

## REPORT OF WOMEN MAJOR GROUP

### SIDE EVENT AT THE ASIA RIM

#### *WOMEN MAJOR GROUP STRATEGY LEADING TO CSD 16*

26 November 2007, (Lunchtime 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.)

Held in Jakarta, Indonesia (Hotel Borobudur)

*Women's groups need recognition at global platforms. Legislation is one place to get formal recognition. Like I am from Pakistan, our former Prime Minister is a woman and she is world renowned for what she has done. She has brought forward the women's agenda that also brought a lot of changes in my country. Our legislation has a provision for at least 30 per cent of women in the Parliament...Get exposure and recognition like in the UN and different levels. I believe that problems in sustainable development cannot be achieved without the role of women. If you pull women out from there, there will be no sustainable development. More and more active and dominant role of women in the complete context will be necessary.*

*Comment by the Government Delegate from Pakistan  
during the Side Event*

*We would like to pay tribute to the late Ms Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, especially for her contribution to women all over the world.*

The Side Event was organised by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) for the Women Major Group during the Asia and the Pacific Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for the 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, last 26 and 27 November 2007.

The women organizers of the Side Event would like to acknowledge the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Environment and Sustainable Development Division, in particular Ms. Hitomi Rankine; the Center for Alleviation of Poverty/Secondary Crop's Development in Asia and Pacific (CAPSA)'; and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)/CSD Secretariat, in particular Ms. Federica Pietracci. We thank them for having facilitated the organization of the Side Event and participation of the Women Major Group at the RIM.

The organizers and the participants would like to express their appreciation especially to His Excellency Mr. Francis Nhema, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Government of Zimbabwe, Chair of the Bureau of the sixteenth session of the CSD; Mr. Tri Tharyat, Chairperson of the Bureau of the Asia and the Pacific RIM; Mr. Rae Kwon Chung, Director of the Environment and Sustainable Development Division, UNESCAP; and Mr. Juwang Zhu, Chief, Programme Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, UN-DESA/CSD Secretariat. They have all joined the Side Event, provided their inspirational messages and actively participated during the lively discussions giving boost to the voice of the Women Major Group at the RIM.

The Side Event was attended by government, intergovernmental and major group representatives attending the RIM. Presentations were made by Ms. Kanchan Lama (WOCAN Nepal), Signora Maria Francisca de Belo Assis (Director of Gender Division of the Ministry of Agriculture of Timor Leste), Ms Meena Bigli (WOCAN India), Ms Daphne Roxas (Philippine Women's University) and Ms. Neth Dano (Third World Network/Philippines). The event was facilitated by Ms. Rosalud de la Rosa (WOCAN Secretariat).

Mr. Tri Tharyat gave his opening remarks. He encouraged a closer communication with the organizers in the future, prior to the CSD in New York. He expressed the openness of the Asia RIM Bureau in hearing the views of the major groups. He acknowledged the presence of His Excellency Mr. Nhema that gave the group the privileged to be listened to.

His Excellency Mr. Francis Nhema congratulated the Women Major Group for organizing the Side Event, as well as in Addis Ababa during the Africa RIM. He hopes to also hear from the group leading to CSD in New York and also the possibility of meeting prior to CSD given the importance of cooperation between the Bureau and the major groups. Giving his inspiring remarks to the group he said: *"In Africa, the people are women...women are educating and they are the future of Africa. I will be listening to what you wish to say and it is important..."*

Kanchan Lama introduced WOCAN as a global network with more than 400 women and men members in over 80 countries. WOCAN's main mission is to build women leaders in the field of agriculture and natural resource management for organizational transformation through an innovative approach of partnering motivated professional and rural women. WOCAN facilitates the participation of women in the sector in advocacy activities such as at the CSD, UN Forum on Forest, the Adelboden Mountain Partnerships and the SARD at FAO. She thanked the organizers for the opportunity and space given to the Women Major Group. She cited that women like her participate in such processes at CSD, learns from it, and brings what she learns back to her own country and in Timor Leste where she is currently based as Gender Advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Signora Maria Francisca de Belo Assis, is the gender focal point of the Ministry of Agriculture of Timor Leste. She expressed her concern about poor rural women,

especially women farmers, who need to compete with market economy but do not have adequate information and are not included in decision making at all levels and programme design. She urged the need for governments and NGOs to work together to discuss the organization of women farmers and improve the capacity of women technicians and empower them through regional networking among professional women in agriculture which can make rural and sustainable development a reality.

Meena Bigli, an expert on gender and social issues in agriculture, water, livestock and rural development from India, gave the impetus to give priority to women in agriculture - where 70 to 80 per cent of them work in the agriculture sector - and yet in many countries the policies and problems are still not focusing on women working as planners and decision makers. She echoed to the group the earlier Panel discussion on capacity building and the need for education in agriculture, however, the need to give a focus in targeting women will necessary so that the gender concerns do not get “evaporated” in the overall plans. She highlighted the burning issues on subsidies where there are two different schools of thought: one says that subsidies should be vanished, while the other says it should not. However, what is needed is to distil from the lessons learned from government subsidies from past experience, especially for the poor women, and perhaps a need for equitable agreement to genuine agrarian reform especially for women.

Daphne Roxas, who has been involved in advocacy for women’s rights in intergovernmental and governmental processes since 20 years cited the usual approaches of women’s caucus in summits by voicing out loud her concerns. She commented on the RIM thematic reports which can have the potential to have adequate materials for advancing the discourse on gender justice and rights-based approach to development but did not necessarily pick up the many citations from work already done by the UN system. She cited published documents from the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) on advances made on the rights-based approach to planning and programming with agencies like UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNEP that have incorporated human rights in their operational work. She also cited international conventions - starting from the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), UN conventions and summit commitments like the Beijing Declaration, that justify the adaptation of the rights-based approach in intergovernmental processes and outcome documents. The critical need for leaders to link the MDGs and human rights will essential in the discourse.

Kanchan Lama concluded the presentations promoting the need to document more case studies that needs to be scaled up. She also cited the biggest constraints of funding, even lack of infrastructure and human capacity like in her own country Nepal that should also be addressed in order to scale-up practices. She reminded the participants about the outcome and the follow up to the International Conference on Agrarian Reform (ICARRD) that was held in Porte Alegre two years ago with a Final Declaration already agreed by 92 governments.

The ensuing interactive discussion was facilitated by Rosalud de la Rosa who first referred to the mandate of the organizing partners of the major groups from the CSD Chair and Bureau explaining the role of the major groups in the process such as the organization of the event.

She presented the list of key messages that the Women Major Group would like to put forward:

#### On Policies and Projects

- Targetting Women is key
- Women as planners and implementers
- Women can take ownership and control

#### Women in Decision-Making

- Drivers, Movers and Shakers
- Women who lead change
- Women who mobilize movements
- Women who integrates the hardware (their technical knowhow) and social issues (software)

#### Distil Lessons Learned from Subsidy Strategies

- Pro-poor, pro-small holders
- Away from market-driven

#### Scale-Up Community-Driven Successful Case Studies

- Address obstacles, i.e., lack of funding, infrastructure, human capacity
- Capture indigenous knowledge of women

She requested participants to participate in their personal capacity, removing their institutional hats. Participants were requested to discuss among themselves and write on a color-coded card (yellow for major groups, blue for governments and orange for IGOs) their additional suggestions on the above issues already raised by the Women Major Group related to the themes of the CSD. In addition, participants were also requested to provide their suggestions regarding their proposed strategies how to influence the CSD and governments to put forward the key messages.

The following were the inputs received from the participants during the interactive discussion and written contributions:

- *Women are key drivers of change in agriculture and in the community and recognition of equality should be there in attaining sustainable development.*

- *Social women's movements/political movements are catalysed by women's groups. In India, women hold key posts in governments and local bodies. Like where I come from there is a provision that alternate leader of a local committee should be a woman. Such positive discrimination for women can go a long way. Initially, there was a lot of apprehension that women might be illiterate and can be influenced by their friends, but gradually they were able to show that these women are getting more independent with their decisions.*
- *Women's groups need recognition at global platforms. Legislation is one place where you can get formal recognition. Like I am from Pakistan, our former Prime Minister is a woman and she is world renowned for what she has done. She has brought forward the women's agenda that also brought a lot of changes in my country. Our legislation has a provision for at least 30 per cent reserved for women in the Parliament. There are agents of change pilot initiatives that show people are trained. Children are leaders of the future. Get exposure and recognition like in the UN and different levels. I believe that problems in sustainable development cannot be achieved without the role of women. If you pull women out from there there will be no sustainable development. More and more active and dominant role of women in the complete context will be necessary.*
- *It is very important to make women's voices heard such as in event like this. It is also important to speak with and to write to government delegates directly who can have an impact.*
- *You can also write case studies to illustrate how women are making changes and impact them are making in agriculture and poverty reduction. Let everyone hear what you have to say. Women have been doing a lot - tell your achievements and where you are making them and that money spent have been worth. Prepare your shortlist of priorities. Prepare a Strategy for Implementation. Present your achievements.*
- *In a lot of ways women are behind men. You have the opportunity speak louder, use it and make sure that everyone knows you are around - demand the space. The world is not changing. Information is power. Make sure that every woman knows what is happening. In most cases there are very few women who know what is happening like organizations who are doing this work. When you ask people they don't know what is happening.*
- *The UN ESCAP supported the organization of this lunchtime event which is a proof that ESCAP is very supportive to the Women Major Group. Our new Executive Secretary, Ms. Noeleen Heyser is a woman (she was the former head of UNIFEM) which tells you the direction where we are moving with a woman CEO. I suggest*

*that you make yourselves known which is good and if I may add also, the voice has to carry a message. I strongly support education is key for women. Korea is an example where half of those who pass the exams for diplomats, judges and lawyers are women.*

- *The improvement in education of the future generation is very important. Like in China, our government has launched a programme for girl education. It is the most important way to improve sustainable development capacity in the future generations.*
- *I would like to highlight few issues of women and gender on women's role in traditional institutions. There is a tendency to emphasise traditional institutions like in land tenure or in development whether these institutions are inclined to work with women. They do not allow women to participate. And yet on the other hand, we promote these types of traditional institutions - which can be a real challenge. The other challenge is to ensure that we give representation to the voice of the poor women.*
- *In IFOAM, we always make sure that gender equity issue is embedded from policy planning, programme and implementation. What we would like governments and intergovernmental organizations to do is: first and foremost - to promote gender equality which is something that is an "untouchable" right, and then - followed with a programme that does not touch these "untouchable right." It is the role of governments to promote these equal rights and even with the development of technology or education. All plans should also be completely monitored.*

Neth Dano from Third World Network wrapped up the Side Event. She thanked all those who keenly participated despite the limitation of the layout of the room and the timing of the event but at the same time it showed how women can mobilize participation. She commented the mirroring in all CSDs where women are always very impressive. The need to recognize the role of women and the improvement of gender equality are always mentioned but to put them in concrete terms and actions is always an issue. The need to look at concrete models that work and how to scale them up is important. The idea of gender equality going against tradition, religion and even culture are real challenges. A major challenge for women's emancipation is within the transformations of traditional institutions that will allow gender equality. There is so much rhetoric at global level but governments should be put to act and a lot still needs to be done. It is not enough to satisfy ourselves in numbers nor have women as presidents which can be disappointing at times. We will be counting on a lot for the Women Major Group to keep the CSD process alive and particularly to keep this at the regional level as we are now already seeing in the RIMs.

Rosalud de la Rosa thanked all the participants, UNESCAP and UN DESA, and the closed the Event. She assured the participants that WOCAN will write and publish the report at the WOCAN website.

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The following suggestions are the written contributions collected from the participants:

- *Women should be involved in decision-making processes related to agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification issues.*
- *Organisations like WOCAN should talk to governments.*
- *Equal access to opportunities and productive resources for women.*
- *Equal representation in governance.*
- *Women are farmers too! We need policies that: grant equal access and control to women over land and other natural and productive resources.*
- *Provide affirmative action (% of women in all key decision-making bodies of governments).*
- *Respond to strategic gender needs (addressing multiple burdens).*
- *Increase social (education) and health services for women.*
- *Gender equity in policy-making and governing bodies.*
- *Agricultural production policies shall explicitly include gender equality and active promotion and inclusion of women.*
- *Pro-active approach where necessary.*
- *Special projects for women where necessary.*
- *Regional cooperation to harmonise process.*
- *Set up monitoring bodies at all levels (in the UN, regional, national, development agencies, World Bank and ADB) to assure that all policies and programmes include gender equality approach from drafting stages to finalization and implementation.*
- *Inform women that THEY will become change agents.*
- *More women in decision-making at all levels.*

- *Institutionalise participation of women in policy formulation and development programming.*
- *Organise and invest in education.*
- *Stop considering women as weaker sector.*



Women Major Group Statement delivered by Ms. Meena Bigli (India)  
at the Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for Asia and the Pacific  
for the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16),  
Jakarta, 26-27 November 2007

On behalf of the attending representatives of the Women Major Group, we thank  
Your Excellencies, Government Delegates and UN ESCAP Environment and  
Sustainable Development Division, for facilitating the participation of the Women  
Major Group in this important regional event in preparation for the UN Commission  
on Sustainable Development 16<sup>th</sup> Session.

Together with other major groups, we have joined all of you in this meeting in this  
Meeting because the pillars of Sustainable Development - economic, social and  
environment - have great bearing on the lives of Asian women, especially poor rural  
women, women farmers, landless women and indigenous women. We are here to  
listen to your deliberations and also to speak with many of you and to express our  
concerns, and hopefully learn from successes as well, in the discourse of agriculture,  
rural development, land, drought and desertification.

Development cannot be sustainable unless and until women, especially the rural  
women who are engaged in agriculture and natural resource management, are  
targeted with plans for empowering and organising them for claiming their sovereign  
rights to natural resource management and policy decisions that affect their lives  
negatively or positively.

The globalization and privatization of markets has posed a difficult situation for  
Asian women in market competition because they do not enjoy appropriate  
economic and market policies that could safeguard their interests. The major issue  
lies in empowering disenfranchised and economically marginalized women in  
decision making process at all levels in order to make development participatory and  
sustainable.

Equitable access to land and security of tenure especially for rural poor people are  
central to sustainable land management and poverty reduction in the region. Asian  
Women need to own land for motivated participation and secured livelihoods. They  
continue to be denied effective rights to own or control the land that they cultivate.  
They remain unwaged and invisible workers on family farms or underpaid workers on  
other's farms. Even among the large and growing body of *de facto* female headed  
households (e.g. in India, it is estimated at 35%) only few have direct access to land  
in their own rights.

Experiences from development projects show that women's independent land rights and control can enhance food security, economic opportunities, improve child nutrition, health and education, and even reduce domestic violence. Again, they have more voice both within the home and in the community and are better able to get their dues from government schemes and financial institutions. Without land in their own names, they are disadvantaged in getting credit, inputs, information and capacities on new farming practices and processing, marketing, etc. Increasing women's rights in agricultural land is of critical importance for policy and action.

As an effect of global climate changes, women have been suffering most from food insecurity, diseases, loss of male working force, lower rate of literacy or illiteracy such that they can hardly find ways out for getting better organised to analyze own situations and make a dignified livelihood.

There is a deep concern on the disproportionately devastating climate change impacts and in particular, the fact that climate change will exacerbate drought and desertification, floods, undermine agricultural production and food security, and cause increased conflicts and insecurity. The women and girls especially from among the poor are most impacted by climatic changes. There is grossly inadequate capacity in the region to adapt to the impacts of climate variability and change. More so, in understanding climate changes from "gender lens."

Majority of Asian governments have signed all important conventions for protecting women's interests in development plans, but there is very little budget allocation and policy adoption to translate them into realities, since most the budget is often diverted to externally-defined security issues whether to protect the country from outside attack or to maintain peace and law and order in the states.

Still most institutions dealing with the technical issues of agriculture, land and forestry are male-dominated and lack the involvement of women who can lead the change and implement reforms. There seems to be inadequate political will for integrating gender concerns into the work of development cooperation agencies -- in gender mainstreaming, gender justice and the rights-based approach to development across sectors of agriculture, land, droughts, desertification and rural development. There must be political and policy mandate to break the 'still going on' compartmentalized approaches to development and/or strengthening an integrated approach to sustainable development. Gender disaggregated data, and the establishment of gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems, including gender budgeting, reviews, assessments and audits, lack of which does hamper building gender responsive policies and programmes. Even and when such initiatives are taken, they often does not get translated into action on larger scales due to gross lack of capacities, infrastructural facilities and adequate funds.

With concurrent inter-governmental negotiations and relevant conferences happening in the global arena that is competing also with the CSD 16 agenda, we

hope that we can altogether have our focus and have meaningful dialogue and discussions around our common concerns. In that way, hopefully by CSD-17, we can agree on new policy options that will transform the lives of women that make up half of the world's population.

Thank you for your kind attention.