



DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment and United Nations Environment Programme 1st Joint Gender forum

Theme:

Bridging the Gap: Gender transforming environmental management
15 February 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

Background:

In recognition of the need to ensure gender responsive environmental management, the UNEP Governing Council bureau has allocated in its meeting calendar, a one day session for the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders of the Environment (NWMLE) to meet with experts and partners to discuss emerging gender issues and make concrete recommendations for inclusion into the President's summary of the Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF). Accordingly the first meeting of its kind will be held on 15 February 2009, in Nairobi, Kenya in conjunction with the 25th UNEP GC/GMEF.

The NWMLE was established in 2002 with the overall aim of promoting women's participation in environmental decision-making and enhancing a gender perspective in national and international environmental policies. The NWMLE was created by a number of women ministers of environment in response to their perceived lack of integration of women's needs and opinions in environmental decision-making processes. Integrating women's perspectives into environmental policy-making processes was considered to significantly enhance international, regional and national environmental policies. UNEP, together with other partners, has been working continuously with the Network to ensure that gender is placed on the global environmental agendas.

The 25th GC/GMEF will focus on two key, interrelated, areas, namely 'Globalization and the Environment – *Global Crises: National Chaos?*' and International Environmental Governance and United Nations Reform *IEG: Help or Hindrance?*. Focus on these themes will provide the world's environment ministers with an opportunity to discuss in a comprehensive manner key environmental and development challenges that individual countries and the global community as a whole is facing as well as opportunities arising from the challenges and how they are intertwined with national and international environmental governance issues. Turning challenges into opportunities by re-thinking traditional approaches to environmental management is the overarching objective of the Council meeting. Therefore discussions will centre on *Moving towards a green economy; Country responses to challenges and opportunities*¹ and *The role of governance in responding to challenges and capturing opportunities*.

¹ Developed and developing country perspectives, and donor and recipient country perspectives.

At crossroads: Gender and the Environment

While further analysis is required to establish the exact correlations between environmental degradation and gender, numerous studies have shown that women and men, by virtue of their social roles and status, are differently affected by it. Climate change is expected to aggravate existing conditions, in fact, the IPCC in its 4th Assessment Report has pointed out that “vulnerability to specific impacts of climate change will be most severe when and where they are felt together with stresses from other sources”. The UNEP GEO-4 report has highlighted the increase in human vulnerability caused by the effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services, such as water and food supply.

The IPCC has, furthermore, predicted that “climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders” and that “the poor, primarily but by no means exclusively in developing countries, will be disproportionately affected”² while the UNDP 2007 *Human Development Report* states that “climate change is likely to magnify existing patterns of gender inequalities”

One of the most apparent examples can be found in the agricultural sector in Africa, where women constitute a majority (over 70%) of the workforce. As weather patterns change and extreme weather events are expected to increase in number and magnitude³ it will become increasingly difficult for women to follow the traditional growing and harvesting cycles and provide for the subsistence of their families. Studies on the victims of climate change related disasters both in the developing and the developed world have shown that it is the economically and socially weaker groups who suffer most⁴. To a large extent this group consists of women.

The impact of environmental degradation on the economic and social wellbeing of the world community has become so severe and is expected to deteriorate that we can no longer carry on business as usual. The world community as a whole but also each individual government has to re-think the way it operates, or else the timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals becomes increasingly unrealistic. To this end, in October 2008 UNEP together with a number of key global partners launched the Green Economy Initiative in London at which occasion the UNEP Executive Director called for “transformative ideas [...] to be discussed and transformative decisions taken”.

The gender-differentiated impacts of environmental degradation exacerbated by climate change require the integration of gender perspectives in the design and implementation of policies and laws. This is not only to avoid that one gender suffers more than the other but also to capture economic and social opportunities that have so far been neglected. There are a number of factors that continue to constrain the development of gender responsive policies and strategies. Firstly, for a full understanding of the connection between gender and the environment within the context of climate change, the collection of gender-disaggregated

² IPCC 4th Assessment Report, 2007

³ Ibid.

⁴ Neumayer, Eric and Thomas Plümper, 2007. *The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981-2002*. London School of Economics, University of Essex and Max Plank Institute for Economics, London.

data in key sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy and water is mandatory. Secondly, to ensure that policies are truly gender responsive, the concept of gender has to feature throughout the life-cycle of a policy, i.e design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, meaning that gender-sensitive indicators have to be developed. Thirdly, both women and men should participate in decision- and policy- making process in order to ensure that their interests equitably represented.

The Gender Forum will provide an opportunity to discuss the main linkages between gender and the environment against the backdrop of climate change and the financial crisis and to develop concrete and strategic recommendations for the integration of gender perspectives into the concept of the green economy and the international environmental governance debate. In particular, insights into the gender dimensions of the food, water and energy sectors will be provided, taking into consideration both North and South perspectives and recommendations will be worked out to make policies in these sectors more effective by ensuring that they are gender responsive. Strong focus will be laid upon gender issues arising in the context of the green economy initiative. Presentations by experts and a panel discussion will address not only the main challenges but also provide key recommendations for the way forward and, in particular, investigate how to bridge the gap between local needs and policy development. Moreover, possible entry points for gender in the international environmental governance structure will be examined.

OBJECTIVE OF THE GENDER FORUM

The objective of the meeting is to discuss the themes under consideration of the 25th GC/GMEF from a gender point of view and decide on a list of concrete priority actions that the international community and individual governments need to address in order to improve the lives of women and men.

More specifically, the Forum aims at:

- Exchanging and deepening the knowledge base on gender and the environment, to meet challenges and identify opportunities in a ‘green economy’
- Suggesting ways to reinforce capacities of governments and Civil Society Organisations in gender responsive environmental management
- Formalising a framework for the NWMLE to ensure that relevant gender concerns are addressed in international, regional and national forums

Outcomes

- An appreciation of the benefits of integrating gender in environmental policies
- An understanding of the interventions necessary to promote gender responsive policies at the international, regional and national levels
- An agreement on the benefits of collecting sex-disaggregated data and a formula to ensure that the various institutions and bodies, which are part of the IEG structure adhere to the agreement
- An understanding on the interventions necessary to integrate gender into the design and promotion of a ‘green economy’

FORMAT OF THE GENDER FORUM

Plenary session: The nature and scale of environmental and development challenges as they relate to gender

In this opening session a panel of experts will set the scene by presenting the challenges and opportunities related to gender and the environment. The presentations will address food security, energy security, water security, and climate change and finance mechanisms as they impact on the development of women and men, good practices; donor interventions including recommendations for action.

Parallel panel sessions:

Following the Plenary session, two parallel panel sessions made up of experts and ministers will investigate how, in the face of the current challenges, gender-responsive policies, can advance sustainable development, while fostering gender equality at the same time. The discussion will centre on two specific topics:

Panel 1: ‘Moving towards a green economy’ - A window of opportunity to foster gender equality? What mechanisms can be used? What synergies can be captured?

Panel 2: ‘The role of governance in responding to challenges and capturing opportunities’ – Do current arrangements represent gender perspectives? What changes are needed to ensure adequate representation of interests and advance development goals? Panel presentations will examine how IEG structure has addressed women’s and men’s specific needs, and will identify how women and men can help states to meet global environmental goals.

Expected participants

- Women Ministers and Leaders in charge of Environment, Water Resources and Forestry, Gender, Energy as well as Technical Directors of the related Ministries
- Senior civil servants
- Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- World Bank
- African Development Bank
- Asia Development Bank
- Secretariats of Conventions on Climate Change, Biology diversity and Desertification.
- UNDP, UNEP, FAO, UNIFEM, UNESCO
- Research and Development institutions
- International and National NGOs working on gender and environment etc.