Gender Perspectives on Climate Justice
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By Mary Robinson

There is a growing awareness of climate justice issues and women are poised to lead the way. At the Climate Change meetings in Cancun in December 2010 (COP16), women leaders from the grassroots to the ministerial levels took the initiative on bringing climate justice to the attention of decision-makers. By linking to this growing international women's network, the GIMAC can help to frame climate justice as an important issue for African women with security implications for the continent.

Women make up the majority of the world's poorest people, and given existing gender inequalities and development gaps, climate change ultimately places a greater burden on women. Men and women contribute to and are affected by climate change in different ways, because the roles expected of them and the demands made of them by families and communities are very different. This is very relevant for Africa, where women are the primary food producers and providers of water and cooking fuel for their families, while having greater responsibility for family and community welfare.

A climate justice approach amplifies the voices of those people who have done least to cause climate change, but who are affected most severely by it. They include the citizens of island states and vulnerable countries fighting for their very survival; indigenous communities whose lands and resources are under threat; women farmers feeding their families and growing much of the world's food. And it includes the poorest and most marginalized people world-wide who already suffer most from poverty, hunger, ill-health and injustice.

Climate justice thus incorporates a strong gender perspective. Gender inequities alone can motivate more women to lead in taking action, but women's leadership must address the entire range of climate issues as well as bringing a gender perspective to each of them. Women in many countries are adversely affected by the impacts of climate change, but they are also powerful agents of change taking action at global, national and community levels. If, as a global community, we hope to respond to the immense challenge of climate change, women leaders must play a greater role in innovating, deciding and implementing the solutions that are so urgently required. The leadership, participation, knowledge and experience of women, especially from the global South and communities most affected by climate change, is vital to successful mitigation, as well as adaptation.

The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice (MRFCJ) will focus on solidarity, partnership and shared engagement with all interested in climate justice. It will provide a space for facilitating action on climate justice and create a website that is a resource for up to date and accurate information on the topic and best practices for solutions to inequities faced by the most vulnerable. It will be focused on sustainable and people-centred development.

The MRFCJ has already begun to establish an informal network on Women’s Leadership on Climate Justice following a meeting of 35 women leaders working at different levels and in different sectors in New York in September 2010 and they had follow up discussions in Cancun. Check out the website www.mrfcj.org for details of the network’s activities and key messages.
At a special side event in Cancun, co-hosted by the Mexican authorities and the MRFCJ, a troika focussing on gender issues for COP 17 was formed. The troika consists of three women Ministers from Denmark, Mexico and South Africa - the countries of COP 15, COP 16 and COP 17. The coincidence of these three COP host countries having women Ministers in the relevant area for climate justice gives a wonderful opportunity for significant progress on gender at COP 17 in Durban in 2011.