

**CSW61: Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work
Multistakeholder Forum, 30 January 2017**

Remarks by Eleanor Blomstrom, Co-Director/Head of Office, Women's Environment and Development Organization

Thank you, colleagues. It is an honor to participate in this dialogue today. WEDO is a global advocacy organization that works at the intersection of women's human rights, gender equality and sustainable development – to ensure that environmental policies (e.g. climate, biodiversity) take a gender perspective and further women's human rights, as well as the reverse – to ensure that policies and programs focused on women's rights (e.g. CSW, CEDAW) incorporate a sustainable development and environmental justice perspective.

WEDO has been an active participant in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly in our role as an organizing partner of the Women's Major Group and I'd like to underscore the importance of interlinkages among the 17 goals for achieving gender equality and the Agenda overall. These interlinkages are seen in practice around issues such as women's economic empowerment and decent work.

WEDO also has a strong presence in the climate change process as part of the Women and Gender Constituency, so I'll also bring forth a climate lens today. Most of the barriers affecting women's labor are the same that affect women's ability to respond and be resilient to climate change. I'm sure they've been discussed at length already today: wage inequality, discrimination, low-wage/low-status jobs for women, undervaluing of traditionally female jobs, increase in informal/precarious work, burden of unpaid care work, lack of access to health, education and other public services, and unequal distribution of resources to name a few.

Considering these barriers and the urgency of climate change action to achieve sustainable development and gender equality, I want to focus on the idea of a 'Just Transition' in terms of women's economic empowerment and decent work, as it has a strong link to technology and emerging work opportunities. It also connects to the notion of leaving no one behind. For those of you who don't know, Parties to the Paris climate agreement (in decision [1/CP.21](#), which annexes the Paris agreement) agreed that "*climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity*".

The UNFCCC has multiple decisions that address women or gender, and if you would like to know more, please check out WEDO's [Gender Climate Tracker app](#) (available to download for iOS and Android).

Four concepts will underline my comments and are critical to keep at the forefront for CSW61.

1. Justice: The concept that all persons should be equally valued and all should share equitably in the distribution of resources, wealth, knowledge, information and power. For women, this means, among other things, the exercise of rights, voice and agency; bodily autonomy; space to make informed decisions on economic, social, environmental and development issues as well as when and how to work.

We can plainly see the injustice in today's world - 8 men now own as much wealth as 53% of population (Oxfam report, An economy for the 99%). The report also says, "On current trends it will take 170 years for women to be paid the same as men." That is not acceptable.

2. Rights: Recognizing the existing human rights framework and the need to fully respect, protect, and fulfil women's human rights – whether articulated as land and tenure rights, labor rights (freedom of association & collective bargaining), or rights to water/food/energy/social protection/healthy environment/decent work/leisure time – is crucial today when we are seeing backward movement worldwide.

3. Accountability: Upholding the responsibility of the relevant duty bearers, including states, UN agencies, and private actors such as corporations, towards fulfilling human rights obligations. But it is also toward addressing inequalities brought about by, for example, corporate tax dodging (which costs poor countries at least \$100 billion every year) and by trade policies that weaken labor and environmental regulations and disrupt ability of nations to enact progressive policies that protect the environment and human rights defenders.

4. Sustainable Development: It has 3 inseparable dimensions: social, economic and environmental. All are to be addressed in meeting needs of today while ensuring the needs of future generations are met (and that we have good quality of life and a healthy planet along the way). We know that the current economic system and the related business practices, production and consumption patterns and governance systems are entrenching poverty and structures of inequalities, at the expense of the natural environment and human dignity.

So what is a Just transition? It is a notion coming from the trade unions to address the move from polluting fossil fuel industries to renewable energy/no carbon economies and its impact on workers – which also recognizes that labor and environmental concerns are linked. But the concept now expands to include women and marginalized groups because all people must be considered in this transition, especially given the barriers we've already discussed and the growing trend in informality that particularly affects women. We want to see a 'gender just transition' that supports transformational systemic change for climate change adaptation and mitigation at the same time as for gender equality and for economic security. In short, the need to take climate action and meet the SDGs provides an opportunity to rethink our economic system and support decent work.

Thus, in a just transition, governments, businesses and other stakeholders must re-think the sexual division of labor. They must take into account women's unpaid care work and women's informal work, which subsidize our economic systems but are not recognized financially or valued socially. We need more governments ready to collect relevant statistics to show unpaid domestic and care work and its impact (recognize it). We need Public investment to reduce burden on women (reduce it). And we need public services and changes in norms so that the work is shared among women and men (redistribute it).

Furthermore, current migration trends – both seasonal and environmentally related - compound the precarious work of women who lack social protections like income stability, care support, health care and more. At the same time, such mobility can create new opportunities in new fields.

So, a just transition must promote decent work for women in under-valued fields such as care work; the (social) service sector; sustainable, locally-focused agriculture and fisheries; as well as locally governed renewable energies with women participating equally as shareholders, owners and fairly-remunerated workers.

In particular, looking at energy and technology in a climate change context, this is a precisely a new economic opportunity that women can take advantage of, and also a challenge given the barriers that exist. For years, climate change was seen as technical and not social, which we still see in mitigation technologies that tend to be large in scale with little regard to human impact.

In a just transition, climate-related technologies would be gender-responsive and reverse the potentially harmful misperception of technology as gender-neutral. Those of us working in climate change and sustainable development know that women are producing solutions at all scales. Therefore, a just transition in this changing world of work would recognize and support women's contributions to small-scale, household- based and traditional technologies such as renewable energy and sustainable farming. It would also value women's inputs into development, and the implementation impacts of, large-scale technology generally dominated by men, with a goal to ensure the technologies are appropriate, sustainable and gender-responsive and women have training and opportunity to undertake that work. As colleagues have said, this requires changing policies, laws and importantly, norms to push the structural changes needed and ensure women's rights and gender equality are front and center in this changing world of work. Above all, it requires immediate, concerted and collaborative action.