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**Changing the climate of participation: the gender constituency in the global climate change regime**

Karen Morrow

**Introduction**

The adoption of the concept of sustainable development by the 1992United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the associated imperative to mainstream the ‘bottom-up’ civil society participation in international environmental law and policy that it entails (WCED 1987) was, in principle, little short of revolutionary in its potential to re-shape global governance (Morrow 2015). This approach was made manifest in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration (UN 1992a) and (in ostensibly more practical terms) in the ‘blueprint’ for sustainable development in *Agenda 21* (UN 1992b). In practice, however, the impact of this advance was severely curtailed from the outset. There were a number of reasons for this curtailment, one of which was that state and institutional ‘buy-in’ to sustainable development, despite enjoying a high public profile, in fact operated in a rather shallow manner, largely ‘siloing’ the issue in the soft law outcomes of the conference and effectively side-lining it in respect of its hard law outcomes. This was very clear in the context of climate change, which at the first UNCED was identified not as a sustainability issue, to be subjected to the new governance approach, but rather as a technical matter suitable for a traditional top-down state-centric approach. Arguably the initial narrow statist and technocratic approach taken excluded the voices of important stakeholders from the debate shaping the emerging international law climate change regime, an issue that has been one of the less discussed factors impeding legal progress in this area (Morrow 2013). Nonetheless, even here participation did make an -- arguably somewhat tokenistic -- appearance in the regime’s founding document, the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (UN 1992c), specifically in Art. 4.1.(i). This provision obliges Parties to the convention to promote public awareness and to ‘encourage the widest participation in this process including that of non-governmental organizations’.

The need for the UNFCCC regime (and not just its signatory states) to extend its reach beyond the traditional parameters of a top-down approach into more bottom-up forms of participation seems to have become evident quite early on. This is evidenced by the regime’s institutions, notably its Secretariat, reaching out to draw other actors into the regime and in particular a number of the major groups[[1]](#endnote-1) that had been identified in *Agenda 21* specifically: environmental, business and industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs); local government and municipal authorities; indigenous peoples; and research and independent organizations and trade unions. Women as a major group were notably absent from this initiative. Whilst women are to some degree active within other major groups, they tend to be underrepresented within them in numerical terms and it is only within a gender constituency context that they are consistently in a position to articulate women’s perspectives as prime considerations. In any event, the identity of those groups chosen to participate in the UNFCCC processes underlines the domination position of hard science and economics in this area of international governance at the expense of social factors. Furthermore, the absence of women from this privileged category of stakeholder groups speaks eloquently of the failure to actualize a systemic approach towards gender across the UN and of a longstanding failure of the UNFCCC process and its institutions to appreciate the significance of gender to its activities. This failure was particularly mystifying as, not only were women recognized as a key constituency in the sustainability sphere alongside other groups that were included by the climate change regime; but also in light of the UN’s longstanding (though admittedly oftentimes problematic) institutional commitment to gender mainstreaming[[2]](#endnote-2) (See for example, Moser and Moser 2005).

Policy and law can and have played a key role in regard to fostering women’s participation in global governance processes, through for example, raising awareness of existing rights and how to access them and providing further rights of access to both general and specific legal and policy information (Brody et al. 2008:17). Furthermore, as I explain in the discussion that follows, harnessing the potential for transplanting law and policy norms from other established areas in which they flourish can prompt an expansion of rights activism into new spheres.

The women’s movement saw the need to engage with climate change issues from a gender perspective early on; though after an abortive attempt to set up a women’s NGO forum at the first FCCC Conference of Parties (COP1, Berlin 1995) (Wamukonya and Skutsch 2001), the issue languished for a number of years. The catalyst for re-visiting gender in the context of climate change came from the more general discussion of gender issues as part of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) process. This heritage is clear in the subsequent goal of the women/gender grouping[[3]](#endnote-3) in seeking formal constituency status which identified its agenda as being:

... to formalise the voice of the women’s and gender civil society organisations present and regularly active in UNFCCC processes … [drawing] upon global commitments to gender equality and women’s rights, especially as they relate to climate change, and toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and related commitments … . (GenderCC 2011: Article 1)

However, the UNFCCC secretariat only approved the women/gender grouping’s application for provisional constituency status in 2009. COP16 (Cancun) in 2010 saw the provisional women/gender constituency advocating for a rights-based approach to participation (Agostino 2010). Full constituency status was finally granted to the women/gender constituency just prior to COP17 (Durban) in 2011 and at last began to emerge as a discernible and distinct institutional priority within the UNFCCC regime. This at long last allowed the women/gender group to have hard-won official observer status in the UNFCCC negotiations (Morrow 2013).

This chapter focusses on women’s participation in the global climate change regime and seeks evidence of the use of feminist (specifically ecofeminist) epistemologies and transversal political strategies to accommodate difference while also forging a basis for coherent participation in global environmental governance. Women’s interaction with the global law and policy community more generally has long been the subject of feminist scholarly scrutiny (see for example Charlesworth et al. 1991). This enquiry has expanded into the rapidly emerging field of global environmental governance (see for example Gupta 2006) and to the developing global climate change regime (Lambrou and Piana 2006).

**Making the case for women’s/gender constituency status in the UNFCCC regime**

Having delineated the time-line for full recognition of the women’s/gender constituency in the UNFCCC process, I now briefly consider how the case was made for this development and the role of activist and theoretical ecofeminism and transversal politics (discussed below) in prompting and shaping women’s practical engagement with the international polis in this area. Advocating women’s participation in the climate change regime is predicated on the proposition that their involvement is necessary in order to effectively address the gender issues raised. There a number of reasons for this, ranging from matters of principle to practical considerations and, in this section, I will consider some of the most significant of these reasons.

***Why gender? Why women?***

It is now widely understood that women are both agents of and affected by environmental degradation that may and often does impact differentially on female and male actors in ways that are intimately shaped by gender considerations. One important manifestation of this knowledge has been the development of ecofeminism which can be viewed as a broad-based perspective that combines scholarship and activism founded on the ‘recognition of a shared societal classification of women and the environment and the application of feminist scrutiny to the particularized impacts of environmental degradation on women’ (Morrow 2013: 377).

As its nomenclature suggests, ecofeminism is the progeny of both ecological/environmental and feminist thought (Rocheleau et al. 2006) but it also enjoys a degree of hybrid vigour and has not been limited in its development to synthesizing its conceptual inheritance, developing into a rich (if contentious) area of discourse in its own right. Of particular significance for my purposes here is ecofeminism’s enthusiastic incorporation of theoretical elements alongside grassroots activism (see Shiva 1993: 70). The ability to accommodate such apparently divergent approaches arguably makes ecofeminism fertile ground for the combination of macro and micro concerns that are required in order to address climate change. Significantly, dominant social ecofeminist approaches view relationships between women and the environment as socially rooted and enforced/reinforced by an intricately interlinked web of societal mechanisms (Sandilands 1999). This approach regards the sphere of the ‘personal’ as extending beyond the individual, into families, communities, host ecosystems, and ultimately the biosphere. This being the case, it also seeks to account for the complex interrelating influences additional to gender that situate women as environmental actors – notably ‘race’ (embracing the concerns of people of colour and indigenous peoples), class, sexual orientation, age, disability, and the concerns of other species and non-human nature - through the concept of compound disadvantage. This approach strives to accommodate the diverse experiences and identities of women and to recognize that each situating component (individually and in combination) has the potential to interact with cross-cutting gender considerations in complex and often unpredictable ways.

In ecofeminist thought, sustainable decision-making processes must accommodate the complexities of gender (incorporating both female *and* male) perspectives alongside the concerns of nature. In so doing, difference is stressed (and must be accommodated); as is equality between participants. These initial foci remain foundational at all stages. In light of these commitments, securing women’s participation as a matter of entitlement, rather than at the discretion of decision-makers in law and policy-making processes, is a central concern. At the same time, the concepts of personal agency and civil society activism that underpin bottom-up approaches to participation in international sustainability and environmental law and policy more generally intersect to a degree with the principles and priorities of ecofeminism. The latter, with its strong emphasis on both individual and collective participation, can be presented as promoting a specific conception of the broader feminist notion of engaged citizenship (Lister 2003). In this context, and being habituated to gender mainstreaming (discussed below) in other aspects of the UN system, women pressed for many years inclusion in the climate change regime (see above), ultimately pursing a well-developed participation agenda to their desired ends. Their tactics in seeking inclusion are honed by long experience of engagement both the international and domestic arenas (Verchick 1996).

Such cohesion as there now is within ecofeminism, forging an actively transversal approach (discussed below) to accommodate multiple incarnations of difference rather than imposing a false homogeneity on women as a group, has been hard-won. At the same time, as seen with regard to progressing the role of the women/gender constituency in the UNFCCC, the strategies developed and the techniques employed in the development of ecofeminism are also proving apposite in the latter context.

***Regime functionality***

The complexity and extent of the problems subsumed under the umbrella term ‘climate change’ is considerable in its own right and only compounded when inevitably enmeshed with a host of other major issues such as health, resource scarcity, food security, environmental disasters, conflict, and migration. The unprecedented scale and complexity of the issues involved means that effective engagement with climate change will require significantly more ambitious and creative endeavour than has been demonstrated thus far. At the very least, given the nature of the causes of climate change, an effectual regime to address it cannot meaningfully be confined to statecraft; the magnitude of the problems involved being such that individual behavioural change is also required in response to the altered social, economic and environmental realities involved. We are all, to a greater or lesser extent both agents of and potential victims of climate change – in effect we are all stakeholders in this global phenomenon.

The statist model invoked by the UNFCCC as initially envisaged exhibited an inbuilt institutional bias (Morrow 2013) that ignored or even effectively excluded many voices, notably those of women, from the law and policy debate. This was at best short-sighted, as women too are drivers of and contribute to the societal practices that generate climate change, making their engagement a necessary element to addressing it. Concomitantly, as gendered societal roles and responsibilities ensure that women hold considerable, though often latent or under-exploited, capacity to offer practical insights into addressing many of the manifestations of climate change and are therefore potentially powerful agents in this regard. Thus women’s participation in climate change governance is a matter of practical necessity as women need to be ‘on board’ with responses and have significant contributions to make to the climate change debate in general and on adaptation and mitigation in particular (Brody et al. 2008).

***A matter of principle***

Even if practical considerations did not support the case for women’s full involvement in the climate change debate, matters of principle make it a moral imperative. Climate change is already having, and will continue to have, a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable in society despite them being least implicated in its causes. The entrenched societal gender inequalities referred to above result in women being among those most disadvantaged by the impacts of climate change and least well placed socially, legally, and economically to respond to them (Parikh, undated; Brody et al. 2008 ). Compound disadvantage also operates to ensure that women are among the most deleteriously affected members of other disadvantaged groups in this regard, notably indigenous peoples and refugees (Brody et al. 2008). Even if this state of affairs did not make a rudimentary appeal to justice; the most recent incarnation of the UN’s own long-standing institutional commitment (ECOSOC 1997) to address systemic gender inequality though gender mainstreaming would seem to require that such an obvious manifestation of it be addressed. Gender mainstreaming, the latest approach to addressing gender inequality embraced by the UN, may be defined as:

… the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC 1997)

Gender mainstreaming sits well with core ecofeminist strategies for tackling the ills associated with patriarchal domination of women and the environment and in particular supports calls for women’s participation in policy and decision-making processes. Mainstreaming notionally seeks to propagate internal organizational change and foster a more profound enculturation of gender at an institutional and societal level. This two-pronged approach is necessary because, for gender mainstreaming to succeed, both attitudes and practices need to change. One problem is that, ambitious as it is, gender mainstreaming is less radical than agenda-setting, involving the integration of gender considerations into existing policy areas, rather than requiring or constituting a full-scale re-orientation of policy agendas (Bhatta 2001; see also Arora-Jonsson in this handbook). Thus gender-mainstreaming is evolutionary, not revolutionary, in its approach; it ultimately seeks (albeit substantial) attitude change in existing institutional praxis and not its rout. As climate change policy was still very much mutable in the mid-1990s when the gender mainstreaming initiative emerged as a UN institutional priority, this arguably allowed it to slip through the net on mainstreaming. Had it been applied from the outset, it could have addressed what has become apparent as one of the major flaws of the climate change regime and avoided a situation where women became disadvantaged and effectively marginalized across its institutions and processes. Nonetheless, even where gender mainstreaming is pursued it does not represent a ‘magic bullet’ – for example, it does not, in and of itself, actually overcome the impacts of pre-existing power differentials – this is dependent on the commitment of policy and decision-makers (Benschop and Verloo 2006).

***A ‘representative’ role***

In principle, ‘women’ ostensibly represent a cohesive group that may notionally be readily represented by inclusion of a gender constituency in institutional arrangements – at least in the rarefied world of the administration of civil society by international governmental organizations which tend, in a gross oversimplification that sacrifices accuracy to convenience, to treat gender as synonymous with ‘women’s’ issues. Convenient as such an approach may be for institutions, it tends to gloss over the fact that gender considerations apply to both women and men, the enormous diversity among women, and the fact that forging a workable and ‘representative’ constituency (insofar as this can be claimed for an unelected body which time and space preclude discussing in detail here) that can legitimately claim to speak for women actually presents a hugely difficult task. Claims to play a (what is perhaps best termed) quasi-representative role in this context require broad participation by women globally in developing strategies and positions. However, ecofeminist approaches are well equipped to accommodate the considerable diversity that such participation brings to the fore and habitually employs a range of approaches, strategies, and methodologies to forge alliances that have been also used to good effect in the climate change context (Morrow 2013). These include: focused campaigning; broader consensus-building activities; general network and specific coalition construction around discrete matters of shared concern; and developing and sharing skill sets. In each of these areas new technologies have been harnessed to good effect to develop a more consistent global reach for these activities than has been attainable hitherto. Furthermore, and significantly given the more established position of other major groups in the climate change regime, these activities are not exclusively focused within the women’s movement, they are also applied in reaching out to other civil society actors where experience of compound disadvantage creates shared and cross-cutting communities of interest.

While agenda setting may be the ultimate goal for the gender constituency, for a relatively disempowered group, it can be problematic and more incremental approaches therefore tend to predominate. The following section considers the application of a number of ecofeminist-informed approaches that have served to aid in constructing the gender constituency in the global climate change regime.

***Transversal politics and coalition-building***

For civil society, the task of coalition-building across administratively convenient constituencies that are in fact comprised of highly heterogeneous groups is a key challenge. Transversal politics, which eschews the ethnocentricity and exclusionary practices of assimilatory politics and the essentialism and reification of identity politics (Yuval-Davis 1995), are increasingly employed by feminists as a means of developing collective identity and action. At its most basic, transversal politics is based on: standpoint epistemology; ‘the encompassment of difference by equality’ and a clear differentiation between ‘positioning, identity and values’ (Yuval-Davis 1999: 95). It can be defined as: ‘… an alternative political ethos characteristic of heterogeneous coalitions which prizes openness, dialogue and unity of purpose amongst diverse entities’ (Murtagh 2008: 22). Transversal politics appears to offer an excellent opportunity to build upon the recognition of intersectionality that is a key response to the ecofeminist conception of compound disadvantage, as it can, amongst other things, potentially capitalize on the politics of multiple overlapping identities, identifying important elements of commonality that can promote coalition building. In its recognition of the importance of lived experience, the contingent nature of knowledge and the need for debate and dialogue that results, and its conscious attempt to accommodate difference without resort to a smothering imposition of homogeneity, transversal politics sits particularly well with ecofeminist thought.

The story of the gender constituency’s battle for recognition in the global climate change regime has involved practical manifestations of transversal politics in its invocation of active and engaged multiple citizenships that are also globally and transnationally located (Yuval-Davis 1997: 5). This type of innovative approach offers an exciting means to progress beyond the deadlock that inevitably ensues from a need for total agreement in forging subject-specific alliances; requiring instead an openness to dialogue as a means to arriving at a common perspective. However its very flexibility represents a serious challenge to more traditional and entrenched means of doing the business of politics that can, in domestic contexts at least, make transversal politics the subject of misunderstanding and even outright hostility (Murtagh 2008). That said, it is arguably more readily suited to the porous and fluid nature of modern international politics where there is perhaps more conceptual space for alternative modes of engagement, including those founded on feminist thought, particularly in light of the (albeit controversial – see Amoore and Langley 2004) growth of global civil society that has been one of the by-products of globalization and the dominance of neo-liberal discourse (Marchand 2003).

The quest for official constituency status in the global climate change regime was mandated by the women’s caucus at COP14 (Poznan). In order to establish its credentials as representing the interests and expertise of women across the globe, one of the key strategies adopted was to forge a coalition. This coalition was headed by an umbrella organization called GenderCC **–** Women for Climate Justice. Originally founded at COP 9 (Milan 2003) GenderCC is a global network of women, gender activists and experts on gender and climate justice issues representing all world regions. Given subsequent developments which have seen extraordinarily rapid advancement for the gender cause after years of glacial progress, the influence of GenderCC on rallying women to action and in relatively short order successfully pressing for institutional change has been little short of miraculous. It also speaks to the importance of providing a figure-head (in both organizational and symbolic terms) in solidifying the identity of what could otherwise be viewed as a somewhat amorphous group.

**Fostering participation and inclusiveness within the gender constituency**

The promotion of inclusiveness through adopting open, participatory dialogue in its own affairs is a hallmark of ecofeminist methodology and one that has been very much present in the development of the gender constituency in the global climate change regime. In part, this is a matter of principle, following through the thinking on women’s participation in global institutional processes to its logical conclusion by applying it internally. At the same time, fostering inclusion through participation is also a response to ecofeminism’s activist roots which emphasize the need to respect and incorporate women’s lived experience in decision-making processes and outcomes. This is not to the exclusion of scientific or technical or scholarly concerns, but as an important source of relevant material in its own right, thus ensuring that conclusions arrived at are based on the most complete information possible.

An inclusive and participatory approach featured strongly in the gender constituency’s activities in developing a strategic position from which to fight its corner in the quest for recognition in the global climate change regime. A key example of this approach in this process was the negotiation and agreement of a charter behind which women could rally. The draft Charter of the Women’s and Gender Constituency (GenderCC 2011) was fashioned through an inclusive dialogue undertaken by a global coalition of women’s groups comprised of Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF); ENERGIA (International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy); the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) and GenderCC. The principles invoked in the Charter, both in draft and as eventually adopted in augmented form after a lengthy consultative process (GenderCC 2016) strongly echo the core priorities of ecofeminism. They include: democratic and participatory governance; respect for divergent positions; and wide and inclusive membership (in terms of age, region and background) (GenderCC 2016: Article 2) These principles are to be pursued through the cultivation of a ‘flexible governance structure’ (GenderCC 2016 Article 7) employing open, active, consensus-building, communication strategies (GenderCC 2016 Article 8). The Charter’s objectives likewise echo an ecofeminist agenda, by prioritizing making women’s voices and experiences heard; feeding women’s views into all aspects of ongoing climate change discourse; and promoting co-operation with other constituencies and caucuses in the search for constructive and mutually reinforcing alliances (GenderCC 2016: Article 3). In line with its own constituent practices, the constituency also specifically committed to a framework for the pursuit of a ‘… just and gender-responsive climate framework’ (GenderCC 2016: Article 4). In its continuing endeavours interfacing with the climate change regime, the constituency promises a flexible, transparent, and accountable governance structure. (GenderCC 2016: Article 6).

**Women’s leadership and climate change**

At the same time as women were pressing for participation rights in the global climate change regime, another important stand of gender activism was emerging. At COP 16 (Cancun) in 2010, through a NGO-sponsored capacity building and networking initiative, the then provisional women/gender constituency was also pressing for a leadership role for women in respect of climate justice (Jackson 2010). In particular, the Mary Robinson Foundation’s Climate Justice Initiative (MRFCJI) sought to promote a more directional role for women in climate change in the run-up to COP16. The conception of leadership involved was a broad and purposive one and in order to promote a range of gender aspects the MRFCJI established an informal women’s leadership network. This drew in diverse representatives from UN institutions, governments, civil society, and the philanthropic and private sectors. The approach that emerged from the MRFCJI process exhibits a number of features that display ecofeminist characteristics, in particular in advocating gender equality in UNFCCC sub-programmes, full participation for women in decision-making, collaborative sharing and extrapolation of good practice, and networking. Progress on developing women’s leadership was augmented at COP16 itself by establishing a troika consisting of the three female ministers holding the relevant portfolios from the states hosting COP 15 (Copenhagen), 16 and 17 (Durban) (Sebastian and Ceplis 2010), in order play a more pronounced role in promoting the women’s agenda in the COP17 process. This approach has subsequently been continued and expanded upon in the Troika+ initiative.[[4]](#endnote-4)

In the wake of the official confirmation of status of the gender constituency at COP 17 (2011) there has of course been a degree of institutional change within the global climate change regime itself but women continue to seek to lead and drive debate in the quest for further progress. For example, another important dimension of the ongoing work of the MRFCJI is providing a research base that is informing the debate on ‘gender balance’ (of which more below) in the UNFCCC process. It subsequently published a report recommending that targets be set (no less than 40 per cent and no more than 60 per cent for either gender) for regime bodies and state delegations and that sanctions be imposed for non-compliance with them (MRFCJI 2013).

In terms of developing women’s leadership in the global climate change regime, the appointment of Mary Robinson herself as the UN special envoy for climate change is encouraging (UN News Centre 2014). Not only is her committed advocacy of an active role for women in this context secured as part of her indicated intention to continue working with her foundation in climate justice of value in its own right, but she is also a strong role model with a proven track record of leadership in human rights and environmental issues within the UN system.

**Changing the climate of participation?**

There have been a number of encouraging developments with regard to gender within the UNFCCC regime in the wake of the granting of constituency status. Most significantly COP 18 (Doha, 2012) led to the adoption of Decision 23/CP.18 on ‘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’ (UNFCCC 2012). This formalized a new institutional commitment to address gender issues in the context of climate change and adopted ‘gender balance’ as a goal for the regime and has set in motion interesting developments, some of which are considered below.

Additionally, COP 18 and COP 19 (Warsaw, 2013) both featured a specific ‘Gender Day’ as part of the official COP meeting. The presence of gender issues was not limited to a single tokenistic gesture: the former also featured the UNFCCC subsidiary body for implementation delivering a report on ‘Gender and Climate Change’ (UNFCCC 2013c). The latter included a workshop on gender balance in the UNFCCC (UNFCCC 2013b) and showcased grassroots good practice on addressing climate change across a range of ‘lighthouse activities (such as climate change resilient affordable housing; the 1 million women movement; and the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme) (Momentum for Change 2013).

The UNFCCC is also beginning to bring gender to the fore in respect of the climate change regime’s substantive activities, for example, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) (UNFCCC 2012b). Its approach here, however, appears to be somewhat anodyne and does not really convey a full understanding of the extent of what is required. For example, despite making references to gender mainstreaming, the document ‘CDM and Women’ seemingly views gender as something that can be successfully addressed as a mere ‘add on’ to an originally gender blind regime. Long experience would suggest otherwise and it is evident that much remains to be done to realize gender mainstreaming in the CDM.

Gender also came to the fore in the context of climate change in association with the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 -- with the joint liaison group of the three secretariats of the treaties signed at Rio in 1992 producing a report on the importance of gender in implementing the long-term objectives of their respective regimes (CBD, UNCCDB, UNFCCC 2012). The UNFCCC’s contribution to this document indicated its understanding in principle of climate change as a gendered issue, the need to pursue gender mainstreaming and women’s agency in addressing its impacts, particularly through the CDM. The coverage offered seemed to indicate a concrete attempt by the UNFCCC to bring itself more into line with the broader UN institutional approach to gender as it had indicated in principle was its aim in Decision 23/CP.18 (UNFCCC 2012). This trajectory was seemingly reinforced by the adoption at COP 20 of Decision 18/CP.20, referring to developments thus far and initiating the two-year Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) under the UNFCCC (UNFCCC 2014) which promised a more thoroughgoing engagement with gender by the regime machinery than hitherto. However, while the regime may arguably be attempting to set its house in order in this regard, this does not guarantee that its signatory states will respond to the invitation to do so positively – or indeed at all. This would seem to be borne out by the Paris Agreement, the most significant outcome of COP 21 (Paris, 2015) and the guiding document for future action on climate (UNFCCC 2015) which, if viewed as an acid test for the regime’s engagement with gender, makes for discouraging reading. Despite significant discussion of gender (not least prompted by the gender constituency) in the run up to the COP, it receives a scant three mentions in the Agreement: appearing once in the preamble – which refers to gender equality and empowerment of women; and twice in the substantive agreement in Articles 7 (adaptation) and 11 (capacity building) – which hardly amounts to ‘mainstreaming’. Nonetheless, these initiatives considered collectively at least indicate that gender is now enjoying some visibility in the global climate change regime – this in itself represents an improvement and indicates that the regime can no longer be described as entirely gender blind – which is a good, if inexcusably belated and as yet painfully slow, start.

**Conclusion: a Damascene conversion?**

The granting of constituency status has certainly opened doors for women’s fuller participation in the global climate change regime as this is the vehicle through which official observer participation is pursued. The UNFCCC has also committed in principle to encourage (but significantly not *to require*, which is beyond its power) ‘balanced geographic and perspective representation’ at workshops mandated by the COPs and the regime’s subsidiary body where much of the real business of the regime is done (UNFCCC undated). Much will of course depend the response of signatory states as to whether such participation manifests as a matter of form or substance. Furthermore, merely allowing women access to the regime does not constitute meaningful participation – they must also be enabled to secure a proportionate influence on its development and operation. This depends in part on the regime’s willingness to accommodate the necessary power shift that is involved, but it is also a more complex question as other structural and procedural factors will come into play. These include: lack of resources to facilitate participation; lack of representation; lack of access to information; lack of technical capacity to engage with scientific materials; limited advocacy skills; financial and procedural barriers. For women the ability to pursue participation is further hindered by gendered social, economic, cultural, legal, and educational barriers (Brody et al. 2008).

At least gender is now finally, if not always prominently, present as a concern within the global climate change regime – a fact indicated by its presence on the main UNFCCC website which recognizes that **gender is a significant cross-cutting issue that is relevant across the range of its activities, noting the ‘gender and …’ relationship in regard to** [adaptation](http://unfccc.int/focus/adaptation/items/6999.php)**, financial support, mitigation, and technology support. There is also a specific commitment to both institutional and human-resource capacity-building support to foster ‘gender balance’ in all the aforementioned aspects of the climate change regime. The rationale for the UNFCCC’s emerging, gender-aware approach is multifaceted: the key element focuses of course on securing the effectiveness of Convention regime initiatives in their own right but supporting strands include the following: not exacerbating other gender inequality/vulnerability issues; promoting solutions to other gender inequality/vulnerability issues; and supporting broader gender mainstreaming with respect to technology. Significantly, in terms of advancing Convention initiatives,** ensuring ‘… the equal participation of men and women in the decision-making and implementation phases of [Convention regime] activities’ are identified as significant (UNFCCC 2013d).

The emerging approach taken towards gender in the global climate change regime, while representing a considerable improvement on what has gone before, does however remain ambiguous at best. On the one hand the avoidance of the established terms ‘gender mainstreaming’ and ‘gender equality’ in favour of the rather vague (in the UNFCCC’s usage, if not elsewhere – see for example MREJF 2013 - discussed above) term ‘gender balance’ in a seemingly deliberate departure from the recognized lexicon gives pause for thought and could, were one inclined to be uncharitable, indicate avoidance of key aspects of the established gender regime. It is also significant that, throughout its ongoing initiatives, the UNFCCC’s tone and approach is necessarily but also determinedly hortatory rather than compulsory. This limits its influence and impact on signatory state behaviour, which ultimately directs the regime – as is amply demonstrated in the relative paucity of gender coverage in the Paris Agreement. On the other hand, in terms of gendering the internal machinery of the UNFCCC, more may potentially be achievable – though it is at the time of writing too early to fully evaluate the impact of the LWPG. Thus far it may be said that the approach adopted towards building and publicizing a database of women’s representation in regime institutions and in signatory state delegations seems to offer a positive start in providing measureable, evidenced baseline for action (UNFCCC 2013a). However, it should be kept in mind that even ostensible organizational cooperation is no guarantee of concrete progress in addressing gender equality issues as the potential for constructive dialogue, let alone action, can be fatally compromised by wildly differing interpretations of key concepts once analysis passes beyond the superficial (Benschop and Verloo 2006) – arguably the stage at which the UNFCCC’s broader engagement with gender currently rests, not least as evident in disappointing approach to gender evident in the Paris Agreement. Realizing effective participation requires a thoroughgoing change in organizational practices and while these may be emerging in supporting areas of the regime architecture, they are as yet scantly represented in the main arena. At a minimum, it is necessary that policies, procedures, and processes are put in place that are capable of addressing women’s more general lack of power in respect of both policy and decision-making processes (Bhatta 2001). Failure to address adequately these structural problems acts not only to the detriment of women’s exercise and enjoyment of hard-won participation rights, but arguably also goes to the viability of societal responses to the substantive issues themselves. Finally, while addressing gender issues is often characterized as the proverbial ‘win-win’ concept, it can be perceived as a threat to a multiplicity of entrenched institutional values and practices and as conflicting with established mainstream policy goals – and this would seem to be a real possibility in the context of the global climate change regime.

At the time of writing it remains to be seen whether initiatives under the UNFCCC represent mere lip-service to tackling the manifest gender inequality issues in the global climate change regime – if so, they will deliver little; but if they represent the beginning of full gender mainstreaming they are potentially revolutionary. COP21 suggests that, while gender issues are now ‘live’ within the global climate change regime, they are yet to gain substantial traction in terms of its central legal sphere. What we seem to be seeing is the (long-delayed) start of a long process of gendering global climate change governance and it is clear that further substantive progress will depend not only on the efforts of the Secretariat but on the willingness of signatory states to demonstrate the necessary political will to drive the process forward - which is evidently even now by no means a given.

**Notes**

The ‘major groups’ identified in Agenda 21 are: business and industry; children and youth; farmers; indigenous peoples; local authorities; science and technology; workers and trade unions; NGOs and women.

2 Gender mainstreaming was first adopted in UN policy in the wake of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action (UN 1995).

3 Whilst the major group in question is commonly referred to in the UN institutional context as ‘women’, internally, the constituency adopts a more inclusive approach, preferring the term ‘women and gender’ in acknowledgement of the fact that the issues involved are not confined to ‘women’s’ concerns.

4 This high-level leadership network now comprises over 55 members and continues to be actively engaged in fostering gender balance and improved participation in the UNFCCC regime – for further information, see <http://www.mrfcj.org/our-work/troika/> (accessed 18 April 2016).

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