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Dr. Anke Stock, Senior Specialist Gender and Rights (Women in Europe for a Common Future):

The role of civil society in promoting sustainable energy – the gender perspective

1) Why Gender?

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report, out of the total 135 countries included, gender equality has a direct correlation to gross domestic product (GDP)¹. States with higher degrees of gender equality maintain higher GDPs in comparison to those with lower degrees of gender equality². A part from a general equality and non-discrimination principle deriving from a human rights approach gender equity is the key argument in order to guarantee stability and prosperity.

2) International Commitments

i) General

By international law equal rights between women and men in relation to civil and political rights are ensured in article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and in relation to working conditions and education in articles 3 and 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). The Optional Protocol to the ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1, 1966) foresees in article 2 that " ...individuals who claim that any of their rights enumerated in the Covenant have been violated and who have exhausted all available domestic remedies may submit a written communication to the Committee for consideration. " This is an opportunity for individuals to enforce their rights stipulated in the ICCPR.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) guarantee more specific rights for girls and women. These include, inter alia, a right to political participation, to health, to participate in economic and social life and specific rights for rural women (see articles 7, 8, 12, 13 and 14 CEDAW). The Optional Protocol to CEDAW (OP-CEDAW, 1999) provides for an individual right to file an action alleging a violation.

For Europe (the pan-European region and the European Union) particular treaties are in place: the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000).

¹ Hausmann, R./Tyson, L./Zahidi, S., The Global Gender Gap Report, 2011, p.27.

² Ibid; see also UN Women, Annual Report 2010 -2011, 2011, p.3.

ii) Gender and Sustainable Development

Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration³ asserts that access to information, public participation and access to justice (referred to as “environmental access rights”) are critical for sustainable development. Regarding women in particular, Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration is more prominent, since this is the first international document to highlight that gender inequality impedes sustainable development by stating: *“Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.”*⁴

In order to understand the implications between gender, poverty and sustainable development the definition of a few key concepts is important. Gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same rights, resources and opportunities⁵. On the basis of the human rights framework there are two main mechanisms to promote and implement gender equality. The direct work specifically targeting women and girls to compensate for past discrimination is called *“affirmative action”*. *“Gender mainstreaming”* is a concept that promotes integrating gender issues into mainstream policies, programmes and projects, institutional structures and procedures in order to ensure gender equality⁶.

Sustainable development is *“development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*⁷. The concept encompasses meeting the basic needs of all in their strive for a better life. Therefore, equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development. As gender inequality is one of the main forms of inequality one has to focus on the cross-cutting dimensions of gender and sustainable development in the search for solutions.

The main link can be made when looking at the allocation of resources between women and men⁸. This includes the gender pay gap and the restricted access and ownership of women to land and other assets and the limits in public/political participation.

In 2000, state leaders set the agenda of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are intended to eradicate poverty, ensure equality and basic standards of life for all individuals, in turn contributing to development particularly in a fashion that reaches all parts of society. One of the goals, MDG 3, specifically targets gender equality. This particular goal has a direct relationship with economic development. According to the MDGs Report more than 20 years later than *“Our Common Future”*⁹ gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the MDGs and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease. But progress has been slow on all fronts – from education to access to political decision-making¹⁰.

³ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992 (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development).

⁴ See footnote 3.

⁵ See inter alia, UNICEF’s definition.

⁶ For definition see UN, Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997, A/52/3, 18.9.1997.

⁷ UN, *Our Common Future*, 1987, chap. 2.

⁸ UNECE, *Empowering Women for Sustainable Development*, March 2011, p.4.

⁹ See footnote 7.

¹⁰ UN, *Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2010, p.4.

3) WECF Approach: Economic and Political Empowerment

Women's concerns and priorities on the issues of poverty elimination, a healthy environment and sustainable development set the agenda. Therefore, WECF works on the following priorities of local women organisations in countries in transition and developing countries: a sustainable economy and women's equal access to resources and finances, the challenge of climate change and sustainable mitigation solutions, especially access for women to safe and sustainable energy solutions, the impacts of climate change on women and men and adaptation solutions, gender issues related to the right of water and sanitation and the protection of women's health from hazardous chemicals in daily products, waste, fuel and pesticides.

Women's empowerment, – both their economic and political empowerment, – are needed to achieve the aim of gender equality. Through its work on women's empowerment, WECF contributes to the Millennium Development Goal 3 ("Gender Equality") as well as MDGs 1, 4, 5 and 7. Gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same rights, resources and opportunities. WECF follows both approaches in its work to tackle gender inequalities.

(i) Economic Empowerment

The economic empowerment of women is addressed by WECF by 2 strategies:

Women's Livelihood Strategy - creating sustainable and affordable access to livelihood resources. This strategy aims at reducing women's time spent in fetching water and fuel, reducing time and cost, and reduction of diseases, and to increase their access to land, safe water, energy and sanitation (e.g. "Switch to Sun - Live in Comfort", EU-funded project in Georgia and Ukraine to develop and promote sustainable energy solutions on household level).

Women's Income Generation Strategy - increasing women's participation in the (green) economy and income from economic activities. WECF aims to train women on professional skills, – for women small farmers, craftswomen and entrepreneurs, – to develop improved technologies based on women's skills, and to increase women's access to markets and finance. The differences in the allocation of resources between women and men, including the gender pay gap and the restricted access and ownership of women to land and other assets, is a main reason for gender inequality. WECF combats the causes for this by promoting green jobs, training women, and providing funding opportunities for women to create their own income (e.g. "Empowering Women Benefits All" (EWA), project in 6 countries funded by the Netherlands, focus on providing women with skills and knowledge to start their own business).

(ii) Political Empowerment

The political empowerment of women is addressed by WECF by 2 strategies:

Women's Participation – increase women's public participation and leadership role in policy and the (green) economy. WECF aims at reducing customary inequality between men and women through gender awareness raising campaigns and increasing women's participation in local and national decision-making, from local water boards, to national parliaments (e.g.

EWA project, supporting the political empowerment of women by leadership trainings etc.) .

Gender Advocacy – strengthening policies and legal frameworks for gender equality and women’s access to resources. WECF works on this through experience sharing and policy advocacy. WECF trains and raises awareness with women and men on the social, economic and environmental benefits of the full participation of women in decision-making, implementation and monitoring, and provides support for women’s organisations to implement actions for the improvement of the environment and health (based on the principles of the Aarhus Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other legal instruments). WECF facilitates public participation of women representatives in national, EU and international policy processes and builds their capacity so that they are able to effectively contribute to decision-making. WECF was conceived after the Earth Summit in Rio 1992 to give a voice to the newly established “women’s major group” – one of the 9 recognised groups representing civil society in sustainable development policy processes and programmes. WECF represented the women’s major group in preparation of the Rio + 20 conference in June 2012 and its follow-up process as well as during the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the women’s major group at the United Nations Environment Programme, and is part of the organisers of the “women and gender constituency” at UNFCCC (e.g. advocacy and lobby work at local, national and international level, part of all practical projects).

4) Next Steps and Recommendations

- Use an integrated approach based on human rights of aligning policies and projects according to gender aspects – benefits for men and women;
- Improve the understanding of gender and sustainable development and raise awareness of these issues;
- Use the specific knowledge of women about sustainable resource management;
- Empower women economically, in particular by using the synergy effects of small-scale, decentralised projects;
- Integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue in all of the goals of sustainable development in the Post 2015 process/SDGs;
- Promote the rights of women to access to resources, land and services;
- Implement the right to access to information, public-participation in decision-making processes and access to justice for women (focus on stakeholder analysis; create “setting” for participation of women, the youth and other marginalised groups);
- Work with local NGOs and rely on local expertise, in particular when developing and implementing project on community level;
- Create democratic institutions with gender balance: Water Users’ Unions/Eco-San Clubs.

Women in Europe for a Common Future

WECF is a network of over 100 organisations and several hundred individual members who are concerned with promoting a healthy environment for all and strengthening the role of women and promoting a gender approach in environment and sustainable development policy and implementation at local, regional, national and international level. Historically, many WECF members are mainly from European, Caucasus, Central Asian and Balkan countries, but membership is open to organisations worldwide. WECF is coordinated through WECF organisations in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland. Our project work brings safe ecological solutions to local problems in the areas of chemical, sanitation, energy and food production. Our policy work at national, European, UN and international level brings women's perspectives to policymakers.

BIODATA:

Anke Stock qualified as a German lawyer in Berlin in 2001 and obtained her Ph.D. at the Humboldt-University of Berlin on anti-discrimination law. After gaining work experience in South Africa, at the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme, she worked with Amnesty International in London. From 2002 to 2005 she was employed as the Legal Officer of the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) in London. After her move to Munich she started working for Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) in 2005. She managed projects in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova and is the senior gender and rights specialist of this network of women's and environmental organisations in the EECCA region and beyond. She also worked as a consultant and trainer for the American Bar Association in Armenia, the European Eco-Forum and the United Nations Protocol on Water and Health. Her special focus is gender and public participation.