

**Partnering with the Mary Robinson Foundation--Climate Justice on the theme of gender and climate change/climate justice**

**Setting the tone: Gender and climate change  
Introduction by Prof Awa Coll-Seck, Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership**

17th Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the AU  
25 January 2011  
Addis Ababa  
9:00-10:00

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this discussion on gender and climate change.

As the Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, former Minister of Health of Senegal, and active member of civil society, I am very passionate about the issue of gender.

Indeed, women's equal access to health and education services is essential to the well-being and prosperity of billions of people across the world.

I thank Femmes Afrique Solidarité and the other organizers of this meeting, including the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, the Mary Robinson foundation for climate justice, and many others, for bringing this eminent group of experts and advocates around the table to exchange on the critical, and yet so often overlooked, links between gender and climate change.

Most experts agree that climate change is happening now, and that it results from human activity. More worryingly, climate change represents one of the greatest threats to human and economic development, and international security.

The unusual and extreme weather occurrences we have seen over the last decades have been making poor people even poorer by taking their lives; destroying their homes; impeding their access to food, potable water, and

health and education services; and increasing their exposure to disease. In sum, climate change impacts on all of the Millennium Development Goals.

All people are vulnerable to climate change, but some are more vulnerable than others. Certain populations are particularly at risk due to the specific aspects of their habitat.

The poor will be hardest hit. And among the poor, the most vulnerable groups are those who have the least financial and decision-making power: women and children.

For example, the 1991 cyclone disasters killed 140,000 people in Bangladesh, and the greatest proportion of victims were women, and children under age ten. During the 2006 Tsunami, male survivors outnumbered female survivors by three or four to one.

Not only are women most at risk; their role as caregivers, homemakers, and engaged community members make them powerful agents of change. Therefore, gender must be at the centre of all climate change mitigation strategies, and women must play a major role in the fight for climate justice.

I will draw on the experiences of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership to provide a few suggestions on the kind of response climate change may require.

An effective response to malaria—an ancient, tenacious disease-- requires the involvement of a wide variety of actors. Roll Back Malaria is a global public-private partnership that coordinates the efforts of more than 500 malaria stakeholders. These include representatives from malaria endemic countries, the private sector, bilateral donors, funds and foundations, civil society organizations, and academic and research institutions.

When the Roll Back Malaria Partnership was launched in 1998, malaria was a neglected issue. But our advocates put malaria high on the international development agenda, and in recent years, malaria has attracted unprecedented levels of attention and funds.

Many high-burden countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ethiopia, have succeeded in slashing their malaria cases and deaths by more than 50%,

thereby surpassing the Abuja targets that were set by African heads of state in 2000.

The keys to success include strong political will; increased international and local funds; a coordinated, multi-sectoral effort; the leadership of malaria endemic countries; and a strategy that ensures that the most vulnerable have access to the essential health services they require.

Gender is a key element of the Roll Back Malaria strategy. An engaged member of the Gender is My Agenda Campaign, Roll Back Malaria is fully committed to the principles and strategies enshrined in the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. RBM also supports the Global Fund in implementing its strategy on ensuring gender equality in the response to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

All of these efforts could be jeopardized by climate change, which increases the risk of diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition, malaria and other vector-borne illnesses.

Climate change is a global challenge, and calls for an unprecedented degree of partnership. An effective response requires actions from across society and sectors; strong collaboration between the North and the South; and the empowerment of those that are most vulnerable to its effects--such as women.

Grassroots movements and women leaders like Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya's Greenbelt Movement and Nobel Peace Laureate, or Mary Robinson, who created her own foundation on climate justice, are essential if we are to make a difference.

I now ask the experts here to share with us some inspiring initiatives on gender and climate change.

Thank you.