



“We know that gender issues are important. Don’t worry, we will include it the discussion. But right now, we have other priorities, more urgent issues.”

This was the response of a delegate during the climate talks in early October 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was a response that smacked of ignorance, common among the majority of decision makers of the climate regime. It also showed that the climate solutions that were being negotiated in restricted meeting rooms did not have people at the core.

This ignorance indeed goes right through the power-holders. Former United Nations General Secretary General Kofi Annan, for instance, said of the women’s situation in the tsunami aftermath in Indonesia: “...there are no different tsunami impacts between men and women.” But the realities on the ground tell an entirely different story.

Tsunami-affected women in Aceh could hardly decide on the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, even though more women perished and even though those who survived carry heavier burdens, including the likelihood to experience sexual abuse. Pakistani women are similarly experiencing difficulty in accessing health services after a devastating earthquake. And as if adding insult to injury, international financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank further plunge women into greater subordination, discrimination and exploitation, with their projects that they insist in the name of “development.”

Gender roles and sexualities are among the main reasons behind the peculiar realities and experiences of women in times of disasters and other crisis. In many cases, such realities and experiences include injustices that are based on gender and sexuality, with violence against women, discrimination, stereotyping and subordination.

The extent of these injustices also relies on factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion and citizenship.

The climate change debates may become yet another process, where women would be deprived of meaningful participation and ultimately, better chances to cope and survive with the drastic changes in the environment, aside from the already existing political, economic, social and cultural inequalities. Unless power-holders break free particularly from deliberate ignorance, start regarding this earth as commons and listen to women as equal stakeholders of communities, we would never redeem the earth from greater disasters and ourselves from sheer stupidity.



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