



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
26 January 2009

Original: English

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### United Nations Forum on Forests

#### Eighth session

New York, 20 April-1 May 2009

Item 7 of the provisional agenda\*

#### Multi-stakeholder dialogue

### Discussion paper submitted by the women major group

#### *Summary*

Current arrangements for the representation of gender perspectives within the United Nations Forum on Forests are grossly inadequate, limiting the degree of usefulness of the Forum to addressing climate change and taking advantage of opportunities for a green economy and demands on States to meet global environmental goals. The present paper reviews the challenges encountered by the women major group in advocating for the inclusion of a gender perspective within the Forum and in representing the interests of women in the Forum. It also presents a few innovative strategies that could be taken up by the women major group to develop this capacity within the United Nations Forum on Forests, as well as provide linkages to gender initiatives within the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other environment-related forums.

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\* E/CN.18/2009/1.



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## I. Introduction

1. While further analysis will be required to establish the exact correlation between environmental degradation and gender, numerous studies have shown that such degradation affects women and men differently, by virtue of their social roles and status. Climate change is expected to aggravate existing conditions; in fact, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its fourth assessment report, pointed out that vulnerability to the specific impacts of climate change would be most severe when and where they are felt together with stresses from other sources. The fourth *Global Environment Outlook: Environment for Development* report of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)<sup>1</sup> 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 panel has also predicted that climate change impacts would 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, would be disproportionately affected. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, states that climate change is likely to magnify existing patterns of gender inequalities.

2. One of the most striking examples can be found in the agricultural sector in Africa, where women constitute a majority (more than 70 per cent) of the workforce. As weather patterns change, and with extreme weather events expected to increase in number and magnitude, 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 in both the developing and the developed world have shown that it is the economically and socially weaker groups that suffer most. To a large extent, such group consist of women.

3. Yet women, who are vital agents of change and who have valuable knowledge and skills, should not be represented in the climate change debate only as victims, but also as leaders in the process of offsetting the negative impacts of climate change, in particular in terms of decision-making in the areas of consumption, food production and the management of sustainable forests. Despite the significant roles women play in the forest sector, their participation in decision-making and in mitigation and adaptation instruments is very low, sometimes non-existent. The mechanisms created thus far have failed to take into account the practical and strategic needs of women. As primary forest managers and farmers with responsibility for managing food security, and as a group with special needs in dealing with natural calamities, including those resulting from climate change, women must be involved in the process of developing and implementing adaptation and mitigation strategies and access benefits from their management of carbon.

4. Women, as the primary household decision makers in many parts of the world, are indispensable to addressing the impacts of climate change, and their role must be recognized if progress is to be made in upcoming talks aimed at negotiating the role of forests in a changing environment and in the context of global climate agreement for the post-2012 period. The efforts made to slow or adapt to climate change, including through the increased use of renewable energy and the maintenance of

<sup>1</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.III.D.19.

forest cover, are closely related to poverty eradication. Given that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development and poverty reduction, the inequalities that are magnified by climate change slow progress towards those goals.

5. 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. The goal is not only to prevent one gender from suffering more than the other, but also to take advantage of economic and social opportunities that so far have been neglected. A number of factors continue to constrain the development of gender-responsive policies and strategies. First, to ensure a full understanding of the connection between gender and the environment in the context of climate change, the collection of gender-disaggregated data in key sectors, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy and water, is mandatory. Secondly, to ensure that policies are truly gender-responsive, the concept of gender must feature throughout the life cycle of a policy, namely, at the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages, which means that gender-sensitive indicators have to be developed. Thirdly, both women and men should participate in decision-making and policymaking processes in order to ensure that their interests are equitably represented.

## **II. Gender within the United Nations Forum on Forests**

6. The high degree of gender blindness in climate change debates and the generally low levels of participation by women in forest-management decision-making and governance processes are issues of major concern to the women major group. Greater strategic and concerted efforts, and a commitment by all actors engaged in sustainable forest management, are needed to strengthen the role of women in the processes and implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests of the United Nations Forum on Forests, and in particular in all dialogues related to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Within the Forum, current arrangements for the representation of gender perspectives are grossly inadequate, limiting the degree of usefulness of the Forum in addressing climate change and taking advantage of opportunities for a green economy and demands on States to meet global environmental goals.

## **III. Priority areas for action: gender strategy within the United Nations Forum on Forests to support financing mechanisms and frameworks for sustainable forest management**

7. All the interventions made by the women major group since the fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests have pointed to the need for structural change within forestry organizations and institutions, including the Forum itself, to address issue of gender equality. The women major group calls for greater strategic and concerted efforts and commitments by Governments, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and regional and subregional networks, as well as in the context of the relevant multilateral environmental agreements, instruments, processes and United Nations bodies, to strengthen the role of women in such processes and to implement a gender strategy or plan of action.

8. Within the United Nations Forum on Forests, women are given the status of a major group. While this has allowed the women major group to represent the interests of women in meetings of the Forum on Forests, it has been able to do so only as a civil society group. The women major group has long maintained that the Forum requires a holistic and cross-cutting focus on gender, not just on women's issues, and has advocated that the issue of gender be mainstreamed throughout the Forum's structures and processes through its discussion papers and interventions. The group's discussion paper for the Forum at its fourth session called for member States and other policymaking bodies to: (a) use gender-mainstreaming strategies to integrate the different needs of women and men in policymaking; (b) ensure gender-balanced decision-making, so as to include women's perspectives and concerns in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policy decisions and outcomes; (c) conduct a gender review process for country reports before they are finalized, to enable women's organizations to actively engage in the monitoring process and select indicators that recognize the needs of women and poor communities; (d) compile a list of national indicators related to gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as specific indicators to measure women's access to and control of forest resources, in consultation with women's organizations and gender advisers; and (e) analyse the differential impacts of specific policies and budget allocations on women and men so as to enhance accountability and improve the targeting of public services. This has been found to be especially useful in incorporating the gender issue into sectors not normally associated with women, such as forestry and natural-resource management.

9. There is a renewed determination to achieve the United Nations mandate calling for gender equality by systematically mainstreaming gender perspectives in the programmatic, normative and operational work of the United Nations system and by redoubling efforts to increase the number of initiatives related to gender and women's engagement; such determination is evident in the case of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues in relation to climate change, in particular. How can we build on this and on the new calls for greater investment in women as smallholder farmers by Governments and donors concerned about food security and climate change?

## **IV. Plans and ideas for action**

### **A. Country-led initiative on gender and the United Nations Forum on Forests**

10. With the appointment of a gender-sensitive woman to head the United Nations Forum on Forests, at the Ad Hoc Expert Group meeting in Vienna in November 2008, a core group of women and men, representatives of Governments, international and regional organizations and the women major group, renewed the push for a structure to mainstream gender within the Forum on Forests. The group proposes to initiate this through a country-led initiative on gender issues within the Forum, focusing on the programme of work, where gender is a major factor affecting the outcome, including the role of women in adaptation for climate change and forests. To be held as an intersessional meeting, this would bridge the focus of the eighth session of the Forum, on climate change and financing, and that of its

ninth session, on livelihoods and poverty eradication. The outcome will be greater awareness of women and gender-related issues, plans for how to integrate these issue areas into the objectives of the non-legally binding instrument and a plan to institutionalize gender within the Forum secretariat. This could begin with a planning meeting during the first week of the eighth session of the Forum, in May 2009, with the assistance of the secretariat. Participants at the meeting will include delegates of countries interested in sponsoring or hosting the event.

## **B. Consultative Group on Gender and Forestry**

11. A Consultative Group on Gender and Forestry, comprising, inter alia, women ministers and leaders within forestry and environment ministries, gender-sensitive staff of forest departments, research organizations, leaders of community-level women's groups, women from other major groups and members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, could be formed under the umbrella of the Forum secretariat. The existing Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment, which is exploring innovative strategies to bridge the gap between women's needs and policy development, should be a part of this structure.

## **C. Pilot projects to test implementation mechanisms of forest-related payment for environmental services projects with women's groups**

12. Pilot projects through partnerships between Governments and civil society, and with regional and global organizations specialized in gender mainstreaming, need to be supported to build and document the positive impact of engaging women in sustainable forest management initiatives to address poverty using payment for environmental services and adaptation funds to prepare scenarios on how climate change funding mechanisms can directly benefit rural women.

## **D. Women's representation in the design of climate change funds at the World Bank and elsewhere**

13. Key meetings of the various climate change funds must facilitate the participation of women from the developing countries most affected by these changes, including those of small island States, and from mountain and tsunami-affected areas, where opportunities for mitigation and adaptation must involve women. To date, there has been very minimal or no inclusion of gender issues within these debates.

14. The second design meeting of the Forest Investment Programme at the World Bank in 2009 presents an opportunity to mitigate the lack of women's representation in these processes to date.

## **E. Women's participation in the World Forestry Congress**

15. Women's participation at the thirteenth World Forestry Congress in Buenos Aires, in 2009, should be funded by member States and strategic partners in order to ensure the maximum participation of women at this event.

## **F. Coordination of women in sustainable forest management at the policy and review sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2012 and 2013**

16. The Commission on Sustainable Development will review forest management and biodiversity at its policy and review sessions in 2012 and 2013, including aspects of poverty eradication and gender equality. The women major group will initiate planning for this significant global event in 2010 in order to ensure maximum participation and impact by women. Funding from member States and strategic partners are needed for this purpose.

## **V. Assessment of the United Nations Forum on Forests process**

17. The current low levels of participation by women in forest management decision-making and governance are issues in general, and within the United Nations Forum on Forests in particular, are issues of major concern to the women major group. Women's participation is constrained by funds that permit only one or two participants from the major group; presentations are those allowed within the time allocated for the multi-stakeholder dialogue session of the Forum, but more frequently in the expert group meetings and meetings on country-led initiatives. In addition, there has been no support or engagement with the implementing bodies — the members of the Collaborative Forest Partnership, most of which have organizational policies to incorporate gender into their work.

18. Within this environment, getting language specific to women and gender within the official documents and plans has been a very large challenge. The non-legally binding instrument includes not a single reference to women (except as a major group), much less to gender equality. The document refers often to forest owners and local and indigenous communities, but never singles out women. Even delegations from countries very supportive of gender equality policies have been reluctant to include language that specifies “women” within the non-legally binding instrument.

19. Why haven't gender issues and women's representation been provided the same degree of respect and recognition given to issues of other major groups, such as indigenous peoples? Why, for example, do various processes of designing climate change funding mechanisms (such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the Forest Investment Programme) include most of the other major groups but lack representation by women?<sup>2</sup> Mechanisms must be in place to assure that such programmes are required to involve women in their design, implementation and monitoring.

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<sup>2</sup> The charter of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (managed by the World Bank) provides for non-voting observers to attend the meetings of its Participants Committee. Currently there are six observers: representatives of non-governmental organizations, the private sector, indigenous peoples, the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and intergovernmental organizations. While observers may attend meetings, propose agenda items, and participate in discussions, they may not vote.

## **VI. Recommendations: what needs to change?**

20. Within the last year, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity approved a plan of action for gender in order to: mainstream gender into the implementation of the Convention and the work of its secretariat; promote gender equality in achieving the three objectives of the Convention; demonstrate the benefits of gender mainstreaming in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing of resources; and increase the effectiveness of work of the secretariat. The plan outlines a framework for integrating gender within all divisions and units of the secretariat, providing strategies with reachable targets and instruments to address gender concerns in the above-mentioned programme of work.

21. The women major group proposes that a similar process be followed within the United Nations Forum on Forests. Recommendations such as those below and others at the country and regional level will be addressed by the formulation of a gender action plan and implementation strategy:

(a) Governments need to refer to their ratification of international agreements on gender equality and women's rights and be held accountable to these while developing policies for women and gender in sustainable forest management;

(b) Design a plan and architecture for gender mainstreaming in the Forum and organizing around this;

(c) The secretariat of the Forum should appoint a gender focal person;

(d) Capacity-building for gender mainstreaming is required within forestry institutions at all levels;

(e) Gender analysis in climate change factors needs to be integrated into agricultural, forestry and mine-related planning, including disaster management planning;

(f) Multi-sectoral approaches are necessary to meet women's needs; the forestry community needs to have dialogue with the food security and poverty alleviation communities, which can be facilitated through links between the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment and the Network of Women Agriculture Ministers and Leaders;

(g) Resources are needed to increase numbers of women who can be "at the table" for the Forum's decision-making and advocacy process, so that the voices of women from a wider group of countries, including those of small island developing States, and from mountain areas, as well as those affected by conflicts and natural disasters, can be heard.