

## *Climate Change & Campaign Strategies*

### **Let me introduce the WI:**

The Women's Institute in Britain started in 1915, 92 years ago. Today it is the largest voluntary women's organisation in the UK with about 211,000 members.

The vision of the WI is far reaching

- it is to offer women the best opportunity to make an impact in their communities,
- to influence local, national and world issues which affect quality of life and the environment
- to learn new skills,
- to make new friends
- and to enjoy the fact we are women working together. .

Throughout its history the WI has campaigned on a wide range of issues that matter to women and their communities; for example:  
ending human trafficking and violence against women,  
tackling obesity and improving children's nutrition;

As environmental threats have become increasingly serious and urgent our members have focussed on tackling them, in particular the growing threat of climate change.

Our organisation has always had a healthy environment at its heart. Health issues, preserving the earth's resources and minimising waste have continuously underpinned the WI's vision. Our organisation is made up of mothers and grandmothers who want their children and grandchildren to inherit a healthy planet and lead healthy lives – and as an organisation we believe it is their fundamental right to do so.

### **Why Women and Climate Change?**

Women have a distinct relationship to climate change.

In the UK, one million more women live in poverty than men. They will be disproportionately affected by increasing costs for energy, transport, healthcare, and nutrition.

Across the world, women and girls are already suffering disproportionately as a consequence of climate change. It is estimated that of the world's 1.3 billion poor, 70% are women. Women account for 85% of deaths resulting from climate-induced disasters. 70% of those who died in the European heat wave in 2003 were women.

These gender differences result from inequalities in many societies: women frequently have lower incomes and fewer opportunities than men and are assigned different roles and subject to different restraints from men.

National and international climate policies do not currently address these gender issues. Such differences in vulnerability and in adaptive capabilities desperately need to be acknowledged in future plans.

### **So, what are we doing?**

WI members have recognised the urgency of the situation, and as an organisation we have accepted our responsibility to take action.

Our campaigns are decided by our members and in 2005 they voted overwhelmingly to take action to preserve our planet for future generations

We have taken a two tiered approach to our campaigning – the first is to lobby our politicians to make the big overall changes needed. However we are not going to wait for politicians to save us so the second tier of our campaigning is to take action ourselves to reduce our own environmental impact.

I would like to give you three examples of the WI in action and making a difference.

### **No 1 Our Manifesto on Climate Change**

The WI and the Women's Environmental Network have recently produced the *Women's Manifesto on Climate Change* to articulate women's priorities for action to the UK Government and to opinion formers.

As part of the preparation of the Manifesto we conducted a survey earlier this year. Our research demonstrated that women in Britain are more environmentally aware than men and more likely to make decisions on household purchases. Many have already made changes in their own lives and are involved in local projects to address climate change and other environmental problems

but

They repeatedly asked for more Government action and help for everyone to do more.

As a result, we believe there is a need for the recognition of women's perspective on climate change.

We are asking for:

- Much more government action in tackling climate change
- More help and guidance to reduce our individual impact on the environment
- More women's involvement in decision making to find solutions to climate change
- Greater representation of women at boardroom level and in scientific research to address climate change issues from a women's perspective.

Many other women's organisations have signed our manifesto and we are using it to call on the Government to take the lead and help everyone to make practical changes in all aspects of their lives to create a safer environment for future generations and developing countries.

There is a very long way to go but we have already achieved results – for example we are now routinely consulted on the Governments' environmental policies. The concept of "gender differentials" is slowly but surely being recognised as a part of policy making.

I would encourage women's organisations in all countries to draw up a "Women's Manifesto on Climate Change". It is an excellent tool to bring women's organisations together and gives women a strong united voice when lobbying Governments.

To take a look at our manifesto or to sign up to it, visit our website at:  
[www.thewi.org.uk](http://www.thewi.org.uk)

### **My Second example: Reducing packaging waste**

The careless use of resources has always frustrated our members, particularly the amount of unnecessary and excessive packaging on food items, much of which can not be recycled, and the increasing number of plastic carrier bags given away by retailers. So we decided to harness the power of consumers by holding a "Packaging Day of Action".

Our campaign was specifically directed at supermarkets and retailers and there were five key aims:

1. to prevent and reduce unnecessary and excessive food packaging;
2. to ensure that where packaging is necessary, it is either home compostable or readily recyclable
3. to reduce the number of carrier bags given away;
4. to encourage stores to compost their food waste;
5. to persuade stores to reduce food miles by purchasing more local foods.

On the Packaging Day of Action thousands of WI members were involved. They collected the unnecessary and excessive packaging from their week's shopping and returned it to the supermarket where they met with the store manager to discuss the campaign's aims.

We are thrilled with the positive response to this campaign and its popularity continues to grow and gain support; from WI members, the public and politicians.

Supermarkets are now beginning to make some very ambitious announcements, setting targets to reduce and where possible eliminate their packaging

We feel this is an excellent indication of what can be achieved by concerted action, and whilst there is more to be done we are pleased with some of the changes that we have seen.

### **And my final example: Reducing personal Carbon emissions**

Never underestimate the value of lots of people doing a few small things. It can make a difference to our climate and it sends out the right messages to governments and industry. To illustrate the large scale effect of small individual carbon savings, we have introduced the WI Carbon Challenge. We are inviting our members, and the general public, to discover how much carbon they are responsible for –in other words their carbon footprints. Those who sign on are offered a range of actions which they can take to reduce their impact on the planet's resources and their carbon dioxide emissions. The challenge started in June 2007 and in June 2008 we will announce the total carbon savings that have been made.

So far 5000 people have signed up. You are welcome to sign up too. Visit our website [www.thewi.org.uk](http://www.thewi.org.uk)

### **In Conclusion**

Through this action the WI has demonstrated that women are not only concerned about our planet, but that we are willing to take responsibility, show strong leadership

and make the lifestyle changes that are necessary to address the threat we are all facing from climate change. Introducing the gender perspective to environmental campaigning is not easy. However it can be done in creative, enjoyable and effective ways - I hope these examples resonate with you and that our experiences inspire other women and their organisations to take action too. Women can and are making a difference!

Thank you.