

**Presentation by Lorena Aguilar, WEDO Board Member**  
**WEDO-CWWL Roundtable “How a Changing Climate Impacts Women”**  
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I would like to start this presentation with the words of Doña Vera Sanchez, a survivor from Hurricane Mitch in Honduras. Mitch (1998) was the second most powerful and devastating hurricane in the history of the Atlantic Ocean. It killed more than 18,000 people and caused thousands of million dollars in material losses.

It seems like it was yesterday...

I lived on the Atlantic coast in Honduras. At that time, I was a single mother of three kids, my husband had left us some time ago. I built a very “rustic house” close to an estuary. With my older son I collected mollusks, did some fishing from the coast and processed (dried and salted) some of the smaller fish that the fishermen gave up.

One morning some of my neighbors said that they had heard in the radio that a big storm was coming and that it had winds of about 290 Km per hour. I remember thinking, what is a 290Km wind?

Most of us on the coast were women with our sons. What should we do? We had no idea. Some women commented that they had heard from their husbands that we had to take some precautions. Unfortunately none of us had ever been invited or went to meetings dealing with this type of situation.

Then it happened. The winds, the waves, the flood. I took my three kids and started walking inland. Very soon the current was so strong, I could not hold all of them, my oldest son was holding my daughter. My hands were holding my youngest baby. The water snatched them, I saw my son trying to swim... I lost sight of them.

I climbed a tree, it was very cold, I could not sleep. Other animals, especially the snakes, were trying to save themselves as well. I was in the tree for almost three days, I was lucky I could breast feed my baby.

I was rescued and sent to a school. I was so lost; I kept on looking for my other two kids. Nothing. Life in the shelter was not easy, too much violence. I had no one to defend me...

I came back to my community almost a month later, nothing was left. There were some organizations supporting some reconstruction efforts. Again it was very difficult for me, I was alone, I had nothing, no land under my name, no money. I still believe that Mitch had something against women...

Doña Vera is just one voice....

As predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income group, occupations and genders” (IPCC, 2001). The IPCC also notes: “the impacts of climate change will

fall disproportionately upon developing countries and the poor persons within all countries, and thereby exacerbate inequities in health status and access to adequate food, clean water, and other resources.”

We now know as a fact that:

- In the 2004 Asian Tsunami, 70-80% of overall deaths were women.
- During emergencies, women are less likely to have access to information about assistance than men. In Bangladesh women suffered the most following the cyclone and flood of 1991. Among women aged 20-44, the death rate was 71 per 1000, compared to 15 per 1000 men. Warning information was transmitted by men to men in public spaces, but rarely communicated to the rest of the family.
- Without secure access to and control over natural resources (Land, water, livestock, trees) women are less likely to be able to cope with permanent climatic change or willing to make investments in disaster mitigation measures.

We women from the South wonder... When will the politicians and scientists recognize that climate change is not gender neutral? When is enough...?

In light of this, women from all around the world pointed out several areas that deserve attention in relation to climate change:

- Despite its status and development within the United Nations international system, climate change policy-making has failed to adopt a gender-sensitive strategy. The international climate change negotiation process – as well as climate policies at regional, national and local levels -must adopt the principles of gender equity at all stages: from research, to analysis, and the design and implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies. This applies in particular to the process towards a post-2012 climate protection system or “regime”.
- Invest in research in areas such as: gender specific resource-use patterns; gender-specific effects of climate change; gender aspects of mitigation and adaptation; women’s capacity to cope with climate change; and gender related patterns of vulnerability.
- Governments should aim to ensure the involvement of women and gender experts when they prepare their contributions for the international and national processes, and ensure women’s participation at international and national meetings.