

Performance of Persistence: A March for Gender Justice in Climate Justice

by Nina Somera

Despite the midday showers, more than three hundred people led by indigenous women joined the women's march on 1 October 2009, heading to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) building in Bangkok, Thailand.

Chanting “No Climate Justice without Gender Justice”, the participants, mostly coming from Armenia, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand stressed that women are among the hardest hit by climate change despite their minute carbon footprint. Moreover, they demanded the meaningful engagement of women in the climate talks.

One of these women was Aleta Kornika Baun, one of the scores of Indonesian indigenous women affected by the lucrative mining industries. “Mining cleared the forests of trees and now causes periodic erosions. Today, we walk for at least two kilometers just to fetch water. If we allow mining, the number of women victims will keep on rising,” she lamented.

Another was Elvie Baladad of the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK) or the Philippine National Rural Women Coalition. She owns an orchard of some 300 mango trees that are expected to yield about 6,000 kilos. But in her last harvest, she only managed to collect 300 kilos.

“I’m still paying my debt, with the devastation brought about by insect infestation, which in turn is brought about by climate change. We have a crazy weather, as crazy as those inside who would not want to reduce their carbon emissions and who are responsible for messing up our climate. I blame the countries especially the United States (US). In pursuit of development, it has trampled those who have less in life,” she expressed.



Northern women likewise joined the women's march. US-based Felicia Marie Davis, who came at her own expense, hoped to learn from the politics and energy of Asian women who have strongly articulated the links between gender and climate change.

As she explained, "I came on my own resources to see and hear first hand how Asian women represent gender in climate change discussions, showing that gender and climate are connected and connected globally. I can connect what happened in the Philippines to hurricane Katrina where more women died. Women from the developing worlds are truly taking the leadership in this issue especially in terms of equity."

During the march, some women participants periodically danced to the drumbeats, with their red umbrellas, batik banners and placards shaped like the Venus sign. Such fusion of energies, at once serious yet creative, drew the attention of passersby. Just before the march, the participants were thrilled to see four motor boats of SEAFish for Justice plying the Chao Phraya river and heading towards the park beside the Phra Sumen Park.

At the end, the women reiterated their call for accountability particularly among developed nations as well as women's meaningful participation in both formal and informal processes.

As Baladad asserted, "We call for reparations that are free of conditionalities. They owe it to us, our children and the next generation." Farjana Akter of Voice of Bangladesh added, "Women must be present in decision-making on adaptation programmes." Finally Baun remarked, "Women and men must work together. We need to learn from our traditions. We have to think of ourselves as friends of the environment." ■



The Women's March

Clockwise: (1) Four motor boats of SEAFish for Justice greeted the women as the latter was about to march from Phra Sumen Park, along the Chao Phraya River. (2 and 3) Elaborate batik banners articulated the women's key messages. (4) Several women from Indonesia's Solidaritas Perempuan were among those who led the "umbrella dance" at strategic points during the march. (5) Some women carried the equally striking Venus sign placards that called for gender justice in climate justice. Photos courtesy of Mongkhonsawat Luangvorapant/Oxfam and Titi Soentoro and Lala Pecson Cantillo of NGO Forum on the ADB.



Mongkhonsawat Luangvorapant/Oxfam



Titi Soentoro



Mongkhonsawat Luengvorapant/Oxfam



Lala Pecson Cantillo



Mongkhonsawat Luengvorapant/Oxfam

Why Climate Change is a Woman's Problem

by Nina Somera

On October 2009, members of the broad coalition, Women for Climate Justice (GenderCC) reiterated the need to include women more comprehensively in the outcome documents of the ongoing meetings on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

As Felicia Davis of GenderCC-USA asserted, "It is time for the women to be recognised as equal partners. There can't be climate solutions without women's empowerment." Moreover, Titi Soentoro of NGO Forum on the ADB stressed UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's previous statements on the importance of women's role on this process. "That was a very important message, that we hope all the delegations will reflect. As of now, [the mentions of] women are fragmented and they still risk disappearing with the cleaning of the texts," she remarked.

The Women's Caucus, a broader group composed of women's rights advocates from the governments and civil society organisations such as GenderCC are pursuing the inclusion of the following language in the Shared Vision, which serves as the outcome document's preamble:

"The full integration of gender perspectives is essential to effective action on all aspects of climate change, adaptation, mitigation,

technology sharing, financing, and capacity building. UNFCCC processes must ensure compliance with existing women's rights standards and best practice as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 [Women and Peace-Building]. The advancement of women, their leadership and meaningful participation and engagement as stakeholders in all climate related processes and implementation must be guaranteed."

Asked by reporters how exactly women are affected by climate change, Ana Pinto of the Centre for Organisation Research and Education (CORE) emphatically responded: "It is a problem for women because we provide for the entire community including men. When women are demanding that our voices be heard, we are not doing this for ourselves but for the community we take care of. So we are asking on behalf of the world."





“If the children are born with asthma, women take care of them. Men can run away, migrate for work. Of course they are not happy with it. Very often they do not send money back home. But women have to stay to care for the children, the sick and the elderly,” she further pointed out.

Soentoro, who worked in Aceh, where 77 per cent of those who perished in the Tsunami were women also cited the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and children. “Underwear, milk for breastfeeding mothers, separate bathroom and others are the basic needs for women but governments do not think about them. Women also have specific thoughts and solutions, their own imagination of the world.”

Gotelind Alber of GenderCC likewise stated that women are hardest hit by carbon-trading mechanisms. “They have been harmful to local communities for example in landfills. Women also do not have access to markets,” she said.

In a dialogue with UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer, members of the Women’s Caucus raise the miniscule attention given to women and gender issues on the

working documents. De Boer suggested that a more practical approach can be adopted, citing as example the proceeds for women’s projects under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). “Make sure that you get it essentially than some sentences in the preamble. Build on practical things,” he said.

De Boer has helped enable the participation of women as a “possible constituency” in the Bangkok meetings. He initially expressed skepticism over the inclusion of women and gender in the Shared Vision. When pressed further by Davis, who cited the mere mention of women among vulnerable groups and women as constituting half of the world’s population, de Boer remarked, “Maybe I have become cynical over the years.”

During the press conference, the “Declaration of Women in Asia on Climate Change” were distributed. Created by over 70 women from indigenous peoples (IPs), peasants, fisherfolk, labour and other sectors in the feminist and social movements, the Declaration reiterated among others: free, prior and informed consent from IPs on development projects, equal rights on security of land tenure, opposition against carbon market-based solutions and privatisation of water, and the recognition of historical and ecological debt.



Declaration of Women in Asia on Climate Change

We, indigenous, peasant, fisher, labour, rural and urban women, face the bulk of negative impacts of climate change and the false solutions to the climate crisis proposed by governments and so-called experts. Women continue to produce and provide food; work inside and outside homes to augment our family incomes and are often the principal income earners; and through our productive and reproductive labour, we ensure the welfare of our families and communities.

However, we are still not recognised by governments, and national and international institutions as contributors who sustain lives in our families, communities and societies, and therefore, we are systematically excluded from decision making about our lives, environments and natural resources. Particularly in relation to the climate crisis, we are identified as “victims”, but not as decision makers in determining how to tackle climate change and contributing solutions based on our wisdom and knowledge.

We, over 70 women from many parts of Asia with various backgrounds –indigenous, peasant, fisher, labour and from different networks and social justice movements, met on September 28 to 29 2009, in Bangkok, Thailand. We exchanged experiences with our sisters and discussed the impacts of climate change in our communities and on us, the women, from these communities. We discussed strategies and solutions to bring our voices and thoughts into the discourse on climate change and shape solutions to tackle the climate crisis. We also resolved to continue our own education about climate issues, educate other women and policy makers, and build alliances and coalitions to work towards genuine climate justice with the principles of gender justice.

We recognise that the climate crisis is complex and far reaching, and we need to act urgently in order to put into place systems that can address the climate crisis in long term and sustainable ways. For this we need real solutions that will tackle the roots of the climate crisis rather than mechanisms that allow corporations to profit from the crisis and allow the wealthy to keep consuming and depleting resources, and polluting the atmosphere.

We want our children and future generations to live in a world that is just, healthy and capable of sustaining lives. Therefore, we declare our following positions:


As indigenous women

1. Respect and uphold the **right to self-determination** as women and as members of indigenous communities.
2. Women should be integral to the process of obtaining **genuine free, prior and informed consent** from indigenous communities on development projects within their traditional territories.

Agriculture

1. Promote and fund **sustainable agriculture, organic and agro-ecological** farming.
2. **No to subsidies and support to industrial agriculture** and agri-business corporations.
3. Recognise **the rights of women farmers**, and the contributions of women in agriculture.
4. **Oppose carbon trading** and **Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs)** in agriculture.
5. **No to genetically modified organisms (GMOs)**.
6. No to free trade agreements and export-oriented agriculture.
7. Defend **security of land tenure** for small-hold farmers, and equally for women and men.
8. Decisions about how to **use and preserve local ecological resources** should be made by local communities, with equal rights to women and men.

The Declaration is an open document that is expected to evolve in the coming years. As of press time, it has more than a hundred signatures. Parties who wish to support the Declaration may contact Tea Soentoro at tea@forum-adb.org



The “Declaration of Women in Asia on Climate Change” is a result of a women’s training held from 28 to 29 September 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. Based on the framework of climate justice, the text contains progressive positions even in otherwise still ambiguous and contested issues surrounding climate change. It highlights the central role of women primarily as agents in the fundamental management of communities and the environment.

Fishery

1. Call for all governments and international agencies to **enforce and protect fisherfolk rights**.
2. **No to market-based solutions on marine eco-systems** regarding climate change.
3. **Involve fisherfolk communities and organisations** in building community resilience to climate change based on local knowledge and capacity.
4. Protect, promote and **fund fish sanctuaries and mangroves based on local, fishery-based community rights**, that are proved to be low carbon by local government and international agreements.
5. **Regulate fish trade and enhance domestic markets** towards **food security** and building **community resilience**.

Forest

1. Exclude forests from carbon markets and as source of emissions offsets.
2. Recognise the **rights of Indigenous Peoples and their rights to territory**, especially Indigenous women’s rights.
3. Uphold the roles, interests and rights of women in using and protecting forests.
4. **No to mining** in forest and ecologically sensitive areas, including coastal areas; subject mining activities in all areas to strong and legal environmental and social regulations.
5. No to Reduction of Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (**REDD**).

Health

Recognise the rights of women to **healthy and safe environments**; governments must ensure the delivery of **basic health services** in adaptation measures that benefit women, children and low-income communities.

Energy

1. **No to nuclear power**, coal-fired power, large-scale hydropower and incinerators.
2. **No to agrofuels, geo-engineering** and false solutions proposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs), governments, Transnational/Multinational Corporations (TNCs/MNCs), the UNFCCC and others.
3. **Decentralise power production and distribution**, with regulations that prioritise small scale power utilities. Promote and fund community-based renewable energy.

Water and Sanitation

1. **No to privatisation of water and sanitation services**.
2. Protect water **as commons**.
3. Promote **sustainable sanitation**.

Financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation

1. Governments must make **commitments for reparation and restitution** in ways that do not create new debts for developing countries.
 2. Recognise the **historical and ecological debt** of the **North to the South**.
 3. Make financing commitments **free from policy conditions or restrictions**.
 4. Ensure that financing commitments are **not managed by IFIs** but by independent bodies that include the participation of civil society; these could be **through the UN** or **an alternative process**.
 5. **Cancel existing debts** of developing nations.
 6. Ensure **gender sensitivity** and **accounting of women’s unique economic, socio-political and cultural needs and priorities** in all financing arrangements.
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