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Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

Discussion Paper for the UNFF 8 submitted by Women major group

Summary
Current arrangements for the representation of gender perspectives within the UNFF are grossly inadequate, limiting the degree of the usefulness of this Forum to addressing climate change and taking advantage of opportunities for a green economy and demands on states to meet global environmental goals. This paper will review challenges encountered by the Major Group WOMEN in advocating for the inclusion of gender perspective within the UN Forum on Forests, and in representing women’s interests in this Forum. It will also present a few innovative strategies that could be taken up by the Major Group WOMEN to develop this capacity within the UNFF, as well as provide linkages to gender initiatives within the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and other environment-related fora.

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I. Introduction
1. While further analysis is required to establish the exact correlations between environmental degradation and gender, numerous studies have shown that women and men, by virtue of their social roles and status, are differently affected by it. Climate change is expected to aggravate existing conditions, in fact, the IPCC in its 4th Assessment Report has pointed out that “vulnerability to specific impacts of climate change will be most severe when and where they are felt together with stresses from other sources”. The UNEP GEO-4 report has highlighted the increase in human vulnerability caused by the effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services, such as water and food supply. The IPCC has, furthermore, predicted that “climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders” and that “the poor, primarily but by no means exclusively in developing countries, will be disproportionately affected” while the UNDP 2007 Human Development Report states that “climate change is likely to magnify existing patterns of gender inequalities”.

2. One of the most apparent examples can be found in the agricultural sector in Africa, where women constitute a majority (over 70%) of the workforce. As weather patterns change and extreme weather events are expected to increase in number and magnitude it will become increasingly difficult for women to follow the traditional growing and harvesting cycles and provide for the subsistence of their families. Studies on the victims of climate change related disasters both in the developing and the developed world have shown that it is the economically and socially weaker groups who suffer most. To a large extent this group consists of women.

3. Yet women, who are vital agents of change, holders of valuable knowledge and skills should not be represented just as victims in the climate change debate, but as leaders to offset the negative impacts of climate change, particularly in terms of decision-making on consumption, food production and management of sustainable forests. Despite their significant roles in the forest sector, women's participation in decision-making and in mitigation and adaptation instruments is very low – sometimes non-existent. Mechanisms created thus far have failed to take into account the practical and strategic needs of women. As primary forest managers and farmers with responsibility for managing food security and a group with special needs to deal with natural calamities, including those of climate change, women must be involved in developing and implementing adaptation and mitigation strategies, and accessing benefits from their management of carbon.

4. Women, as the primary household decision-makers in many parts of the world, are “indispensable” to addressing the impacts of climate change, and their role must be recognized
if progress is to be made in upcoming talks to negotiate the role of forests in a changing environment, and in a global climate agreement for the post-2012 period. All efforts to slow or adapt to climate change, including through increased use of renewable energy and maintenance of forest cover, are closely related to poverty eradication. Given that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development and poverty reduction, the inequalities that are magnified by climate change slow progress towards those goals.

5. The gender-differentiated impacts of environmental degradation exacerbated by climate change require the integration of gender perspectives in the design and implementation of policies and laws. This is not only to avoid that one gender suffers more than the other but also to capture economic and social opportunities that have so far been neglected. There are a number of factors that continue to constrain the development of gender responsive policies and strategies. Firstly, for a full understanding of the connection between gender and the environment within the context of climate change, the collection of gender-disaggregated data in key sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy and water is mandatory. Secondly, to ensure that policies are truly gender responsive, the concept of gender has to feature throughout the life-cycle of a policy, i.e. design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, meaning that gender-sensitive indicators have to be developed. Thirdly, both women and men should participate in decision- and policy-making processes in order to ensure that their interests are equitably represented.

II. Gender within the UNFF

6. The high degree of gender blindness in climate change debates, and the generally low levels of participation by women in forest management decision-making and governance are issues of major concern to the Major Group WOMEN. More strategic concerted efforts and commitment by all actors engaged in Sustainable Forest Management are needed to strengthen women’s role in the processes and implementation of the NLBFI of the UNFF, and particularly in all dialogues related to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Within the UNFF, current arrangements for the representation of gender perspectives are grossly inadequate, limiting the degree of the usefulness of this Forum to addressing climate change and taking advantage of opportunities for a green economy and demands on states to meet global environmental goals.

III. Priority Areas for Action: Gender within the UNFF to Support Financing Mechanisms and Frameworks for SFM

7. All of the interventions made by the MG WOMEN since UNFF 4 have pointed to the need for structural changes within forestry organizations and institutions – including the UNFF itself - to address gender equality. Major Group WOMEN calls for more strategic concerted efforts and commitments by governments, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and sub-regional networks, as well as relevant multilateral environmental agreements, instruments, processes and United Nations bodies to strengthen women’s role in these processes and to implement a gender strategy or plan of action.
8. Within the UNFF, “women” are given the status of a Major Group. While this has allowed the MG Women to represent women’s interests within the UNFF meetings, it has been able to do so only as a civil society group. The Major Group WOMEN has long maintained that the UNFF requires a holistic and cross-cutting focus on gender, not just on women’s issues, and has advocated for gender to be mainstreamed throughout the Forum’s structures and processes through its Discussion Papers and interventions. The Group’s Discussion Paper for UNFF4 placed a call for member states and other policy making bodies to: a) use gender mainstreaming strategies to integrate different needs of women and men in policymaking; b) ensure gender balanced decision making to include women’s perspectives and concerns in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policy decisions and outcomes; c) conduct a gender review process for country reports before they are finalized, to enable women’s organisations to actively engage in the monitoring process and to point out indicators that recognize the needs of women and poor communities, d) compile a list of national indicators related to gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as specific indicators to measure women’s access to and control of forest resources in consultation with women’s organizations and gender advisers and e) analyse the differential impacts of specific policies and budget allocations on women and men to improve accountability and targeting of public services. This has been found to be especially useful in incorporating gender into sectors not normally associated with women, such as forestry and natural resource management.

9. There is a renewed determination to achieve the UN’s mandate calling for gender equality by systematically mainstreaming gender perspectives in the programmatic, normative and operational work of the UN system, and demonstrating more activity to increase gender and women’s engagement initiatives; this is evident in the case of UNEP, UNDP and the OSAGI in relation to climate change, in particular. How can we build on this, and on the new calls for more investment in women as small holder farmers by governments and donors concerned about food security and climate change?

IV. Plans and Ideas for Action
A. Country Led Initiative on Gender and the UNFF
10. With the appointment of a gender sensitive woman to head the UNFF, a small core group organized at the AHEG meeting in Vienna in November 2008 of women and men of governments, international and regional organizations and MG WOMEN are renewing the push for a structure to mainstream gender within the UNFF. This group proposes to initiate this through a CLI on Gender Issues within the UNFF, to focus on a substantive issue of the Program of Work where gender is a major factor affecting the outcome, such as the Role of Women in Adaptation for Climate Change and Forests. To be held as an Inter-sessional meeting, this would bridge the UNFF8’s focus on climate change and financing and UNFF 9, with a focus on livelihoods and poverty eradication. The outcome will be a higher awareness of women and gender related issues, plans for how to integrate these issue areas into the objectives of the NLBI, and a plan to institutionalize gender within the Secretariat. This could begin with a Planning Meeting during the first week of the UNFF 8 in May, 2009, with the assistance of the Secretariat. Participants at this meeting will include delegates of countries interested in sponsoring or hosting this event.
B. Consultative Group on Gender and Forestry
11. Formation of a consultative group on gender and forestry, comprised of women ministers and leaders within forestry and environment ministries, gender-sensitive staff of forest departments, research organizations, etc., leaders of community level women, women of other Major Groups, CPF members and others could be formed under the Secretariat. The existing Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment is currently exploring innovative strategies to bridge the gaps between women’s needs and policy development and should be a part of this structure.

C. Pilot projects to test implementation mechanisms of forest related Payment for Environmental Services projects with women’s groups
12. Pilot projects through partnerships between governments and civil society, and with regional and global organizations specialized in gender mainstreaming need to be supported to build and document the positive impacts of engaging women in poverty-addressing SFM initiatives using Payment for Environmental Services and adaptation funds to prepare scenarios on how climate change funding mechanisms can directly benefit rural women.

D. Women Representation in Design of Climate Change Funds at the World Bank and elsewhere
13. Key meetings of the various climate change funds must facilitate the participation of women from the developing countries most affected by these changes, including those of small island states, mountain areas, and tsunami-affected areas, where opportunities for mitigation and adaptation must involve women. To date, there has been very minimal or no inclusion of gender issues within these debates.

14. The second design meeting of the Forest Investment Program at the World Bank in 2009 presents an opportunity to mitigate the lack of women’s representation in these processes to date.

E. Women’s Participation at the World Forestry Congress
15. Women’s participation at the XIII World Forestry Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2009 should be funded by member states and strategic partners to assure the maximum participation of women at this event.

F. Coordination of Women in SFM at CSD 2012/2013
16. The Commission on Sustainable Development reviews forest management and biodiversity in 2012 and 2013, including aspects of poverty eradication and gender equality. Major Group WOMEN will initiate planning for this significant global event in 2010 to assure maximum participation and impact by women; funds from member states and strategic partners are needed for this purpose.

V. Assessment of the United Nations Forum on Forests process
17. Current low levels of participation by women in forest management decision-making and governance are issues in general, and within the UNFF are issues of major concern to the Major
Group WOMEN. Women’s participation is constrained by funds that permit only 1-2 participants from the Major Group; presentations are those allowed within the time allocated for the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue session of the Forum but more frequently in the expert meetings and Country Led Initiatives. As well, there has been no support or engagement with the implementing bodies – the members of the Collaborative Forest Partnership, most of which have organizational policies to incorporate gender into their work.

18. Within this environment, getting language specific to women and gender within the official documents and plans has been a very large challenge. The NLBI includes not a single reference to women (except as a Major Group), much less to gender equality. The document refers often to: forest owners, and local and indigenous communities but never singles out women. Even delegations from countries very supportive of gender equality policies have been reluctant to include language that specifies ‘women’ within the NLBI.

19. Why haven’t gender issues and women’s representation been provided the same degree of respect and recognition that issues of other major groups, such as Indigenous Peoples have? Why, for example, do various processes of designing climate change funding mechanisms (such as the FCPF- Forest Carbon Partnership, and the Forest Investment Program) include most of the other Major Groups but are without representation by women? Mechanisms must be in place to assure that such programs are required to involve women in their design, implementation and monitoring.

VI. Recommendations: What needs to Change?

20. Within the last year, the UN Convention for Biodiversity has approved a Plan of Action for Gender, to mainstream gender in the implementation of the Convention and the work of the Secretariat; promote gender equality in achieving the three objectives of the Convention; demonstrate the benefits of gender mainstreaming in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing of resources; and increase the effectiveness of work of the Secretariat. The Plan outlines a framework for integrating gender within all divisions and units of the Secretariat, providing strategies with reachable targets and instruments to address gender concerns in the Convention’s programmes of work.

21. Major Group WOMEN proposes that a similar process be followed within the UNFF. Recommendations such as those below and others at the country and regional level will be addressed by the formulation of a Gender Action Plan and Implementation Strategy.

- Governments need to refer to their ratification of international agreements on gender equality/women’s rights and be held accountable to these while developing policies for women/gender in SFM

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1 The FCPF (managed by the WB) Charter provides for non-voting observers to attend FCPF Participants Committee meetings. Currently there are six observers: NGO, private sector, indigenous peoples, UN-REDD, the UNFCCC secretariat, and inter-governmental organizations. While Observers may attend meetings, propose agenda items, and participate in discussions, they may not vote.
• Design a plan and architecture for gender mainstreaming in UNFF and organize around this;
• UNFF Secretariat should appoint a Gender Focal Person
• Capacity building for gender mainstreaming is required within forestry institutions at all levels
• Gender analysis in climate change factors needs to be integrated in agricultural, forestry and mine related planning, including disaster management planning.
• Multi-sectoral approaches are necessary to meet women’s needs, so forestry community needs to talk to food security, poverty alleviation communities – this can be facilitated through links between Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for Environment and the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders of Agriculture
• Resources are needed to increase numbers of women who can be ‘at the table’ for decision making and advocacy within UNFF process, especially so that the voices of women from a wider group of countries including those of Small Island Developing States (SIDS and mountain areas, and those affected by conflicts and natural disasters can be heard.