 participants from all over the world. They discussed their demands for forward-looking climate policies, wrote letters to the conference chair, Angela Merkel, then Minister of the Environment and now Chancellor of Germany, and created links between the negotiations and so-called civil society. Gender perspectives did not feature prominently then, and there were hardly any clear-cut women's demands, but it was made very clear that women were eager to take part in discussions and decision-making and might have other priorities than men. The rejection of risk technologies and, especially, of nuclear power clearly showed that the origins of women's activities lay in the anti-nuclear

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movement as much as in championing renewable energies in order to avoid climate change and as an alternative to nuclear power (Röhr 2004). The participants at the conference were not so much from a women's movement background, but rather belonged to the environmental movement. This may be one of the reasons why women's perspectives were not followed up at later UNFCCC conferences.

The drive and the euphoria of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 had led the international women's movement to believe that Agenda 21 and all other UN resolutions concerning the integration of gender and women's perspectives would now be implemented in all further negotiations, at least at the UN level. They quickly realised that this had been a misjudgement: climate policies were treated by the negotiating parties, the Climate Secretariat, the NGOs and the scientific establishment as if they had no gender relevance whatsoever (Röhr 2004).

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNFCCC AND KYOTO PROTOCOL

In 1992, after two years of negotiating, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted and signed by 154 states at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The Convention, while obligatory for the signatories, remained relatively open regarding specific goals. However, it stipulated the establishment of a Conference of the Parties (COP) and a Climate Secretariat to support the COP (UNEP/Climate Change Secretariat 1999). Annual meetings serve to define terms and concepts, coordinate climate protection goals, facilitate exchange and review the implementation of the Convention. The Framework Convention entered into force in 1994 and has been ratified by 192 states to date (Röhr 2004).

Unlike the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Agenda 21, which was also adopted at the Rio Summit, is not legally binding. Aspects of gender justice and equal opportunities for women and men have been widely integrated into Agenda 21, while there is no trace of them in the legally binding Framework Convention. As no clear climate protection targets had been established in the convention, it could be assumed that the missing gender perspective would take centre stage during the annual conferences of the signatory states (Röhr 2004). This was a false conclusion, however. The Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted after two years of tough negotiating in 1997, established emission reduction mechanisms and specific goals. As in the Framework Convention, far from any reference to gender issues, women were not even mentioned. The Protocol, however, was the cornerstone of future climate policies. The missing link to gender issues resulted in the long-term absence of women's organisations from the Conference and in climate policies which generally neglected the social aspects.

THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS: COPS AND MOPS¹

The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. Since COP 13 in Bali, therefore, negotiations have focused heavily on CO₂ reduction commitments and, beyond that, on agreements for long-term cooperation between industrialised countries, developing countries and newly industrialising countries, especially concerning adaptation to climate change. In order to avoid a time gap between the commitment periods, an agreement has to be reached in Copenhagen. Experience shows that it takes 2 to 3 years for a sufficient number of parties to ratify such an agreement. This is the reason why all sides attach such extreme importance to COP 15 in Copenhagen, whether politicians, (envi-

ronmental) organisations, scientists, the media or civil society. The negotiations are being accompanied by a growing number of ‘observers’, who advise, observe and influence government delegations, provide information and confront them with demands. Unlike the processes at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), there are no ‘major groups’ (women, youth, farmers, environmental NGOs etc.) here. Instead, there are ‘constituencies’ which accredited NGOs assign themselves to. To begin with, there were RINGOs (Research), BINGOs (Business and Industry), ENGOS (Environmental NGOs) and LGOs (Local Government Organisations), followed by IPOs (Indigenous Peoples Organisations) and, as the latest addition, TUNGOs (Trade Unions).

Currently, the accreditation applications of Youth, Farmers, and Women and Gender NGOs has been processed – which means that the COPs are on a par with the major groups of the CSDs, at least numerically. The constituencies coordinate the activities of their member NGOs during and between the conferences and serve as a conduit to the Climate Secretariat. Therefore, they play an important role concerning the strategies for integrating gender perspectives.

“IS GENDER AN ISSUE IN CLIMATE CHANGE, AND IF SO, HOW SHOULD IT BE APPROACHED?”

KICK-OFF IN MILAN

The highly promising beginning of women’s involvement in the COPs (see p. 52) was followed by several years of silence until women once again raised their voices. At first there were only sporadic and scattered activities, which later coalesced into a continuously growing network since COP 9 in Milan in 2003.

During the eight years that intervened between COP 1 in Berlin and COP 9 in Milan, ‘the market’ progressively usurped

climate change debates. Discussions became increasingly technocratic and social aspects were progressively marginalized – if they had ever played a role in the first place. Women’s organisations seldom took part in the annual conferences, nor did women’s and gender departments of the UN agencies. No wonder. Among other things, the language had become abstract to such an extent that only insiders and full-time climate experts could access the negotiations. For others, the complexity of the process and the expansion of the issues to be covered made participation unfeasible.

Nevertheless, three women’s organizations (LIFE, ENERGIA, WECF) represented at COP 9 joined forces to ask whether the interest in gender aspects was really as minimal as it seemed and sent out invitations to an informal meeting. The overwhelming response to the question “whether gender is an issue in climate change” showed that the group of those who felt uncomfortable with both the mode and content of the negotiations was bigger than expected. The thirty people who reacted to the call-out came to the conclusion that

“climate change is not a gender neutral process and this needs to be explicitly recognized and dealt with. Five main areas of concern were identified:

1. Lack of gender specificity in the criteria related to the climate change instruments.
2. Lack of gender specificity in relation to the vulnerability/adaptation discourse.
3. The need for case studies which illustrate how climate change itself, as well as projects (both mitigation and adaptation), affect men and women differently.
4. The underlying gender connections between climate change agreements and other international processes such as the CBD, and health-related treaties on pesticides etc.
5. The lack of participation of women in the whole process.

A number of cross-cutting issues were also identified, including how to tackle the lack of awareness of gender perspectives in climate change policy at the national and local levels. It was decided to aim for an all-day event at COP 10 to bring them to the greater climate community. Five sub-groups were set up to deal with the five themes outlined, and they met during the remaining period of COP 9 to plan their inputs to COP 10.”²

This was the starting point of the Gender-CC-network, which has continued to develop over the years.

Initially, however, things turned out as they often do in such situations: there was a lot of enthusiasm during the conference, but once people returned to their daily working lives, the issue was quickly pushed to one side. Consequently, a year later there was no real basis for a whole thematic day on gender and climate. Even so, there were two interlinked side events highlighting the gender aspects of adaptation and mitigation, and a position paper was produced and disseminated. In sum the COP 10 in Buenos Aires showed the need for a more comprehensive strategy in order to bring home the importance of gender aspects to the delegates and the attendant environmental organizations.

GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE: ISSUES, ENTRY POINTS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE POST-2012 PROCESS AND BEYOND

By the next conference in Montreal, a strategy had been developed, and implementation was on its way. In the paper *Gender and Climate Change: Issues, Entry Points and Strategies for the Post-2012 Process and Beyond* (Hemmati 2005), thematic links, activities which were seen as necessary steps towards a gender-sensitive climate regime by the networks and gender experts involved, and promising organizations had been identified. The starting point for these

considerations was that gender aspects are generally more prominent and accepted in the areas of adaptation and vulnerability, whilst there is a distinct lack of attention in the area of mitigation. Comprehensive strategic goals should be pursued simultaneously:

1. Closing knowledge gaps relating to the gender aspects of climate change (research; gender-disaggregated data).
2. Including more women and gender experts in climate protection-related negotiations and decision-making at all levels.
3. Integrating gender-related knowledge into policy-making, implementation, monitoring, and communication strategies and materials.

The different routes for attaining these goals are manifold and broad. At the climate conferences, for example, information booths offer a ‘first contact’ with gender aspects in climate change policy at the basic level. The knowledge gained there is to be extended in trainings and workshops. Daily group meetings serve for women and gender experts to discuss strategies, to network and also to help balance the often frustrating experiences made during the conferences. They also offer a space for developing and disseminating position papers and submissions which help to present women’s organizations and gender experts as a coherent entity. In this way, the visibility of gender and women’s issues has been enhanced from conference to conference since COP9 in Milan in 2002.³ As a result, women and gender NGOs are now recognized as an independent ‘constituency’, which will improve their chances of exercising influence.

This attention boost is partly due to the marked attention that the issue of climate change is receiving in general, and especially to the fact that development NGOs are finally acknowledging the issue. Development NGOs, in contrast with environmen-

tal NGOs, are very familiar with gender analyses, gender assessments and the implementation of gender mainstreaming, and they tend to push these issues. In this context, it is worth mentioning the various UN organizations, from UNDP to UNIFEM, which recently formed a network in order to push for the integration of gender issues at the climate change negotiations and to gain the support of government delegations for this aim.

REASONS FOR THE LONG ABSENCE OF GENDER AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

The proportion of gender and women's organisations at the negotiations is still quite low. One can only speculate why organisations such as the European Women's Lobby are still refusing to take on the issue of climate protection. Other organisations such as the US-based WEDO were not present at the negotiations for many years and therefore did not influence international climate policies. There is as yet no scientific research on the lack of broad participation of women's organisation at the COPs in the past and how their absence is reflected in the outcomes. One reason is surely that most women's organisations do not engage with either environmental politics or climate politics. The multitude of issues that need to be dealt with from a gender justice perspective makes it necessary for gender organisations to limit themselves, usually due to their lack of resources. In addition, the number of gender experts in the environmental area is rather small, gender expertise being more often found in the typical domains of equal opportunities for women, such as education and labour market policy or the promotion of women's representation. From this perspective, the environmental area, with its scientific bias, did not seem overly relevant, especially as the scientists working in this field viewed it as 'gender neutral'. Though there was some fundamental criticism on the part of

those involved in a feminist critique of science in the 1980s (e.g. Merchant 1980; Fox Keller 1985), this hardly found any reflection in practical experience.

In climate politics, the 'gender-neutral' approach was very strong, while the scientific approach to the issue was complemented by highly technical definitions of the fields of action, especially concerning large-scale technological schemes for climate protection. Another aspect was the one-sided focus on economic solutions. Areas where the gender perspectives have not been sufficiently analysed makes it difficult to translate gender into climate discourses at the next stage. If, for example, the UNFCCC negotiations focus exclusively on the international level, climate justice will also be reduced to this level, that is, to North-South justice. Injustices within specific countries will not be addressed, let alone those at the local level. This, however, is the level at which gender aspects can be most readily identified. Or, if the European Emission Trading Scheme focuses exclusively on big industrial firms, household emissions, and with them the whole area of the care economy, will appear less relevant. According to Meike Spitzner (2009), "technological innovation does not enact distributive justice, but follows the established social hierarchy of gender and class by directing profits towards middle-class men and leaving women with traditional 'clean up' roles".

Moreover

European researchers and policy-makers avoid the simple question of who emits and why? Rather, the focus is on developing countries, self-servingly understood as 'under-technologised' and needing further capital investment. The economic North is not given to reflection on [sic] the direct relation between global warming and its own complicity in globalising industrial productivity. If the Third World or women are appraised at all, it is as victims, not as 'alternative consumers' or 'non-polluting producers'."

It has been argued that “the dominant debate on so-called ‘common’ climate policy is deaf to gender differentiation due to an underlying male norm”. Dialogues which could open up the field are “undercut by the dominant social norms of competitive masculinity, with its attendant over-valuation of technologies, markets and large-scale projects.” (Spitzner 2009:224)

The lack of gender-relevant data or of gender research on climate change and how it can be curbed was – and still is – a fundamental problem. This, however, is a prerequisite for convincing climate experts who are, in their majority, natural scientists, economists or engineers. A growing number of publications in this area offer examples of how women are impacted by or, at the very best, of how women actively address the effects of climate change (that is, as ‘agents of change’). But unfortunately they do not offer a substantial basis for arguments and demands concerning the specific issues and instruments addressed in the climate change negotiations.

THERE ISN’T JUST ONE WAY OF DOING IT: STRATEGIES FOR A GENDERED CLIMATE REGIME

The messages of women’s and gender organisations who are observing the negotiations follow varied interests, being rather ambiguous and quite diverse.

One approach is concerned with general demands for gender mainstreaming, gender disaggregated data and participation, that is, with anchoring women’s and gender aspects in the negotiating text. Another aims at fundamental change in structures and practices. This can clearly be seen in the submissions for the negotiations. The US-based women’s environmental organisation WEDO, for example, refers explicitly to the existing negotiation texts and suggests, among other things, that:

financial support be directed at adaptation

initiatives and national policies and programs that prioritize women and other vulnerable populations. [...] Regarding the effectiveness of vulnerability and adaptation assessments to support adaptation planning and implementation: gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data (submission by WEDO 2008 on behalf of GGCA).

The Dutch-based organisation WECF refers to the instruments of the Kyoto Protocol and wants them to be applicable at a local level, thereby benefiting women amongst other groups:

we propose to create a simplified CDM mechanism for sustainable energy projects in rural areas at the household and community level, including improved funding conditions for smaller scale and cutting-edge-technology projects. Such projects should be developed in consultation with the local communities, including women, and should be accessible to them (Submission WECF 2009).

GenderCC goes one essential step further and demands that the negotiations should aim at fundamental change:

Gender mainstreaming is an important part of involving women and gender aspects actively in climate politics. However, achieving true justice between women and men – including in relation to climate change – will involve more fundamental changes of cultures, structures and institutions, individual capacities and relationships between sectors in society. [...] Recognize the ways in which the economic crisis and the climate crisis are based on the same failures: we consume more than we have at our disposal, we are living in an unsustainable way that ignores economic, ecological and social limits to growth whilst relegating those elements we need to live a good life to the status of mere “resources”. Therefore, economic activity has to be transformed and renewed from a “careless” process into a “caring” one. The

vantage point for this transformation should be the provision of care and caring, paid or unpaid work that has, up to now, mostly been done by women. The economy, its actors, structures and processes need to adapt to the environment, to the needs of women, indigenous peoples, the socially disadvantaged, not vice versa. This transformation needs additional financing mechanisms, beyond market based mechanisms. Investigation in creating and supporting funding mechanisms that provide an alternative to market-based solutions is essential (GenderCC LIFE 2009 submission).

Of course there are overlaps between these demands, positions and strategies, and there is cooperation between the various networks and their members' organisations, but there are no far-reaching messages or approaches which are upheld by all of them. This is partly due to the still tiny number of women's/gender organisations that are taking part in the negotiations, but it also has to do with the proximity of some parties to governments and intergovernmental organisations, which precludes joint demands for fundamental change. And there is competition: for attention, influence, information, power, financial support. This is the main obstacle to further development and to reaching out to such women's organisations as the European Women's Lobby, who are not yet involved in environmental issues. If the climate process is really to be made more 'gender sensitive', it requires a much wider participation by women's/gender organisations, not only at the conferences, but also when it comes to implementing the process in different regions and countries.

INSIDE OR OUTSIDE – OR BOTH?

WHY A FUNDAMENTAL CRITICISM OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS IS HARDLY EVER ACKNOWLEDGED

Diverse positions and strategies do not oc-

cur only between women's/gender networks: distinctions can be found also inside networks. For example, some of the members of the international network GenderCC want women to profit from market-based instruments, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) or technology transfer, and therefore demand that the instruments be adjusted in order to encourage smaller, decentralized, community-based projects (Etuati 2008). Others completely reject these mechanisms because they destroy the livelihoods of women and of the local indigenous population and because they view nature and the environment solely through the lenses of carbon sinks and economic gain, whilst disregarding cultural and ethical values (GenderCC 2007). These women also fear that the mechanisms disregard the importance of ensuring the survival of the local population. Whilst some demand a high-level gender-expert group in order to support the UNFCCC process in integrating gender perspectives, others repudiate this categorically because they fear that their positions might be pocketed or diluted. As one of the network members put it at a fringe event in Poznan, women and gender experts are not a monoculture but are characterized by their diversity, which is also true of their opinions. Apart from the very interesting discussions within the group, the issue becomes more pressing when we look at the acceptance of gender aspects in the climate change negotiations themselves. In plain language, if you want to be acknowledged, you have to move within the system. This means that if a network totally rejects market-based instruments, the group and its positions will be ignored, and no debate with those who participate in the climate change process is going to take place. Yet women's networks are faced with critical questions regarding their willingness to go against what they believe to be true in order to be heard and acknowledged. Should they rather argue their more radical

views outside the UNFCCC process, so as not to gamble away the attention that gender aspects have gained within the process? For how long will they be able to maintain this balancing act without losing their footing completely? These questions will provide for exciting discussions in the networks and the women and gender NGO constituency.

TOWARDS A GENDER-SENSITIVE CLIMATE AGREEMENT AND BEYOND

The notion that women are the most vulnerable victims of climate change and its impacts is what makes many negotiators receptive to women and gender aspects. This is only one side of the coin, though undoubtedly an important and dramatic one.

If we are talking about mitigating climate change, however, or about criticizing the myopic focus of the climate regime on market-based instruments, the response is still very meagre. Women as victims, yes, but women as active protagonists with their own ideas about sustainable climate politics – this goes decidedly too far for many. Nevertheless, women are not just victims of climate change, they are also implicated in causing it. They may not do so to the same extent as men, as is shown by data on energy consumption in several European countries (Räty and Carlsson-Kanyama 2009), but this is not the most important point. The important issue is what differentiated requirements derive from the responsibilities and social roles of men and women, in which sectors climate protection is implemented, what role technologies plays in providing solutions and instruments, how they are perceived and how they impact on the daily lives of women and men. Above all, it is important which requirements and perspectives are accepted and which are marginalized or sidetracked. And finally there is the question of how climate change will impact on gender and power relations in the medium and long terms. There is a

lot of work still to be done by the gender and climate community.

A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

An essential point for a gender-sensitive climate regime is that it must go beyond addressing women as ‘most vulnerable to climate change’ in the field of adaptation and has to include women’s and gender perspectives in mitigation. In addition, there has to be a guarantee that the existing knowledge on the gender aspects of climate protection and climate change be implemented, for example, by providing mechanisms, tools and budgets and through mandatory evaluation of implementations.

Women and gender experts unanimously assert that a future climate regime will need to commit itself clearly to the existing UN Conventions on women’s rights and human rights and will also have to focus more strongly on sustainable development. This implies those measures which primarily benefit both climate and justice, which incidentally are also the ones that offer the greatest ‘co-benefits’.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge gender justice as a goal in its own right. Gender justice is not just a means to achieve poverty reduction, food security, or to make adaptation measures more effective: it is a matter of ethics and of fairness. What may require further discussion are the concepts of justice that this goal should be based on (Winterfeld 2008).

Realistically seen, the chances of drawing nearer to these visions in the outcomes of the climate conference in Copenhagen in 2009 are slim. But the preparatory process offers a great opportunity for strengthening the co-operation of women, gender and climate experts in substantiating these visions.

The change we envision is fundamental. GenderCC believes that in order to achieve women’s rights, gender justice and climate justice, fundamental changes are necessary to

overcome the existing systems of power, politics, and economics. In that sense, the challenges of climate change and gender injustice resemble each other – they require whole system change: not just gender-mainstreaming but transforming gender relations and societal structures. Not just some technical amendments to reduce emissions, but real mitigation through awareness and change of unsustainable life-styles and the current ideology and practice of unlimited economic growth. Not the perpetuation of the current division of resources and labour but a responsible co-operative approach to achieving sustainable and equitable societies.

We believe that linking women's rights, gender justice and climate justice is key to achieving these fundamental changes. This is a question of justice and equity as much as a matter of quality and effectiveness of decisions (GenderCC 2009).

ABBREVIATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

COP – Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC
 CMP – Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol
 CSD – Commission on Sustainable Development
 ENERGIA – International Network for Gender and Sustainable Energy, the Netherlands
 GenderCC – International Network Women for Climate Justice, Germany
 IGO – Intergovernmental Organisation
 LIFE / genanet – Focal Point Gender, Environment, Sustainability, Germany
 NGO – Non governmental Organisation
 UN – United Nations
 UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
 WECF – Women in Europe for a Common Future, the Netherlands
 WEDO – Women's Environment and Development Organisation, USA

NOTES

1. Since 1995, there have been yearly Conferences of the Parties (COPs). At COP 3, binding targets were set for 37 industrialised countries and the European Community to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within a five-year period from 2008-2012. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997 and entered into force in February 2005. 184 Parties of the Convention have ratified its Protocol to date. The detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at COP 7 in Marrakesh in 2001, and are called the Marrakesh Accords (http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php). Issues of implementation, further rules and regulations or indicators are discussed at the MOPs (Meetings of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol).
2. Press release by ENERGIA, ETC, LIFE at COP 9 in Milan, 2003.
3. For detailed information about the development of gender activities at the UNFCCC conferences, see www.gendercc.net/policy/conferences.html

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