

U.S. Embassy Sweden's Environmental Policy Competition

May 12, 2016

Utrikespolitiska Föreningen i Malmö

Mariah Katz and Laura Korte

“How can the United States and Sweden help ensure that women in developing countries participate equitably in helping their countries meet COP21 commitments?”

I. Executive Summary

Developing countries will likely struggle to offset climate change as a result of unresolved issues from political instability to poor economy. In developing countries, 43% of the agricultural labour force is women. In Latin America, they comprise 20% and in parts of Africa and Asia they total 50% of the agricultural labour force. Exceeding 60% of employed women in sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture. In most developing States, women are just as often employed as men in agriculture, sometimes more often.¹ In the developing States of Africa and Asia, women have to walk an average distance of six kilometers to obtain water. They have to carry heavy jerry cans, often on top of their heads.² Women in “rural areas in developing countries are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, because of their responsibility to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating.”³ As climate change progresses in developing States, drought and irregular rainfall, among other uncertainties, have made it incrementally harder for women to secure resources and perform their work. Millions of women work with local natural resources, and they will be greatly affected by future climate change in terms of health, safety and education and economic opportunities. One of the paramount concerns facing climate change is how women in developing countries will participate in COP21 commitments. To further ensure the inclusion and protection of this most vulnerable and impoverished group, women in developing States, it is now recommended to Sweden and the United States to 1) *act, in accordance with Article 7 § 9, as allies and advocates of women’s climate action education in developing States through Ad Hoc Working Groups by strengthening and upholding the President’s Proposal, Article 12 and Article 9 of the Paris*

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

² <https://waterfortheages.org/2009/12/02/10-facts-on-women-and-water/>

³ http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/

Agreement by extending measures to safeguard against financial corruption in developing countries that may negate this goal to educate women there, and 2) focus on emphasizing vernacular that supports women more, particularly elderly, disabled, pregnant, LGBTI, migrant/refugee and indigenous women in developing States so that every iteration of woman is made equal in climate action.

COP21 convened from November 30th to December 11th of 2015 to ratify a Declaration through the United Nations, promising, for the first time in the past 20 years, to create a legally-binding environmental treaty. Comprising 55 ratifying States to represent 55% of the world's total greenhouse emissions, COP21 is an ambitious endeavor and at the helm are countries like the United States and Sweden. The United States recognizes “the challenges and opportunities” that climate change poses to women in the developing world.⁴ Sweden's Ministry of the Environment and Energy has concluded that “consideration should be given to a feminist approach, based on the different needs of women, girls, men and boys.”⁵ Both countries have their fair share of work to rebuild their own energy sources and regulate their anthropogenic waste and emissions while at the same time leading change abroad.⁶ During COP24, the two States, who presumably will be a part of the future legally-binded 55 States, will “develop recommendations for modalities, procedures and guidelines in accordance with Article 13 § 13, of the Agreement, and to define the year of their first and subsequent review and update, as appropriate, at regular intervals, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties...with a view to forwarding them to the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement for adoption at its first session” (Chapter III § 92).⁷ In the Ad Hoc Working Groups, both countries will find themselves heading initiatives time and again recommending

⁴ *Supporting Women to Address Climate Change*, USAID,
<https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/addressing-gender-programming/increasing>

⁵ *Strategy for a Successful Climate Conference in Paris 2015*, Ministry of the Environment and Energy,
<http://www.government.se/contentassets/d9bbc2ed8b74418282c7fb0462b0f453/strategy-for-a-successful-climate-conference-in-paris-2015>

⁶ http://unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php

⁷ <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

these “modalities, procedures and guidelines.” However, these commitments are a communal endeavor on national and international levels.

II. Context and Importance of Problem

As Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network stated, the Agreement “fails to address the structures of injustice and inequality which have caused the climate crisis and hold the historical polluters sufficiently to account.”⁸ The United Nations’ Framework Convention on Climate Change argues that the Agreement puts the onus on developed countries, yet the opposite is true. The burden already weighs heavily on developing countries who have been exploited. Waterways are polluted, rainforests have been burned, and mining has devastated ecosystems. Technological advances may buffer the impact of climate change, but will innovation arrive in time for those living in less developed environments? It all depends on the ability to safeguard finances to those most vulnerable groups and States in order to ensure their needs are met.

Within the Proposal by the President, it is “acknowledged”:

That climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

Women who are migrants, indigenous, disabled and/or in various other vulnerable situations must be acknowledged within Ad Hoc Working Groups to honour the abovementioned

⁸ <https://wecaninternational.wordpress.com/2015/12/13/women-cop21-response/>

clause.⁹ It is the responsibility of Sweden and the U.S. to do so, especially when considering their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, HeforShe, the Global Sustainability Goals, among other agreements regarding gender and equality. Article 7 § 9 of the Paris Agreement calls for Parties, “as appropriate, [to] engage in adaptation planning processes and the implementation of actions, including the development or enhancement of relevant plans, policies and/or contributions,” with special regards to “(c) The assessment of climate change impacts and vulnerability, with a view to formulating nationally determined prioritized actions, taking into account vulnerable people, places and ecosystems.” Chapter III, Paragraph 65 recommends States to “enhance the coordination and delivery of resources to support country-driven strategies through simplified and efficient application and approval procedures, and through continued readiness support to developing country Parties, including the least developed countries.” To follow these recommendations would lay the groundwork for advocacy in Ad Hoc Working Groups of vulnerable people in developing States.

In the President’s Proposal of the Paris Agreement, it emphasizes the importance of:

Agreeing to uphold and promote regional and international cooperation in order to mobilize stronger and more ambitious climate action by all Parties and non-Party stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities, local communities and indigenous peoples,

In order to remain beholden to the financing and general support of cooperation and mobilization between all parties, it is recommended that Sweden and the United States focus on advocating for collaboration and funding between all Parties with an emphasis on the inclusion of disenfranchised groups, namely vulnerable women in developing States. Climate action will only move forward if expanded to encompass everyone on macro and micro levels. Finances are key to further this goal of global climate action, especially for poorer States. Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network, one of many NGOs to recommend declarations during the Paris Conference, sees that the goal of focusing on the micro level instead of the macro level is needed when empowering women in developing States. The ability to make generalized measures and

⁹ http://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/vulnerable_groups/en/

top-down approaches will ignore women at the local level. It must be understood that “the identity categories most relevant to understanding vulnerability in a particular place are contextually specific.”¹⁰ Thus, Ad Hoc Working Groups should direct their attention toward “locally-tailored solutions... [where] women are central to this process, because they are among the most powerful actors that hold the localized knowledge and social capital necessary to urgently implement adaptive and innovative measures.”¹¹

Water shortages, droughts and other climate irregularities aggravate political, social and economic issues already challenging women in developing States throughout the Middle East, North Africa and in other least developed regions.¹² All women residing in these regions need to be protected in the midst of climate change since their socioeconomic situation already makes them vulnerable.

III. First Policy Recommendation

The only way to empower women in developing countries is to give them the tools to empower themselves. Climate action education is one way for women to secure their livelihoods while still fostering agency. Currently, women’s unequal representation in the work field slows down economic growth and will hinder developing States from reaching their COP21 commitments.¹³ This can only be circumvented through local project-based work that supports the education of women. If they know how to adapt to climate change, then the worst effects will be thwarted, including extreme poverty, disease and even death. According to Article 12 § 1, of the Agreement, Sweden and the U.S. should focus on advocating for education and training in developing States. This Article can be acknowledged by advocating for women’s climate action education, such as water education and awareness programs and developing culturally appropriate education resources. It should be noted that both Sweden and the U.S. should respect

¹⁰ Gender and Climate Change Adaptation in Agrarian Settings, USAID, http://www.climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/USAID_Gender%20and%20Climate%20Adaptation.pdf

¹¹ http://wecaninternational.org/uploads/cke_documents/WECAN-Agenda-update-2016c.pdf

¹² <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/06/2011622193147231653.html>

¹³ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

developing State's self-determination when recommending climate action education for women. The self-determination rights of States and groups should mirror the rights in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 1 and the Charter of the United Nations Article 1.

The capacity to ensure climate action education for women can only work when finances are allotted. To avoid corruption and exploitation of finances earmarked for women's climate action education in developing States, Sweden and the U.S. must advocate for the monitoring of funding through a transparent screening process and proper follow-up reports across all States. Ultimately, this would further protect aims to support the protection and involvement of women in the COP21 commitments.

As such, the first policy recommendation is for Sweden and the United States to *act, in accordance with Article 7 § 9, as allies and advocates of women's climate action education in developing States through Ad Hoc Working Groups by strengthening and upholding the President's Proposal, Article 12 and Article 9 of the Paris Agreement* by extending measures to *safeguard against financial corruption in developing countries that may negate this goal to educate women there*. The ability to collaborate with developing States' most overlooked people, women, will be further examined in our second recommendation about how inclusive language should be infused to benefit all disadvantaged women facing climate change.

IV. Second Policy Recommendation

Within the Paris Agreement, it presupposes that States will cooperate for the sake of climate action, yet neglects to emphasize the most vulnerable groups that will likely be overlooked in the future. Sweden and the United States should make a recommendation to include and represent women to a greater capacity, particularly refugee/migrant, LGBTI, pregnant and elderly women of developing States within the vernacular of future writings. If all iterations of women are not expressly stated in future policies, then there is a risk of drafting overly-generalized policies that overlook the needs of all women in developing States facing climate change.

In Article 9 § 1, of the Adoption of the Paris Agreement, developed States are to provide financial support to less developed States, and this should be done in accordance with the most vulnerable groups, such as women, emphasizing elderly, pregnant, LGBTI, refugee/migrant and indigenous women of a developing State. Therefore, this aforementioned Article should be interpreted to protect the rights and self-determination of these groups as well as promoting their possibilities to be more intertwined with the COP21 commitments.

Even though the Agreement acknowledges “ that climate change is a common concern of humankind” and that Parties should “respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity”, the wording still excludes elderly, disabled, pregnant, migrant/refugee and LGBTI women.

The future wording of any new policy should allow flexibility toward women’s various and changing roles in society, and should avoid locking women into one category. It needs to be addressed that climate change is not a generalized issue.¹⁴ Indigenous women Nicaragua have different needs than women facing climate change in Sweden, just as a transgender woman in North Africa will face very different challenges. From the UN Women Watch’s “Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change,” it is underscored how women in developing States have a distinct position. They are historically disadvantaged in regards to decision-making and economic independence, they are typically the primary caretakers of the family and a lot of agriculture depends on their work. Families, agriculture and economies are at stake if women are overlooked, so “women's and men’s specific needs and priorities [must be] identified and addressed” within climate change.¹⁵ Therefore, the vernacular within future climate change policies should define specific issues relating to gender and climate change. Women’s networks, women’s NGOs and female leaders have had an indispensable influence on the Paris Agreement and their call to represent women and vulnerable groups within that gender has been largely

¹⁴<http://wecaninternational.org/discussion/61/achieving-sustainable-development:-the-challenge-of-climate-change-for-women->

¹⁵ http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/

ignored. It is thus secondly recommended to Sweden and the United States to *focus on emphasizing vernacular that supports women more, particularly elderly, disabled, pregnant, LGBTI, migrant/refugee and indigenous women, in developing States so that every iteration of woman is made equal in climate action.*

V. Conclusion

There is hope in civil society's capacity to bring forth change, which is an idea supported within the United Nations' Conference on Climate Change and its projects already underway with various NGOs. Civil society will come to shape environmental initiatives just as much as the world's greatest States. NGOs have already presented their recommendations during the Paris Conference. Particularly groups championing women's rights were vocal in the representation of equality in climate action. Indigenous Voices in Asia, Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, Women and Gender were just a few groups who sought declarations to be included during the Paris Conference. They were there to represent those who would likely be forgotten: women and women from stigmatized and/or impoverished backgrounds. Sweden and the United States should work toward the inclusive representation of all women in climate action while acknowledging how grassroots work amongst NGOs and local movements can achieve this.

Sweden and the United States have a history of supporting women through their work with the UN. It is up to both States to continue this legacy within the framework of the Paris Agreement. During one of the greatest challenges of humankind, it is up to States, like Sweden and the U.S., to pursue active advocacy and allyship with women. If Sweden and the U.S. support bottom-up movements, or grassroots movements, for women in developing States through the above-stated policy recommendations, then there is a chance to globally achieve climate action goals. Paramountly, climate action needs to be made feasible for all women in developing States, from macro to micro levels, so that they can have a fair and equal chance to maintain their livelihoods through self-determination and education.