

Women's Leadership on Climate Change Justice and the Grassroots Perspective

COP 16 Side Event



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GBM Blog: GBM's official side event was held on Saturday 4th December 2010 in Cancun. We were honoured to share this event with Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights and the Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice. Mary was joined by women leaders to discuss strategies for women's participation in decision-making on climate change.

Panelists included Constance Okollet, Chairperson of Osukuru United Women's Network, Uganda, and founding member of Climate Wise Women, and GBM's Francesca de Gasparis. Lorena Aguilar of the IUCN, Costa Rica did an excellent job moderating.

Despite being on the graveyard shift at 8:15 pm on a Saturday night we had an excellent attendance. The side event started with a video message from Professor Wangari Maathai (Nobel Laureate 2004) on climate justice, women in climate change and the need for governments to take action now.

"It is extremely important for the United Nations and governments at the national levels to ensure that the voices of women are heard. It is no longer possible to say we do not have qualified women, we do have a lot of qualified women who should be invited to the table."

Panelists and respondents explored issues including first hand impact in her village from Constance. The need for adaptation and to involve the grassroots on REDD+ from GBM. Climate justice and gender issues were eloquently substantiated by Mary Robinson.

"Many inspiring women are already leading as powerful agents of change in communities, countries and international agencies working on climate, but they remain under-represented in national and global decision-making. In particular, the voices of women from the global South are seldom heard. Their vast expertise and knowledge are largely missing from international discussions. Any fair and equitable approach to climate change solutions must involve women alongside men in every stage of climate policy-making."

GBM's Europe Director, Francesca de Gasparis's speech:

The opportunity that REDD+ presents is one which will allow us to change our behaviour to value forests for what they are. However creating a "carbon market" for trading to produce finance to protect forest is taking a business as usual approach. Thus minimising the worth of a forest to carbon alone so that its true value is lost.

So where does this leave us as we look for climate justice and for leadership to act on climate change. For REDD to work to protect forests and its people we need to see other criteria as a part of how we measure successes or its impact. These include:

- Governance at all levels- international, national and local
- Biodiversity – which is the real “bank” to safeguard our future
- Rights, livelihoods and well-being of forest peoples – whether they dwell in the forest or alongside it- Free Prior Informed consent is needed.
- Ecosystem services- regulation of climate through rainfall, cloud, water, fertile soils

For this to work women must have a seat at the table during climate change talks. If we are to effectively address this issue how we do it must reflect our society. Women make up over 50% of the human population and yet remain shut out of most important meetings.

For us at the Green Belt Movement who have worked with rural women and their families for over thirty years. Women who live by the forest, they eke their living from the land. Our experience has shown that education which uses tree planting as an entry point enables communities to truly understand the linkages between poverty, the environment, and sustainable livelihoods. It was for this approach that our founder Wangari Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. We know it is possible to build resilient systems which have at their centre an empowerment model for women. REDD+, if done correctly, would bring additional needed resources to these communities and forests thus helping create healthy ecosystems.

For this to happen we need to change the business as usual approach to finding solutions. We need to opening up decision making fora to include women who have hands on experience and a wealth of knowledge to offer.

We know what needs to be done, we must do it: the knowledge and voices of women must be heard to create a sustainable future for generations to come.

For more on COP16 from the Green Belt Movement, Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice and the Nobel Women’s Initiative click on the links below:

<http://greenbeltmovement.org/blog/entry.php?id=179> Wangari’s video message

http://www.mrfcj.org/news_centre/2010/official_mrfcj_cop16_side-event.html

<http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org/news/article/women-shape-the-future-of-climate-change-at-cop-16>

Images from Cop16 side event: **Women’s Leadership on Climate Change Justice and the Grassroots Perspective**



Opening message from Professor Wangari Maathai



Mary Robinson (with Constance Okollet)



Constance Okollet speaks about the experiences in her village



Francesca de Gasparis shares the Green Belt Movement's approach to REDD+ and women's leadership