

**52<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women  
25 February to 7 March 2008**

**Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of  
women or equality between women and men**

**“Gender perspectives on climate change”**

**28 February 2008**

**Moderator’s summary**

1. On 28 February 2008, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel to examine the emerging issue of gender perspectives on climate change. The session was moderated by Mr. Ara Margarian of Armenia. The panelists included: Ms. Minu Hemmati, member of Gendercc – Women for Climate Justice; Ms. Lorena Aguilar, senior adviser to the World Conservation Union; Ms. Anastasia Pinto, adviser to the Centre for Organization, Research and Education in India; Ms. Rachel Nampinga, programmes director for Eco-Watch Africa; and Ms. Sri Woro Harijono, director of the Meteorological and Geophysical Agency (BMG) in Indonesia.
2. Participants called attention to the fact that climate change is not a gender-neutral phenomenon, and highlighted many of its gender-specific impacts. Given that climate change disproportionately affects the poor, and that women form the majority of the world’s poor, women are among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Participants noted further that women are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods, fires, and mudslides. Many women live in conditions of social exclusion. When, for example, skills such as swimming and tree climbing are taught mainly to boys, women and girls are more likely to die when a natural disaster strikes. Indigenous women are especially susceptible to natural disasters.
3. Participants stressed that climate change has a direct impact on women’s lives because of their domestic responsibilities. In Africa, for example, women have primary responsibility for food security, household water supply, and the provision of energy for cooking and heating. Conditions such as drought, deforestation and erratic rainfall have a disproportionate negative affect on their ability to carry out these duties. As climate change causes African women to work harder to secure these basic resources, they have less time to secure an education or earn an income. Girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school to help their mothers gather fuel, wood and water.
4. The massive and unequal impact of climate change in the developing world also impinges directly upon women’s livelihoods. In Africa, women rely directly on forest resources to meet health, nutritional, economic and cultural needs of their families and communities. Deforestation poses a direct threat to women’s economic well-being

because forests provide a significant source of environmentally-based income generating activities for women.

5. Women in developing countries are also primarily responsible for the production of food, mostly through subsistence forms of production, and are highly exposed to the risks that come with drought and uncertain rainfall. In the agricultural sector, women are the main producers of the world's staple crops, producing 60 to 80 per cent of the food in most developing countries. Concern was voiced that if global climate change leads to El Niño-like conditions, crop production in Africa will decline, worsening the living conditions for the women and communities that rely on this agricultural activity.

6. In the Asia- Pacific region, for example, women in many communities are responsible for a large part of aquaculture production and harvesting. If current global warming trends continue, there will be a significant depletion of fish stock and the coral reef destruction will result in loss of key marine ecosystems that are central to supporting marine resources which comprise a major source of women's livelihoods in the region.

7. Participants also pointed out that the decline of rainfall and the scarcity of water resources threatened women's security, health and well-being. According to estimates, by 2050, there will be 250 million environmental refugees, or people who are forced to flee their homes due to increasing incidence of droughts, desertification and extreme weather conditions.

8. Participants stressed, however, that women are not just victims of climate change; they are also powerful agents of change. Women have demonstrated unique knowledge and expertise in leading strategies to combat the effects of climate change, as well as natural disaster management, especially at the grassroots level. Participants also noted that women play a vital leadership role in community revitalization and natural resource management. Overall, however, women tend to be underrepresented in decision-making on sustainable development, including on climate change, and this impedes their ability to contribute their unique and valuable perspectives and expertise on the issue.

9. With respect to natural resource management, participants drew attention to the different types of contributions that women and men can make. In forest resource management, for example, women play key roles in planting, protecting or caring for seedlings and small trees, as well as in planting and maintaining homestead woodlots and plantations on public lands, whereas men are more likely to be involved in extracting timber. Women typically gather non-timber forest products for commercial purposes and to improve the living conditions within their households (e.g. medicines, fodder for livestock). Participants mentioned, for example, that the representative of the Equilibrium Fund, which is a regional initiative for Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, has been participating in carbon trading dialogues with the United States and Europe to show how specific projects could help improve women's lives, adapt to changes caused by climate change and reduce greenhouse gases. Participants also noted that women were beginning to play important roles in tropical forest preservation, as women's groups were managing forest resources and development projects through woodlot ownership, tree

planting and nursery development.

10. Actions that are being taken to increase women's participation in climate change activities include global and national networks, awareness-raising, advocacy for greater participation of women in the climate change negotiations, and promoting the inclusion of gender perspectives in policy formulation and evaluation. In this regard, the special role of civil society organizations was highlighted. Participants also raised the fact that women have been engaged in a number of activities aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change. Several national level examples were given of women spearheading massive tree planting efforts, household waste-recycling initiatives, and projects to produce fertilizers from organic waste, in support of the "four R's" – reduce, reuse, recycle and replant.

11. Participants noted that climate change is best addressed in the context of sustainable development, because of its impact on the environment and on economic and social development. At the national level, it was suggested that the issue of climate change from a gender perspective should be integrated into all national policies and programmes that address sustainable development.

12. Participants underscored that the international climate change negotiation process and climate change policies at the national level must adopt the principles of gender equality at all stages, including research, analysis and design and implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies. In particular, it was suggested that action should be taken to include gender mainstreaming in all mitigation and adaptation policies, including gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting. The use of gender-sensitive indicators and criteria for analysing the impacts of policies was also called for. Participants noted that practical tools would have to be created to integrate gender equality into climate change policies and evaluate their impact.

13. It was noted that there was a greater need for the involvement of and participation of women in the current international policy dialogue on climate change. Participants stressed that there was a need for increased attention to mobilizing and supporting women's groups and networks to advocate for and raise awareness on climate change. Partnerships should be forged between international organizations, national mechanisms, the scientific community and the women's movement to ensure that gender equality perspectives is mainstreamed in climate change efforts. Participants suggested that continuous representation of women and gender experts at the international level, including in activities organized in the context of pursuing the Bali Plan of Action, was crucial. The need to link discussions at the grassroots level with those taking place at the international level was also emphasized. Providing capacity building opportunities for women to enable them to become effective advocates on policy on climate change was also crucial.

14. Participants also highlighted the need for research to obtain more comprehensive data on gender aspects of climate change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation strategies. Sex-disaggregated data needed to be collected and published, and a gender

15. On the intergovernmental level, participants noted with concern that gender has not been a component of the international negotiations, and that climate change discussions have tended to be gender-blind. The different international instruments, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), do not make reference to the gender aspects of climate change. Participants suggested that efforts should be made to include a gender perspective in a post-Kyoto regime.

16. Participants suggested that climate change should be approached from a human rights perspective. Action needed to be taken to ensure that the UNFCCC complied with requirements in human rights frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Participants highlighted the need for social justice to become an integral part of the process to combat climate change, and for women to take a leadership role in steering the climate change debate towards issues of equality, fairness and justice.

17. Financing initiatives related to climate change were raised, and participants expressed the view that they needed to be adequately restructured to reflect women's priorities. Existing mechanisms, such as the Adaptation Fund, should allow women access to and voice in decision-making on allocation of its resources. Participants stressed that the active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and programmes as well as in decisions about funding was crucial. Gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments regarding climate change must be undertaken and efforts made to promote gender-sensitive investments in programmes for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building.

18. Participants stressed that technological developments should take into account women's specific needs and concerns. Women need to be granted full and equal access to new technologies, including through training, credit and the support of the development and adoption of new technologies and skills. Finally, participants reiterated the importance of ensuring that technology transfer delivers both climate protection and support to women by making technologies easily available and appropriate to their needs.