

International Women's Day Media Hits

(As of March 23, 2010)



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Global Sisterhood

March 8, 2010

By Sharon Hanshaw

I could barely feel my toes after 8 hours of standing in line outside at the Bella Center, where the international conference on climate change was taking place last December in Copenhagen. The bitter cold had done a number on my cheeks too, but I was on a mission.

I headed to Copenhagen for an opportunity to participate in a climate hearing organized by Oxfam with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and a number of my sisters from around the world whose communities are struggling because of climate change. I was ready to tell the world the story of Biloxi, Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The devastation. The perseverance and community spirit. The lessons of preparedness. And how women picked up the pieces.

Participation in the event meant so much to me because I wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with others in the same struggle. But because of access restrictions for civil society, by the time I finally got my pass to enter the conference building it was too late. The event was over.

I was devastated and heartbroken, but still determined. So today, I am at it again. This time, I'm heading to Washington, DC where I'm joining almost a hundred women from all over the country and the world who are celebrating International Women's Day by taking a stand against climate change and calling on Congress to stop bickering and take action to help vulnerable communities.

Poor is poor in any language. And whether in Biloxi or in Darfur Africa, it's the poorest who get hit by climate change hardest. My sisters from all over the world know this firsthand.

Constance Okollet knows this because her community in Eastern Uganda has been struggling with increasingly severe droughts and erratic, destructive rains that have led to floods. This has dramatically decreased local food production, leaving some people in her village eternally hungry.

Shorbanu Khatun knows this because when Cyclone Aila hit the Gabura region of Bangladesh, the river burst, crossed over the embankment and totally flooded her village. She and her children had to climb onto the roof of their house, until it too started collapsing. She lost everything she owned.

Ursula Rakova knows this because water levels are quickly rendering her small island in the South Pacific inhabitable, so she is organizing her community to relocate to another island.

And I know this first hand because it happened to me and my community. I lost my home and the business I had devoted my whole life to build. And although the whole Gulf Coast was devastated, the poor were hit hardest as they had no resources to fall back on, and women most of all, especially single mothers with no housing or childcare who were forced to leave their children with strangers so that they could look for work.

But women are fighting back, from Biloxi to Bangladesh. From using hand cranked radios that give advance warning of threatening storms to planting drought resistant seeds, women are on the front lines on the battle against climate change. And we must help them.

As the world celebrates International Women's Day, let's live up to our responsibility together and be pro-active not re-active. Let's not wait for the next devastating hurricane or the next tsunami or drought before we act to help vulnerable communities cope with the negative impacts of climate change. On this International Women's Day, let's get through the noise in Washington and get Congress to act to curb dangerous greenhouse gas emissions and help poor communities cope.

Sharon Hanshaw is the Executive Director Coastal Women for Change, which began in January 2006. This group brings together community members in Biloxi, Mississippi to discuss and take part in the long range community planning and rebuilding. Ms. Hanshaw ran a local business and worked as a community advocate for over 20 years before the Hurricane lifted her to a position of leadership in Biloxi. Sharon was featured in Oxfam America's "Sister on the Planet" about women fighting climate change in their communities. For more information, please see <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/campaigns/climate-change/sisters-on-the-planet>

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Why are women being left out of climate decision-making?

By Elizabeth Becker, Suzanne Ehlers

8 Mar 2010

When will we finally break through this damn glass ceiling? U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced an important new climate change financing group last week, but out of the 19 people named, no women were included. This is unfortunate because women will bear the brunt of the effects of climate change and are key to any climate solutions.

The group is tasked with investigating potential sources of revenue to support developing countries in their efforts to cope with the impacts of climate change and the shift to low-carbon development pathways. The Copenhagen negotiations in December called for \$30 billion in climate financing for 2010 to 2012, ramping up to \$100 billion annually by 2020.

The secretary-general's choices for the advisory group will bring intellectual energy and political gravitas. The group is chaired by U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. It includes two additional heads of state, ministers of finance, and leaders of central banks. Taking part are financier and philanthropist George Soros and economist Sir Nicholas Stern. It includes equal representation between industrialized countries and developing countries (though only two smaller, highly vulnerable developing countries). But what it does not include at all is women.

Leaving women out is unfortunate and reflects a persistent bias in climate change decision-making roles. It is also unwise given the ultimate objective of the advisory group. This elite club will frame and shape climate change financial flows to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. We know that women are disproportionately represented among both of these groups and are often on the front lines of climate change. In developing countries, because of their role as primary providers of food, water, and fuel for their families, women are both the most affected by climate change and a pivotal force for building responses to direct climate impacts. We also know that women are frequently the decision-makers about household consumption, and represent an increasing share of wealth around the world.

By leaving their voices out of the critical tasks before this advisory group, the secretary-general is closing out opportunities to explore the widest possible range of creative and innovative sources of revenue on the scale that is needed to address climate change.

The secretary-general himself has noted the need to include women in all aspects of decision-making on climate change. In a speech last September, he called on member states "to foster an environment where women are key decision makers on climate change, and play an equally central role in carrying out these decisions...We must do more to give greater say to women in addressing the climate challenge." So why have they been ignored yet again?

The secretary-general and the co-chairs of the advisory group can correct this by expanding the membership of the group to include meaningful representation of female officials before the group's first meeting in London at the end of the month.

It is impossible to believe that the secretary-general couldn't find any women with expertise to participate. On today, International Women's Day, we hope the secretary-general reconsiders the membership of this important group.

Elizabeth Becker is a member of the board of Oxfam America. Suzanne Ehlers is interim president of Population Action International.

REUTERS

Women hit by climate change head to Capitol Hill

Deborah Zabarenko, Environment Correspondent
Mon Mar 8, 2010

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Women hit hard by the effects of climate change -- drought, floods, sea level rise and crop failure -- gathered on Monday to plan a Capitol Hill push for U.S. legislation to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate "witnesses" from the United States, Peru, Senegal, Uganda and other countries aim to tell their stories to members of Congress on Tuesday in a lobbying effort timed to follow Monday's International Women's Day.

Beyond trying to cap climate-warming carbon dioxide emissions, the women said they want to make the strong link between poverty and climate change, and to stress that poor women suffer disproportionately as a result, so adapting to climate change is key.

"Nature is disrupted," Marisa Marcavillaca of Peru said through a translator. "It rains when it shouldn't rain. We have freezing temperatures when we shouldn't have freezing temperatures. Because our yields are down, it is difficult to feed our children."

Warmer temperatures in her farming area have spurred plant diseases, and the quality of agricultural seeds has degenerated, cutting into local women's ability to earn a living, she said.

Because many women in poor countries are farmers, and because their traditional tasks tend to use lots of water, they are often the first to feel the consequences of climate change, said Rebecca Pearl of the Global Gender and Climate Alliance.

"WE BLAMED GOD"

When agricultural productivity drops due to changing climate in Peru, Marcavillacca said, young people in the area are leaving for cities, "which means that our culture is being dismembered."

Constance Okollet of Uganda said she first noted a change in her farming village in 2007, when floods swept away most homes. Because her home still stood, she took in neighbors until there were 29 people staying in her house.

"We didn't know what was happening," Okollet said, wiping away tears at the memory. "We blamed God."

When the floods returned in 2009, with "drastic rain," hailstorms and wind, destroying schools, contaminating the water supply and disrupting planting seasons, Okollet learned that human activities are one cause of climate change. The floods were followed by a eight-month drought.

"We want reduced emissions," she said. "Let them have some plans for adaptation so that we get our seasons back."

Vore Gana Seck of Senegal said she lives in a fishing village where the beach has shrunk from a width of about 50 yards (meters) to about one yard, due to sea level rise.

Ground water is becoming salty as the waters rise, making the soil saline and hard to cultivate, Seck said.

Sharon Hanshaw of Biloxi, Mississippi, didn't think about climate change until after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2005.

"Everything I knew changed," Hanshaw said. "When I went back (home after the storm), you don't see no replica of life -- and that's climate change ... It doesn't matter if you're in a foreign country or in the United States."

Hanshaw and others want global action to cut greenhouse gas emissions, looking for progress at an international climate meeting in Cancun, Mexico, in December.

CONGRESS.ORG

Women lobby for climate bill

Groups emphasize need to address global problems.

By Ambreen Ali

March 9, 2010

Nearly 100 women came from 33 states to lobby for a climate bill in honor of International Women's Day.

The group organized by Oxfam America wants lawmakers to focus on global environmental problems along with the domestic energy focus that appears to be the centerpiece of Senate legislation .

On Tuesday, the women plan to meet with 125 Senate and House offices to ask that they support the international communities most affected by natural disasters.

One of those meetings is with Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), who has been opposing a push by the White House to regulate greenhouse gases.

The event hosted by Oxfam America kicked off Monday as they celebrated grassroots activists among them. Women, especially those who are poor and living in vulnerable areas are the most impacted by changes to their environment, according to the group.

"Most of the people who go on the Hill want something for themselves," Janet McKinley, an Oxfam board member, said. "We don't."

McKinley said it was important for American women to appeal on behalf of women globally who don't have a voice on Capitol Hill. She honored four women who have helped their communities cope with the effects of changing weather patterns.

One of those was Sharon Hanshaw, a Hurricane Katrina survivor who started Coastal Women for Change to help her neighbors in Biloxi, Mississippi, after the natural disaster.

"I'm excited because we only had 20 people last year," Hanshaw said. "We're going to get what we're looking for this time."

E&E's CLIMATEWIRE

Women's groups failing to focus on climate hardships, says U.S. ambassador

03/09/2010

Lisa Friedman, E&E reporter

U.S. global ambassador for women Melanne Verveer yesterday called on women's groups to get more involved in fighting climate change.

Speaking at the launch of a two-day lobbying effort sponsored by Oxfam, Verveer noted that women in poor countries face some of the greatest hardships from rising temperatures. But climate change remains low on the list of priorities for women's rights advocates.

"There are not too many groups that are coming together on this topic," Verveer said. "Women's organizations are overwhelmed with priorities ... this is not, for the most part, a major consideration."

The comments came as the United States and other countries marked International Women's Day. President Obama and first lady Michelle Obama hosted a White House reception to mark the occasion, and organizations around the world highlighted women's achievements.

In the quest to convince governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help poor and vulnerable countries adapt to the threats of climate change, Verveer said, women have a significant role to play. As the leading victims of global warming -- responsible in many parts of the world for hauling water that will be increasingly difficult to find and tending crops likely to see decreased yields -- women also can have the strongest voices in the political debate, she noted.

"It would be a mistake to solely view women as the victims," she said. "Women are absolutely critical to helping solve this tremendous global challenge."

In the afternoon, about 100 League of Women Voters representatives from across the country blitzed Capitol Hill to lobby for passage of cap-and-trade legislation. A new bill sponsored by Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) is expected out soon, but movement on federal legislation to cap emissions is considered low on Congress' priority list this year.

WIBC RADIO (Indianapolis, IN)

League of Women Voters Lobbying For Climate Change Bill

By Amber Stearns

3/11/2010

Members of the League of Women Voters of Indiana traveled to Washington D.C. this week to make their voices heard in support of climate change.

Members met with staffers for Senators Dick Lugar and Evan Bayh and Congressman Brad Ellsworth urging them to support the American Clean Energy Leadership Act.

Spokeswoman Pam Locker says the league takes a strong position on climate change because of the impact it has on the poorest people on the planet. Locker says often these are women trying to provide clean water and food for their families and changes such as drought and flooding can create crisis situations.

Locker says the league will continue to raise awareness on the issue. The lobbying effort was organized by Oxfam America for International Women's Day.

NEW YORK TIMES DOT EARTH BLOG

New U.N. Climate Change Group Is All Male

By SINDYA N. BHANOO

March 11, 2010

Women at some environmentally conscious nonprofits are indignant that a new group overseeing financing for a United Nations climate change effort has 19 members — none of them women.

The group's task is to allocate funds to developing countries to help mitigate the impact of climate change.

"It includes equal representation between industrialized countries and developing countries," Elizabeth Becker, a member of Oxfam America, and Suzanne Ehlers, president of Population Action International, wrote in a joint blog post on Grist. "But what it does not include at all is women."

The group's members were appointed by the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, after consultation with governments, said Dan Shepard, a United Nations spokesman. It will be led by two prime ministers, Gordon Brown of Britain and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia.

The blog post argues that as primary providers of food, water and fuel in developing countries, women are significantly affected by climate change.

Furthermore, Ms. Ehlers said, women are critical to family planning. Population growth is considered a major factor in the warming of the planet.

“Family planning is not the silver bullet for climate change, but it is an easy, cost-effective intervention,” she said.

Women do in fact lead several major United Nations operations, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Development Program.

For some important agencies, “it’s clear that the secretary has been able to look very broadly at who’s best for the job,” Ms. Ehlers said.

Population Action International is working with other nonprofit groups to draft a letter to Mr. Ki-moon requesting that women be appointed.

A update from the U.N.: France has replaced its appointee with a woman, the French finance minister, Christine Lagarde. We don’t have further details, but we’ll update if we find out more.

THELOOP21.com
I am my sister's keeper
By: Keli Goff
03/16/2010

African-American women face a myriad of challenges, many of which I’ve written about on this very site. Among them, the fact that we have become the face of the AIDS epidemic in this country, not to mention the fact that more than 70 percent of our children are now born out of wedlock— one of the greatest predictors of poverty. So it’s understandable that many black women might be hard pressed to find the time, energy and resources, to invest in solving the problems of other women. But while attending Oxfam’s climate change summit on International Women’s Day and the Women in the World Summit hosted by The Daily Beast and Vital Voices (with support from Hewlett Packard) this weekend, I was reminded that women around the globe share many of the same hopes, dreams, and fears about health, safety and motherhood.

The Women in the World Summit featured inspiring women delivering awe-inspiring words; from Queen Rania of Jordan telling us that educating more children in developing countries will prevent seven million AIDS cases over the next decade, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reminding us that fifteen years after she first said it as first lady, “women’s rights are still human rights and human rights are women rights.” But for me the two most touching moments were when Marietou Diarra—through an interpreter—told Diane Sawyer her heartbreaking story of losing two daughters, ages seven and eight, both of whom bled to death after enduring the practice of female genital mutilation.

The other story featured a young woman who confessed to Katie Couric that in order to be allowed to finish high school (and not be married off at age 12), she had to promise her father that she would undergo female genital mutilation as well, and she did. (If you are not familiar with the barbaric practice and what it entails follow the link, although please be warned that the images and description may be both disturbing and graphic.)

Both stories reminded me that with all of the challenges women of color face in this country, there are many, many countries where women of all ethnicities and nationalities have it much worse. The stories also reminded me that I am part of an international sisterhood and that even though we may be separated by an ocean there are things we all can, and should, do to help each other.

At the Oxfam summit on climate change, where women from around the world gathered to discuss the impact of climate change on their lives, and to share their stories with members of Congress, I met actress Nicki Micheaux, best known for her work on the critically acclaimed Lincoln Heights. When I noted how few Black American

women were in attendance and asked for her perspective on why, Micheaux suggested that global issues are often not on the radar of Americans in general.

“Americans tend to be very self-reflecting,” she said noting that because we often don’t travel internationally as much as Europeans we are often not as familiar with the plight of others outside of our own country.

But she added that, “As African-Americans we have really strong, legitimate problems that we are struggling through in our own community and may not think we have the time to go on a protest march for Darfur or talk about what’s happening to women in the Congo because you’re a single mom struggling to get through the day and you’re behind on your home loan.”

Put simply, many black women “have a lot on our plate already. “ But she said she agreed to become a goodwill ambassador for Oxfam because, “I felt like more African-Americans needed to be present and visible, raising our hands on the situation in Darfur and the Congo. I felt it was important that we be seen. These issues are very close to my heart.”

So what can the rest of us do to help the sisterhood? Well a few things:

1. In my last Loop21.com column, I mentioned that the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) had been reintroduced by a bipartisan coalition of elected officials. [Click here](#) to learn more about what you can do to help pass it.

2. You can also help two women who have officially joined the ranks of Rosa Parks and Shirley Chisolm as two of my heroes. Inspired by the loss of her girls to female circumcision, Marietou Diarra, has saved hundreds and possibly thousands of others by becoming an activist for the group Tostan. The non-profit has convinced more than forty villages in Africa to abandon the practice of female genital mutilation. And the young girl who had to undergo female circumcision to go to school? Her name is Kakenya Ntaiya and is now a college graduate who just opened a school for girls in her homeland.

I know we all have a lot on our plate, but there’s always extra in the kitchen for family so let’s do what we can for the sisterhood.

Keli Goff is a political blogger for TheLoop21.com. She is the author of the critically acclaimed book Party Crashing: How the Hip-Hop Generation Declared Political Independence (Basic Books, March 2008). She is a regular contributor to The Huffington Post and previously served as an editorial contributor to RushmoreDrive.com. Keli can be seen regularly on national news programs including Anderson Cooper 360, The CBS Early Show, Lou Dobbs and BET.

TREEHUGGER.COM

It's not God, it's Climate Change

by Constance Okolett

03.19.10

Climate change is happening. I know this because it is hurting my people.

In my village in eastern Uganda, climate change has thrown the life that my neighbors and I have always known into chaos, leaving us to struggle with the most basic things in life.

It started three years ago, when we had a tremendous flood that swept away our entire village. It rained and rained until all the land was soaked and our houses were submerged in the water. This forced us to move to higher ground and by the time we came back, all the houses had collapsed, our granaries were destroyed and our food was washed away. The remaining crops were rotten, and our food was no more.

We struggled to rebuild, but it happened again a year later and much worse. Flooding destroyed the school and the children were not about to go to school for months. Malaria broke out, leaving many sick and killing others. And of course, our crops were ruined again, leaving us without food to eat or to sell to earn money.

But the problem is not just flooding, it's also drought. Sometimes it won't rain for months. The last time we went five months without rain, we watched as our livelihoods wither in the sun. We had never experienced such heat, all of the crops dried up and the wells where we used to collect water were also dry.

Growing food is always a gamble. We don't know when to plant, when to harvest, whether we'll harvest or not.

We didn't understand why this had happened to us. We wondered what we had done to make God so angry. But we now know it's because of climate change.

So we organized ourselves to fight back. But we can't do it on our own.

That's why I came to Washington with Oxfam's "Sister on the Planet Campaign." I came to ask Americans, to help us, to stop damaging our lives. And to have some funds for us, at least to adapt to climate change.

I have asked every leader I met in Washington to help us stop the cycle of floods and drought that are destroying my community. I have told them about how the rains destroyed our schools and left scores sick with malaria. We want to work but mother nature is working against us because of climate change.

We know this problem is man-made, but the solution is too. I ask you to help my community fight the climate change that destroys our houses, increases diseases and stops our children from attending schools. That's what I am asking on behalf of my fellow villagers.

This post was written by Constance Okolett, a farmer from Tororo district in Eastern Uganda and a mother of seven. She is also a community activist and chairperson of the Osukura United Women Network.

PUBLIC NEWS SERVICE (Madison, WI)

"Sister" Group Urges Climate Action

March 22, 2010

MADISON, Wis. - Flooding over the past several years in Wisconsin and dramatic weather events across the globe are driving an effort to organize women to work on solutions to climate change. The international humanitarian group Oxfam America is behind a campaign called "Sisters on the Planet." The "sisters" recently gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the impacts of climate change and push for solutions.

Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton is involved in the effort. She says you don't have to look far to see the impact here at home.

"We have had in Wisconsin, you'll remember, last year and the year before in southwestern Wisconsin, unusual flooding that has literally transformed communities."

Lawton says it's important for women to take a lead role in advocating for action because often it is women around the world who are most affected by the impacts. For example, she says, in many societies women gather their families' food and water - work that is more challenging in some areas as a result of climate change and climate-related disasters.

Lawton says the Sisters on the Planet movement is pushing for substantial investments in vulnerable communities around the world to help them cope with the change.

"In each specific place, we want to work with those who are affected on the front lines."

Lawton says it's important that the help be tailored specifically to the impacted areas.

"We want to make sure that we address what they need to survive and thrive in those areas."

Lawton received a Sisters on the Planet Climate Leaders Award to celebrate her efforts to promote U.S. policy that combats the effects of the climate crisis.

