

Women Continue Their Struggle for Good-Living and Climate Justice : Reflections from Copenhagen

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FUNDAEXPRESIÓN

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We have recently had the wonderful opportunity of connecting our community-based work in Colombia with two international women's networks: **GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice**¹ and **WLOE - Women and Life on Earth**². These social platforms are essential to unite the struggles and experiences of women groups around the world, on crucial issues such as climate change and biodiversity conservation. Moreover, we have managed to envision how these societal challenges are inter-connected and directly affect the livelihoods of marginalized peasant communities and women rights. Our joint vision as women has particular significance in terms of autonomy, empowerment, cultural identity, elimination of all forms of violence, preservation of biodiversity, water and life in general.

Therefore, for us as women's groups and environmentalist movements, it was crucial to be able to participate directly and reflect upon two recent **international summits** which took place at the end of the year 2009 in Europe, with implications on a planetary scale: the 7th conference of ministers of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva and the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen (COP15).

These two summits were initially linked for a number of social movements by the **Social and Climate Justice Caravan** which was a vehicle for exchange and mobilization with representatives from global movements from the South and the North. One of the main achievements of the caravan was an enlightened awareness of the linkages of commerce, globalization and the climate crisis, and the implications and impacts this has for cultural and environmental patrimony, and the survival of local people and all living species. Fundaexpresión accompanied the caravan during its route: Brussels - Hamburg - Copenhagen:

Climate Caravan Website: <http://www.climatecaravan.org/>

Climate Caravan Reader :

http://www.climatecaravan.org/images/Caravan_bulletin_09.pdf

Climate Caravan Blog: <http://climatecaravan.wordpress.com/>



¹ **GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice:** Network for capacity building and awareness raising to empower women at local and national levels affected by the impacts of climate change, web-page: <http://www.gendercc.net/>

² **WLOE - Women and Life on Earth:** Multi-lingual website and international network to share information and work for peace, ecological health and social justice: <http://www.wloe.org/>

What is clear from both summits is that the “powerful” nations are eloquent when they speak about reducing emissions and alleviation of poverty, but ineffective when it comes down to making real commitments to societal and system changes for the benefit of peoples’ livelihoods and sustainability. What also becomes clear, from the debates on Commerce and Climate Change are the underlying conditions of **social and ecological injustice** which go back to colonial times; in fact, colonialism is ever-stronger today, and its facets are visible in the negotiations, that is to say: imposing, intimidating, exploiting, pirating and finally making agreements under the table and behind closed doors!

The image of negotiators (mostly men) still stick in my mind, and I cannot avoid remembering the faces of so many people who believed that maybe their governments could achieve a “climate-deal” at the **Bella Center**. The name of the Center, which in Spanish or Italian means beautiful, unfortunately did not live up to its character. Similarly, the signs that welcomed us to the city: “Welcome to Hopenhagen” became a standing joke and people began to say: “Good-bye to Hopelessshagen”.

I would have loved to report more on the official negotiations, but from my point of view the fact that so many people and NGOs were excluded from the Bella Center made me think about one important issue: is there a real chance of fair process of dialogue? As reported by our GenderCC press release, the outcomes of the official meetings show that civil society was virtually excluded from the talks, which proves that grassroots’ movements have to continue to ensure that their voices and experiences are seen and heard through many different mechanisms and scenarios.

COP 15: When there are no people, how can there be women?

Extracts from Press Release / GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice
Friday, 17 December 2009

We, women are appalled and alarmed civil society has been effectively excluded from its already marginal participation ... Today, developed countries are still not committing themselves on the real solutions: drastic emissions cuts and clear schedules, and appropriate responses in terms of adaptation, mitigation, including lifestyle changes, technologies, financing, and effective monitoring mechanisms ...

Women, especially from the South, have lower carbon footprints. Moreover, the food, water, firewood, energy and other resources we access are not for ourselves alone. These are shared with our families and communities. Women’s close relationship with communities and environment has made us indeed critical in responding to the global climate crisis ... At the same time we are at the forefront in coping with the impacts of these crises.

While we are grateful for a Women and Gender Constituency within the United Nations Framework on Climate Change being accepted, and the openness of some national delegations to our objectives, we cannot celebrate the mere inclusion of women and gender into the language when the process has become so extremely undemocratic and opaque...There is no process without people. There is no climate justice without gender justice. There is no gender justice without climate justice. <http://www.gendercc.net/metanavigation/press.html>

Overall, we now clearly understand, that although the governments and politicians were unable to reach a serious deal, many of us do see Copenhagen as an opportunity to seize the **political terrain** and to show the world that women’s networks, social movements and local communities have effective, common-sense and real solutions to the climate crisis.

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS IN COPENHAGEN

I would like to highlight some of the specific activities and events which I had the chance to participate and in support during my time in Copenhagen:

Klimaforum 09 - Peoples Climate Summit

<http://www.klimaforum09.org/?lang=en>

The first time I heard about Klimaforum09 was through Tony Andersen, one of the lead organizers, who invited us to participate as women's groups in June 2009, and the idea of becoming a contributor to this "global civil society counterpart" stuck in my mind.

On arriving to the Klimaforum, I was delighted to find a scenario rich in activities and organizations and contrary to what happened in the official meetings, this parallel summit showed a great diversity of community-based experiences and a real commitment towards achieving climate solutions, in a much more meaningful way. This was the opportunity for networking between the North and South, and of growing stronger to collectively envision the fundamental changes required to achieve a sustainable transition of societies.

System Change, Not Climate Change :

Extracts from the People's Declaration from Klimaforum09:

"There are solutions to the climate crisis. What people and the planet need is a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all peoples and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to present and future generations. ... People's movements embrace a number of alternative visions for society and concrete steps that must be taken in order to move towards a sustainable future These steps will help us to convince the broad majority of people that a sustainable transition entails the promise of a more fulfilling and good life ... One aspect of this concept is the restoration of local communities rather than the global market as a basic social, political and economic unit. Social cohesion, democratic participation, economic accountability, and ecological responsibility can only be accomplished by restoring decision-making at the lowest appropriate level".

I would like to describe several key events I attended during the Klimaforum and where I was also an active part of the dialogue and exchange process:

Beyond Gender Mainstreaming in Climate Policy? A dialogue about change

Tuesday 15 Dec 2009 | KlimaForum09 / Organizers: GenderCC

In order to achieve women's rights, gender justice and climate justice, fundamental changes are necessary to overcome the existing systems of power, politics, and economics. In many ways, the challenges of climate change and gender injustice resemble each other - they require whole system change: not just gender mainstreaming, but transforming gender relations and societal structures. Not just technical amendments to reduce emissions, but real mitigation through awareness and change of unsustainable life-styles and the current ideology and practice of unlimited economic growth. Not the perpetuation of the current division of resources and labour but a responsible cooperative approach to achieving sustainable and equitable societies.

Starting off the dialogue are:

- Claudia Gimena Roa Avendano, FUNDAEXPRESION (Colombia), and GenderCC
- Irene Dankelman University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and IRDANA
- Titi Soentoro NGO Forum in ADB, The Philippines, and GenderCC

Facilitator: Minu Hemmati, GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice

- I also attended other interesting events such as the book launch of *“Red Sugar, Green Deserts - Latin American Report on Monocultures and Violations of the Human Rights to Adequate Food and Housing, to Water, to Land and to Territory”*³, published and promoted by **FIAN International**.
- It was particularly important to discuss the problems of tree plantations and gender issues, and particularly why monoculture plantations can be destructive for women's lives, and why they are not a solution to reducing emissions as demonstrated by Ana Filippini, from the **World Rainforest Movement**.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/video/2009/dec/18/ana-filippini-world-rainforest-movement>

[wrm.org.uy/Videos/Women_Voices.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/Videos/Women_Voices.html)

- The **World March of Women** : This international feminist action movement is working to connect grassroots organizations around the world and seeks to eliminate the root causes of impoverishment and violence against women. Part of this discrimination is clearly reflected in daily life, but also in the way policies do not take into account our needs and inspirations as women. This involves the authentic engagement of women in promoting fundamental changes in society.

<http://www.ips.org/TV/copenhagen/tag/world-march-of-women/>

- **Vía Campesina -International Peasant Movement-**, was participating in Copenhagen in coordination with Friends of the Earth to denounce the false solutions that are put forward for climate change, including monoculture, agrofuel production, and the privatisation of nature, through, carbon credits. Moreover, they highlighted the role of sustainable small-scale agriculture to “cool-down” the planet.

http://viacampesina.org/main_en/

- **Carbon Trade Watch** (*carbon trading, how it works and why it fails*): By centering its work on bottom-up community-led projects and campaigns, this network aims to provide a body of research which ensures that a holistic and justice-based analysis of climate change and climate policy is not forgotten or compromised.

<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/>

The closing ceremony of Klimaforum was a reminder of how much has been achieved outside the official conference, in terms of building networks and social movements which will carry on pushing and demonstrating the necessary actions and changes to achieve sustainable livelihoods and climate justice; this has been colloquially acclaimed in Latin America as the **search for good-living**: *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay*).

³ http://www.fian.org/news/press-releases/investment-in-monocultures-violates-human-rights-and-aggravates-climate-change/view?set_language=en

Bella Centre Side-Events

GenderCC - Women for Climate Justice, was involved in many talks and side-events with the aim to highlight issues and policies for women to be effectively represented in the climate change negotiations, including our central demands, empowering women's participation in decision-making, and how to protect and prevent climate impacts on marginalized communities. We work together with many women's groups and explore how to communicate these fundamental issues to a broader audience.

For example, we were invited to participate in a workshop on gender, cities and climate change. I live part of my time in the city and the other part of my time visiting and working in rural areas. Therefore, although we maybe focus more of our work within rural communities, this talk has allowed me to understand that we should foster dialogue and understanding between rural and urban people on climate change issues in both local, regional and national scenarios.

Gender, Cities and Climate Change:

Thursday, 10 Dec, 2009 | Bella Center

Organized by GenderCC

Speaker: Gotelind Alber

A paper currently prepared for UN HABITAT as input for the upcoming Global Report on Human Settlements will be presented. Then, representatives from city networks, and one or two cities will comment and share their experience of integrating gender aspects into local climate policy.



In this line of action, we will be organising in Colombia (October 2010) a **Festival of Rural and Urban Expressions - Dialogue for Diversity and Sustainable Livelihoods** - to deepen the involvement of the general public and institutions in environmental issues and to reflect upon sustainable livelihood changes, with the central objectives to:

- 1) Reclaim cultural expression as a means to promote dialogue and understanding between rural and urban people, in order to encourage self-affirmation and solidarity.
- 2) Recognise the key role played by peasant, fisher-folk and ethnic communities in Latin American society, as a source of innovation and cultural understanding.
- 3) Generate a favourable environment for public awareness and understanding of imposing development models that affect the livelihoods of both rural and urban people.



Mobilisations and Demonstrations

The central demonstration: “**Climate Justice Now**”, December 12th, was one of the largest demos I have ever attended in my whole life! The official police estimate was that there were 100,000 marchers. We also knew there were people marching in other cities of the world; that made us feel even better. The slogans of our banners made us feel proud to carry them, and most important of all, is that we felt united under one global chant and demand for “system change, not climate change”.

Reclaiming Power in Copenhagen, a decisive step towards a global climate justice movement

Olivier Demarcellus, Social and Climate Justice Caravan

Its important to talk of the spirit, the conviction and enthusiasm that made the demo and other moments in Copenhagen so magic for many. Objectively, we were practically kettled in by the cops, but it didn't affect most people at all. There was no fear or powerlessness in the air. After eight hours in the cold and snow, the demo arrived in the centre still compact and continuously belting out slogans ... As we marched through the night, a phrase came back to me again from Seattle:

« We are winning »



GENDERCC - STRATEGIC PLANNING

One of my main activities included our joint process of **strategy planning** as core group members of GenderCC, as well as getting to know and interact with other women's organizations. These discussions took place in the internal meetings of Gender CC, the women's caucus and during many side events, and wherever we had the chance to talk and discuss our role as a network.

Moreover, as a dynamic women's movement which links representatives from different world regions, we are taking onboard our new role of being part of the **Women and Gender Constituency** within the UN Framework.

Sharmind Neelormi from Bangladesh on behalf of the Women and Gender constituency:

"I am speaking on behalf of millions of poor women who are disproportionately impacted by the adverse effects of climate change and with a blurred future expecting a just climate negotiation. It's the concerns of their survival; it's the healthy reproductive future we are hoping for. As you would agree, Mr. Chairman, neither survival nor our reproductive future is negotiable".

I was also delighted to see so many women again of GenderCC from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, US and Canada. All of them give me a great sense of the commitment women have to engage in community and lobbying work; moreover, the integration of women world-wide helps to integrate and strengthen our networks and gives me a feeling that I am always at home with you all !

Dorah Lebelo from GenderCC says: *“The advancement of women, their leadership and meaningful participation, and their engagement as equal stakeholders in all climate-related processes and implementation must be guaranteed although issues such as loss of biodiversity, loss of forest tenure, rising temperatures, disease, agriculture, and food insecurity are discussed, nobody seems to be acknowledging the effects on women and children We’ll continue lobbying right up to the end of this conference because we want justice ... Women should not be perceived only as victims of climate change; they should also be part of making decisions about this global phenomenon. Women have been able to adapt through the use of indigenous knowledge. They just need to be involved from the lowest to the highest level of decision making”.*

<http://www.globalonenessproject.org/videos/greenhouseproject>

a) Street Drama and Women’s Activism

It is vital that our local and regional projects are supported and encouraged by women activists, who play a critical role in shaping public opinion, transforming politics and providing strength to our movements for social and climate justice. I am thus convinced that women’s issues need to be highlighted and approached through cultural expression.

In this sense, it is important to create and share new “messages” that are not only linked to a conference room. For example, during our time in Copenhagen, we had the wonderful experience to connect and get involved in preparing a street drama performance with the women’s theatre and activist group of Loucas de Pedra Lilás. <http://www.loucas.org.br/>

Without doubt, artistic expression, and in this occasion street drama, becomes a gathering place and provides an excellent and innovative scenario for promoting dialogue and awareness raising to a wider audience. Street drama became a crucial point of producing gestures and actions to make people aware of women’s rights in Copenhagen. Our voices resonated: **<Emissions down, Women’s rights up>**, as “irate panthers” and women who seek the defence of life, biodiversity and social justice.

Irate Panthers in Copenhagen / Loucas de Pedra Lilás

"Irate Panthers" South American Feminist Climate Change Theatre : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiR21BuBEck>

"Irate Panther" Interview : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTyQFw0c80M>



The fact that we also worked together with women from Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Brasil, Uruguay, Mexico) and women from Europe (Austria and Switzerland), gave us the possibility of involving women in a broader coalition and a multicultural dialogue. I personally felt very comfortable with this group because arts gives a warm feeling of transcendence and motivation to continue our local and global struggles for the dignity and sustainable livelihoods of local people.

The Angry Mermaid Award

<http://www.angrymermaid.org/>

“The Mermaid statue in the Langelinie harbour in Copenhagen serves as a reminder that the cost of climate change is measured in far more than economic terms. Part woman, part sea creature, she bridges the gap between humans and the rest of the natural world. Her silent form represents the hidden voices in the climate change debate. As an ambassador of nature, and of women, she is a strong and fitting symbol of campaigning for women’s voices to be heard in climate change decision-making”.



b) Gender and Alternative Media Resources

The chance of meeting and speaking with Nina Somera from ISIS International and WIA gave me an immense sense of inspiration.

ISIS International

<http://www.isiswomen.org/>

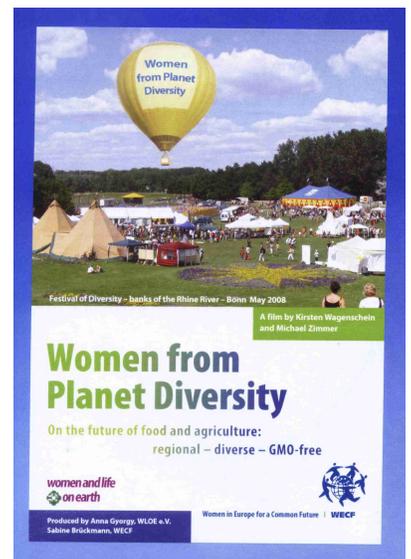
*Documenting feminist visions ...
Creating critical communications ...
Strengthening social movements*

Her involvement as part of this media-awareness group has shown that communication is a cross-cutting element, which can help to re-define the power balance in this undemocratic system: **Alternative media** is a fundamental tool for us all who seek women’s empowerment. By speaking to Nina, I could envision our work in Colombia, particularly the need to give voice to marginalized people and groups of society.

Another interesting media project is the **DVD “Women from Planet Diversity”**, based on the women’s program of Planet Diversity, working with its organizers, Anna Gyorgy of WLOE e.V. and Sabine Brückmann, of “Women in Europe for a Common Future.” I could distribute both Spanish and English versions at different events during Copenhagen. More information:

<http://www.wloe.org/Women-from-Planet-Diversi.556.0.html>

Women activists, NGOs and people in general are empowering themselves through more objective and critical media resources. We also made a commitment to write a few testimonial articles on the situation of women and climate change in Latin America.



A FEW CLOSING THOUGHTS

While I was in Copenhagen, I always recalled the feeling and smells of our fresh fruits, flowers and the collective work of women and local communities in Colombia. Equally vivid in my mind, was our street theatre performance in front of people from all nationalities. The children were so happy to see “panthers” on the winter streets, they shouted and said so many things in Danish that of course I could not understand, but my belief is that it is especially for the youth that our work and environmental actions must succeed.

Although I cannot deny that I was very concerned about the undemocratic and the many times repressive nature of the COP negotiation process, I had a unique opportunity to meet up with so many women's, social and environmentalist groups, and I am confident we will continue to work together to further our common goals and networks for action and campaigns for climate justice.

There are also forthcoming messages for hope and change, such as the invitation for women organizations to participate in Cochabamba, Bolivia at the Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change And Mother Earth's Rights⁴, which is a strategic move to congregate social movements and to take the initiative away from governments; this includes proposals such as the discussion of a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights, the organization of a Peoples' World Referendum on Climate Change and the establishment of a Climate Justice Tribunal.

At the time of writing this report, my deepest sentiments and sympathy goes out to the Haitian people who are suffering the aftermath of a devastating earthquake. This human catastrophe clearly shows how the most vulnerable and improvised communities and nations are more acutely distressed by “natural” and human-made disasters. It also gives us ever more reason to continue our local and national struggles for the rights of women and communities affected by the climate crisis.

⁴ *Conferencia Mundial de los Pueblos sobre el Cambio Climático y los Derechos de la Madre Tierra*, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 19 - 22 of April 2010, web-page : www.cmpcc.org