



Women's Environment & Development Organization



The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW): An Overview

What is the CSW?

The [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) is a functional commission of the [United Nations Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#), charged with evaluating progress on gender equality and formulating concrete policies that promote gender equality. The CSW was established in 1946, one year after the founding of the United Nations itself, and in the years since, its mandate has expanded to include the empowerment and advancement of all women, as well as identification of key trends and challenges. After the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the CSW was additionally mandated to periodically review the Beijing Platform for Action and evaluate signatories' progress in keeping their commitments.

From the beginning, the CSW has been one of the most important mechanisms for policy makers and civil society to discuss progress and obstacles, exchange ideas and make substantive policy contributions towards increasing gender equality. In addition to its broad-based work for women's rights, the CSW has recently recognized the threat posed by environmental degradation and climate change to the advancement of women's status. In 2008, the CSW declared gender perspectives in climate change to be one of its key emerging issues, thereby shedding light on the important convergence of gender mainstreaming and environmental policy.

How are NGOs involved in the CSW?

The CSW is comprised of 45 countries, elected every four years by ECOSOC, based on equitable geographical distribution. The commission meets once a year at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for a period of 10 days.

NGO participation in the CSW is organized by the [Division for the Advancement of Women \(DAW\)](#). NGOs have historically been, and continue to be, a critical part of the CSW process. Civil society groups, such as WEDO, have played an integral role in many CSW achievements, including the creation of the Beijing Platform for Action. NGOs continue to act as a strong force to hold governments accountable to their promise to pursue the principles outlined in the Beijing Platform.

NGOs use **caucuses** to collaborate with each other, to strategize, and to formulate positions and language. Regional caucuses are open to NGOs from a particular geographic region, while thematic caucuses are open to all with a UN Pass and are centered on certain themes important to women's lives. In particular, WEDO will be hosting a number of [Conversation Circles](#) on sustainable development and climate change to facilitate open discussion and exchange information with WEDO program coordinators, Rachel Harris and Eleanor Blomstrom. The [NGO Committee on the Status of Women](#) works closely with DAW to facilitate NGO participation in the CSW. In May, 2009, the NGO/CSW [Sub-Committee on Women and Climate Change](#) was formed to raise awareness, educate, mobilize activists, research and monitor the proceedings of the UNFCCC.

What are the outcomes of the CSW meetings?

The outcomes of CSW meetings are expressed in a document containing adopted resolutions, policy recommendations, and proposals. These resolutions represent a consensus and a common will among policy makers, and touch on a wide range of issues. After the [43rd CSW](#), for example, a resolution concerning the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan was adopted; in [2007](#), the CSW urged governments to integrate a gender perspective into all economic and environmental policies.

In addition, key emerging issues and themes are identified (such as the impacts of climate change on women).

What is special about CSW 56?

This year's CSW 56, held from February 27th to March 9th, 2012, will focus on the urgency of rural women's empowerment. The substantial contributions that women in rural areas bring to economic growth and the fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty are well established. Therefore, an in-depth discussion on the situation and empowerment of rural women and their role in development is long overdue. CSW 56 will critically assess whether past efforts to empower rural women have brought the expected results – and if not, how to change course. In addition, the 2012 session will provide the opportunity to share experiences and best practices, as well as identifying key areas where policy measures and interventions are necessary to make measurable and accelerated progress in rural women's empowerment.

Further, environmental protection and the climate crisis will play a central role in this year's CSW. Recent global crises, such as the economic and food crises, natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and challenges associated with climate change have demonstrated the urgent need to reduce women's vulnerabilities. The proliferation of side events dedicated to gender and the environment are a testament to the growing awareness of the importance of this issue.

How does WEDO participate in the CSW?

WEDO is a veteran participant at the CSWs. As a major international forum, the CSW provides an arena for WEDO to advocate directly with country governments, as well as network and exchange ideas, best practices and common challenges with other NGOs. WEDO will be a robust presence in many of the CSW events, including those related to climate change, as well those organized for GEAR. For a full list of the events in which WEDO will participate, [click here](#).