

Women and the Environment Workshop Report

Beijing +30 Civil Society Forum
CSW-NGO Geneva

19 October 2024

The Women and the Environment Working Group (Working Group) presented a workshop for participants of the NGO-CSW Geneva *B+30 UNECE Civil Society Forum* held 19 and 20 October 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland. The purpose of the workshop was to develop a set of advocacy messages and actionable recommendations using the “Message House” technique. The workshop was attended by about 20 individuals.

Introduction and Context

As participants entered the workshop space, Mary Rose Kaczorowski distributed workshop flyers and copies of the Working Group’s statement and recommendations. Pascal Muyaert welcomed attendees to the workshop and referred participants to the resources published at the NGO-CSW Geneva website (<https://ngocsw-geneva.ch/>).

To set the tone of the workshop, a short video prepared by the Working Group was then shown to attendees. Merly Barlaan spoke about fundamental human rights and building peace, and introduced the workshop team to the participants; Pascale then spoke about dependence on natural resources, small-holder farms, and access to information, and stated that, in general, women are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Monica Maghami spoke about the deep, historical roots of contemporary inequalities, and introduced attendees to the concept of creating a Message House, which is a communications technique that would be used by workshop participants to develop advocacy messages.

Pascale engaged workshop participants with an attention exercise using tennis balls to illustrate the power of focus and to show the importance of a Message House. Pascale also introduced “A Moment for Action” that would occur during the small group portion of the workshop. Workshop participants were then divided into two groups, one to work with Monica and the other with Merly, to develop advocacy messages and actionable recommendations.

Building the Message House Framework

The two small group facilitators explained each part of the Message House framework to participants, emphasizing how each component builds a cohesive and actionable narrative, and

encouraged their participants to align their selected messages with the principles of solidarity, cooperation, and inclusivity that guide our advocacy work.

Participants were provided “flashcards” with text excerpted from Women and the Environment Working Group documents to focus their thoughts and the small group discussions. Depending upon how quickly the small group might work its way through the Message House process, the groups would complete a Core Message and Key Messages, and identify Supporting Details:

- a. Core Message (Roof): The overarching message that reflects their community’s priorities and can resonate at national or global level.
- b. Key Messages (Walls): Supporting arguments that reinforce the core message and focus on women’s leadership in environmental actions, the role of women in community development, and proactive solutions for climate resilience.
- c. Supporting Details (Foundation): Facts, statistics, case studies, and personal stories of real-world experience that support the key messages.

Actionable Recommendations

The two small groups worked independently to create actionable recommendations that focus on how women can lead environmental efforts within their communities as well as how participants can support these efforts. Mary Rose documented the workshop activities with photographs; Pascale and Mary Rose monitored group progress and provided guidance when useful and needed. Discussion points and Moments for Action were recorded on flip chart sheets.

Neither small group created a foundation for their Message House, but both groups selected wall and roof messages (see: Appendices A and B). The groups selected some of the same messages, but positioned them differently in their Message Houses, and one group divided their roof into “roof” and “sub-roof” sections.

The roof and sub-roof messages of both groups concerned Women and the Environment, and though working separately, the two groups selected two identical messages for their Message House roofs:

There is an urgent need for the UN and UNECE Member States to fully meet the environmental and gender equality undertakings through recommendations since the adoption of the BPfA in 1995 to date, including the provisions of UNFCCC, CEDAW, UPR, the Sendai Framework, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, CSW Agreed Conclusions and ILO Decent Work Convention. Those commitments must be all fully implemented to protect the rights of all women and girls.

In the years since the adoption of the BPfA, environmental degradation, including air, land, and water pollution and climate change, has progressed to crisis levels.

Humanity now faces an existential threat from environmental catastrophes and the adverse health effects in humanity due to climate change caused by human activities, fossil fuel, agriculture, and corporations 'overproduction. Reversing environmental degradation is critical. Humanity's survival depends on bold, decisive steps to restore our planet and protect the health of future generations.

Participants of one group disagreed about the use of “United Nations language.” Mary Rose reminded this group that the purpose of the workshop was to create an advocacy tool and messaging that could be used at UN CSW sessions or when interacting with local officials, community-based organizations, and so on.

All contributions to the small group discussions were recorded on flip chart sheets (see: Appendices C, D, and E), as terminology and nomenclature can be adapted and used for specific constituencies and audiences.

Closing and Commitments

At closing, Mary Rose reminded workshop participants they now have a shared knowledge base and a tool set to use in various situations, including UN CSW69 and the NGO-CSW NY Forum. Mary Rose offered her assistance, including Zoom presentations, to workshop participants planning and developing their advocacy work.

Acknowledgments

The Women and the Environment Working Group, On Site Workshop Team included six members of the Women and the Environment Working Group:

Monica Maghami
Merly Barlaan
Sabine Peters
Pascale Muylaert
Mary Rose Kaczorowski
Janet Hall Schempf

Additional help was provided by Aroha Francesca Philipson, scribe, and Juliesett Hatulan, logistics.

This workshop report was prepared by Janet Hall Schempf, 30 October 2024, with assistance from the On Site Workshop Team.

Appendix A: Group A Message House Priorities

At the roof level, this group selected these messages:

Climate change isn't just about the planet. It's about people – especially women and girls. They're on the frontlines, feeling the worst of its effects, but they're also the key to solving it. Pollution, rising temperatures, and disappearing natural resources are major threats to all of us. But women and girls, especially in the most vulnerable communities, face the hardest challenges.

There is an urgent need for the UN and UNECE Member States to fully meet the environmental and gender equality undertakings through recommendations since the adoption of the BPfA in 1995 to date, including the provisions of UNFCCC, CEDAW, UPR, the Sendai Framework, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, CSW Agreed Conclusions and ILO Decent Work Convention. Those commitments must be all fully implemented to protect the rights of all women and girls.

In the years since the adoption of the BPfA, environmental degradation, including air, land, and water pollution and climate change, has progressed to crisis levels. Humanity now faces an existential threat from environmental catastrophes and the adverse health effects in humanity due to climate change caused by human activities, fossil fuel, agriculture, and corporations overproduction. Reversing environmental degradation is critical. Humanity's survival depends on bold, decisive steps to restore our planet and protect the health of future generations.

For the Message House walls, this group selected Education messages from the prepared flashcards:

Grassroots environmental education is needed to increase resilience and environmental effectiveness.

Create gender-responsive policies to promote women-led, community-oriented, and gender-responsive implementation of UNGA Resolution 76 300 on the Human Right to Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment; reduction, reuse, and recycle through the development of environmental educational programs; and creative changes to existing habits and actions on over-consumption, aiming to reduce the negative environmental impact.

Invest in comprehensive environmental education at all levels. Institutionalize and implement gender mainstreaming through the governance of educational programs and institutions.

Appendix B: Group B Message House Priorities

At the roof level, the second group selected one message from the prepared flashcards:

Our planet and our future are in danger. Pollution, rising temperatures, and disappearing natural resources are major threats to all of us. A healthy and safe environment is becoming harder to secure and it's only getting worse.

This group created a sub-roof section, and selected messages from the prepared flashcards.

There is an urgent need for the UN and UNECE Member States to fully meet the environmental and gender equality undertakings through recommendations since the adoption of the BPfA in 1995 to date, including the provisions of UNFCCC, CEDAW, UPR, the Sendai Framework, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, CSW Agreed Conclusions and ILO Decent Work Convention. Those commitments must be all fully implemented to protect the rights of all women and girls.

In the years since the adoption of the BPfA, environmental degradation, including air, land, and water pollution, and climate change, has progressed to crisis levels. Humanity now faces an existential threat from environmental catastrophes and the adverse health effects in humanity due to climate change caused by human activities, fossil fuel, agriculture and corporations 'overproduction. Reversing environmental degradation is critical. Humanity's survival depends on bold, decisive steps to restore our planet and protect the health of future generations.

The group selected from the prepared flashcards to build two walls for their Message House; both walls concern empowerment of women:

Empowerment of women's leadership through equal access to funding and an inclusive operational model must be:

- o **Increased:** securing proportional distribution of power, authority, and leadership amongst all stakeholders in the development cooperation process, ensuring half of the planetary workforce, women are represented. Implement gender-transformative approaches putting women at the centre of development and creating conditions for our meaningful engagement in climate action.

- o **Promoted:** for democratic policy-making to foster people-centered and gender-responsive governance to ensure women's participation. Leadership must be promoted at every level of society, whether in the family, community, government, corporation, or nation.

- o **Galvanised :** so Indigenous and vulnerable populations of women and girls are directly supported by empowering and promoting leadership, through mechanisms

such as the Green Climate Fund and Member States commitments on the Loss and Damage Fund.

- o **Sponsored independently** : to create women and girls networks & coalitions focused on environment & technology, providing platforms for advocacy, information sharing, & collective action.

- o **Mentored**: to assist all women and girls to gain decision-making and leadership skills necessary for assuring that all women and girls have options and ability to make decisions conducive to our well-being, of our families and others.

Empower all women and girls through equal access to funding, as an inclusive operational model in mitigation, adaptation and resilience to climate change.

Member State policies should fund women's full participation in climate action, leadership, and entrepreneurship, ensuring sustainable development and advancing the future, health, and wellbeing of both the environment and all women and girls.

Action is required to increase women's presence in leadership roles and creating conditions for women to engage more meaningfully in community life, by the creation of opportunities for women and girls' participation at various levels of governance as well as in diverse leadership roles.

Governments and private sector need to make sure women have the money and opportunities to lead the charge in climate action. They're already making a difference; they just need more support.

There is growing consensus that gender inequality and climate change must be addressed hand in hand, and the international community has continued to underscore women's important role in managing natural resources and securing sustainable livelihoods. (SIGI 2023 Global Report, p.126 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sigi-2023-global-report_4607b7c7-en)

Female representation in national parliaments leads to more stringent climate change policies across countries, and by doing so, it results in lower carbon dioxide emissions. (Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make a difference? 2018, p.16 <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/179923/1/GLO-DP-0221.pdf>)

Nations with higher proportions of women in Parliament are more prone to ratify environmental treaties than are other nations. The results point to the importance of considering the role of gender in analyses of state behavior and environmental politics and are consistent with the argument of some feminist theorists that the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women are interconnected. (Gender Equality and State Environmentalism 2005, p.1 <https://pages.uoregon.edu/norgaard/pdf/Gender-Equality-Norgaard-York-2005.pdf>)

Countries need to seize the opportunity move towards greener technologies, developing low-cost, renewable energy facilities based on solar and wind. Within this transition, women have a central role to play as energy professionals, energy decision-makers and energy consumers. For instance, women and men reveal different preferences for energy policy options. However, energy policy is often gender-blind and women tend to be underrepresented in the energy sector at all levels, including in bottom-up approaches such as community-based solutions. Acknowledging the benefits of a green transition for gender equality and the role women could play in the clean energy sector due to their behavioural preferences, calls for an urgent action to eliminate structural barriers for women's participation in labour force and decision-making in the energy sector (Gender and the Environment 2021, p.176 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/gender-and-the-environment_3d32ca39-en)

Excluding women not only weakens the effectiveness of the strategies aimed at coping with the effects of climate change, but also constitutes a lost opportunity. Indeed, the policy and programmatic responses to the effects of climate change could constitute a window of opportunity to bridge gaps, empower women, and put equality back at the heart of the global policy agenda. If prevention, adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change mainly remain gender-blind, gendered impacts will likely worsen, aggravating women's vulnerabilities.

(SIGI 2023 Global Report, p.14, 23 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sigi-2023-global-report_4607b7c7-en)

Because of women's pivotal role and unique perspective, empowering them and realising gender equality would improve the policy and programmatic response to crises.

Women are essential to strengthening resilience to climate-induced disasters. The link between climate change and gender has been recognised since the early 1990s. Evidence demonstrates that women are powerful agents during and in the aftermath of disasters by rapidly contributing to post-recovery efforts. (SIGI 2023 Global Report, p.12, 126 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sigi-2023-global-report_4607b7c7-en)

Appendix C: A Moment for Action (Monica's group)

Small group participants brainstormed potential advocacy tips, which were recorded on three flip chart sheets.

Sheet 1 of 3

- Mass writing to MPs
- Celebrate Earth Day together, with a social media storm and wearing green colored clothing
- On-line campaign to younger generation and girls via Tic Toc/ Instagram / LinkedIn / Facebook
- Should we aim for 'the generation above'- assumption that young people are very aware.
- Aim for each generation appropriately- adapt media & message (eg who recycles, who doesn't?)
- Women in government positions
- Adopt taxes / polluter pays
- Countries in UNECE cause / see less effects > hold governments and countries accountable
- Work around the 'us / them' perception, with workshops and training
- Move beyond the messages to action

Sheet 2 of 3

- Development Conference for Environment with UNECE countries or member states.
- Consumer organizations to give more info (eg what is (really) green, overconsumption, sourcing)
- Demo & communicate cost of inaction vs cost of action - for example, cost of drought in Zimbabwe, cost of climate refuges.
- Collect meaningful data for statistical analysis and to support policy and funding decisions
- Use climate disaster announcements to educate widely about issues. Go beyond the headline.
- Think beyond GDP
- How can we create real empathy with the wider consequences? (Via segmentation by attitude?)
- Call it! Climate Crisis

Sheet 3 of 3

- Coherence across different processes and feminist groups (for example HR Council and Environment)
- Spread message at ground level; suggest simple actions (eg : Fast Actions 4 Friday-suggestions what you can do this week)

- Equality at NGO management / leadership
- Every voice heard at grassroots: get / raise funding to grassroots, Reform donor structures (talk to the donors)
- Reduce / Minimize power of big agricultural and pharmaceutical corporations
 - Raise funds for subsidies and projects!
 - Court action
 - House squatting / house occupation
- Educate Consumer / Public and link it to policies (advocacy)

Appendix D: Recommendations (orange marker)

One small group brainstormed Recommendations, and wrote their ideas on a flip chart sheet.

Light Blue:

- All Earth's populations, animals, ecosystems
- Acknowledgement of colonial harmful traditional practices
- All Genders, gender diverse peoples
- Justice for people who are suffering but not polluting
- Feminist tech solutions
- Unpacking gender roles, hetero-masculinity, toxicity
- Gender and climate justice
- Regrow with, circular economy, green growth
- Indigenous voices
- Supporting statements

Education:

- 9 – Indigenous, Grass roots
- 8 – Gender transformative
- 4 – Life-long learning

4)

- All of the population of Earth
- Just transition
- Aarhus Convention: protect environmental defenders, especially those who are disproportionately marginalized

6)

- Not "slow" but rather regression and 21/169 targets
- Explicitly no carbon capture storage and offsetting

7)

- Missing civil society element
- Harmonizing all processes, especially harmonizing B+30
- Instead creating a weaker new document / convention

Appendix E: A Moment for Action (Merly's group)

Output of brainstorm of actionable recommendations

Sheet A

- Localise information/ examples: involve national and grass root organizations to get right scope; no cut and paste
- Move away from colonization mentality
- Educate re: AI disinformation that is spreading wrong message
- Gather + ideas to advocate in local groups
- Document and share ideas
- Special set of messages about eco-anxiety, with tools to respond positively

Sheet B

- Child and youth friendly messaging
- Make messages accessible!
- Start dialogues to unpack masculinity and foster masculinity of care
- Include marginalized communities - give them their own space
- Intergenerational discussions