



Women's Major Group

Rio+20 Position Statement - Summary

UN Conference on Sustainable Development

1 November 2011

Women's Major Group Submission, UNCSO Rio+20, 1 November 2011

The Global Women's Major Group submission is submitted in response to the request for input by the Secretariat for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. It has been developed by over 70 organizations worldwide to reflect the diversity of women's perspectives. This summary comprises the global Women's Major Group submission. A longer Women's Major Group compilation document (working document) for Rio+20 is annexed. The Women's submissions are available at the UNCSO website www.uncsd2012.org under 'Major Groups–Women', along with regional Women's Major Group statements from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

SUMMARY

Introduction

Throughout the world women are key actors in maintaining the sustaining livelihoods and welfare of their families and communities, and in making a transition to a more equitable and sustainable world. Our economy is linked to and depends on a healthy planet. It also depends on women's economic contributions, both formal and informal.

Women's Vision for Rio+20: an Equitable and Sustainable World

Social equity, gender equality and environmental justice must form the heart of sustainable development, and of the outcomes of the Rio+20 UN conference in 2012. Twenty years after the first Rio conference, great social and economic inequities still remain. These inequities especially affect women and children, who make up the majority of those living in poverty.

Measures to ensure equity, equality, social and environmental justice need to be prioritized, as these are the cornerstones for achieving sustainable development globally. These measures should promote:

- **Gender equality in all spheres of our societies:** education, employment, ownership and control over resources, access to justice, political representation, institutional decision-making, care giving and household and community management. A world where women can fully deploy their potential in all spheres of our societies, meaning without gender-based violence, where women share in land ownership and financial resources, where women and girls are equally represented in all areas and in which women's sexual and reproductive rights are assured.
- **Respect for human rights and social justice:** building societies based on respect for human rights of all people, ensuring social protection, sustainable livelihoods and environmental security, and



fair distribution of the earth's natural and economic resources. A world where economic, social and environmental rights for women and men are fully respected.

- ***Environmental conservation and protection of human health:*** creating societies which function within the earth's ability to support life and human livelihoods, preventing disruptive climatic changes as well as pollution and contamination of ecosystems and human settlements. A world where women's livelihoods are not irreversibly harmed by environmentally destructive economic activities.

1. Renewing Commitments to Sustainable Development and Gender Equality

(this section refers to point 4.a. of the Rio+20 guidelines for submissions)

Women worldwide have been working towards recognition of the gender dimensions of sustainable development by the United Nations. The Women's Action Agenda 21 was developed in 1991 by women from all regions in the world, and aimed to influence the outcomes of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED, or the "Earth Summit"). It contained an outline for a healthy and peaceful planet, and formed an important basis for introducing gender equality in the official UNCED outcomes. It criticized existing economic thinking and development models and practices that were deemed unjust, inequitable and unsustainable.

In response to women's efforts and advocacy, Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (1992) recognizes that: *"Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development."* Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 "Global Action for Women towards Sustainable Development" contains 11 different commitments with specific recommendations to strengthen the role of women in sustainable development and to eliminate all obstacles to their equal and beneficial participation, particularly in decision making activities.

Other important global agreements that underline the importance of gender equality and sustainable development include the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Program of Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

We call on governments to renew their commitments to these agreements and support their commitments through action and direct financing to support gender equitable sustainable development.

We recommend that the Rio+20 Outcome Document include a set of 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) that complement existing agreements, including specific crosscutting goals, targets and indicators on gender equality in all spheres of society.

2. Views on 'Green Economy' in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

(this section refers to point 4.b. of the Rio+20 guidelines for submissions)

We are critical about the use of the term 'Green Economy'. We are concerned it is too often separated from the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. We are concerned it will be used



and misused to green-wash existing unsustainable economic practices that lead to inequities and infringe on the rights of effected peoples and future generations, because it does not fundamentally and adequately question and transform the current economic paradigm.

In particular, the current economic system:

- **Harms women and the environment:** while the wealthy consume more and more natural resources and are responsible for increasing levels of environmental damage, those living in poverty are suffering from degradation of their agricultural land, forests, water supplies and biodiversity, and of alteration of weather cycles due to climatic changes.
- **Is inequitable and unsustainable:** social and economic inequities are inherent in the present economic system and are increasing in many countries both in the North and the South; with especially adverse consequences for women and children.
- **Uses performance indicators that are socially and environmentally blind:** our (failing) economies are currently managed so as to achieve and celebrate growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and do not promote human and environmental welfare.

Most governments state that their objectives are progress and development, yet at the same time use economic tools which do not help attain these objectives, but instead have lead to concentration of wealth and increased inequities. Governments at Rio+20 should renew support for the objectives of equitable and sustainable development, and should commit to choosing the right economic tools. In a sustainable development framework, the economy has to fulfil social progress taking into account environmental limits.

We support the transformation from the current economic system to a sustainable and equitable economic system that ensures gender equality, human rights and environmental justice and supports sustainable livelihoods and poverty eradication.

Recommendations regarding 'Green Economy' in the context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

- Use the term '**Sustainable and Equitable Economy**' instead of 'Green Economy'
- Principles of a Sustainable and Equitable Economy:
 - Promotion of social equity, gender equality and intergenerational equity
 - Democracy, transparency and justice
 - Application of the precautionary principle
 - Ethical values, such as respect for nature, spirituality, culture, harmony, solidarity, community, caring and sharing
 - Global responsibility for the global common goods
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Common but differentiated responsibilities



- Sustainable and Equitable Economies have economic policies aiming at:
 - Poverty eradication and gender equality: with fairer distribution of resources and rights, and assurance of human security of all
 - Ending violence against women through legislation, support services for women, affordable access to justice for women, and information about rights and norms
 - Prioritizing peace promotion and conflict prevention
 - Preventing toxic and radioactive harm on women's and children's health, and ensuring safe waste reduction, reuse and recycling policies
 - Providing women, adolescents and girls universal access to sexual and reproductive health
 - Sustainable agriculture, food security and food sovereignty and recognition of women's role in food production
 - Assuring access to clean, efficient and safe energy and technologies for all, especially for women
 - Safe water and sanitation for all, particularly for poor rural and urban women and girls
 - Conserving biodiversity, women's access to natural resources and respect of their environmental rights
 - Necessary and equitable measures for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change
 - Measures against land grabbing – protecting women's (continued) access to (communal) land and commons
 - Phasing out GMO's as women in many countries are the majority of the 'seedkeepers'

- Measure and operationalize progress through:
 - Policies that recognize and promote women's economic contributions
 - Indicators that go beyond the 'GDP' (Gross Domestic Product), including indicators to show gender impacts
 - Financial sector re-regulation and reform, encouraging long-term perspectives
 - Fiscal sector reform, including new taxation to redistribute wealth, such as a financial transaction tax, and taxing of non-renewable and unsustainable resource exploitation
 - Investments in women's leadership, education, skills and entrepreneurship
 - Investments in health care, child-care and social protection floor

3. Views on an 'Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development'

(this section refers to point 4.c. of the Rio+20 guidelines for submissions)

Rio+20 offers a platform for much-needed fundamental reform of international governance to ensure sustainable and equitable development within the carrying capacity of the planet.

Our existing institutional and governance structures have proved inadequate to meet our rising sustainable development challenges. Our core policy formulation, economic thinking and motivations remain firmly detached from our broader sustainability concerns. Since our electoral cycles and business models of reporting increasingly define our decision-making, short-term gains take precedence over future and long-term interests.



With women comprising a small percentage of those in decision-making positions of government, parliament and private enterprises, women remain disconnected from the core of policy-making. Without true representation of their needs, women are left without a voice, or a legitimate means in which to question or present their concerns

Many institutions that regulate and manage programs and projects are not gender sensitive. These institutions need to change and demonstrate internal practices of gender equality.

Important pillars for governance of sustainable development (global, regional, local) include:

- Rio Principle 10 (right to information and participation), and conventions that cover all countries
- Rio Principle 20, ensuring the full participation of women (for example, through quotas, and changing governance culture)
- The Precautionary Principle and the Polluter Pays Principle
- Valuing the unrecognized contributions of women and of the environment to sustainable development
- Financing of sustainable development that respects the right of free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, and the rights of communities
- Gender criteria of financial mechanisms for sustainable development
- Recognition that women can capacitate “sustainable economies” with their knowledge systems and hitherto unvalued “care economy” contributions
- Protection of women’s indigenous and traditional knowledge systems from appropriation and exploitation by big business
- Acceleration of progress towards gender equality in all areas of governance, the judiciary and the economy

Recommendations regarding ‘Institutional framework for Sustainable Development’

- Governance of sustainable development should be placed at the highest level of the UN, reporting directly to the UN General Assembly, with accountability mechanisms that include specific gender indicators
- Gender mainstreaming within the entire sustainable development governance structure, based on the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals, including: collection and use of gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data; improved institutional gender capacity; consultation with networks of gender experts; partnering with women’s organizations; and user-friendly involvement mechanisms that will enable grassroots women to participate in global, national and local dialogues
- Strengthened international environmental governance, including adequate public and predictable resources for a reformed United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), enabled to assure capacity building at national level and coherence of the MEAs
- Safeguarding environmental, social conditions for the benefit of present and future generations through national and international ombudspersons for future generations as independent institutions with legal powers¹ and funds for future generations

¹ As supported by the Major Groups: Workers and Trade Unions, and Youth



- A strengthened and adequately financed UN Women, to guide and implement flagship programmes on strengthening women’s role in sustainable development, and coordination between all UN agencies on gender and sustainable development
- Strengthening of effective and balanced civil society participation
- Reform international finance, economic and trade organisations, to assure priority for equitable social development and environmental protection, and prevent a commodification of natural resources

4. Views on the ‘Objective of the Conference’ including ‘Emerging Issues’

(this section refers to point 4.a. of the Rio+20 guidelines for submissions)

The Rio+20 agenda includes setting priorities for work on “Emerging Issues”. Women’s priority and sectoral issues, including some identified among the UNEP Foresight 21 Challenges for the 21st Century List, include:

➤ **Food security and food sovereignty: Women’s voice over agriculture and biodiversity**

Women produce much of the world’s food. They need secure land tenure and resource rights to ensure their productivity. Their traditional knowledge about seeds, farming skills and livestock management needs to be recognized. Given that women constitute more than 50% of those who “go to bed hungry every night” (World Disasters Report on Hunger), food security systems need to address issues of equitable distribution of food, and need to address reasons behind crop failures, collapsing fish stocks and food price increases, including large-scale industrial bio-energy production. A review of the unfair legal framework for intellectual property in this field is needed to defend food security and food sovereignty, especially for women. Effective measures should be adopted at the global level to prevent speculation in the food market and maintain sustainable fishing practices both near shore and on the high seas. To increase the social and environmental resilience of communities and prevent loss of agricultural biodiversity, women’s production needs to be supported, including through improved access to education, resources and markets. To defend food security and food sovereignty, their rights to choose what to plant, eat and sell, must also be ensured.

➤ **Rush for Land: Women’s land rights and ownership tenure, and prevention of land grabbing**

Women’s land rights need to be ensured. Women farmers and indigenous peoples are currently losing their territories, resources and livelihoods in the grabbing of land by governments, local and foreign investors, including for large-scale bioenergy production. This results in increased poverty and lack of food security and food sovereignty. The increasing influence of corporations and other economic actors over environmental policies is also leading to privatization of common lands. Women are among the main victims of this trend, as they are deprived of access to resources that are of essential importance to their livelihoods and communities. These practices should be halted and community and indigenous rights should be respected, protected and strengthened. In consultation with women’s groups, plans need to be put in place at all levels to ensure that land purchases do not threaten and compromise the livelihood of rural women.

➤ **Halt privatization and commodification of the commons: Women most affected**

The increasing influence of corporations and other strong economic actors over environmental policies is



leading to tendency to privatize and commodify the commons² - formerly ruled by community rules and accessible to them - including water, genetic resources, and Indigenous territories and community conserved areas. Women are amongst the main victims of this trend, as they are deprived of access to resources that are of essential importance to their families. The privatization of the commons should be halted and Indigenous and community rights should be respected, protected and strengthened.

➤ **Women and children's greater harm from radiation: Need for phasing out of nuclear**

Women and children are at significantly greater risk of suffering and dying from radiation-induced cancer than a man exposed to the same dose of ionizing radiation, and are not protected accordingly by current regulation. There is no "safe" dose of radiation. We take a firm position against nuclear energy as one of the solutions to the energy crisis. It is neither clean nor sustainable, as many nuclear disasters have already so painfully pointed out. States must take decisive positions from immediate decommissioning to phasing out, and take the path of promoting the use of renewable energy. A legally binding mechanism to address the cost of decommissioning and clean up of nuclear power-plants, nuclear waste and uranium mines should be committed to at Rio+20. Redress and clean-up should be financed according to the polluter-pays principle. The entire nuclear cycle is threat to our generation and to that of our children. A UN rapporteur on uranium and nuclear risks should be agreed on³.

➤ **Promotion of clean renewable energy technologies and phasing out of unsustainable energy**

Close to 2.4 billion people in developing countries still depend almost entirely on traditional biomass fuels (wood, charcoal, dung and agricultural residues). It is mostly women who are tasked with collecting and managing these fuels, which limits their time and opportunities for education and income-generating activities. Investments in access to modern energy are needed for improved livelihoods, education, health services, water and sanitation, education, and transportation. Women need increased access to cleaner, more efficient energy sources and technologies for household use and productive activities, as well as training and education for business development - including designing, producing, marketing and managing new energy products and services. Unsustainable energy sources such as nuclear, shale gas, tar sands and coal continue to be expanded and subsidised. Governments should agree in Rio to eliminate direct and indirect subsidies to unsustainable energy supply – currently estimated at 7-9 billion Euro annually – and instead to create incentives and a fair legal environment for renewable energy and women's access to these resources.

➤ **Strengthen gender priority in Climate Change policies**

Climatic changes are already causing major problems in many regions of the world, and women bear the harshest impacts of the current climate crisis. Due to gender roles and inequalities, climate changes have particularly adverse impacts on women's livelihoods and work burdens, and also reinforce gender discrimination and the feminization of poverty. Women have valuable experience, knowledge and ideas about climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience and disaster risk management, and are important actors in the promotion of sustainable consumption. Women's decision-making power and participation in the development and implementation of climate change policies, mechanisms and funding must be increased to ensure they are gender-responsive. Women also need access to environmental rights,

² Rules, Games, and Common-Pool Resources; Ostrom, Elinor et al. Editors, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994

³ [1] Proposal of the women major group, UNEP regional statement 2011/2012, see http://www.unep.org/civil-society/Portals/59/Documents/Bonn_Consultations_2011/bonn_outcomes/Sept_2_2011/11_9_30_UNEP_Regional_MGS_Statement_Europe_2_Sept.pdf



climate change funding, and sustainable technologies.

➤ **Women and migration**

Due to unsustainable activities and climate change, many regions are experiencing land degradation, desertification, water insecurity and scarcity, sea level rise, droughts/floods, land grabs, changing disease vectors and deforestation. Economic and ecological displacement and migration are expected to increase as a result of this resource instability, both rural to urban and cross-border. In Asia, women make up the majority affected. A sustainable development agenda must address the social costs of this migration by addressing conditions of women's economic deprivation and environmental degradation, as well as by establishing policies to assist the migrants, particularly women and children, and improve their legal status.

➤ **Women and children at risk: Need for new approaches to minimizing risks of novel technologies and chemicals**

Women are greatly concerned by the technological solutions offered to climate change, including geo-engineering. Women are also very concerned by the rising volume of chemical production of many toxic chemicals and chemicals yet to be adequately tested for safety, and the wide-scale deployment of new technologies such as nano-technology in consumer products without necessary health information. Women and children are at specific risk from diseases associated with toxic chemicals - including many cancers, infertility, metabolic disorders, and learning and developmental disabilities – which are likely to increase in incidence and severity. We seek from our governments a commitment to the rapid reduction and elimination of toxic substances and highly hazardous pesticides, while steadily phasing-in non-chemical pesticide management approaches. Rio+20 outcomes should include participatory and transparent mechanisms for monitoring and assessing these technologies, using the precautionary principle and a gender perspective to examine, among others, dangers to women's reproductive health, multiplication of their already many burdens and other impacts.

➤ **New challenges to water availability: Burden for women**

Approximately one billion people live without access to clean water, and over 2 billion lack basic sanitation. In many developing countries, it is women and girls who are often most affected by lack of water, as they are primarily responsible for obtaining and transporting water for daily use. Water scarcity is compounded by climatic changes, and increasing due to chemical – amongst others from shale gas fracking – and biological pollution. This is a serious threat to the health of women and their babies and families, and it adds to the women's burden of water provision. Given the importance of protecting the health of future generations and the health of women who are more vulnerable to toxic chemicals during pregnancy, access to clean water for women and their families must be ensured and pollution of water halted at every level. In line with the UN resolution of 2010, we consider water as a basic human right, and as such it must be treated as a common good. Its treatment, distribution and management must be under public control, including mechanism of social control and community administration. Due to their major role in water provision and administration, women must be the leadership of water management decisions.



5. Views on Rio+20 Outcomes

(this section refers to point 3.a. of the Rio+20 guidelines for submissions)

We call on governments to recognize that sustainable development is built on a healthy environment as the foundation of all human well-being and that economic development must serve human and cultural development and take place within the carrying capacity of the planet. Economic instruments should aim at incorporation of externalities, equitable redistribution of wealth and equality between women and men.

➤ Sustainable and equitable economies

Commit to gender-sensitive development of binding international and national measures, in particular:

- Agree to develop binding policies that ensure healthy and sustainable livelihoods for women, in particular through halting use of unsustainable, radioactive and harmful substances and technologies
- Agree to assure a Social Protection Floor for all women as a fundamental human right, thus effectively reducing poverty and allowing women to fully participate in sustainable development
- Agree to end violence against women through legislation, support services for women, affordable access to justice for women, and information about rights and norms
- Agree to assure access to clean, efficient and safe energy, water and sanitation for all, especially for women
- Agree to assure women's access to natural resources, measures against land grabbing, access to and protection of commons, and respect of women's environmental rights

➤ Governance of sustainable development

Commit to gender-sensitive development of binding international and national measures, in particular:

- Agree to strengthen international governance of environment and to bring global sustainable development governance to the highest level of the UN, whilst assuring gender targets and policies for the new structures
- Agree on binding measures for the protection of women's indigenous and traditional knowledge systems from appropriation and exploitation by corporations (strong regulation of corporate power which effectively protects the most vulnerable in times of globalization)
- Agree on the development of agreements that guarantee global access to timely information, relevant public participation, affordable access to justice, liability and redress mechanisms
- Agree on creating specific windows and incentives to increase women's role and access to assets and finance in the area of sustainable development
- Agree to create an independent technology assessment organisation with the mandate to assess, control and, where necessary, limit use of technologies before widespread use, based on the precautionary principle
- Agree to create global mechanisms for the protection of the global commons, including clean up of harmful pollution such as from uranium mining, and a mechanism for its implementation
- Global and national institutions to protect the rights of future generations⁴

⁴ As supported by the Major Groups: Workers and Trade Unions, and Youth



➤ **Commit to targets and indicators for women's engagement**

The Outcome Document should include specific targets and indicators to support and promote women's engagement as key actors in sustainable development and to measure government progress on recommended actions. These could be incorporated into Sustainable Development Goals or could stand alone.

➤ **Include gender equality goals in Sustainable Development Goals**

A proposal has been presented by member states for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which governments in Rio can agree to develop up to 2015, to follow up the Millennium Development Goals.

The Women's Major Group supports the idea of SDGs, however, regrets that the proposal does not yet include any specific gender related goals, unlike the MDGs which contain several.

A set of Sustainable Development Goals should be adopted that includes specific crosscutting goals on gender equality in all spheres of society, in particular these could aim to:

- Secure women's greater access and control over assets, land tenure, inputs and natural resources including traditional common lands;
- Promote women's access to services and technologies needed for water, energy, agricultural production, family care, household management and business enterprises;
- Provide comprehensive social protection measures, especially for women;
- Provide safe health care facilities, including for sexual and reproductive health;
- Enable women and men to combine their jobs with childcare;
- Support investments in women's economic, social and political empowerment, including through new financing and credit facilities accessible to women;
- Support for traditional knowledge systems and management practices;
- Determine specific targets for women with regard to technology training, business management skills and extension services;
- Promote women's participation in government and business leadership, with targets of at least 40% women;
- Strengthen women's organizations/self help groups, entrepreneurs and networks to enable them to negotiate the terms of their engagement with sustainable development projects; and
- Develop in-house capacities for gender mainstreaming within implementing agencies and local partners.

The world stands at a crossroads, and the future of our planet Earth and its human communities lays in (y)our hands. United in our diversity we, women from all regions in the world, call on our governments and other stakeholders to renew the commitments on equitable and sustainable development made at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. We commit ourselves to contribute to a peaceful and healthy planet, in which human rights are well respected and women's voices are well-represented. We urge you to act in the spirit of global solidarity, trust, environmental and social care, and incorporate our recommendations into Rio+20 decisions.



WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP, Rio+20

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4. APROMAC – Environmental Protection Association; Brazil
5. APWLD - Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development; Thailand
6. Armenian Women for Health and a Healthy Environment (AWHHE)
7. AWNGD – Asian Women Network on Gender and Development/Helena Benitez Global Forum
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