
Women and climate change in Cochabamba

An analysis of Peoples' Agreement (1) that emerged from the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held from 20 to 22 April in Cochabamba (Bolivia) may lead us to think that the gender issue was not present at that Conference.

Although in general terms it may be true that a gender perspective was not substantially incorporated into the conclusions of the working groups, gender language can be found in some of the texts. For example, group 6 on migrations specifies that it is women who suffer the most serious situations arising from migration; group 7 on indigenous peoples, calls for the full and effective participation of vulnerable groups, including women; group 8 on climate debt mentions women twice in connection with vulnerable groups; group 12 on funding appeals for women to have representation in the new funding mechanism that should be set up to take on the costs of climate change; and group 14 on forests asks for recognition of the role of women in the preservation of cultures and the conservation of native forests and jungles and proposes the establishment of an expert group with representation of at least 50% by women. (1)

However, it would not be fair to assess the influence of feminist and women's groups solely based on the conference texts and not consider the important contributions made alongside the working groups that prepared the final document. Here are some examples:

The Feminist Working group from Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) made a presentation at a workshop, showing the conclusions of the tribunals on gender and climate change held in seven countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The presentation included an analysis of the differentiated gender impacts caused by climate change, among which, the lack of access to drinking water and water for agriculture, impact on food sovereignty and greater dependence on the economy and the market, prolonged droughts and heavy unseasonal rain and the loss of the ability to produce natural medicines due to reduced availability of the appropriate plants. This activity was positively assessed by the participants as it introduced a relevant but scantily addressed issue at the conference. However, perhaps the most important input of this group was related to the role of education in the generation of changes in production and excessive consumption patterns that are the true causes of climate change. (2)

The event organized by the Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy (Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía - REMTE) made important inputs regarding "the structural causes of climate change and the challenges of an economy for life," an approach in which the proposals of "Living Well" (Buen Vivir), the visions and practices of ancestral community economy, of feminist economy and of ecological economy all converge. In a very brief summary, they state that "what matters is to move towards an economy that promotes a broader reproduction of life instead of the reproduction of capital."

Along the same lines, during the Assembly of Social Movements that took place during the conference, women's struggles did not go by unnoticed. In the Letter made public, it is stated that "resistance [to the climate crisis assessed as part of the global crisis] is being built up from the

interrelation of diverse anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-racist approaches”... and that in the “process of articulation under permanent construction” one of the “key moments” will be the Third International Action of the World March of Women to take place in Congo next October.(3)

For their part, the Latin American representatives of Gender CC - Women for Climate Justice, made an analysis of the gender impacts of climate change in Bolivian and Colombian communities. Perhaps their most important contribution was the analysis of the impact on women of the false solutions to climate change proposed so far. These false solutions include, among others, increased monoculture tree plantations for agrofuels and carbon sinks and major hydroelectric dams promoted as supposedly clean energy sources. They are false solutions because, from the standpoint of climate they do not attack the true causes and, what is even worse, they will not only aggravate injustices towards the poorest communities but also, as has already been proven, they worsen the lives of women in particular. (4)

The Latin American Feminist Community group, the voice of feminist social movements and organizations, also made a substantial input, making public a Pronouncement that arose from a document presented at one of the workshops. This document was discussed during the workshop and later the discussion was continued in an open space, where it received contributions from indigenous and other women from different countries. The Pronouncement analyzes in detail the concepts of Pachamama (Mother Earth), community, reciprocity, autonomy and climate change. As it is a lengthy document we will only refer to some points related to climate change which we believe to be of substance. (5)

Regarding climate change, the pronouncement explains that “it is the consequence of human activity, of human excesses, conceived in the framework of a predatory development model that is sustained by the consumption of fossil fuels and through deforestation and violation of nature in order to increase cement cities. A capitalist and patriarchal system, where everything is a commodity, where everything can become private property and have a price on it, and where any consequence of human activity can be repaired or modified by science and technology. It is the result of a system that ... has undermined the basic necessary conditions for perpetuating life in a harmonious cosmos, for us the Pachamama (Mother Earth).”

One of the indigenous members of the movement explained that for them, patriarchy is a system of oppression of which its offspring, such as colonialism and neo-liberalism, are just different ways of plundering life, where the latter is the one that most cynically plunders the Pachamama. For this reason she added, it is not the indigenous peoples who are going to save the planet, because the men and women of the indigenous peoples are also patriarchal and it is patriarchy that is destroying life. This is the reason for the need of a Pronouncement by Community Feminism, because our struggle is for our dreams.

Regarding the effects of climate change, the group ratified and agreed with the analysis made by other groups that “they are different and more severe for women because of their socially allocated role, where production, feeding and looking after the family is central; bringing up children and working outside the home, which does not imply not doing so-called domestic chores. As a result, women are more intensely affected by changes in the climate.”

The pronouncement rejects the fact that the same patriarchal rationale that inequitably allocates roles and tasks to sustain society is used to face climate change. Those responsible for it, the self-denominated developed countries have plundered, contaminated and forced the Pachamama. Their industries, elites and corporations are attempting to compensate and put a price on destruction.

Regarding this, the pronouncement emphatically concludes: “From this community feminist viewpoint we reiterate that we do not want money in exchange for the damage caused to the Pachamama or to women. To accept money would be like a time bomb, it would mean that they will continue exploiting and paying for this exploitation. We want restitution of rights. The damage caused can no longer be repaired, but the Pachamama’s rights can be restored and for this patriarchy must be dismantled, including its states, its armies, its transnational corporations, its hierarchical rationale and all the violence this means to women and to the Pachamama. We will not accept either that we women are made responsible for the plundering, what we have before us, men and women, is a community task. That is to say a task for all of us.”

Women spoke out clearly in Cochabamba. The enormous task of disseminating these contributions and their true inclusion on the agenda of social movements struggling for change still remains.

By Ana Filippini, Latin American Focal Point of the international network Women for Climate Justice, Gender CC, email: mujeresporjusticiaclimatica@gmail.com

(1) The full texts can be found on the Conference’s webpage e: <http://cmpcc.org/>

(2) See details of the conference and the presentation in the text distributed by Ana Agostino available at: <http://www.icae2.org/files/349c.pdf>

(3) Full text of the Letter in Spanish available at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/actores/CCC/CMPCC/Movimientos_Sociales.html

(4) Full texts and power point presentations in Spanish available on the webpage of Gender cc: <http://www.gendercc.net/>

(5) The full document in Spanish is available at: <http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/pronunciamiento-feminismo-comunitario-latinoamericano-conferencia-pueb>