

## **The Most Vulnerable Groups (MVGs) – African Women's Expectations for the Copenhagen Climate Conference**

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### **Introduction:**

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges humanity has ever faced and Africa finds itself in a critical juncture. There is an increased concern about the impact of climate change in post conflict and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Most of these countries do not bear the responsibility for the causes of climate change yet in Copenhagen December 2009 an agreement must be reached among the international community to combat its devastating effects.

There is a global concern that while climate change has a wide range of impacts on all sectors and regions the solutions need to be worked out in a collective manner. The 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the IPCC provided a regional assessment which showed Africa to be the most vulnerable continent to the effects of climate change with the least adaptive capacity. Furthermore it is the poorest people within these vulnerable communities, who are most affected and who urgently need assistance.

The Continent faces critical climate change related challenges in the areas of:

- Food security/Food self sufficiency
- Water security
- Energy security
- Human health, affordable clean fuels, sanitation and hygiene
- Urban and coastal community security and
- Transport infrastructure.

All these challenges include aggravated land degradation, water scarcity, augmented disasters such as floods, droughts, climate forced migration, low accessibility to energy resources and poor energy use efficiency and changing disease prevalence. There is also the alarming rise of armed conflicts related to diminishing access to natural and vital resources.

These challenges are exacerbated by multiple stresses and limitation including low adaptive capacity, limited access to knowledge and technology support extreme poverty, weak policy support and lack of integrated approaches for strategic planning and regional cooperation.

The most vulnerable groups include the women, youths, children, the elderly, and persons with disability etc, who suffer most because of the climate change impacts and see themselves as not taken seriously by the industrialized countries or even their own governments. These people throughout history have been adapting to environmental changes within their communities and the best support or aid is to ensure that they are empowered to carry out self reliant projects/programs for sustainable livelihoods and improvement of their living conditions.

African countries have decided to go to Copenhagen with a single voice insisting the Kyoto Protocol (KP) is the only legal instrument and must not be killed by Annex 1 countries. The Addis Ababa Declaration on Climate Change in Africa looked about climate change in relations o the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The declaration embodies the African head of states and governments' commitment to integrate climate change into national, sub regional and regional development policies/programmes, putting into perspective the key role citizens would have to play.

Looking at the current climate debate at any level women and other vulnerable groups has been completed left out. Considering the fact that Africa women produce over 80% of the food, they are the care takers of the sick, the homes and communities and natural resource managers yet have only been seen as vulnerable groups and not active/positive agents of change.

The Women Environment and Climate Action Network (WECAN) is a Pan African Initiative that seeks to provide a platform for women across Africa to become active and positive agents of change in combat climate change in Africa. We provide a platform for women's voices to be heard in the African Climate Debate and ensures that both women and men concerns are integrated. The proposed treaty seems to be very gender blind. Till now the only positive impact is the introduction of a women and gender constituency of the UNFCCC which comes into operation from the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2009. That is why women and gender groups involved in the UNFCCC process is fighting hard to ensure that both women and men concerns are reflected in the treaty.

From an African women's perspective the best condition to avoid a climate catastrophe is to consider both women and men's concerns (gender considerations) and promote a low carbon, green economy at all levels.

### **The Challenge:**

One of the greatest challenges in the climate debate is the issue of finance. Carrying out mitigation, adaptation or technology processes needs money. The developing countries say that Annex 1 countries owe a climate /environmental debt. They argue that the main causes of anthropogenic climate change impact has risen from the industrial revolution of industrial countries through the use of coal and other fossil fuels putting more CO<sub>2</sub> and other Green Houses Gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere.

None of the commitments made under the Kyoto Protocol have been fully supported by any financial mechanism yet more and more market based mechanism have to bring forward to ensure that the poor becomes poorer. For example the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) produced by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) has not been funded for complete implementation of these projects.

In terms of funding by the World Bank most African countries are very suspicious of World Bank Funding from the experience with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980s. It is argued that the SAP brought more poverty than development in Africa and this makes World Bank projects not very popular in Africa. The World Bank has to look at a different approach, as regards to their work in Africa to eliminate these negative attitudes against them. The World Bank is also regarded as being ill-suited as a climate bank because it promotes oil mining and finances coal-fired (dirty technology) power plants in many countries. Under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) two multilateral funds were set up in 2001, the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) and the Least Development Countries Fund (LDCF) with the purpose of helping developing countries cope with the costly adaptation. Both funds were placed under the World Bank, a move that developing countries criticized as very undemocratic, given their very limited scope of co-determination. After tough negotiations developing countries managed to convince the Board to accept double majority voting system for donor countries and recipient countries, yet both funds cover only a fraction of the actual funding needs. Between 2001 and early March 2008, the SCCF received payments of no more than 74 million USD, and the LDCF 92 Million USD.

Many African countries and NGOs have voiced their criticism that the statutes of these World Bank funds treat the hard-won of the UNFCCC as mere guidelines and not binding undertakings. The fear is that the funds resources are being partly disbursed in the form of interest-bearing loans, and donor countries are at liberty to charge non-reimbursable funding to existing development aid budgets.

Another challenge is the issue of Development and Climate Change. Most donor agencies see development and climate change as two different issues. But it is believed to achieve sustainable development in Africa and other developing countries the development paradigm must be revisited. Climate change concerns must be integrated into development plans at all levels. For example infrastructure development such as the building of bridges, roads, houses, dams, new areas of settlement and food cultivation cannot be done without climate change perspective, considering climate related events such as floods, hurricanes, coastal flooding etc.

### **Actions Needed:**

African countries and the women of Africa especially cannot subscribe to a climate agreement that fails to regulate the funding of adaptation costs in a fair, equitable and binding manner. There has been no such regulation till date and there are still doubts if the Copenhagen agreement would bring this to light. It is evident that numerous multilateral climate funds do already exist, but the voluntary contributions from industrialized (Annex 1) countries are very invisible. There is also competition between the funds. Many Annex 1 countries funding mechanism through the World Bank and other mediums where Africa (Developing) countries have little or no say and this makes it very difficult for Africa and other developing countries to accept this funding mechanism as an answer to the global climate crises.

Many developing countries and NGOs argue that only the Bali Fund or a new institution under the UNFCCC Secretariat should be entrusted with climate adaptation funding and this would enable developing countries to have a say and work as equal partners to the process.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Women's Actions and Decisions: The WECAN Trust Fund**

The Women Environment and Climate Action Network (WECAN), working in collaboration with other partners across Africa, seek to establish the Women Environment and Climate Action Network (WECAN) Trust Fund. Due to the present inequality that women in Africa face, experience climate change in their daily lives as one of the Most Vulnerable Groups (MVGs), the Women Environment and Climate Action Network (WECAN) under the Society for Women Empowerment Education and Training (SWEET) Africa Foundation has initiated the WECAN Trust Fund to assist Grassroots women across Africa to carry out adaptation and mitigation projects within their communities. This Trust Fund seeks to provide Microfinance funding mechanism to assist grassroots women and other vulnerable groups to carry out projects at community levels under community based adaptation and mitigation mechanism

### **Conclusions**

Women of Africa, under WECAN has recognized the fact that women as an active stakeholder group has to play a key role in combating the global challenge of climate change at all levels and should not only be recognized as vulnerable groups. We call upon our governments to engage fully and effectively in the international negotiations in support of our demands herein, and we urge all Parties to the UNFCCC to work urgently and resolutely to agree a fair and safe deal at Copenhagen, COP 15 come December 2009 for the benefit of us all. We appeal to the Annex 1 countries to meet up their commitment to raise adequate funds for climate financing. Women agree that the global community must avoid delays and excuses and consider the situation of Most Vulnerable Countries (MVCs) and Most Vulnerable Groups (MVGs) including women especially.

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