

Women's Major Group* Statement:
Asia Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20
19-20 October 2011 (Seoul, South Korea)

We, the Women's Major Group representatives at the Asia Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20 call on governments to reaffirm their commitments to Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action, and fulfill their obligations to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We also call on governments to respect recent international agreements including the 2009 UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development where the causes and effects of the global economic, food and ecological crises were discussed and urgent measures adopted to achieve a less volatile macroeconomic environment for sustainable development, including making economic policies compatible with human rights obligations.

On the road to Rio+20, we invoke the principles enshrined in these instruments – especially non-discrimination and substantive equality and their linkages to gender, economic and ecological justice. We assert the need for a radical change in mindset necessary to steer humanity off the course of repeated crises and self-destruction. To this end, we make the following six points:

First, we are alarmed by the complete disregard for women's human rights and gender equality in the Draft Asia Pacific Regional Statement. This is a regression from gaining an entire chapter on Women in Agenda 21 and a chapter on Women and the Environment in the Beijing Platform for Action. Governments in the Asia Pacific region must recognize that gender is cross cutting in development processes and that gender equality is vital to the achievement of sustainable development.

Second, we wish to reframe the "green economy" as "sustainable economies". We reject current economic models pursued in the name of efficiency and economic growth, but are in fact driven by profit and greed, and have resulted in unprecedented levels of poverty, inequality and food insecurity that disproportionately affect women. Instead we are working to realize "sustainable economies" that are gender just and enable long-term social and well-being outcomes for present and future generations, especially marginalized groups such as indigenous, ethnic and sexual minority groups.

As women comprise half the world's population and also count among the poorest, a "sustainable economy" must recognize women's paid and un(der)paid contributions to economic production, must generate sustainable livelihoods by which women can realize the full enjoyment of their human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, and prevent all forms of discrimination and violence in women's exercise of their economic rights and co-stewardship of the earth's resources. Central to this is women's unmediated right to access, own, control and benefit from productive resources and assets, which includes land, water, seeds, energy sources, livestock, financial resources, public subsidies and appropriate technologies.

Third, women farmers must be recognized as co-managers of community resource bases and co-decision-makers in determining the use of natural resources and the distribution of benefits arising from them. They must be assured of capacity development in bio-diverse ecological agriculture including humane sustainable livestock and fisheries production, necessary rural infrastructure, appropriate technologies and marketing skills for their economic autonomy. We further seek from our governments a commitment to the rapid reduction and elimination of toxic substances and highly hazardous pesticides and fertilizers, while steadily phasing-in non-chemical approaches.

There is much to learn from gender-responsive good practices on agro-ecology and sustainable natural resource use and management that strive for balance and synergy between humans and nature. It must also be recognized that women can capacitate “sustainable economies”, with their indigenous and traditional knowledge systems which should be protected from appropriation and exploitation by big business.

Fourth, as marginalized and excluded groups, women bear the harshest impacts of the current climate crisis, including increased ecological and economic displacement. States must address the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change while ensuring greater and more meaningful participation of women in the climate deliberations and outcomes, and in adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Fifth, distressed migration is a phenomenon across many countries in our region, with women comprising the bulk of those who migrate from rural to urban areas and from developing to developed countries. Governments must address the huge social costs resulting from distressed migration by addressing women’s economic deprivation and environmental degradation.

Sixth, women are greatly concerned by corporate driven technological solutions to climate change that are harmful to the planet and people. Such technologies must be subject to rigorous, transparent and participatory assessments including the implications on women’s and children’s health and well-being.

We take a firm position against nuclear energy as one of the ‘solutions’ to the energy crisis. It is neither clean nor sustainable, as many nuclear disasters have already so painfully pointed out. States must immediately phase out nuclear energy and seek fresh and up-scaled financial resources to shift the world to green (renewable) energy, which will benefit all of humankind.

In closing, we expect nothing less from Rio+20 than a commitment to promoting sustainable development and gender equality in ways that go beyond the limited “add women and stir” approach, and which genuinely recognize women’s co-leadership and co-stewardship. Toward this end we call for sex disaggregated data and gender budgets to assure equitable resource allocation.

We further insist on the full realization of the Rio Principles including the precautionary principle, common but differentiated responsibilities, polluter pays, and Principle 10 on access to information and justice. We, the Women’s Major Group call on all our governments to take action now.

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