

The Women and Gender Constituency in the Climate Negotiations

by Gotelind Alber

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Sharing the Space.
The Women's Caucus held a press conference during the UNFCCC climate change talks in October 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Photo by Lala Pecson Cantillo

"The goal of the Women's and Gender Constituency is to formalise the voice of the women's and gender civil society organisations present and regularly active in UNFCCC processes, and to debate, streamline and strengthen the positions which these organisations put forth. The Constituency draws upon global commitments to gender equality and women's rights, especially as they relate to climate change, and toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and related commitments and Conventions. The Constituency works to ensure human rights and a gender perspective is incorporated into UNFCCC negotiations, plans and actions."

- Draft Charter of the Women and Gender Constituency

Fifteen years after the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) entered into force, civil society organisations (CSOs) working on women and gender issues are finally acknowledged as a special observer group, although temporarily, hence, “provisional constituency status.”

The last several years saw the increasing presence and engagement of women’s and gender organisations in the process. Although small in number, they had a great impact.

Unlike the processes around the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), there is no “major groups” concept that allows the involvement of civil society in the UNFCCC conferences and debates. Nonetheless, some 1,000 CSOs have been admitted as observer organisations. Moreover at many Conference of Parties (COP), observers outnumbered the government delegates to the UNFCCC.

Already in the early years of the process, several groups of stakeholders evolved, the first two being the Environmental (ENGO) and Business and Industry NGOs (BINGO), and later on the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA). In the following years, the UNFCCC Secretariat developed a procedure for the admission of similar constituencies. Subsequently the Indigenous Peoples (IPO), Research and Independent Organisations (RINGO), and Trade Unions (TUNGO) clusters were

formed and recognised as constituencies.

A constituency status is usually provided on a provisional basis for a certain time span. Once the member organisations have demonstrated their capacity to make a meaningful and specific contribution to the process, a permanent constituency status is granted.

The last several years saw the increasing presence and engagement of women’s and gender organisations in the process. Although small in number, they had a great impact. At COP13 in Bali, Indonesia in 2007, a daily women’s caucus was held for the first time. These meetings were open to anybody who was interested in women, gender and climate change. It was also at COP13 when the women’s caucus decided to apply for its own constituency.

GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice offered to work on the application process. Other active groups include the Germany-based LIFE eV, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), and Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO).

A draft charter has been prepared, defining the following principles and objectives of the constituency:

- to regularly review developments in the climate change discourse within and around the official negotiations;
- to ensure representation of women’s voices, experiences, needs and capacities and to ensure a gender perspective in all discussions;
- to feed women and gender sensitive perspectives and situations into the discourse;



- to help foster communication between women and gender organisations/ actions and national- or global-level negotiations;
- to support and contribute to the women's and gender caucus and the daily coordination meeting during formal meetings;
- to liaise with other caucuses and constituencies, especially to identify common ground.

Cheerful amid the Challenge.
Members of the Gender CC during COP 14 in Poznan, Poland.

Photo by the author.

The benefits of the constituency status include a greater respect accorded to the members of the constituency and the visibility of women and gender organisations. Constituencies also earn a slot for interventions during the plenary sessions and in-session workshops. They are also invited

to the consultations with chairs of committees and the COP presidency as well as the thematic UNFCCC workshops that are held in between sessions. The more practical benefits of having a constituency status include the provision of an office space and meeting rooms.

The interaction between the UNFCCC secretariat and the constituency is through a focal point, who is nominated by the members of the constituency. Currently, GenderCC is the focal point presumably until the end of the provisional status. A final decision will be taken on this status by COP17 in 2011.

In the meantime, women and gender organisations are constantly evaluating their bases for collaboration. Within the constituency, there is diversity of approaches and positions. For instance, some groups concentrate their efforts on gender mainstreaming, while others envision more fundamental changes. There have also been discussions on carbon markets, on whether they are useful instrument or are merely a threat to women.

Nonetheless, there is sufficient common ground for a close collaboration among the members of the constituency. The joint working group who drafted the charter of the constituency identified the following priorities for the time to come:

- Adaptation – equitable actions to urgently respond to those most in need by prioritising actions, funds and other resources for most vulnerable countries, communities and populations;
- Mitigation – upholding the principles of common but differentiated, historical responsibilities; promoting a sustainable energy paradigm where fossil fuel-based

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and nuclear energy are opposed, and the recognition of women's role as efficient and capable energy managers;

- Sustainability – going beyond the focus on carbon and considering other issues of environmental, social, or economic relevance;
- Participation – fostering the wide participation of women and women's issues in these processes and supporting their views and perspectives;
- MDGs – ensure climate change policies are in line with global commitments such as sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Moreover, women's and gender organisations are building and strengthening alliances with other constituencies such as indigenous peoples and trade unions who share our concerns on human rights and social and economic justice issues related to climate change. The constituency also reaches out to a number of like-minded governments. One of these is Finland, that has supported the participation of women delegates from African countries and has been supportive of the activities of the constituency.

At different legs of the climate talks, the women's caucus is organised daily, open to anybody who is willing to work with us. Due to the cross-cutting character of women and gender, such openness has been felt to be useful in strengthening the campaign for climate justice, instead of following the process in its narrow focus on technologies and mechanisms. Moreover, further observer organisations can join the constituency, and CSOs who have not yet been accredited to the UNFCCC can work through one of member organisations. In order to achieve gender justice within climate justice, we need as many allies as possible. ■

Gotelind Alber is a co-founder and board member of GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice in Berlin, Germany. A physicist by education, Gotelind has 25 years of research, policy and management experience as Managing Director of the Climate Alliance of European Cities, among others. She is currently working as an independent consultant on sustainable energy and climate policy, multi-level governance and gender and climate justice. Among her ongoing research include "Gender, Cities and Climate Change," a background paper for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN HABITAT) and one on cooperative societies and their role for local climate policy. She is also leading a campaign to promote green electricity that addresses women.