

## Executive Summary

Global Humanitarian Forum  
2009 Forum: The Human Impact of Climate Change  
Geneva, Switzerland  
23 – 24 June 2009

Wednesday, 24 June  
9:00 – 10:00  
women

### Climate Change and the Impacts on Poor Women

- HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, UN Messenger of Peace; Chairperson, International Humanitarian City
- Malini Mehra, Founder and CEO, Centre for Social Markets (CSM), India
- Barbara Stocking, Chief Executive, Oxfam GB
- M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, Swaminathan Research Foundation
- Sherry Ayittey, Minister, Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, Ghana
- Moderator : Cyba Audi, Al Arabiya/MBC

Of the 1.4 billion people living on less than \$1 a day, 70% are women and girls. At the same time, women produce half the world's food, but own just 1% of its land. Because women are chiefly responsible for family nutrition, supplying fuel and water and raising children, they are more affected by climate change. But women are also adapting to climate change – they have no choice.

Moderator Cyba Audi asked: “Can women play a role? They are the most vulnerable and the weakest politically. Are they the victims of climate change or are they agents of change?”

Participants discussed whether climate change is specifically a gender issue. HRH Haya Bint Al Hussein pointed out that while climate change is at the top of the political agenda, the lead-up to Copenhagen 2009 should not be turned into a “gender monologue.” Women represent 70% of the solution and of course they will be huge agents of change, she said.

“We need to solve the climate change issue now, but we have underlined [commitments to gender issues] in the Millennium Development Goals and we have proven methods and vehicles,” HRH Haya Bint Al Hussein added. “How do we move from rhetoric to action?”

Sherry Ayittey disagreed, noting that climate change is a gender issue because women are the carriers of the next generation. “They are agents of change, but they are also the victims of political decisions,” she said. “They are involved in agriculture and are the bedrock of

## Executive Summary

households. If the effects of climate change on women are not addressed positively, a whole generation will be undermined.”

Climate change affects men and women in different ways because women are close to the natural resources. “If we are not careful, women will become more burdened than they already are,” said Barbara Stocking. She pointed out that women are already adapting to climate change. However, women must fully participate both in developing National Adaptation Plans and in the Copenhagen negotiations. “So far they are being ignored and this cannot be right,” she said.

Both Malini Mehra and M.S. Swaminathan emphasized the importance of educating young girls and investing in women as a first step toward engaging them in becoming decision-makers.

Mr. Swaminathan pointed out that the ecological prudence of women is much stronger than that of men. “All negotiations, policies and programmes must be engendered. We must listen to the voices of women in all debates,” he said. “This is important in large international conferences, but the basic problems of gender and justice must be solved at the country level. We need to see that women are empowered.”

Ms. Mehra recommended that National Adaptation Plans of Action must be gender-mainstreamed and that negotiating teams going to Copenhagen must be gender-balanced. “If there is not a gender champion to ensure there is parity for women, it ain’t going to happen,” she warned. “There must be cabinet-level discussions and all of the muscular ministries in government must recognize that women are at the core of their economies.”

Mary Robinson said the focus on women’s issues in relation to Copenhagen represents an opportunity to reframe development. “We can create a new paradigm for development that is respectful, acknowledges causation and focuses on green [technologies],” she said. “We cannot go on with business as usual.”

Solutions to addressing the impact of climate change on women include:

- Women must take the lead in lobbying ministries and negotiators. In Africa, women should contact the African Women Leaders in Agriculture and Environment Network. Worldwide, the Global Gender and Climate Alliance is working to train negotiators.
- An adaptation fund for Africa should be managed by the African Union. A percentage of the fund should be set aside for women’s initiatives. More importantly, women must be able to access funds.
- Population stabilization initiatives would empower women to control their own fertility, ease pressure on dwindling natural resources, create fewer climate change victims, and reduce the number of carbon emitters in developed and developing countries.

### Executive Summary

- India boasts the largest number of elected women in the world. In addition, 50% of village council representatives in the country must be women.
- 
- Train rural women in adaptation measures and in how to get involved in climate change actions.