

# Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) Statement at UNEP Globalization Roundtable

Remarks By Betsy Apple, Deputy Director, WEDO

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My name is Betsy Apple and I am the Deputy Executive Director of the Women's Environment & Development Organization.

It is clear that globalization has accelerated the race for control over key natural resources. As we know, many developing countries are endowed with critical natural resources: timber, oil, natural gas, and copper among others. Nonetheless, the blessings of those natural resources often do not result in the kind of poverty eradication they should and could. Rather, in many cases, these resources result in deepened poverty, environmental devastation, and human rights abuses associated with the protection and extraction of such resources. In short, their blessing becomes a curse, the resource curse.

One of the questions before us is how to transform the resource curse back into the positive legacy it should be.

I would like to suggest that we have to view globalization in these sessions through the lens of environment—that is the critical starting point, and not the other way around—but we also have view it through a gendered lens. One important strategy for addressing the indivisibility of the environment and globalization is to recognize the critical role that affected peoples play in making decisions about how to use their natural resources. While globalization is, as its name suggests, a global phenomenon, its effects are felt locally as well. Maximizing the participation of local and affected communities in natural resource decisions is a critical tool in combating resource degradation and exploitation. Furthermore, within those local communities, some of the most marginalized groups—women in particular—offer practical experience and skills in natural resource management, which, if harnessed, would serve as an important counter to the resource curse.

The UNEP Governing Council has already recognized the critical linkage between a gender perspective and environmental protection and conservation in its GC decision 23/11 of 2006. Further, there are many international instruments and commitments that recognize the critical role of women as agents of development and stewards of the environment. By supporting programs and policies that seek to increase women's access to the full range of rights related to natural resources – to justice, land, and decision-making, to name a few—governments help some of those most affected by the resource curse, to transform it into a resource blessing.

I would also like to suggest that, if we are truly to look at globalization through an environmental lens, we must also address the role of non-state actors in creating and mitigating the resource curse. The international community increasingly recognizes the threats posed by non-state actors, for example, in conflicts perpetrated by other armed groups. Similarly, the international community, (indeed, in some of the background documents for this very meeting), has identified corporations as one key group that must be engaged in this discussion about environment and globalization. One question before us is, what are the roles and responsibilities of corporations, in preventing, mitigating, or transforming the negative effects of the resource curse? As my colleague from the

chemicals industry reminded me this morning, there are many companies that seek to raise corporate standards of behavior related to environmental, labor, and human rights practices. However, as my experience as a lawyer working on corporate accountability issues in the extractive resource industries of oil and gas indicates, there are many companies that do not. This is why an international legal regime for corporate accountability is essential.

As another one of my good colleagues from the international business community assured me this morning, legally enforceable global standards for corporate behavior vis-à-vis environmental, labor, and human rights practices, which I would argue are inextricably linked and therefore should be the subject of a comprehensive regime, are good for business – they create predictability, consistency, a level playing field, and stability. Voluntary standards, individual corporate initiatives, peer review – these are a good start. However, they can by no means be the end goal. Voluntary initiatives are not enforceable, they rely upon the good will and good conscience of individual actors, and they produce a patchwork of standards of behavior that aid neither corporations nor civil society in engaging together to turn the resource curse into an endowment. We are here this week to talk about coherence in governance structures. We currently have an incoherent legal regime regarding standards of corporate behavior in the environmental and human rights context. I urge you to consider the role in helping to impose some much-needed coherence in the field of corporate accountability; to do so will be to help transform globalization from a detrimental to a positive process for some of the world's most marginalized peoples.