

The “Doha Miracle”? Where are the Women in Climate Change Negotiations?

Written by Katharina Höne

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2013/01/18/the-doha-miracle-where-are-the-women-in-climate-change-negotiations/>

KATHARINA HÖNE, JAN 18 2013

The “Doha Miracle,”[1] this is what Christiana Figueres, the Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) called a decision, taken at the most recent global meeting, to enhance the participation of women in climate change negotiations. Using this as a starting point and appropriating Cynthia Enloe’s famous question, I will ask: ‘where are the women in climate change negotiations?’[2] The question can be further broken down into two main aspects which can also be understood as normative goals. On the one hand, there is the presence of women at the negotiation table and the question of equal representation and participation at all levels. On the other hand, climate change policies and programmes need to take a gendered approach if they are to be effective, especially with regards to adapting to climate change and protecting the most vulnerable people. Equality at the negotiation table is key in achieving gender-sensitive decisions and policy on climate change. The most recent climate change negotiations, the 18th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP18), made significant progress towards the goal of gender balance and it is the decision taken at COP18 and related developments that I will focus on in the following.

The 18th Conference of the Parties (COP) ended on December 8th in Doha, Qatar. Two weeks of negotiations ended in disappointment for many. Negotiating a successor regime to the Kyoto Protocol and making new pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions was one of the main foci of negotiators as well as civil society and media observers. However, no new pledges were made in Doha while the Kyoto Protocol was extended until 2020 with a successor regime to be negotiated by 2015. Another key issue was operationalizing the Green Climate Fund. With regards to both, civil society observers voiced strong disappointment.[3]

However, besides modest progress in the area of loss and damage, there is another outcome of COP18 which received praise. Based on widely expressed support from delegations, the conference adopted a decision for “Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations and in the representation of Parties in bodies established pursuant to the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol,” which aims at increasing the number of female delegates involved in the UNFCCC process at all levels and was praised as the “Doha Miracle” by Figueres.

This decision has to be put into context. With regards to climate change negotiations, the last three years have been marked by strong women at the top. Christiana Figueres succeeded Yvo de Boer as Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC in 2010. The presidents of the previous three COPs (2011 in Durban ,2010 in Cancun, and 2009 in Copenhagen) were women and the presidents of COP16 and COP17 were both praised for their skills in engineering consensus and moving the negotiations forward. Yet, the larger picture is not one of gender balance. According to numbers from the Women’s Environment and Development Organization, between 2008 and 2012 an average 32% of UNFCCC delegates were female while 19% of heads of delegation to the UNFCCC were women.[4] While direct comparisons are hard to make, these numbers are slightly lower, for example, than numbers for women in the UN Secretariat.[5] However, it seems that in contrast to foreign policy areas that are traditionally conceived of as male domains such as disarmament for example, climate change diplomacy is characterized by greater female participation.[6] Yet, with barely 20% of heads of delegations being women, the goal of gender balance in climate negotiations is far from being achieved yet. In the interest of better climate change policy which will be crucial for the

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livelihood and survival of the most vulnerable people, gender cannot be ignored and achieving more equality at the negotiation table is an important first step.

The decision adopted at the most recent COP in Doha builds on decision 36/CP.7, [7] taken eleven years ago which aimed at improving the participation of women in the UNFCCC process, and elevates the vague commitment of 2001 to a more measurable goal. With the adoption of “Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations,”[8] countries have signed up to the following key goals:

- 1) Improving the participation of women in the bodies of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol (paragraph 1) and striving for a gender balance in these bodies (paragraph 2)
- 2) Striving for gender balance in country delegations (paragraph 7)
- 3) Conducting a workshop on gender balance and gender-sensitive climate policy and capacity building at the next COP in Warsaw at the end of 2013 (paragraph 10)

A commitment to gender balance is a marked step up from decision 36/CP.7 which aimed at the *improvement* of the participation of women and encouraged UNFCCC parties “to give active consideration to the nomination of women for elective posts in any body established under the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol” (paragraph 1). Though gender balance is not clearly defined, it can be taken to imply that the goal is to have the same number of men and women participating in the process, which is a much stronger commitment than the one made in 2001. However, gender *balance* represents a compromise as it is a rather toned down expression. The term gender *equality* would have been a stronger choice of words, as Gotelind Alber and Yvette Abrahams from *GenderCC* point out.[9] Gender *equality* also implies power and authority to make sure that the perspectives of women and men are equally taken into account. In this sense the commitment made in the document is not as strong as it could have been.

Reading the recent decision on gender balance at the UNFCCC, it is also clear that this is only one step towards more inclusive and gender responsive global climate negotiations. Implementation will be the key factor. It seems that the recent document represents the start of a sounding phase where parties are encouraged to submit their views on achieving gender balance (paragraph 11). Whether changes to national delegations and UNFCCC bodies will be made on any significant level and how the topic will be received and further discussed at the next COP in Warsaw will be decisive for working towards greater gender balance in climate negotiations. The document itself already mentions one caveat: some of the suggested activities are made explicitly subject to the availability of funds (paragraph 14). Moreover, the call for greater gender balance in national negotiations challenges long held beliefs and practices in some countries.[10] Here, changes are likely to be met with strong resistance and current structures will complicate and prolong the implementation of gender balance.

The policy work and pressure exerted by NGOs will be important. With regards to the recent COP, the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice (MRFJ), the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA), as well as GenderCC have been key actors. All organisations raised awareness during the UNFCCC Gender Day at COP18. Additionally, the work of WEDO’s Women’s Delegate Fund which focuses on capacity building and travel funds could contribute towards achieving greater gender balance at the next COP. These organizations will likely play a key role in making the commitment to gender balance at the UNFCCC a reality. As Mary Robinson points out, doing so will improve the decision-making process at future COPs, make climate policies more effective by being more gender-aware and will lead to a better protection of those being most vulnerable to climate change.[11] Whether COP18 in Doha represents a miracle in terms of a gendered approach towards climate negotiations remains to be seen. The question “where are the women in climate change negotiations?” will have to be asked again and again at future COPs.

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[1] Kelly Rigg, ‘Finding Hope in the Final Hours of the Doha Climate Conference’, *Huffington Post* (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-rigg/finding-hope-in-the-final_b_2259034.html

Also mentioned in Mary Robinson, ‘Lessons from a ‘Gender’ Cop’, *Outreach. A multi-stakeholder magazine on climate change and sustainable development* (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/sf/outreach/index.php/component/content/article/167-cop18-wrap-up/1321-lessons-from-a-gender-cop>

[2] Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 7. Here, it is also worth to re-read Enloe’s writing on “women as diplomats, men as spouses” for a contrast with recent developments (pp. 114-120).

[3] See for example the overview provided by the Adopt a Negotiator Project. Adopt a Negotiator Project Editors, ‘The Cop18 Outcome through the Eyes of Our Partners’, (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://adoptanegotiator.org/2012/12/11/the-cop18-outcome-through-the-eyes-of-our-partners/>

[4] Women’s Environment and Development Organization, ‘Women’s Participation in UN Climate Negotiation 2008-2012’, (New York: WEDO, 2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://www.wedo.org/library/new-report-on-womens-participation-in-the-unfccc>

[5] Numbers from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs reveal that women comprised between 30% and 20% at the highest decision-making level of the organization in 2009 while entry level positions are staffed by about 50% women (p. 123). UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘The World’s Women 2010: Trends and Statistics’, (New York: UN, 2010). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW2010pub.htm>

[6] In their “The Relevance of Gender for Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction” Carol Cohn, Felicity Hill and Sara Ruddick point to the following numbers: “In the ten years between 1992 and 2002, 33 women headed delegations to the review meetings of the NPT, compared to 660 men in that role. During the same period at the General Assembly First Committee on Security and Disarmament, women headed only 7% of country delegations.” Carol Cohn, Felicity Hill, and Sara Ruddick, ‘The Relevance of Gender for Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction’, (Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, 2005). See note 2. Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd80/80ccfhsr.htm>

[7] Decision 36/CP.7 can be accessed from the UNFCCC website. Retrieved January 6, 2013, from http://unfccc.int/meetings/marrakech_oct_2001/session/6273/php/view/decisions.php

[8] The document is as of publication of this article still only available in its draft format from the UNFCCC website. Retrieved January 6, 2013, from http://unfccc.int/meetings/doha_nov_2012/meeting/6815.php#decisions

[9] Kelly Rigg, ‘Finding Hope in the Final Hours of the Doha Climate Conference’, *Huffington Post* (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-rigg/finding-hope-in-the-final_b_2259034.html Megan Rowling, ‘Climate Talks Adopt Gender Balance Goal’, *Alertnet* (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/climate-talks-seen-adopting-gender-goal/>

[10] To get an overview, the following UN publication is worth consulting: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘The World’s Women 2010: Trends and Statistics’, (New York: UN, 2010). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW2010pub.htm>

[11] Mary Robinson, ‘Lessons from a ‘Gender’ Cop’, *Outreach. A multi-stakeholder magazine on climate change and sustainable development* (2012). Retrieved January 6, 2013, from <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/sf/outreach/index.php/component/content/article/167-cop18-wrap-up/1321-lessons-from-a-gender-cop>

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