

Women Major Group Perspectives to UNEP Governing Council

This presentation is based on the inputs from the March 2011 Women's Major Group Position Paper, the Bonn UNDP statement, UNEP Global Rio+20 consultation statement, Women MG statements at the Regional meetings in Santiago de Chile, Seoul, Cairo and Addis Ababa

Introduction

In many groupings especially political groupings especially in Africa, there are often women's special groups for instance the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League (South Africa), the Zimbabwe African Women's Union (ZAWU) of the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU). It is important to note that there are no corresponding men's groupings.

This is by no means an accident but a recognition that women have special socio-economic, biological and other needs and responsibilities that can be better addressed through targeted action towards their empowerment and development.

Background

In June this year, the World will be celebrating 20 years after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCED) or first Rio conference. One of the outputs of UNCED was Agenda 21 a blue print for sustainable development. By way of focus, Agenda 21 came up with 9 special groups called the major groups (MGs). Women were among the 9 major groups in recognition of their needs and roles in sustainable development. These roles were clearly articulated in Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration which recognizes the vital role of women in environmental management and development and the importance of their participation to achieve sustainable development. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 headed: Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development is devoted to women. The chapter contains specific recommendations to strengthen women's role in sustainable development by removing any obstacles to their participation in decision-making.

Following the first Rio conference, there were other efforts with specific goals to enhance or galvanize the role of women in sustainable development. Some of these were the Fourth World Conference on Women of 1995 entitled, 'Action for Equality, Development and Peace': the Millennium Summit of 2000 which gave rise to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which MDG3 and MDG5 directly address women's concerns: the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) with its Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) that called for the further implementation of Agenda 21 and by the same token, further implementation of global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development. Besides these, various UN agencies made special efforts aimed at gender equality. For instance, before and after Rio UNEP did a lot of work on gender and the environment. Among others, in 2004 UNEP organized the first 'Women as the Voice of the

Environment' (WAVE) Assembly and also commissioned a study on Mainstreaming Gender in Environmental Assessment and Early Warning. UNDP instituted changes for improved gender equality in its operations. Similarly UNICEF strives to mainstream gender equality in all its work with children. Also at regional levels efforts have been made to achieve gender equality and improve the situation of women. In Africa for instance, the African Union has the Solemn Declaration on Gender which commits member states to strive for gender equality and has requirements for periodic reporting through the African Union Commission to the Heads of State and Government. The Solemn Declaration and other AU frameworks legitimize women's participation in the work of African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) and the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) among others.

Progress 20 years on

Despite all the efforts made to improve the situation of women over the past 20 years, great socio-economic inequities still remain. As women and children form the majority of the poor, they are particularly affected.

The slow progress made this far is of great concern to the Women Major group whose common vision **for Rio+20 is an Equitable and sustainable World.**

In this regard therefore, the Women Major Group:

- Agrees to prioritize measures to move faster towards equity, equality, social and environmental justice in order to achieve sustainable development.
- Advocates for gender equality in all spheres of society including education, employment, ownership and control over resources, access to justice, political representation, institutional decision making, care giving and household management.
- Looks forward to a world where human rights of all women and men are fully respected including those of indigenous people and those living with disabilities.
- Advocates for environmental conservation and protection as well as protection of human health from environmental causes.

Recommendations for the Zero Draft

IEG:

- There is need for concrete global instruments for women and girls to obtain redress such as an ombudswoman for future generations

Green economy

- There is need to go beyond GDP to measure progress and wellbeing in particular there is need to measure the value of women's unpaid work
- Issues of land, energy and food are crucial to all, and women in particular. Rio+20 should agree on *Measures* to ensure **food sovereignty** for local communities which will support production of their own healthy, nutritious food, and reduce dependency on the agro-chemical industry and food dumping from the North otherwise regarded as constituting food security
- Need to move towards a Global Convention on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration

Regional perspectives

Although women throughout the world share similar concerns in terms of sustainable development, there are region specific perspectives for instance whilst the African Major Group thinks that a truly sustainable 'green economy' would involve economic development that takes place within the limits of nature, the Latin American group is concerned about the use of the concept of 'green economy' as the use of the terminology carries the risk that economic actors would dominate and even determine the policies for sustainable development

Sector specific recommendations

Energy access for women: There needs to be:

- Policies to ensure the participation of women as active agents in development based on cleaner and more efficient energy systems and technologies
- Investments in women as energy managers to simultaneously address the challenges of poverty eradication, gender equality, SD and climate change threats

Nuclear phase out

- Women and children are at greater risk of suffering and dying from radiation, than men, as many studies show. There is no safe dose of radiation. All stages of the nuclear cycle are a threat to our generation and that of our children therefore urgent need for nuclear phase-out

Climate change

- Concerted efforts to be made to reduce the vulnerability of women to CC impacts
- Women should be included in decision making and contribution to climate change policies

Water, sustainable livelihoods and women

- Priority should be given to increasing access to safe and affordable water and sanitation as it is essential for women's development.

Biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods and women

- Further efforts should be made to conserve biodiversity as it is a source of livelihoods especially for women. As women lead in protecting food-germplasm and herbs for health, they should be assisted to benefit from flora and fauna through value addition and protection of their intellectual property rights and not depend on GMOs

Waste management

- Women should be technically empowered to safely reduce, reuse and recycle waste as a source of income

Recommendations for Rio+20

Through the consultations, there were many recommendations for Rio+20 from the Women Major Group from all regions. A few of them are summarized and included here

- Any set of sustainable development goals should include a specific goal on gender equality in all spheres of society

There should also be specific targets and indicators to support and promote women's engagement as key actors in sustainable development and to make progress on recommended actions to:

- Secure women's property rights
- Promote women's access to services and technologies needed for water, energy and agricultural production
- Provide safe health care including sexual and reproductive health
- Provide comprehensive social protection measures especially for women.
- Enable women and men to combine their jobs with child care
- Support investments in women's economic, social and political empowerment.
- Promote women's participation in government and business leadership
- Assure a healthy environment for women at the work place and in their communities
- Special funds for women for SD with mechanisms to ensure that they reach the grassroots

All countries and agencies should speedily work towards the achievement of SD especially for women. Maybe UNEP and CSW (Commission on the Status of Women should consider coming up with a Women and SD Outlook

Put together by Mildred Mkandla. February 2012

