

**Notes from 2008 ECOSOC Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast:  
"Migration, environment and climate change: the gender perspective"  
Co-hosted by UNFPA, OSAGI and IOM  
2 July 2008 at 8.00 am**

**Chairs**

The Ministerial roundtable breakfast was co-chaired by Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), Ms. Mari Simonen, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Ms. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director-General, International Organization For Migration (IOM).

**Ms. Rachel Mayanja welcomed** participants and highlighted a few critical points from the issues paper, including that the single greatest impact of climate change and environmental hazards, which were not gender neutral, could be on human migration. Citing the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh and 2004 tsunami in Asia, where male survivors outnumbered female survivors by 3 or 4 to 1, she pointed to the disparity between men's and women's economic and social rights which can be exacerbated by certain cultural practices. Ms. Mayanja continued by saying that women also tended to be underrepresented in decision-making on sustainable development, including on climate change which impeded their ability to contribute to these issues.

**Ms. Ndioro Ndiaye emphasized** the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on population displacement and the need to consider women's specific needs in this context. Acknowledging the broad range of displacement and migration figures which cited that by 2050 25 million to 1 billion people could be displaced as a result of climate change and environmental degradation, she called for further evidence-based and policy oriented research. The wide range of situations from sudden humanitarian internal- or cross-borders migration to long term, structural migration patterns would have to be envisaged and planned at the national, regional and international levels and had to incorporate a gender perspective. In situations of forced migration, as in any crisis and emergency situation, women and girls and men and boys were exposed to different types of risks and trauma, in particular gender-based violence, human trafficking for sexual purposes or for labour exploitation and involvement in criminal activities. Those elements, if already well-known, were sometimes overlooked in the sense of urgency in relief operations.

**Participants acknowledged** that the role of women in climate change was usually not present in discussions at the UN, partly due to the fact that the Kyoto Protocol and other treaties on the issue did not include a gender perspective at all. A disconnect existed between gender equality advocates and others in the climate change/agricultural and resource management groups. While activists had been recognizing the relevance of women in the rural sector, as primary farmers and managers, there was still bureaucratic resistance to acknowledging the role of women as key players in the agricultural context. This was especially prominent during the recent FAO summit on food security (6 June 2008) where the role of women was omitted from discussions. To that end, the importance of engaging the agricultural sector and technical organizations including FAO was noted. This would include urging collaborative action and involvement on women and the environment, particularly on agriculture, so as to not lose opportunities that are being presented throughout the current climate change discussions.

However, the discussion on climate change and environmental hazards should not be limited to agriculture, but encompass the whole scope of related issues. One such suggestion was to advocate for UNFCCC to include a gender analysis in the criteria for countries' adaptation plans. There was still much to be done to clearly articulate the linkages between gender equality and climate change, that while climate change did not necessarily cause gender inequalities, it certainly exacerbated them.

At the international level, it was critical to include and highlight the importance of the gender perspective during the debates at the General Assembly and ECOSOC. The upcoming Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Manila was another venue in which to raise women's rights and underscore the linkages between migration, gender and climate change. While it was important for United Nations agencies and civil society organizations to make statements related to gender equality and climate change, it was imperative for Member States themselves to make public statements on these issues so as to encourage national ownership while also encouraging other member states to take similar action. It is of particular importance considering the current challenges in political will and commitment. International debates on climate change were critical entry points for women especially since they have been adapting to climate change on the ground even before the issue was labeled as such.

At the field level, agencies such as IOM, UNFPA, and UNIFEM played a key role and looked forward to ensuring support of commitments made by Member States in these areas. The summary of the Commission on the Status of Women's debate on emerging issues<sup>1</sup> was considered useful in raising awareness at the community, national and global levels. The need to have the voices of women and children on the ground heard both in the wake of natural disasters and climate change, as well as in the negotiation of adaptation strategies and action plans was stressed. The importance of creating an enabling environment for women's groups was highlighted as an important next step in order to empower them to advocate these issues. Financing for women's organizations remained a challenge as women's issues often tend to be 'pushed back'. The importance of having a space for dialogue, fostering ownership, and South-South exchange were also iterated.

Finally, participants acknowledged good practices in government policies that mainstreamed gender issues, especially with strategic guidance and coherence. Regarding a suggestion that adaptation funds might provide an opportunity for targeted women specific initiatives, some governments were wary of imposed conditionality which might contradict cultural norms and national ownership. On the other hand, with women constituting roughly half of the population, some questioned how such a focus could be deemed an imposition. Participants suggested that when such funds were negotiated, an interchange of ideas and commitments should be made rather than impositions or conditionality. When faced with competing priorities for basic needs, Member States needed capacity to enable them to focus and invest in critical gender equality programming.

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<sup>1</sup> CSW (2008), *Emerging issues: Gender perspectives on climate change: Moderator's summary*. Available from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/52sess.htm#themes>

**Ms. Mari Simonen concluded** the discussion by thanking everyone for their attendance and reiterating the importance of taking action at the local, national and global levels, including at the ECOSOC High Level Segment, GFMD event and other respective forums. She stressed that this discussion illustrated the types of challenges that were associated with gender issues, as well as the importance and need for dialogue. Ms. Simonen highlighted the discussion's focus on fostering ownership versus conditionality and the necessity of incorporating the gender equality, climate change and migration nexus systematically rather than as an afterthought. Finally she closed by stating that partnerships were critical in having an impact and that all agencies looked forward to collective action and working together.

### **Recommendations:**

- A brief flyer should be drafted to enable easier messaging and advocacy where three key points and three corresponding questions for each point would be articulated. For example, the first point could state that women are overwhelmingly affected by natural disasters, supplemented by evidence of real numbers. Secondly, that climate change policies as they relate to education, water and agriculture – must have the involvement and consideration of women's needs and rights. Thirdly, the impact of climate change resulting in displacement and migration should be addressed distinct from regular migration.
- A representative from UNFPA and/or IOM should use the opportunity of the GFMD to highlight the importance of these issues, in particular underscoring the need for action at the global and grassroots levels.
- Advocacy activities should be centered on the notion that everyone will benefit, with resources benefiting both men and women.

### **Annex: List of Participants**

#### **Chairs:**

1. UNFPA, Ms. Mari Simonen
2. OSAGI, Ms. Rachel Mayanja
3. IOM, Ms. Ndioro Ndiaye

#### **Participants:**

4. Beligum, H.E. Olivier Belle
5. Finland, Mr. Ilkka Heiskanen
6. Korea, Rep. of, Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
7. Malaysia, H.E. Hamidon Ali
8. Molodva, Mr. Andre Stratan
9. Philippines, Mr. Jimmy Blaas
10. United Kingdom, Mr. Andrew Steer
11. UNIFEM, Ms. Ines Alberdi
12. UN Foundation, Ms. Tamara Kreinin
13. NGO Women Org. for Change in Agriculture, Dr. Jeannette Gurung
14. International Center on Research for Women, Ms. Anne Warner
15. Women's Environment and Development Organization, Ms. June Zeitlin
16. IOM, Mr. Luca Dall'Oglio
17. UNFPA, Ms. Aminata Toure