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EMERGING ISSUES PANEL

Gender Perspectives on Climate Change

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Over the past two decades climate change has increasingly become recognized as a serious threat to sustainable development, with current and projected impacts on areas such as the environment, agriculture, energy, human health, food security, economic activity, natural resources and physical infrastructure. While previously cast as a future condition to be avoided, there is mounting evidence that climate change is already happening a

intensified. Sen (1988) reports how women and girls were systematically disadvantaged by food relief in the aftermath of flooding in West Bengal that destroyed crops and farmland.

Some people may say this is only anecdotal or subjective evidence.

However, last year a study carried out by the London School of Economics that analyzed disasters in 141 countries provided decisive evidence that gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women's economic and social rights. That is, when women's rights are not protected, more women than men will die from disasters. The study also found the opposite to be true: in societies where women and men enjoy equal rights, disasters kill the same number of women and men (Neumayer and Pluemper 2007).

So what does this mean for all of us that are working in climate change: **That the empowerment of women should be one of the priorities in adaptation and risk reduction strategies.**

But what are the other linkages in relation to gender, adaptation and mitigation strategies?

Women are powerful agents of change and their leadership is critical. Women have always been leaders in community revitalization and natural resource management. For example:

Women are the main producers of the world's staple crops, providing up to 90% of the rural poor's food intake and producing 60–80% of the food in most developing countries. Maize, sorghum, millet and groundnut yields have a strong association with the year-to-year variability of ENSO (El Niño/Southern Oscillation) in Africa. For southern Africa the productivity is expected to drop by 20–50% in extreme El Niño years. If global climate changes move more towards El Niño-like conditions, crop production in Africa will decline (Stige *et al.*, 2006).

In 2007, according to FAO, about 35 million people worldwide were directly engaged in fishing and aquaculture. In the Pacific region alone, it is estimated that women catch about a quarter of the total seafood harvested. For example, in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Viet Nam and the Philippines, there are communities where women play a greater part in aquaculture production and harvesting of littoral organisms than men. Changes in fish communities can have a severe impact on fisherwomen. If the greenhouse gas emissions scenario remains as present, climate warming could result in biannual thermal stress spells causing coral bleaching (Donner *et al.*, 2007). This phenomenon could result in the loss of a key marine ecosystem that supports many marine resources essential to women's livelihoods (e.g. their fishing and tourism activities).

Men and women often have different roles with regard to forest resource management. They play different parts in planting, protecting or caring for seedlings and small trees, as well as in planting and maintaining homestead woodlots and plantations on public lands. Men are more likely to be involved in extracting timber. Women typically gather non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for commercial purposes and to improve the living

Establishing the linkages between MDGs, climate change and gender (MDG 3 has been mainstream throughout the analysis)

Millennium Development Goals	Threats due to climate change	Gender implications
<p>MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</p>	<p>Reduction of agricultural production for survival and commercial ends</p> <p>Food security at risk</p> <p>Less access to safe water</p>	<p>Loss of domestic species of plants and animals used by women to ensure food security of their families.</p> <p>Reduction, mobilization, or extinction of marine species used by women for household consumption or for productive activities.</p> <p>Increase in women's workload due to decline in availability of water and other resources.</p>
<p>MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education</p>	<p>Increases the workload needed for agricultural production and subsistence activities</p> <p>Environmental changes are likely to drive migration</p>	<p>Generally, girls and women are responsible for the collection of water and fuelwood. If the time they invest in these tasks increases, their</p>

		<p>Migration enhances the risk of getting HIV/AIDS, given that families are separated and they are forced to live in overpopulated spaces.</p> <p>In developing countries, the poorer households affected by HIV/AIDS have less resources to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The need to adopt new strategies for crop production (such as irrigation) or mobilization of livestock is harder for female-headed households and for houses with HIV-infected people.</p>
MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	<p>Extinction of species, changes in species composition, disruption of symbiotic relationships, changes in trophic cascades, among others.</p> <p>Changes in the quantity and quality of natural resources could reduce the productivity of ecosystems.</p> <p>Floods, droughts, rising sea levels, melting of glaciers and polar icecaps.</p>	<p>Without secure access to and control over natural resources (land, water, livestock, trees), women are less likely to be able to cope with climate change impacts.</p> <p>Less available drinking water means women have to expend more effort to collect, store, protect and distribute water.</p> <p>Adaptation measures, related to anti-desertification, are often labour-intensive and women often face increasing expectations to contribute unpaid household and community labour to soil and water conservation efforts.</p> <p>Decrease in forest resources used by women.</p> <p>Women often rely on a range of crop varieties (agro-biodiversity) to accommodate climatic variability, but permanent temperature change will reduce agro-biodiversity and traditional medicine options.</p> <p>Lack of representatives and women's participation in the decision-making spheres related to climate change at all levels (local, national and international).</p>

If this is the case **what can be done?**

Analyze and identify gender-specific impacts and protection measures related to floods, droughts, heat waves, diseases, and other environmental changes and disasters;

Guarantee that women and gender experts participate in all decisions related to climate change.

Take action in order to ensure UNFCCC compliance with human rights frameworks, international and national commitments on gender equality and equity, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Support the development of a gender strategy or plan of action within the UNFCCC.

Establish a system for the use of gender-sensitive indicators and criteria for governments to use in national reporting to the UNFCCC Secretariat.

To ensure gender equity in all phases and aspects of funding mechanisms: when designing, implementing, evaluating proposals, and reporting on programmes. A series of gender-responsible criteria for programmes/projects should be developed, which vary according to the instrument concerned.

Increase equitable access by poor women and men to climate change market-based approaches such as the Clean Development Mechanism.

Facilitate the exchange of technologies that offer ecologically sustainable and socially equitable solutions for developing countries and for women and men within these countries.

Women's organizations, the ministries or offices of women affairs and UNIFEM should play an active role in the discussions and decisions that are being made in the climate change arena. The discussion on climate change should not be seen as a discrete environmental problem – it should be understood in its economic developmental dimension.

Aware of the challenges ahead of us, the gender specialists of a group of organizations – UNDP, UNEP, IUCN and WEDO – have launched the Global Gender and Climate Alliance. The main goal of the GGCA is to ensure that climate change policies, decision making, and all initiatives at the global, regional and national levels are gender-responsive. We invite you all to join us in this new challenge. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes. By neglecting the importance of gender we are responsible for the deaths and impoverishment of thousands of people.

