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## **“The Social Dimension of Climate Change Mitigation – Tracking the Fairness Gap” SB38 Side Event report**

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This is a report of a side event held at the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subsidiary Bodies of the UNFCCC from June 3<sup>rd</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, in Bonn, Germany.

- Title : The Social Dimension of Climate Change Mitigation - Tracking the Fairness Gap
- Date : 13:15 - 14:45, Wednesday, 12 June, 2013
- Organiser(s) : GenderCC - women for climate justice e.V. (GenderCC)
- Venue : Room Metro at the Ministry of Transport of Germany
- Presenter(s) : Gotelind Alber (GenderCC), Kate Cahoon (GenderCC), Simone Lovera (Global Forest Coalition), Ahsan Uddin Ahmed (Centre for Climate Change), and Kuini Rabo (Secretariat of the Pacific Communities)
- Abstract: While the social dimension of adaptation is increasingly taken into consideration, this has been largely neglected in mitigation efforts in developed countries. We highlight aspects of social justice and fairness in energy and transport policy, as well as path breaking examples for the future.

### **■ Summary**

#### 1. Gotelind Alber: “Introduction”

- Ms. Alber presented the general theme of the side event. She stated that although the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that social aspects of climate change mitigation be scrutinised, little attention has been paid to this issue until now. She argued that disparities in society and the needs of different social groups need to be taken into account in formulating climate change policy. According to her, social factors in climate policy include: vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, carbon footprint, capability to reduce carbon emissions, perceptions and behaviour, participation in decision making, and socio economic impacts of policies and measures.
- She considers gender as a social category. There are underlying causes of gender differences, such as, segregation in education, income and wealth, livelihoods, unpaid labour, cultural constraints, and legal discrimination.

- Gender is closely related to other social categories (which is denoted as “intersectionality”). People have multiply layered identities derived from history, social and power relations. Social categories are not independent from one another; they rather overlap and reinforce each other. Understanding this complexity is important not only for academic research but also for policy making.

## 2. Kate Cahoon: “The Human Rights Case”

- Ms. Cahoon discussed the complex nexus between human rights and climate change in her presentation.
- There is growing awareness about the connections between human rights and climate change (meaning that climate change and related responses have significant human and social dimensions). In recent years, several declarations, resolutions, and agreements have been adopted by a number of international bodies, including the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UNFCCC (e.g. the Cancun Agreements in 2010), recognising this linkage.
- Ms. Cahoon briefly discussed some specific examples illustrating the links between human rights and climate change, which include the apparent incompatibility between CBDR and universalism, extra-territorial obligations of states, and difficulty in establishing a cause and effect relationship between state actions and global temperature increase.
- According to human rights law, states have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Mitigation of climate change analysed through a human rights lens has the following connotations: 1) mitigation policies should not violate human rights; and 2) human rights can be used as an instrument to push for strong and urgent mitigation actions. These two statements are seemingly in contradiction with each other, but they can be interpreted to mean that human rights can offer arguments both for and against mitigation action.

## 3. Simone Lovera: “The Biofuel Case: Women and the bioeconomy”

- In her presentation, Ms. Lovera severely condemned the “bioeconomy” and warned against various risks it may pose to impoverished people, in particular women.
- At the outset of her presentation, she proclaimed that corporate-driven ostensibly “green economy” solutions are problematic. According to her, green capitalism denotes the kind of capitalism sought after by corporations using public concern about a global crisis for increased profit-making. She asserted that what she calls false and destructive solutions, such as the bioeconomy are being promoted by such

corporations. And the bioeconomy agenda is especially attractive to fossil fuel corporations.

- As concrete examples of the potential menaces of the bioeconomy, she mentioned the following: 1) genetically modified crops may harm the reproductive capacity of women; 2) land grabbing for biomass monocultures could displace women farmers and disrupt the ecosystems; 3) bioenergy requires 400 times more land than the most advanced solar energy; 4) biofuels could significantly increase food prices, possibly triggering hunger and malnutrition; 5) women suffer from air pollution caused by biomass power plants; and 6) REDD+ could be considered as “commodification of nature.”
- In conclusion, she called for discontinuation of subsidies for bioenergy, carbon offsets, and meat consumption, which she thinks “destructive.”

#### 4. Ahsan Uddin Ahmed: “Socially responsible mitigation in Bangladesh: A case study on gender sensitivity”

- Mr. Ahmed presented on a UNDP project currently under implementation in Bangladesh, which promotes mitigation in a gender-sensitive manner.
- Mr. Ahmed stated that mitigation is not a priority in Bangladesh. There is already an adaptation gap, which is widening due to the currently low level of mitigation ambition.
- Because men have played a dominant role in areas related to formal energy, transport, and industry, the focus of mitigation policies tends to be more technological, rather than behavioural. However, in the informal energy sector, women’s contribution and involvement are more pronounced (e.g. collection of biomass wood). In other words, women in Bangladesh generally use energy of poorer quality. And there exists a technological divide between men and women.
- The UNDP Green Brick Project in Bangladesh targets its brick making industry, one of the largest sources of GHG emissions in Bangladesh, which emits more than six million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. About 33% of fuel used for brick making is derived from wood, although this practice is formally banned by the government. Massive pollution is being caused by this industry, triggering health problems among the population. Women are increasingly employed in this industry, but faces various hardships, such as, low wage and environmental hazards.
- The project promotes Hybrid Hoffman Kiln (HHK) technology to improve burning efficiency and reduce emissions. Private companies participating in this project are required to address labour rights, especially the rights of women (e.g. leave, increased wage, availability of drinking water, improved hygiene, mobile doctors, improved safety measures). The project seeks to offer a win-win solution to mitigation of climate change

and upholding labour rights for women.

5. Kuini Rabo: “Pacific Context: International Climate Change Initiative (ICI) Project”

- Ms. Rabo made a presentation on Kiribati’s initiative to use traditional culture to diffuse the value of mitigation among the population.
- She noted that the people of Kiribati traditionally used renewable energy in various ways. The traditional energy sources include solar (drying and heating marine products and fruits), wind (navigating the sea) and traditional methods for preserving food in the past
- The ICI project uses such traditional culture as a method to communicate mitigation activities and contribute to carbon emissions reductions in Kiribati. In this sense, it offers a win-win solution to preservation of traditions and mitigation of climate change.

6. Gotelind Alber: “From gender balance to gender justice”

- Following the presentations, Ms. Alber delivered concluding remarks.
- To realise gender justice, there are several steps to be taken, such as, ensuring gender balance and equal participation, and recognising and addressing gender roles.
- Ms. Alber took up an example – introduction of feed in tariff for renewable in Germany – to illustrate that mitigation policies can have unintended social side effects. For instance, low-income households can be most affected; larger proportion of new jobs may disproportionately benefits men; and opportunities of investment for women might be limited. In the same vein, she explained that energy saving service for low-income households could have negative side effects.
- To address the downside of climate change policies, a multidimensional approach that considers social and gender dimensions from the very beginning and at all levels is needed. And it is also essential to develop appropriate tools and methodologies and involve social and gender experts in the decision-making process.

■ **Q&A**

Q. (Unidentified): Is there space to bring in a human rights framework to hold states accountable?

A. Ms. Cahoon: Three steps are needed: strengthening a human rights framework; integrating human rights into the UNFCCC; and interactions between these two.

Q. (Unidentified): Would the actions suggested in the presentations contribute to altering the

existing power relationships in society?

A. Ms. Rabo: In the case of Kiribati, both men and women are part of the process, thus possibly influencing the power relationships.

Mr. Ahmed: It would. But in the case of Bangladesh, we are only at the beginning of the process.

Q. (Unidentified): Wouldn't it be more fruitful to have this kind of discussions at the national level rather than at the international level, given that the on-going discussions at the UNFCCC are already too complicated?

A. Ms. Lovera: Sometimes it is shocking to notice a huge cleavage between theoretical discussions going on at the international level and realities on the ground. However, the plight of people in the South is directly or indirectly caused by developed countries. In this sense, it is meaningful to discuss the links between human rights and climate change at the UNFCCC.

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English:

[http://www.mmechanisms.org/e/relation/details\\_oecc\\_SB38report.html](http://www.mmechanisms.org/e/relation/details_oecc_SB38report.html)