

15 October 2012 - International Day of Rural Women

The NGO Rural Women's Day was declared a UN General Assembly Resolution Day in 2007
Annual WWSF global awareness campaign to increase knowledge and empowerment since 1996



WWSF annual Open Letter to Rural Women of the World

Theme: **Claim your Space in Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change!**

Dear Sisters living in rural communities around the world,

Climate change threatens people's access to the basic human rights of food security, safe drinking water, a sustainable livelihood, minimal exposure to health hazards, and education. Women, especially rural women, are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change as they make up the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change.¹ Of all farmers, women have the least leverage to adapt with and prepare for climate change since their coping capacity is limited by social, economic, and political barriers.²

Although they are the most vulnerable to climate change, women have had the smallest role in creating climate change and are the least able to shape responses for adaptation and mitigation.³ When combined with unequal access to resources and limited mobility, the inability to contribute to decision-making processes places women, in rural areas, in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The importance of a focus on gender equality and gender balance within climate change is understood among international agencies and governments.⁴ Yet women, especially rural women, are frequently excluded from participation in projects and policy-making processes that work to reduce greenhouse gases and respond to changes in the climate. To date, development policy has not been able to ensure that rural women's expertise in land and resource management is recognized.

About two-thirds of the female labor force in developing countries, and more than 90 percent in many African countries, is engaged in agricultural work.⁵ In the context of climate change, traditional food sources become more unpredictable and scarce. Consequently, women face loss of income, as well as harvests, which often serve as their sole sources of food and income.⁶

Women's involvement is essential to mitigating the effects, as well as adapting to the inevitable changes wrought in local communities by shifting climate patterns. Rural women have the knowledge and skills in understanding the fields that they work and their surrounding environments. They have grown familiar with the land and have developed methods to keep it productive, such as spatial mobility, crop and herd diversification, and exchange relationships with sedentary and urban peoples.⁷

Women often have a strong body of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction, and adaptation strategies.⁸ Women have the potential to serve as agents of social change and development through their unique roles in the family and child care, agricultural labor, health and disaster risk reduction, and food and nutritional security. Their engagement is essential to addressing climate change in equitable, healthy, and sustainable ways. Integrating women's empowerment and building women's capacities to contribute to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change is key to the well-being of communities under a changing climate.

¹ UN WomenWatch, *Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*, 2009.

² *Ibid.*

³ Milne, Wendy. *Changing Climate, Uncertain Future: Considering Rural Women in Climate Change Policies and Strategies*, 2005.

⁴ IFAD, *Gender and Desertification*, 2008.

⁵ *Op.Cit.* UN WomenWatch.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ IUCN, *Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation*, 2009.

⁸ *Op.Cit.* UN WomenWatch.

Dear Sisters living in rural communities, you face unfair and inequitable representation in decision-making processes at all levels. The limited integration of a gender approach in international climate change policies fails to recognize your vital role and leaves you facing challenges in obtaining effective participation in the discussion of climate change strategies. You have, as all people, a place in mitigating and adapting to climate change. This call to recognize women's vital role in climate change is included in various international treaties, convention and instruments, such as:

- **Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)**
 - **Preamble:** “Recognizing also the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation.”
- **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992)**
 - **Principle 20:** “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.”
- **Agenda 21 (1992)**
 - **Section 15.4 (g):** Governments should “Recognize and foster the traditional methods and the knowledge of indigenous people and their communities, emphasizing the particular role of women, relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources...”
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**
 - **Para. 256:** Actions to be taken by governments: (a) “Integrate women, including indigenous women, their perspectives and knowledge, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making regarding sustainable resource management and the development of policies and programs for sustainable development”; (d) “Integrate rural women’s traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable resource use in the development of environmental management and extension programs.”
- **World Climate Conference: Conference Statement (2009)**
 - **Para. 87:** “Involvement of local communities, particularly local women in environmental change and climate observations...”
- **Rio +20 Outcome Document – The Future We Want, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012)**
http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/774futurewewant_english.pdf
 - **Para. 190:** “...We emphasize that adaptation to climate change represents an immediate and urgent global priority... We underscore that the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, with a view to accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions...”

Dear Sisters, you must take action and claim your space in mitigating and adapting to climate change. There can be no effective and efficient movement against climate change if there is not equitable representation of women in all processes and decision-making bodies addressing climate change.

Know, understand and claim your rights from your governments. Ensure that your leaders:

- **Reaffirm** your space in mitigating and adapting to climate change
- **Provide** equitable representation of women in all areas of climate change
- **Protect** and **raise** awareness of women’s personal identities, skills, and knowledge, focusing on raising awareness among governments in order to enhance their understanding of women’s unique role and their indigenous knowledge and expertise
- **Develop** national and local government strategies to ensure women’s equal access to land ownership and other resources needed for effective participation, such as technology
- **Train** women in methods for increasing their productivity in a changing climate
- **Adopt** principles of gender equality in international negotiations on climate change as well as regional, national, and local policies at all stages of the negotiations process, from research, analysis, and design, to the implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies
- **Provide** equitable representation of women in all decisions relating to climate change and **adopt** a gender perspective in all development and environment policies and programs
- **Appoint** women to decision-making bodies and **ensure** their direct inclusion in both policy-making and project planning



As always, WWSF empowers you to celebrate the International Day of Rural Women and to use the “Open Letter” to claim your space in mitigating and adapting to climate change. **Elly Pradervand**, CEO & NGO campaign coordinator, **WWSF-Women’s World Summit Foundation** www.woman.ch - wwsf@wwsf.ch