

The Africa Women's Major Group Statement

Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio + 20

Addis Ababa, 22nd of September 2011

On behalf of the Women Major Group we wish to state that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002, reaffirmed sustainable development's central role in the international agenda. The Johannesburg plan of implementation (JPOI) adopted at the WSSD contains commitments and targets that member states agreed to pursue in order to foster sustainable development at all levels.

A truly sustainable 'green economy' would involve economic development that takes place within the limits of nature, and ensures a fair distribution of resources among all countries and social groups - as well as between women and men. Social equity and environmental justice must remain at the heart of sustainable development, and the outcomes of the Rio+20 UN conference in 2012. Environmental conservation is critical for maintaining the earth's ability to continue to support life, and human livelihoods. As countries confront the challenges of providing food, energy, shelter, health care and employment for growing populations, governments must find ways to preserve vital ecosystems and limit the disruptions of climate change, and to manage the world's natural resources in an equitable manner, with an emphasis on human rights, gender equality, and environmental justice.

We the WMG in Africa call on governments to reaffirm their commitment on the following:

1. GREEN ECONOMY

a) Access to water and sanitation

Water and sanitation are essential for women's economic development. A large number of the world's people live without access to clean water or basic sanitation. Due to gender roles, it is women and girls who are often most affected by lack of water, as in many countries they are primarily responsible for obtaining and transporting water for daily use. Women and girls travel many kilometres and spend much of their time securing essential water supplies, and their task becomes more difficult as rivers and lakes become polluted and ecosystems degraded. Lack of safe water and sanitation limits women's development possibilities. Privatization of water resources - in particular of water sources, rivers and lakes - can have a disproportionately damaging impact on women who have less economic power and access to income from formal employment.

We call for environmental protection policies and enforcement of water protection measures, and women should participate in their development and implementation. We also call for dedicated funding programs to ensure that women and girls obtain safe water

and sanitation at homes, schools and other public places.

b) Transportation

Access to affordable transport is limited for women in Africa. Changing demographic and land-use patterns have made the distance to fields, water and fuel wood sources greater, increasing travel times to these sources. Transport planning tends to underestimate the economic and social value of women's time, as well as the economic benefits.

We call on governments to accelerate investment in affordable means of transport and involve women in transport planning and implementation.

c) Land – Agriculture, food security

Property rights for women are still not recognised and respected. Women need secure land, property and resource rights. In many countries, women produce close to 80% of the food, but own only 1% of the land. The significance of the livestock sector and its socio-economic importance to African women cannot be over emphasized.

We call upon governments to expedite implementation of the Land Policy Initiative of the AU, specifically women's access and ownership to land.

d) Access to Energy

Green energy policies must incorporate a gender perspective. According to the African Development Bank, most of the 2.5 billion people using traditional biomass for household energy live in Africa. African women play a major role in the collection and management of biomass fuel such as fuelwood, dung and agricultural residues for household use. Access to modern energy in rural and poor urban areas leads to improved health services, clean water and sanitation, better education, efficient transportation and a more profitable informal sector. All of these directly benefit women. Gender-equitable energy policies, legislation and investments could effectively boost women's opportunities for economic and social empowerment and their ability to contribute to the green economy.

We call upon Africa Governments to implement programmes that directly support women's access to affordable off-grid energy technologies as well as connection to grid.

e) Access to health services Institutional Framework

AIDS/HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases have a devastating effect on women in Africa. There is lack of access to proper medical facilities for women in rural and poor urban areas. This is compounded by conflicting social, economic, cultural and political

factors.

We call on governments to invest in more functional health facilities in rural and poor urban communities, educate and train women on health issues that affect them, especially maternal mortality.

f) Governance, Peace and Security

Violent conflict in Africa over natural resources and political power has had adverse effects on women's health and sustainable livelihoods.

We call upon Africa Governments to guarantee and uphold good governance and democratic processes that ensure peace and security.

2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The global environmental governance has not effectively implemented the Rio principles for sustainable development, and the Johannesburg Plan of Action.

We call on governments to put in place a coordinating mechanism and parallel institutions at the regional and national level for sustainable development which defend women's rights and interests.

3. POVERTY REDUCTION

The UN estimates that approximately 70% of the 1.3 billion people living on less than one dollar a day are women. The situation is worsening due to the current environmental and climatic changes resulting in food crisis, flooding, famine etc, in Africa.

We call on governments to provide incentives for low-carbon economies that enhance and restore the natural environment, thus providing new green livelihoods, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

We also call on governments and development partners to ensure that policy formulations and foreign investment are based on the bottom – up approach involving all critical stakeholders, especially women.

In the development of the 10YFP the Women Major Group on behalf of the Major Groups will want to offer the following:

- a) Incorporate a gender perspective in SCP projects and policies
- b) Address differing women's SCP needs and priorities in the North and South

- c) Analyse obstacles to, and opportunities for, scaling up SCP initiatives to benefit women especially grassroots women,
- d) Provide education for girls, vocational and technological training for women, and adult literacy programmes, as part of every intervention
- e) Acknowledge and incorporate women's traditional knowledge and their contribution to green economies.

Thank you.

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