



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

CONFERENCE REPORT

***“Gender Equity and Sustainable Development:  
Prioritizing Actions to Achieve Results”***

Today, prospects for sustainable development remain a serious challenge as our global economy, our natural environment, our social well-being, and our political structures are in crisis. From the economy to climate change to food and agriculture, systems of governance are in disarray. Everyone is struggling more intensely in today’s world – particularly women and girls. The bottom line is that gender equity and sustainable development go hand in hand. The question for us now is: how can we make it happen?

On January 19, 2012, the Heinrich Böll Foundation North America and co-organizing partners Oxfam, ActionAid USA, Gender Action and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy tackled this question in a one day conference on gender equity and sustainable development. Four roundtables provided a gendered analysis of global governance processes, the global economy, the world’s food and agriculture system and climate change respectively. The conference focused on identifying remaining challenges, sketching out solutions and recommending necessary actions to achieve immediate and long-term results in order to make gender equity and sustainable development a reality.

**Klaus Linsenmeier, director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation North America**, welcomed close to 150 participants to the discussion by pointing out that without gender equity there will be neither good development nor a good life for any of us. Gender equity has to be addressed as a cross-cutting issue by decision-makers as well as civil society world-wide and can only be achieved if gender champions in governments, institutions, the private sector and societies work together to overcome the resistance and ignorance in many countries in the world.

He introduced the key note speaker, the **Honorable Melanne Verveer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues at the U.S. Department of State**, who works in her position, the first of its kind in a U.S. administration, to better the lives of women and girls, around the world. In her remarks (read [in full here](#)), Ambassador Verveer stressed that the challenges of our time demand that we harness the immense human capacity to innovate and that no effort will succeed if half of the world’s population is

not taken into account. Unlocking the full potential that women represent is essential. Since the Rio Earth Summit recognized that women play a vital role in environmental protection, other major international processes have underlined this fundamental truth. However, too often women's experiences on the ground still fail to reach decision-making tables and inform policy-making at the highest levels. Elevating women's leadership and participation in global processes on economic policy, food and agriculture and climate change; mainstreaming gender equality at the policy level; improving the representation of women and girls in science, technology and engineering; and fostering innovative partnerships and initiatives that bring together countries, the private sector and non-governmental actors for the benefit of women and girls must be front and center of attempts to achieve gender equality and sustainable development.

**Thilmeeza Hussain, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Maldives to the United Nations**, reflected on Ambassador Verweer's remarks from her perspective as a young female political leader from a developing country severely affected by climate change. She highlighted the key roles of higher education, equal employment, including in ecosystem management services, and increased political participation in unlocking women's full potential in achieving sustainable development and overcoming and changing conservative gender attitudes. She expressed high expectations for the upcoming Rio+20 conference and urged women and gender champions to work together internationally and within countries across political, race and class lines for a successful outcome in June.

### **Roundtable I – Global Governance: Shifts and Turns**

Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the global challenges threatening the full achievement of gender equity have not lessened: Catastrophic and largely inevitable climate change; heightened economic and financial crisis with an ever increasing degree of economic inequality among and within countries; urgent issues of food insecurity; an atmosphere of conflict and political instability including through the decade old war on terror have brought new threats to women's and girls' very survival and even led in part to some ideological backlash. For example, in the face of global food, energy and climate crises the perceived dangers of population growth and, with it, battles over who controls women's fertility have resurfaced. Such argumentation however, as speakers in the governance panel, were quick to point out, is but a distraction from the underlying structural roots of these problems and the true stumbling blocks to progress on gender equity. At the core of addressing any framework for action is the need to better understand and more honestly analyze the links between the global environment and the global economy – its structures, incentives and actions.

**Tracy Raczek from UN Women** shared her view that any viable governance model needs to increase women's leadership and participation at all levels. She offered some examples of achievements in improving women's participation in global governance processes – for example, the number of women's delegates in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has increased from less than 15 percent just a few years back to now close to 30 percent and achieving gender balance has been stipulated as the aspirational goal for the governance of a number of climate-related bodies such as the

board of the new Green Climate Fund, the UNFCCC's Adaptation Committee or its Standing Committee. That said, women still don't have enough seats at the decision-making tables, especially in economic, scientific or financial gremiums. More importantly, even improvements in more gender-equal participation, while an important step, are not sufficient as they often do not yet translate into increased gender expertise in these bodies. Thus, as **Anita Nayar from DAWN** reminded the audience, developed country governments finance many of these global governance processes and they need to be held accountable to prior commitments on gender equality, for example those elaborated in the Beijing Platform on Action, CEDAW or the Millennium Development Goals. This is especially important for the Rio+20 Conference to be held in Brazil in June of this year. For Rio +20, the "green economy" is one of two core themes; the other being institutional framework for sustainable development. Nayar pointed out that this concept is presented by its proponents in a largely gender-blind manner with a focus on green technologies and market mechanisms for a greener economy that will continue to rely on women's unpaid and underpaid work as a given instead of acknowledging, questioning and compensating them, for example through a reform of tax incentives and structures, which could supplement or supplant women's care contributions. Rather than superseding the concept of sustainable development, efforts to green the global economy need to strengthen the balanced integration of social, including gender, and environmental indicators in order to promote an ecologically-motivated redirection of global economic processes. Otherwise, false solutions that harm gender equity, livelihoods and the environment are supported on ecological grounds. An example would be the ill-placed support for large-scale, export-oriented biofuel production as a desirable renewable energy source and an effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The successful development and application of gendered indexes and indicators as a way to create sustainable economies and the country conditions for resiliency from crises was championed by **Caren Grown from USAID** as examples of concrete positive actions to promote gender equitable sustainable development. USAID has prioritized gender in its Feed the Future initiative (interestingly, the U.S.' idea for this came out of the G20 meeting in London) and developed a "Women's Empowerment and Agriculture Index" as a tool to monitor and evaluate agricultural investments based on improving women's participation in decision-making, increasing their disposable income and improving their access to productive inputs and on easing their time-burden. Other initiatives championed by the US government currently include one focusing on the involvement of women in post-conflict management as well as one looking at women's economic empowerment as an important measure for a new multi-dimensional poverty index. However, for these indexes and indicators to work, local, bottom-up participation in decision-making by grassroots women is key.

One of the biggest challenges to gender equity and democratization in global governance processes however might come from power shifts within the global economy over the past two decades that have made the G20 the effective ruling club of the global economic and financial system. As presented by **Nancy Alexander from the Heinrich Böll Foundation**, this global club excludes more than 170 countries and operates largely without transparency, scrutinized by too few civil society representatives worldwide. The G20's Development Action Plan, which elaborates action plans in various areas (including infrastructure, agriculture and food, social protection, trade, private investment and value

chains) may prevent non-member countries, particularly the poorest, from having a say over their own development paths and how sustainable these can be. Unless its power is curbed, the G20 will undermine the democratization of global governance through, for instance, issuing mandates to more than 26 international organizations that can override their governance structures and redirect their programming and resources. For instance, the G20 has called for six multilateral development banks to design an “infrastructure action plan” and a “food and water action plan” in ways that undermine the Boards of the institutions and circumvent their information disclosure and public consultation requirements. The G20 has effectively become the apex institution of global governments operating year round through multiple subsidiary bodies – without the participation of most governments, elected representatives, and the global citizenry. One key action would thus be to not only increase civil society participation and monitoring of the G20, but more specifically to bring a gendered analysis of G20 action plans to civil society advocacy efforts – which have to include a reminder to the G20 governments of their existing obligations and commitments under international human rights law to gender equality.

### **Roundtable II – An Enabling Economy for Gender Equity**

In the discussion on gender-equitable economy, **Jennifer Klugman from the World Bank** highlighted the findings of the most recent *World Development Report on Gender and Development* which focused on the intrinsic value of a human rights dimension to economic equality. This is a “first” for the World Bank – acknowledging the human rights dimension of gender issues. In her characterization, gender equality is smart economics, which can only be realized by giving voice and agency to women. However, several speakers underscored that, while empowering women as economic actors is a helpful first step, it is not sufficient in the current macroeconomic situation. Instead the macroeconomic model itself needs to be scrutinized and several of its assumptions critically challenged, among them relying on women’s unpaid care work as an enabling factor, in order to get to the root of some of the structural problems hindering gender equitable economic outcomes globally. **Radhika Balakrishnan from the Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University** questioned an often heard argument that a focus on growth necessarily increases women’s equality. She asserted that human rights approaches should define the nature of economic policy-making and that the purpose of any economy has to be based on social goals. Women’s ability to exercise their right to food, for example, is threatened around the world by existing trade policies of liberalization and oligopolistic market domination by a few companies as well as the financialization of agriculture, which contributes to volatile food prices to the detriment of small-scale, often women farmers (who are often net food buyers). In times of financial and economic crises, the way that fiscal and monetary policy is conducted is also a main determinant of whether gender equity can be realized. **Aldo Caliari from the Center of Concern** shared his point of view that the global drive for fiscal austerity, which is now practiced in more than 90 countries globally, often with spending for social programs well below pre-crisis levels, has led to “adjustment with a woman’s face,” as social spending cuts continue to increase the unpaid care burden borne primarily by women. Instead of attempting to balance national accounts on the backs of women, fiscal alternatives that force creditors to make significant changes and take larger “haircuts” need to be implemented. In the discussion, one participant pointed to the successful example of Iceland, which dodged orthodoxy in maintaining social

spending despite the collapse of its national banking industry. One important action is to increase the involvement and economic literacy of human rights groups, so that they can shift the focus of the discourse about the financial sector. As the Occupy Movement indicates, growing political pressure from society on these issues is urgently needed to elevate the discourse to one of equitable social outcomes instead of profit maximization. Advocacy should also highlight the need to introduce certain taxes, including the financial transaction tax, to limit financial speculation, and strong financial regulation, with tax proceeds going to social and gender-focused interventions.

**Tim Scott from the United Nations Development Programme** pointed out that improved targeting of social service interventions and the creation of more-multidimensional poverty indexes are driving forces in the attempt to socially repurpose economic activity. It is also important to create new and/or improved and strengthened accountability mechanisms on the local, national and international level to enable peoples' voices to be heard individually and collectively. As with other speakers, Scott identified Rio+20, the G20, the ongoing climate change negotiation processes, and national and community level policy platforms as the most important leverage points for change in 2012 and global climate change as possibly the biggest global challenge. Scott highlighted the role of women as entrepreneurs and drivers of low emission growth in green and blue economies, particularly given the growing role of women as owners of small- and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries. The panel also had some exchanges on the role of women as "green consumers", pointing to studies that indicated that women's control over household consumption and spending decisions is growing and that environmental awareness and concern seem to be more widespread among women than men. However, there was some disagreement on whether the billions coming from the carbon market and meant to support the shift to a greener economy could also help foster gender equality, supplementing and surpassing (in volume) traditional development assistance, on the one hand, or if carbon markets are but another manifestation of an economic system gone awry at the expense of humanity and environment, on the other. There was also the question related to the level and type of growth that is needed to promote sustainability and gender equity, with some speakers challenging the continued coupling of sustainability and growth, particularly in developed, high consumption countries, while others pointed out that economic growth remains critical for poor people in developing countries.

### **Roundtable III – A Gendered Framework for Food and Agriculture**

Unfortunately, there is no "quick fix" to the food insecurity that plagues a large number of people around the world, with many challenges for women who are involved as provider for their families, but also as the key producers of food in most developing countries. Globally, 60 percent of poor people are hungry, while 60 to 80 percent of poor people grow food, most often small scale farmers. Something is wrong with this picture when farmers are going hungry! Volatile food markets and inadequate government responses, both geared more toward short-term fixes rather than the long-term needs of people, are partially to blame as well as a continued and blatant disregard for the voices and analysis of women in agriculture, in spite of rhetoric among governments, institutions and the private sector to invest in women in agriculture as the central component to the solutions being brought forth. However,

gender tends to be most understood with regard to nutrition and safety programs at the micro level, while efforts to link micro and macro-level solutions are still insufficient. **Florence Rolle from the Food and Agriculture Organization** pointed out that the inequality, including gender inequality, in terms of access to agricultural inputs such as seeds or credits keeps close to 150 million people in poverty -- unnecessarily. Organizations, such as the FAO, which address food security issues worldwide need to overcome their own institutional shortcomings in addressing the gender aspects of agricultural action, for example by building capacity among staff and partners to gather gender disaggregated data, by revising the selection criteria for institutional positions, and by enhancing the accountability and capacity of management and technical staff on gender issues. In 2011, the FAO scored poorly on its own internal gender evaluation. As a result of this and with leadership from the FAO's new director, the organization has prioritized a plan of action to strengthen the areas mentioned.

**Evariste Karangwa from the Lutheran World Relief** illustrated how improving the understanding of the links between gender, assets and agricultural development can help to overcome persistent detrimental attitudes and societal norms. He gave some concrete examples from projects in Africa showing that while it is critically important to increase women's control over assets and empower them to take initiative in order for change to be sustained and sustainable for the benefit of the community, men need to be involved and incentivized to support women's actions and changed roles. Institution-building at the local level is essential. Several speakers supported the practice of seed savings groups and initiatives, such as the FAO's "Save and Grow" as a way to overcome social isolation and increase agricultural productivity without carbon-intensive inputs. **Mara Russell from the Land O' Lakes Foundation** underscored the benefits of cooperatives as both social and business opportunities for communities, especially in providing marketing services and support to connect women farmers to the monetary economy. She pointed to the challenge of integrating gender and sustainability concerns at all levels in food corporations such as her own, but sees a great potential in such companies for fostering workplace policies and practices that support women. She emphasized that developing a gender lens on agriculture and food issues is not rocket science. The integration of a gender-lens into policies however has to be accompanied by robust monitoring of program implementation in order to establish gender accountability in agriculture and food policy actions over an extended time, say five- to ten-year periods. Only then, can the repetition of mistakes be avoided and persistent attitudes be changed, both within implementing organizations and within communities.

Having identified the interaction between agriculture, climate and energy in an age of scarcity as the main problem for global hunger and food insecurity, **Marie Brill from ActionAid USA** proposed more country-owned, women-led initiatives as concrete steps forward. This includes prioritizing agro-ecological experiences and practices that are not dependent on carbon-intensive inputs, are climate-resilient and rights-based. Many of these practices that are effective in a small-scale decentralized setting lose some of their effectiveness when upscaled, for example to plantation or monoculture proportions. An example would be some large-scale agricultural cultivation for biofuels, which has been identified by lands-right groups as main motivator for land acquisitions in developing countries displacing small-scale farmers and destroying livelihoods. Diversification and integration of various

sources of energy and food at appropriate scales have more potential for achieving gender equity and sustainable development.

#### **Roundtable IV – Gendered Responses to Climate Change**

The effects of and contributions to climate change are not gender-neutral and engaging women in actions addressing climate change on all levels – community-based, nationally and in international processes will be the key to an effective response. Due to their gender roles, unequal rights and access to resources, and biased participatory processes and decision making, women are more adversely affected by climate change impacts than men, both in developed countries, but even more so in developing countries. For instance, women are victims of natural disasters and the spread of tropical diseases at a much higher rate than are men. This was the starting point for a discourse on gender equity and climate change. As one of the main challenges for more gender-equitable responses to climate change, **Liane Schalatek from the Heinrich Böll Foundation North America** identified a persistent perception of climate change as a purely scientific and technological problem demanding technological fixes not altered human interactions, including a change in the power relationship between men and women. A human-rights centered approach to climate action would thus supersede a narrowly-defined notion of effectiveness and efficiency as based on investment return with a broader understanding of the societal, social, gender and environmental co-benefits of reducing emissions and addressing adaptation needs. She and other speakers lamented the attempts of ongoing developments in the global climate regime to strip the international discourse of the equity dimension – firmly enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in form of the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities,” which is missing from the Durban framework. In the view of **Mariama Williams from the South Centre**, the Durban climate summit in December pitted the poor against the poor with solutions reduced to survival versus development. **Sivan Kartha from the Stockholm Environment Institute** identified certain climate change myths such as the notion that there is a geophysical inevitability to climate change, that it is difficult to introduce gendered responses, and that fashioning a technocratic response to climate change is enough. He instead highlighted the need for behavioral shifts to be at the center of attempts to address climate change. These necessarily require a change in socioeconomic cultural practices and norms, need to address women’s rights and the cultural glorification of materialism in many societies, consumption patterns, distribution of wealth and democratic participation. **Mariama Williams from the South Centre** stressed that economic justice, gender justice and climate justice need to go hand-in-hand. **Bonizella Biagini from the Global Environment Facility** likewise warned of attempt to “fence-in” climate change as an environmental action and recommended looking for development solutions to climate change that are focused on the local and community level, particularly in adaptation.

The discussants recommended concrete actions for 2012, including the implementation of the new Green Climate Fund as the first multilateral climate fund with a gender perspective from the outset, as well as the retroactive integration of an improved gender-lens into existing bilateral and multilateral climate financing initiatives. Speakers pointed out, however, that some of the long-term climate finance

pledges for up to US\$100 billion per year by 2020 are only “aspirational” in nature and that therefore sustained advocacy, supported by popular mobilizations such as the Arab Spring or the Occupy Movement, will be necessary to keep the broader agenda of equity on the global political “radar screen,” in general, and a feature of climate change discourse, in particular. The role of the private sector in supporting climate actions – and particularly gender-equitable mitigation and adaptation projects and programs – was seen critically. Several speakers pointed out that a strong regulatory framework is necessary to balance corporate fiduciary responsibilities to maximize shareholder profits and that, without such a framework, privately financed projects – at least from the for-profit sector – will be unlikely to address social and gender dimensions and co-benefits. For these goals to be realized, a stable core of public climate finance is thus irreplaceable. Nevertheless, speakers saw some opportunity for more gender-specific, private sector interventions coming particularly from micro and small enterprises in developing countries. Such enterprises are particularly well-suited to addressing energy poverty with its unequal gender dimensions. Many successful off-grid local projects, for example home solar panels that are installed or maintained by rural women specifically trained for this technology, could be replicated and scaled-up, indicating that a standard growth approach is not required to allow for pro-poor, gender-responsive sustainable energy and climate policies. Such community-based approaches that put human rights and human needs, equity and participation first provide encouragement and exemplify the actions that are necessary to address climate challenges in a gender-equitable way.

### **Conclusion and Outlook**

Throughout the conference, it became apparent that it is not difficult to identify concrete immediate actions, often very pragmatically framed, to improve the status of women in many areas relevant for sustainable development. The larger challenge for gender equity lies in substantially reforming the current economic and financial, food and agriculture and climate regimes themselves and continuing to challenge some of the underlying assumptions that propel these regimes. A focus on human and women’s rights is crucial to highlight the structural impediments to greater gender equity and sustainable development. A larger popular focus on democratic participation and equity, as expressed through some of the social movements and uprisings of 2011, will be necessary to ensure that human rights and equity are understood as the democratic imperative of all economic, social and environmental actions. It is a critical time for raising gender awareness and improving gender expertise in official political processes and in institutions on the local, national and international levels as well as in civil society more broadly. Gender equity advocates around the world need to seize the opportunities to mobilize and engage provided by entry points in 2012 such as the Rio+20 preparatory process, the UN Committee of World Food Security, the Commission on the Status of Women, the G20 process, the ongoing climate and trade negotiations, and national election campaigns.

## **Conference Program:**

8:30am - Breakfast

9:00-9:15am – Welcome and Brief Overview by **Klaus Linsenmeier, Heinrich Böll Foundation North America**

9:15-9:45am –Keynote Speaker: **The Honorable Melanne Vermeer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, U.S. Department of State**

9:45-10:00am – Response: **Thilmeeza Hussain, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Republic of Maldives to United Nations**

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10:00am-11:15pm – **Panel I: Global Governance: Shifts and Turns**

*This roundtable discussion will reflect on the outcomes from the various global summits relating to the economy, food and agriculture and climate from a gender perspective. Speakers will be asked to reflect on what was achieved and what needs to happen in 2012.*

FACILITATOR: **Jim Harkness**, President, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)

- **Caren Grown**, Senior Gender Advisor in the Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning, U.S. Agency for International Development
- **Tracy Raczek**, External Relations Specialist, UN Women
- **Anita Nayar**, Executive Committee, Development Alternatives for a New Era (DAWN)
- **Nancy Alexander**, Program Director for Economic Governance, Heinrich Böll Foundation North America

11:15-11:30am - Break

11:30-12:45pm - **Panel II: An Enabling Economy for Gender-Equity Sustainable Growth**

*This roundtable will reflect the various trends in the global economy, and prioritize those rules and responses that will best address gender equity and sustainable development at various levels.*

FACILITATOR: **Elaine Zuckerman**, President, Gender Action

- **Radhika Balakrishnan**, Executive Director, Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Rutgers University
- **Aldo Caliari**, Director, Bretton Woods Project, Center of Concern
- **Tim Scott**, Policy Advisor on Gender and Environment, UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Jennifer Klugman**, Director of Gender Unit, The World Bank Group

12:45-1:45pm LUNCH

1:45-3:00pm - **Panel III. A Gendered Framework for Food and Agriculture**

*This panel will reflect on ways to improve global hunger, prioritizing rules and responses to address gender equity and sustainable development: how do we move from rhetoric on the need to invest in women in agriculture to action that is both viable and long-lasting?*

FACILITATOR: **Alexandra Spieldoch**, Independent Gender and Food Systems Specialist

- **Evariste Karangwa**, Program Director, Africa International Programs Department, Lutheran World Relief
- **Marie Brill**, Senior Policy Analyst, Action Aid USA
- **Florence Rolle**, Senior Liaison Officer, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Office for North America
- **Mara Russell**, Practice Manager: Food Security and Livelihoods, Land O'Lakes International

3-3:15pm - Break

3:15-4:30pm - **Panel III. Gendered Responses to Climate Change**

*This panel will reflect on how gender plays into political and economic responses to climate change, prioritizing rules and responses to address gender equity and sustainable development: what's needed?*

Facilitator: **David Waskow**, Climate Change Program Director, Oxfam America

- **Liane Schalatek**, Associate Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation North America
- **Sivan Kartha**, Senior Scientist, Stockholm Environment Institute
- **Bonizalla Biagini**, Head, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Operations, Global Environment Facility
- **Mariama Williams**, Senior Research Fellow, South Centre (*confirmed*)

4:30-4:45 - Closing Remarks and Next Steps, **Liane Schalatek**, Heinrich Böll Foundation, followed by a RECEPTION