

Gender and Climate Change Issues: The Challenge for Policy Advocacy In Ghana.

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ABSTRACT

There has been an intense effort by gender advocates across the world to ensure that concerns about global warming and the increasing dramatic changes in climatic conditions create the basis for acknowledging issues of women's rights and gender justice. Even as there has been some skepticism about aspects of the science that has created a large body of knowledge about climate change, there is still agreement about the relevance of the evidence behind the climate change negotiations and policy-making. At the core of the climate change negotiations are issues of unequal power relationships between and among developed and developing countries, governments and civil society, as well as public and private interests. Spaces created for negotiations have therefore served as opportunities for coalition-building, networking and advocacy on a wide range of issues by different groups and individuals such as indigenous people, youth, trade unions, the business community, local government and women. The coalition-building effort of women's groups as a basis for policy influencing in the climate change negotiation is what is of interest to this paper. Specifically, the paper seeks to provide an analysis of the efforts by women's organisations to engender climate change negotiations through working together as a constituency. The key issues, challenges and the prospects for promoting women's rights and gender equality through such coalition building efforts will also be discussed. Finally, the lessons learnt and the implications for the women's movement and policy-making in Ghana will be drawn out.

1. Introduction

The issue of climate change was initially seen as a domain for those who have expertise in environmental and the atmospheric sciences. However, in the past decade or so, the actual experiences of women and men living in different parts of the world have led to a realisation that climate change is a development issue given its implications on agriculture, energy, health, food security, and physical infrastructure (UNDP, 2008). Much less acknowledged are the social relationships and the growing movement building efforts within which these developmental

issues are occurring in terms of questioning the politics and power relationships being displayed by world leaders about climate change and its potential catastrophic consequences for sustainable human development (UNDP, 2008).

This paper therefore attempts to look at the critical issues of climate change, the extent to which women's rights activists have engaged with the issues, the challenges encountered and the way forward particularly in the context of Ghana. The paper is divided into seven sections. After this introduction, section two discusses the theoretical and conceptual issues involved and attempts to build the discussion into a framework on gender and climate change in section three. Section four presents the key issues of climate change while section five examines the specific issues of concern to women. The sixth section then focuses on the movement building efforts around climate change while some perspectives about the way forward are discussed in section seven.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

A critique of the scientific discipline has been one of the central focuses of feminist analysis and research (Mama, 2009). Originally conceived of as 'rationale', 'objective' and relying mainly on quantifiable data, feminist researchers have succeeded in interrogating the 'scientific' way of knowing by acknowledging the importance of different ways of knowing as relevant for interrogating social phenomena (Harding, 1991). African feminists have contributed to this discourse by initiating, encouraging and consolidating active research that provides perspectives from women based on their knowledge and experiences (Mama, 2009). The idea is that women believe in the significance of local knowledge and in their capacity to contribute to and find solutions to their concerns utilising their own rich experiences. The idea is that valuable concepts

are embedded in local practices and must be unearthed and articulated. This means that notions about climate change even as they have implications for all humans globally, have embedded cultural meanings based on the history of multiple practices in a given society. Thus, even as climate change may have some degree of uniformity, this has direct relationship with multiple layers of deep difference (Rohr, 2007). Such differences must be acknowledged and changes examined to identify similarity and differences and assess impacts as they relate to different classes of women in the various spaces they occupy.

Recent agitation during the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) by women's groups against the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, on his appointment of an all male committee to manage a fund on climate change provides a clear indication of the relevant work women and feminist scholars have undertaken in articulating their concerns in key decisions that have implications for their lives.¹ Within the climate change negotiations and debates, developing a linkage between climate change and gender and development has been a major challenge particularly due to the original notion of climate change as purely technical and scientific. While science is important and has provided the basis for understanding and developing responses to many social phenomena, the danger has been to adhere to models that largely ignore the different experiences of women and men (Stanley, 1990). Thus if climate change is looked at as only an atmospheric science, we subject it to many of the erroneous assumptions of the scientific discipline (Rohr, 2007). This assumption includes looking at climate change as objective, high level, technical, difficult and therefore requiring rationale

¹ The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon announced the set-up of a Climate Change Adaptation Fund during the March 1-12, 2010 holding of the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Sadly the Committee Members were all men. This has led to a protest and a campaign by women against this action. The argument is that such a committee should include women to enhance women's rights to decision-making at all levels.

thinkers to undertake meticulous assessments of scientific data, and therefore exclusive to some groups and not accessible to others.

However, such assumptions have been challenged and alternative approaches proposed from a women's rights perspective, enabling feminists and gender activists to make important contributions which should be taken into account in relevant provisions around climate change at all levels including Ghana. The basic argument being made is that depending on a number of social categories such as gender, age, class and location, climate change would have differential meanings, experiences and impacts. As such if attention is not paid to the embeddedness of inequality in the causes and effects of climate change, injustice may increase all over the world, and poverty exacerbated particularly in Africa in attempts at addressing climate change (UNDP, 2009).

While there is a need to address gender concerns in the climate change discourse, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of what Mama (2006; 153) has referred to in relation to methodology as:

“gender interventions in which gender is applied as depoliticised technical device, generalising log frames and statistics, that do little to challenge unjust gender relations.”

In other words, what is required is for utilising critical evidence in the context of Africa, to explore the complex dynamics involved in the interrelationships between climate change, gender equality and social justice. How women experience unequal gender relations within the context of climate change and the differential impacts encountered must also be examined if the goals of human survival and dignity must be assured. This means that discussions on climate change

cannot be framed in a linear way. Rather it has to be acknowledged within the context of a complex, diverse and differentiated scenario within which women play active roles as knowledge creators, as they constantly engage in the daily struggles and challenges of survival and well-being. Thus an understanding of climate change and the embeddedness of gender relations within it is being discussed on the basis of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of social justice particularly as it relates to the African condition. Murray's (1970: 102) concern with human solidarity is instructive in this respect:

“The lesson of history that all human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardises the rights of all is particularly applicable here. A built - in hazard of an aggressive ethnocentric movement which disregards the interests of other disadvantaged groups is that it will become parochial and ultimately self-defeating in the face of hostile reactions, dwindling allies, and mounting frustrations.”

Again, bell hooks (1981: 194) and her analysis of feminism and the necessity of self-conscious are instructive:

“Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that all women will have equal rights with men. It is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates western culture on various levels- race, sex, class- to name a few and a commitment to re-organising societies so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires.”

However, given the inequalities involved in the social relationships between women and men, it is important to recognise the different interests of different women and men and to build solidarity across boundaries to promote social and women's rights. Goetz (2002) has for example noted that the ability of women to access their rights is affected by the persistence of inequality and domination at all levels of society. This means that even as women claim spaces in a number of creative ways to address their concerns, the institutionalised nature of discriminatory practices continue to pose many challenges for realising their equal rights with men.

A number of strands are noted in the attempt to operationalise the concepts of women's rights and gender equality. Two of these are the liberal feminist and the socialist/political economy feminist approaches.² In the literature, liberal feminist approaches have tended to explain off women's subordination in terms of lack of opportunities and resources. The policy prescription is then seen as the provision of minimum economic and social well-being (Tinker, 1982; Young, 1990; Sen, 1999). This explanation is problematic because it essentially ignores the complexities and challenges involved in working towards a state of equality at all levels among different groups of women and men. Arguments rooted in liberal feminism seem to feed into the neo-liberal economic policy framework where development is explained off as a linear process of individual needs and wants without recognising differences in historical experiences that affect individuals and groups in ways that may be disempowering.

Another group of commentators propose the idea of gender justice but those who theorise on this concept from the liberal feminist standpoint argue that international agreements and provisions as well as legislation are sufficient in providing a basis for addressing gender-based

² In between these two strands are the radical feminists who combine aspects of liberal feminism with specific notions of women's rights. (Firestone, 1970)

discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been specifically cited as capable of leading women to claim the justice space to address gender-based discriminatory practices. Out of this discussion has evolved the rights-based approach which has also become very popular in operationalising gender justice (Tsikata, 2007). The limitation of these approaches however as Tsikata (2007) has noted, is that since many of them are rooted in the neo-liberal framework, they tend to be top-down, legalistic and inadequate in promoting women's rights. Particularly in the context of Africa where the poor and other marginalised groups may be constrained by the character of the governance system and the political environment, the ability of disadvantaged groups from demanding their rights from power holders becomes problematic.

Be that as it may, the use of CEDAW and the rights based approach cannot be totally discounted as they do create platforms for women to demand their rights and hold the state accountable to their concerns. Taking these useful aspects into account, there are also those analyses from a feminist political economy perspective which are very critical for an understanding of the African situation (Stamp, 1998). One can also take the notion of gender-justice from this perspective as provided by Goetz (2007) who has explained that gender justice enables us to struggle to end inequalities between women and men. Such inequalities as argued occur as a result of the historical embeddedness of the subordination of women to men in areas such as distribution of resources and opportunities needed for social, economic and political well-being of individuals and groups, as well as for obtaining their human dignity, autonomy and integrity and the ability to make decisions or choices about life. It means also that women themselves have a collective way to transform existing inequalities to empowering experiences, relationships and processes. There is also an accountability dimension which empowers women to demand

that power holders at different levels and spaces- the household, the community, wider society or international level- be held responsible for ensuring that decisions and actions that prevent women's ability to realize their rights particularly gender-based discrimination are redressed (Goetz, 2007).

This notion of gender justice is useful in discussing climate change particularly in the context of Africa and Ghana. It means that women can make a case by drawing attention to the historical imbalances in social relations between women and men at all levels which continue to influence human societies and how decisions are made. Secondly, it can be argued that in the context of climatic change conditions, both formal and informal relationships at different levels and situations can act to determine how powerful groups/institutions can act with impunity to ignore the rights and interests of less powerful groups and individuals. Thirdly in the context of the global concern about climate change, women can further argue that the nature and character of the relationships that define how the rules are made and rights accessed, limit their choices for negotiation. A case in point is the discourse around processes of globalisation which have proceeded on the assumption that all states have an equal chance to benefit from economic and technological advances (Kaul, et al, 1999). Advocates of globalisation such as Friedman, (2000, 2005) argue that this way of organising the world is good for everyone and that if countries complied with the requirements of globalisation, their inhabitants will live happily ever after. This assumption is being pushed into the climate change agenda with the U.S, multinational institutions and the international financial institutions extending their global reach into profit making in the arena of the environment and the atmosphere. Many liberal feminists are using this approach creating a kind of cultural imperialism whereby women from the global South, especially Africa, are called upon to take advantage of the opportunities being offered without

urging them to question the increasing worsening social and economic conditions being created for women under the free market system of economic globalisation (Moghadam, 2005). Clearly this threatens the vision of justice for women and indeed for all of humanity.

But other women's groups, ecologists, labour organisations and farmers argue for the need for an alternative to neoliberalism for the sake of human survival. Globalisation for such rights-based groups is that it is 'a recipe for impoverishment and ecological disaster' (Eisenstein, 2006, p43); The creation of an alternative economic and social system is therefore critical.

If we understand globalisation as a complex process of economic, political and cultural change on a world scale that entails integration, marginalization, exploitation and resistance, then our analysis of any phenomena that is embedded in it can both acknowledge our integration within the system and the forms of resistance we need to develop to counteract its dominance (Mogadam, 2006). This means that the political underpinnings of climate change negotiation as well as the dangerous machinery of corporate globalisation, needs to be interrogated through our struggle for sustainable environments and livelihoods. The approach in looking at gender and climate change should therefore combine different perspectives that enable us to challenge systems of privilege, injustice, and inequality. This should enable women to claim their rightful place and make those valuable contributions from their own perspectives towards a gender justice and climate justice future. This is the kind of perspective that informs the issues discussed in this paper.

3. Instruments on Gender and Climate Change.

By linking gender justice to climate justice, women and their groups can make reference to human rights instruments as a basis for calling on governments to hold themselves accountable to their concerns in terms of the promotion of gender equality and equity (Gracia, 1999). Unfortunately the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol (KP) has no language on gender issues (UNDP, 2008). However a number of instruments and conventions on climate change are increasingly taking gender issues into account which is a reflection of the incremental successes of the continued struggles of women in influencing the thinking and trends around the subject. If combined with human rights provisions, it is possible to affirm that women and men have equal rights and therefore states have an obligation to adopt measures against discriminatory practices in any field of endeavour (UNDP, 2008).

The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which all UN member states adhere to are the starting point for making a case for rights and freedoms and for emphasising the protection of the dignity of persons. Other decisions adopted by consensus at international conferences are also useful reference points for advocating for change at all levels to benefit women. These include decisions on women's rights and gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 as the first international treaty recognising women's human rights. Other agreements signed onto in a number of conferences such as the, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995); Resolutions on Financing for Gender Equality (2008); and the Empowerment of Women at the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2008 are equally relevant.

With reference to global environmental instruments, there is no specific mechanism linking gender equality and equity to climate change strategies. However international frameworks related to environmental issues provide sufficient guidelines for advocating for gender equality considerations in promoting climate change equality measures (UNDP, 2008). The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as the Earth Summit which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 produced two legally binding agreements with far reaching consequences for the environment: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit or UNCED, through the activism of civil society organisations adopted a gender perspective in all development and environmental policies and programmes. This has been an unprecedented landmark for promoting a gender perspective in promoting sustainable development (Rio, 1998). In 1997, governments agreed to incorporate an addition to the UNFCCC, known as the Kyoto Protocol (KP), with the objective of reducing emissions of green house gases by 5 percent between 2008 and 2012 through taking more active and legally binding measures (UNDP, 2008). The CBD on the other hand was adopted in 1992 as the international framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair distribution of its benefits. Unlike the UNFCCC and the KP, women's participation has been explicitly acknowledged in the CBD. Paragraph 13 of the Convention states: "Recognise the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity emphasising the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy – making and implementation for biological diversity conservation" (as cited in UNDP, 2009: 43). The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) which was adopted in 1994 is the only internationally recognised legally binding instrument dealing with land degradation especially in poor rural

areas. The UNCCD talks of gender mainstreaming, the role of women in rural productive activity, and the equal participation of women and men.

Apart from these environment-focused processes, other UN Conferences on women have also addressed the links between gender the environment and sustainable development. Chapter K of the Beijing Platform for Action (BfPA) produced at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, also clearly defines the link between gender, the environment and sustainable development (BPfA, 2001: 137-145). The BPfA continues to be the blueprint document that guides action on the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. In review meetings held every five years since its adoption, as well as during the yearly sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the interrelationships between the environment, gender and sustainable development have been stressed. At its 46th Session in 2002 and more concretely at its 52nd Session in 2008, the CSW referred to gender and climate change as an emerging theme.

The most recent international advance in the attempt to integrate gender equity into all decision – making and planning processes related to disaster risk management occurred during the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Hyogo, 2005). According to the Framework for Action of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction: “A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision making processes including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training”. (<http://www.unisdr.org>).

Given that states have obligations under conventions and covenants and that signing and ratifying them make such instruments legally binding, the above provisions and their relevance

for climate change efforts are obvious. It means that countries such as Ghana are obliged to ensure that any laws and policies adopted in this area fully respect the rights of women to equal treatment before the law. It also means ensuring secure, fair and equitable distribution of benefits (funds, technology, information) and responsibilities, as well as the equal participation in decision-making in all processes.

In fulfillment of its obligations as a country that has signed onto all the above conventions and agreements, Ghana has made an attempt to comply with the mandate of holding itself accountable to the three Rio Conventions, namely, the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, the CBD and the UNCCD. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a national focal point on climate change and has undertaken some work in the area of women's livelihoods in its effort to develop National Communication assessments on climate change. These studies are useful, but they have been limited in scope and perspectives and do not go far enough in offering space for women's rights issues to be addressed in a fundamental way. For example, processes towards the development of a National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) have however included gender experts. Yet referring to NAPAs in Africa, the UNDP (2009:17) has said:

“In general, the NAPAs portray women as victims without the skills that would allow them to become involved in negotiations of strategic planning. Most of these plans do not even recognize that women with the knowledge they have can make a contribution to adaption processes and that they should be a focal group of adaptation programmes”.

The Ghana process however involved consultations with women's groups but it is yet to be seen if these consultations are translating into concrete actions involving women in the policy-making

processes.³ A secretariat combining the three Rio Conventions has also been established under the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MIST). Known as the Ghana Environment and Climate Change Authority (GECCA) there are efforts to engage with civil society. But it remains to be seen how the interest in working together can lead to the development of concrete positions, strategies and ideas and translated into policies and actions that benefit women.

4. Key Issues of Climate Change

It is against this background that the key issues of climate change have to be articulated. According to the science, the over two centuries of industrialisation in the world has resulted in the creation of wealth often expressed through unsustainable lifestyles and behaviours that is harming the atmosphere through carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emissions. Developed countries have contributed more to climate change and its adverse effects and it is estimated that three-fourths of carbon dioxide of emissions come from industrial sources from those living in the industrialised world (www.climatedebt.org). Unfortunately the worst effects of climatic change are felt among poor countries, communities and poor women and men. This is in spite of the fact that they contribute least to climate change but they are the worst affected. According to the Fourth IPCC Assessment report, Africa is the most vulnerable in all the regions of the world:

“All of Africa is very likely to warm during this century. The warming is very likely to be larger than the global annual mean warming throughout the continent and in all seasons” (IPCC, 2007).

³ History is instructive in this regard. In the preparation

Indeed the continent is expected to warm up to 1.5 times the global average according to the IPCC report with negative consequences for human survival in terms of the subjection of tropical forests to deforestation, reduction in crop yields, increased water stress and high costs involved in adapting to high sea level rise.

The scale of potential threat of climate change has therefore led the international community to act on searching for effective response measures. The UN General Assembly therefore established a negotiating committee at its 45th session in 1990 and in 1992 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed at the Earth Summit. The Convention had the broad objective of stabilising concentrations of greenhouses gases in the atmosphere, as well as to define adaptation measures for multilateral action. A number of commitments were defined for parties which are signatory to the UNFCCC based on the principle of ‘shared but differentiated responsibilities’ as well as others that all states need to comply with. However by the second half of 1990, Annex 1 Parties could not comply with their reduction commitments, hence the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) which was signed during the third session of the Conference of Parties (COP 3) in Kyoto, Japan.⁴ The KP was to facilitate compliance with UNFCCC’s ultimate goal of reducing emissions by establishing quantitative goals for those countries. Entered in 2005 it is expected to remain in force until 2012 when review processes would have led to agreement about new targets for compliance. This was the hope of the Copenhagen Conference of Parties (COP 15) held in December 2009. The idea was that there were going to be two outcome documents, one from discussions around the UNFCCC itself and the other more specifically around KP, all with the aim of making proposals for minimising the effects of global climatic changes.

⁴ Annex I Parties are those countries located in the global North where emission levels are highest and required by the UN to set targets for cutting down on such emissions.

Instead of complying with the two track approach proposal under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries are now offering solutions that threaten poor countries and communities. Among others, those who must really cut their emission targets have made proposals that will cause global average temperatures to rise up to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This definitely has adverse implications for developing countries. For example, it is estimated that a 2°C average warming implies around a 3°C warming in all regions of Africa which will threaten millions of women and men with drought, disease and death (Khor, 2010). Relatedly, the proposal of allowing global emissions to continue at above 50 percent of 1990 levels all the way through to 2050 actually risks a 50 percent chance of exceeding 2°C globally. This will be unacceptable given the threat this will pose for the lives of millions of women and men and the sustainability of life on the earth itself. Among the mechanisms proposed by developed countries is the global carbon markets (CDM) which will allow such countries to continue with their pattern of consumption and pollution while the burden of mitigating climate change will occur in developing countries. Thus an amount of 10 billion Euros in short-term financing up to 2012 is being offered to developing countries for adaptation and mitigation programmes (UNDP, 2010). Clearly this approach is unjust and ineffective and the effort to protect the climate system and promote sustainable development must be based on justice as has been provided for within the UNFCCC. There is a need for the repayment of climate debt on an equitable and effective way using the science based evidence. This requires that, those who have contributed most should compensate those who are bearing the worst effects in terms of adaptation and mitigation debts. In other words, even though all countries of the world must change consumption and other behavioural patterns in addressing climate change concerns, developed countries should lead the way according to UNFCCC and KP provisions. Given that

those who must do more, namely developed countries are using their power in decision-making spaces to propose solutions that will mainly serve their interests in market access, it can be said that climate change discussions are political and about power relations and not just a neutral science.

The thirteenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP-13) held in Bali, Indonesia, adopted the Bali Action Plan for developing a new agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol upon its expiration in 2012. The fourteenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP -14) was also held in December 2008 in Poznan, Poland. It focused on technological themes and strategies to manage and reduce risks associated with climate change. A detailed action plan was also outlined to culminate with an agreement at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP-15) which was held in December, 2009. As alluded to already, COP15 was therefore of critical significance as it was expected to determine the successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012 (UNDP, 2009).

But COP-15 did not produce the desired outcome: instead of a legally binding agreement, what was produced was an accord, the “Copenhagen Accord”. The two track process of the UNFCCC and its two working groups namely the ‘Ad hoc Working Group in Further Commitments for Annex I Parties’ under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG – KP); and the Bali Action Plan (2007) ‘Ad Hoc Working Group in long Term Cooperative Action’ (AWG-LCA) to enhance the implementation of UNFCCC was therefore sidelined. As the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC has said of the Copenhagen Accord,

“Since the Conference of Parties neither adopted nor endorsed the Accord, but merely took note of it, its provisions do not have any legal standing within the UNFCCC process even if some parties decide to associate with the Accord”⁵

Again as another commentator has said,

“The main lesson of Copenhagen is that leaving off some countries into a separate track with a separate document is not the right way to coordinate global climate negotiations. The way forward is to return to the multilateral forum, where the complex issues have to be sorted out into a final conclusion” (Khor, 2010:3).

The above discussion is important as a basis for developing relevant actions on gender and climate change. First of all, women and men experience social, economic and environmental processes differently due to the embeddedness of inequalities and discriminatory practices that affect women and men according to age, socio-economic class, culture, and geography among others. If we apply a gender analysis to the above historical facts, we are able to provide an understanding of how gender identities and relations in specific contexts operate to undermine women’s capabilities and initiatives on climate change. What this means is that specific measures must be articulated and put in place to enable women access their rights on an equal basis with their male counterparts given their differentiated climate interests and needs. As well, it seeks to establish equitable relations between women and men by transforming gender identities and the unjust relations that are embedded. In so doing, a clearer perspective for promoting equal participation, assessing needs, interests will be considered in designing relevant policies and programmes that promote greater equity and equality in climate issues.

⁵ See UNFCCC website: <http://www.unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

5. Issues of Concern to Women.

The character of climate change processes by themselves and the complex negotiations involved create conditions for worsening existing inequalities particularly those relating to rich and poor countries and citizens, with different gender identities and relations in specific historical and social contexts. Gender inequalities cause women to face higher risks and discriminatory practices. Women are largely absent from decision-making processes and so in an area which has been defined as mainly scientific, this exclusion is likely to be worse.⁶

Other areas of inequality in relation to climate change are: women's limited access to and control of land, women's almost exclusive responsibility for water collection, fuelwood, as women's household burden, their responsibility for agricultural production, their experience of poverty, demands on their time, their exclusion due to lack of formal education and their economic insecurity. In sum, the historical gender-based inequalities and discriminatory practices embedded in different socio-economic and cultural contexts, which express themselves in unequal and differential access to and control of resources; unequal gender division of labour; and lack of adequate decision making powers are working once again to deny women the right to full participation in climate change discussions and negotiations. There are also differential experiences between women and men around the issue of vulnerability.

These gender based inequalities are evident in the ways in which environmental issues have generally been discussed from a gender neutral perspective, as in the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. More worrying is the fact that debates on climate change even among civil society groups have been essentially gender blind. Women's groups are having to articulate their own

⁶ An example is the UN Secretary General's own unacceptable practice of establishing an all-male committee on a Climate Fund as alluded to in the introduction of this paper.

concerns in their own spaces and also working with gender responsive men to have such issues acknowledged in the mainstream. Again even though women are knowledgeable and can contribute to climate change discussions, studies have noted that women are limited in terms of their knowledge of climate politics and climate protection. This points to the ways in which climate change information has been communicated mainly towards those with technical interest and know-how (Rohr, 2006). It is therefore critical that equality and equitable principles and the language of the women's movement is used as the basis for looking at the linkages between gender and climate change in order to determine appropriate responses.

In practice, women as a constituency have approached the climate change discussions from different perspectives depending on their political and intellectual persuasions. Generally however, women have worked hard to ensure that the initial conception of women as 'victims' of climate change is transformed into one which acknowledges them as having critical knowledge and experiences to contribute from the local to international levels through research, advocacy, and campaigns⁷. There is a women's caucus which is hosted by the Gender Action on Climate Change (GenderCC) and it is open to all UNFCCC meeting participants. It is an informal meeting of participants to update each other on issues to explore opportunities for working together. The Women and Gender Constituency on the other hand is the official "women's major group" to the UNFCCC. They participate in UNFCCC negotiations and input gender texts into documents through lobbying government officials.

⁷ The Women Environment and Development Organisation, the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) and the Gender and Climate Change (Gender CC) are at the forefront of the advocacy work, aiming to ensure that gender equality principles and specific texts are integrated in UNFCCC negotiations at the international levels. As a relatively new area of work for gender activists, women's groups in the climate change discussions across the world are few. However efforts are being made to link local initiatives with global advocacy initiatives.

6. Engaging with Climate Change from a Gender Justice Perspective

At all levels, there are a number of initiatives towards engaging with climate change issues from a gender perspective both by government and civil society especially women's organisations. While the efforts by government have been largely dictated by commitments made at the global level, for women's groups, experiences at the local levels and the need to claim justice for women using global commitments have informed their advocacy work. At the governmental level, Ghana has established a UNFCCC Focal point at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).⁸ The focal point has undertaken research and produced both the First and Second National Communication documents.⁹ Both documents provide information on climate change scenarios and their implications for the different sectors of the economy. There is also a specific chapter on women's livelihoods (Dampney and Mensah, 2000). However much of the data on women focus on vulnerabilities. Even though this is useful, it is limited as the approach does not draw attention to fundamental and systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices that can hinder women's ability to participate effectively in climate change policy-making processes. Ghana has also participated actively in all the UNFCCC processes including the negotiations at all levels. Yet Ghana has not built on its experiences with Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (GPRS) where the costs of gender inequalities have been extremely high.¹⁰ Instead, even though the country has demonstrated that it is interested in gender equality issues in relation to climate change, it has done so from an essentially technical perspective. Ghana's position on the 'Copenhagen Accord' is a case in

⁸ This was in 1992 after the earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

⁹ These documents are required by UN member countries that have signed onto the UNFCCC.

¹⁰ The lack of sufficient articulation of a gender perspective in broad economic policies such as SAPs and the GPRS has led to a situation where women are largely ignored in national budgetary allocations which in turn limit women's ability to address their livelihood needs and concerns (see Pobee- Hayford and Awori, 2008).

point. In Copenhagen, African countries took a strong stance and a unified position along with its civil society that there was ‘one African, one voice, and one position’. This was in reference to the goal of a fair, equitable and legally binding framework that would impact positively on the development concerns of the continent. Yet Ghana is among the 23 countries in Africa which have associated themselves with the Accord ostensibly with an eye on global climate funds¹¹.

That is why the role of civil society and the women’s movement is critical, in terms of advocating for a political position based on the best analysis of efforts needed to keep Africa safe. The need to ensure that the burden of mitigating and adapting to climate change is fairly shared is equally critical as is the need to secure the financing and technology required by Africa and other developing countries to promote a gender responsive and just climate future. Based on engagements at different levels, mainly from the local to the international levels, women have actively participated in all the negotiations of the UNFCCC, contributing to an expanded understanding and knowledge of climate change beyond its original conception as ‘scientific and technical’ to include broader issues of gender politics and socio-economic aspects. While some women’s groups concentrate on vulnerability issues, a number of internationally recognised coalitions and gender and climate change advocates have taken a clear political stance, demanding justice for women particularly those in poorer nations and advocating for their active participation in decision-making processes at all levels. Organisations such as Gender Action on Climate Change (Gender CC) Women, Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) and the Global Gender Climate Alliance (GGCA) and many others, have worked hard to have

¹¹ Developed countries have put together a mitigation and adaptation fund worth 10 billion Euros. This is a major attraction for developing countries such as Ghana who are ignoring the long term loss in environmental sustainability for short term climatic change response gains.

women's voices heard in negotiations and included relevant language on gender equality in the documents in the UNFCCC negotiations.

At the continental level as well, civil society initiatives such as the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) is working as a network of civil society groups and individuals from over 40 African countries to promote climate justice in Africa. PACJA is interested in promoting gender justice as a core feature of its campaigns and is therefore actively fostering the participation of gender advocates in its processes. The challenge is how African women use this opportunity to develop relevant gender strategies and language in the deliberations and position papers. The urgency of such an initiative cannot be over-emphasised. A recent statement issued by PACJA to the 14th Ordinary Summit of the African Union (AU) was very strong on the politics of the negotiations and the need for the continent to adopt a cautious attitude to the Copenhagen Accord and ensure that the UNFCCC negotiations are not jeopardised but manages to hold Annex I countries to deliver on their commitments to new and additional short-term financing (PACJA, 2010). In spite of this very strong political language, the statement becomes limited when one notes that it does not link these positions directly to the specific needs and concerns of women and gender sensitive men on the continent, and how the injustices and inequalities experienced much more by the poor and women, can be addressed through a strong Africa regional stance on climate change. PACJA has also attempted to develop innovative strategies for action in the post-Copenhagen period. Ghana has therefore hosted a strategy development meeting in March 2010 on the theme, "Pan-African Conference on Climate Justice and Post-Copenhagen Dialogue" (March 14-17, 2010). Here again, there was no specific session within the programme to discuss gender equality issues even as PACJA made strong arguments for a socially just and ecologically sound climate regime for Africa. Women activists who participated

in the meeting pointed to this huge gap and it is hoped that future initiatives of PACJA will create space for focused discussion around gender responsiveness.

In the West Africa sub-region also, organisations and individuals are actively engaged in climate change discussions, both at the ECOWAS Ministerial and civil society levels. Women actively participated in an ECOWAS Ministerial to develop a sub-regional Action Plan for Climate Change from March 15-18, 2010.¹² On the part of civil society, there is the “West Africa Network on Climate and Sustainable Development” (WANET-CSD) also working to enhance civil society engagement with policy-makers on the issues. Here again women’s organisations including ABANTU for Development are intensifying their interest in promoting a gender dimension in the work of WANET-CSD.

The experience of working with women at the local level and the knowledge gained about the gendered power relationships and dynamics involved, has urged a number of activists in Ghana to work hard to translate their engagement with climate change processes into a core institutional building initiative for gender justice. Thus a four pronged strategy has been developed: active participation in global processes; policy influencing at the national levels; sensitisation programmes at the local level and institutional development/movement building. At the global level, ABANTU for Development has worked through the Women Environment Development Organisation (WEDO) and the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) in its advocacy efforts to promote gender equality. The association with GGCA enabled ABANTU and its experts on climate change to contribute to a UNDP strategy development process in 2008 on

¹² This meeting was held in Accra during the same period as PACJA. It was hoped that PACJA will take advantage of this concurrence and lobby the West Africa regional ministers to be more committed to climate justice issues.

climate change.¹³ As well, ABANTU actively participated in preparatory meetings toward COP-15 as well as in the actual meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009 as part of the GGCA advocacy team. GGCA contributed relevant gender language in the negotiating text and engaged with government delegations to include gender language in their presentations.

At the national level, ABANTU through the leadership of UNDP has also managed to contribute to the inclusion of gender responsive frameworks and indicators to a National Adaptation proposal which is expected to feed into the development of a National Adaptation Policy and Plan. These initiatives are likely to enhance gender responsiveness at the level of the Ghanaian state given the extent of the strategic nature of the advocacy work being undertaken through ABANTU's leadership. First of all, through ABANTU's active engagement with the women's caucus during the Copenhagen conference in December 2009, Ghana won an award for being among the few countries that had demonstrated commitment to gender issues in climate change.¹⁴

Secondly and perhaps more significantly, ABANTU has since 2008 been mobilising interested civil society and women's groups towards the formation of a coalition on gender and climate change. This has culminated in the formation of the Gender Action on Climate Change for Equality and Sustainability (GACCES). GACCES has a seven-member steering committee and over 30 organisational and several individual members with the aim of promoting gender responsiveness in climate change policy-making. The specific objectives of the Coalition include the following:

¹³ This meeting, under the leadership of Winnie Mbyayima of UNDP Gender Unit in New York, took place in Kigali, Rwanda in July, 2008.

¹⁴ Other countries are Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Norway. The idea was to encourage these countries to do more in terms of providing leadership for a more concerted global initiative on gender and climate change.

- To enhance awareness of the gendered nature of climate change
- To promote women's active participation in all decision-making processes on climate change at all levels
- To sensitise critical actors on the relevance of acknowledging women's experiences and views on climate change.
- To establish a relationship with critical actors such as policy makers, civil society organisations and community leaders to ensure continuous engagement on the issue of climate change in the medium to long term.

The coalition has succeeded in obtaining support from UNIFEM to implement a two-year project titled, "Building Capacities to influence Climate Change Policies from a Gender Perspective." The project which is currently underway, targets women and gender based institutions and networks as primary actors and beneficiaries. Other target groups are policy makers, media practitioners, chiefs, community leaders, private sector institutions and civil society organisations. It is still early to indicate the extent of impacts of these initiatives on gender equality and governance issues. However there seems to be a high level of interest on the subject by the different constituencies we have engaged with. Indeed the year 2010 offers the coalition a unique opportunity in terms of influencing attitudes and behaviours as well as achieving a policy shift to benefit women in governance: First, there is the constitutional review process and then there is the district assembly elections, both of which are governance platforms that could be used to propagate issues of gender and climate change to impact positively on policy measures, attitudes and behaviours of critical actors on women's participation in governance processes.

7. Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward

As the above discussion has pointed to, the need for a gender responsive approach to climate change policymaking is an imperative. This is because excluding the voices of women from climate change discussion means excluding the voices of half the world's populations, denying them rights and ability to contribute vital knowledge. In Ghana, as in the rest of the world, there are lessons about gender specific risks and vulnerabilities as a result of climate change in areas such as agriculture, water, land, fisheries and social relations generally. More research is needed to uncover impacts in other areas. Again, investing in women and girls to take an active part in adaptation and mitigation as well as decision-making processes is critical. The role of the women's movement cannot be over-emphasised in urging government to rethink its economic development path and its implication on the ecology, livelihoods and human security. This requires effective policies by the state in terms of prioritising local knowledge and deepening gender responsive democratic principles.

The power relationships surrounding the climate change discourse must also be interrogated to promote women's rights and gender equality. This means strengthening alliances, and building international solidarity through networking to enhance compliance with adaptation and mitigation commitments. In all this, women's leadership is critical and investments are needed to promote women's contributions in policy decisions towards a transformed and just climate agenda.

The contribution of women's groups to policy advocacy work around climate change is growing. Indeed at critical moments women have created their own spaces to enhance their participation in the climate change negotiations as a constituency. Recent examples at local levels are also noted

particularly around the initiative of GACCES hosted by ABANTU for Development. Clearly it is only a strong women's movement that can strategically work to articulate specific and general interests of women as equal citizens that can lead to real changes in promoting gender justice in climate change. Indeed such a movement has to be broad-based and inclusive so that perspectives from different groups at all levels can lead to the transformation we all desire. This is because solidarity across boundaries is important as is the analysis of the critical issues of concern to women. The implication for promoting gender equality therefore is the need to continue to engage with both the state and development institutions from a position of promoting women's rights as part of development. There is a need to move away from the technical project of gender mainstreaming which often leaves existing unequal power relations within societal structures, processes and relationships untouched.

The way forward is to promote an international agenda for a gender responsive climate justice development agenda through enhancing participation in critical decision-making by using consultative processes that involve all actors such as governments, civil society, women's rights groups and development partners. In conclusion, climate change must relate to gender equality. We need to continue making the links between international agreements, national realities and the promotion of gender equality. We should also build on our experience of engaging with other processes, by examining the extent to which donors and governments are complying with internationally agreed commitments and provide invaluable insights about donor-state relationships. By deliberating more critically on issues of national sovereignty, rights, entitlements and responsibilities of citizens and the critical role of the women's movement in advancing gender equality causes, we would be enhancing social well-being, democratic governance, gender justice and climate justice.

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