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In Retrospect: Gender in COP15

After months of negotiations, the outcome of Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen (COP15) is extremely alarming - and for those who are already suffering the effects of climate change utterly devastating.

Although most of the delegates underlined the urgent need for a fair and ambitious agreement including serious emission reduction targets as well as sufficient financing, no firm and worthwhile commitments were laid down at the end. Although there has been some progress in the inclusion of gender in the language since Poznan, these successes have been watered down. And although COP15 saw the strongest and broadest commitment of civil society ever seen within the climate change negotiations, it was marked by the most blatant exclusion of civil society in the history of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Women and Gender groups in the UNFCCC-process

Generally, women's share in the delegations of parties remained small with about 30% of registered country delegates and only about 10 % heads of delegations being female¹! However, COP15 was the first UNFCCC-conference with Women and Gender NGOs recognized as a constituency, somehow indicating UNFCCC's growing consciousness on the stake of women and the importance of gender in both its structure and process. As a constituency, the groups had better opportunities to engage in the discussions and debates.

But as COP15 became a closed process for civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements and therefore lost its most critical audience, the constituency could not fully perform its potential to effectively intervene. It is important to point out that the constituency is largely borne out by the struggles of women, many of them coming from CSOs and social movements, whose participation was barred in COP15.

The failure to ensure the entry and participation of thousands of accredited civil society representatives was a dire indication of the inability to tackle climate change in a comprehensive, equitable, transparent and just way. Furthermore, the cruel means of dealing with demonstrators who were peacefully organizing for climate justice is simply unacceptable.

¹ COP 14: about 32 % of registered country delegates and about 15 % head of delegations.

Gender in the outcome²

The so called “**Copenhagen Accord**” is far from the “fair and ambitious agreement” that CSOs have demanded, and it does not consider gender or gender justice at all. Moreover, it has not only resulted from a process that betrays the supposed character of any UN process. It also lacks substantive strength and political support especially from the global South. While the document invokes all nations to reduce their emissions, it is silent on concrete measures and even timeframes.

The Copenhagen Accord has been developed by only 26 of the 192 countries represented within the UNFCCC. Led by the United States, the process towards the Accord hardly had the support of developing countries. In the end, parties merely “took note” of the Accord³, rendering the document non-binding. The document likewise does not commit countries to agree on a binding post-2012 agreement.

Taking note of the Accord, the states underlined the need to limit global warming to two degrees centigrade, ignoring the fact that this is not enough to save small island states, coastal regions or the arctic and other low-temperature habitats from sinking. Moreover, there is no mention of any reference dates. Annex I Parties have been required to submit their emissions targets by 31 January 2010 - a task that up to now only a few states have done at all and even fewer have announced adequate targets. Besides, rich countries have been asked to support the poorer developing countries for the period 2010-2012 with a total amount of USD 30 billion and from 2020 with an annual amount of USD 100 billion.

However, the Copenhagen Accord is not the only COP15 - result. Compared to the drafts before, and regarded on a superficial level, gender language in the draft texts of the **Ad-hoc working group on Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG LCA)** has increased, although especially during the last days, with the negotiations becoming more and more tense and difficult, it was significantly watered down and partially deleted.

The final draft of the AWG LCA points out that “the effects of climate change will be felt most acutely by those parts of the population that are already vulnerable owing to youth, gender, age or disability, ...”. Furthermore, it recognizes the need for “gender equality and the effective participation of women” (beside others). It stresses that “enhanced action on adaptation” must be gender-sensitive and “enhanced action on capacity-building” needs to take gender issues “into account”. “Gender considerations” must also be addressed in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries (REDD).

In sum, there is still much more emphasis on women “being vulnerable” instead of being recognized in the process of stakeholding. Still, it is tellingly absent in the AWG LCA texts on mitigation and financing⁴. As the AWG-LCA process is now mandated to continue until COP16 in Mexico, the strategies for ensuring gender responsive texts as well as meaningful participation of women must be maintained and strengthened.

2 The negotiations produced three general outputs: a political statement called the “Copenhagen Accord”, drafts of the negotiating texts under the two main working groups, the ad-hoc working group on Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG LCA), and on the emission reduction targets for industrialized countries signed up to the Kyoto Protocol (AWG KP), and a mandate to continue the negotiations under these two negotiation tracks for one year.

³ With Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, Tuvalu, and Sudan categorically rejecting to support the document.

⁴ As well as in the drafts of AWK-KP (Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol).

GenderCC's Assessment and commitment

GenderCC named its objectives - referring to a joint statement of the Women-Caucus in Barcelona 2009 - very clearly in the first intervention in the opening plenary of the AWG-LCA, as delivered by Andrea Guzmán (Bolivia):

“The full integration of gender perspectives is essential to effective action on all aspects of climate change, including adaptation, mitigation, technology sharing, financing, and capacity building. The advancement of women, their leadership and meaningful participation, and their engagement as equal stakeholders in all climate related processes and implementation must be guaranteed.”

Given what lack of transparency and freedoms in COP15, we cannot consider the Conference a success. We believe that the climate crisis is a mere symptom of a larger and long-standing systemic crisis which consistently puts premium on power and profits. The UNFCCC process continues to result in political declarations that hardly disturb the perennial global imbalances at the expense of poor and marginalized countries and people. But we still need to engage the UNFCCC by immediately starting a collective learning process that is geared towards genuine and lasting solutions.

Countries and their delegations need to work on the development of a binding post-2012 agreement to be approved in Mexico, at COP-16 in December this year.

GenderCC - together with women and gender experts from all over the world advocates for this agreement to be fair and ambitious - based on a strong gender perspective and a meaningful involvement of women as equal stakeholders in all processes and on all levels of decision-making.

Given that Yvo de Boer, UNFCCC - Executive Secretary announced his resignation, GenderCC lobbies for the next UNFCCC-Executive Secretary to be female!

At the same time, we commit ourselves to concrete action, not elaborate speeches nor diplomatic games, which only blur and deepen the existing global injustices and environmental destruction: What we need is fundamental changes of how we live and consume especially in industrialized countries and how we share the earth's resources within communities and among nations. We need deep emission cuts and significant public funding that can convert this climate crisis into an opportunity for an ecologically sound and ethically just global society.

We need to appreciate our diversity, the different contexts of women, men and children, our different needs and our different roles. - Before it is too late to rehabilitate our only planet and forge a common future.

It is already too late for many. We must act now.

There is no climate justice without gender justice!

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