



Conflict of Interest in UNFCCC: Pull Out Polluters from Negotiation

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Climate negotiations have been happening since 1991, while UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has entered into force on 21 March 1994. The negotiations are expected to produce real solutions to solve climate crisis and save the planet, including people who are already impacted by climate crisis. In fact, after 23 years of UNFCCC, we are still struggling in increasing state's commitment for climate action and reducing the impact of climate change, through real solution that can truly solve the root problems of climate crisis. Moreover, UNFCCC keep producing false solutions that cause more problems to people. Resulted solutions from this negotiation only benefit industrial countries, transnational corporations and international financial institutions. For example, the REDD and REDD+ initiative in Indonesia¹ has been impacting our people, women and men who have to suffer loss of their livelihood resources, evicted, as well experience economic and social impact caused by the projects. Meanwhile, through projects titled "Climate Smart Agriculture", that propose to reduce emissions and build resilience in agriculture sector to address climate change. In fact, the projects only focus on changing the farm input such as seeds and fertilizers to be replaced by big company's products. It means the government is only accommodating interests of agri-business, and grab farmers' sovereignty over their production, and even creating farmer's dependency to big company's seeds and fertilizers. These projects are even lead by company interests. Yara, world's biggest fertilizer company is in the steering committee of Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture.²

The active engagement of corporations/private companies, in particular big industries at the negotiation table is believed as one of the factors that creates these profit-driven solutions. We all know that to solve climate crisis, we need to address the root causes of climate change, which is to reduce emissions drastically from the source, i.e. industrial activities and

¹ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

² More reference: <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5270-the-exxons-of-agriculture>

the changing patterns of production and consumption that relies on fossil fuels, one of them by cutting off the investment in fossil fuels. But how is it possible, when companies like Big Oil Gas and Coal Company that are polluters for decades, even are parts of the negotiation. Exxon Mobil as the one of world's biggest oil and gas company even claim their commitment to engage climate action, as well as engage in negotiation, but in fact this company has been actively promoting climate change denial.

Corporate Accountability International (CAI) reports that more than 250 Business and Industry Non-Governmental Organizations (BINGOs) have currently been admitted to the climate talks.³ Meanwhile, according the UNFCCC website, 13,9% from Observers are coming from BINGOs. It is a huge number compared to the number of observers coming from impacted communities and groups, such as Indigenous People, Farmer, Women, and Youth.⁴[4] We acknowledge that not all of the business sectors are polluters, where some are promoting local, and small scale solution. But involvement of BINGOs that dominated by some companies, such as oil gas companies, has also brought conflict of interests, since they represent the interests of corporations that basically are polluters for decades. As a response, civil society including Environment NGOs, Women's group as well as Indigenous People, bring voices and raising awareness about the issues of Corporates' Conflict of interests in UNFCCC. The discussion about conflict of interest was continuing in the Bonn Climate Change Conference - May 2017.⁵

This issue was brought to In-Session Workshop on Opportunities to Further Enhance Effective Engagement of Non-Party Stakeholder. Kalyani Raj, from All India Women's Conference has represented the Women and Gender Constituency as one of the speakers and said that it is important to adopt a clear mechanism to see difference between stakeholders who represent public interests and right based groups (rights-holders), versus those who represent the business interests. This statement was also supported by some feedbacks from a representative of the Ecuadorian Delegation, Walter Schuldt-Espinel, Indigenous groups, and Climate Justice Now. Besides, we need to learn from the process of Convention of Tobacco Control regarding the awareness and recognition of fundamental conflict between tobacco industry and public health interests, so that limiting role of tobacco industry in negotiation is very necessary. In the context of UNFCCC, we need to limit the role of actors that might be 'polluting' the process.

³ <http://www.thebigissue.co.ke/index.php/2017/05/23/conflict-interest-threatens-climate-change-talks/amp/>

⁴ http://unfccc.int/parties_and_observers/observer_organizations/items/9545.php

⁵ The forty-sixth sessions of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 46) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA 46) as well as the third part of the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA 1-3), conducted from 8 to 18 May 2017, in Bonn, Germany.

On the other hand, to create true solution, we need to encourage more spaces for society and produce people centred solutions. Indigenous people, peasants, fisher folks, already have their initiatives in saving the earth. For example, women live around forest in Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi, Indonesia who use nature's product such as pandan/screw pine and rattan as material for making handcraft. They will only harvest big pandan/screw pine, with limited amount as needed and then will replant the trees. This initiative is taken to guarantee the sustainability for the next generations.

This issue also brought to UNFCCC through an in-session Workshop that has the objective to discuss opportunity to build relationship between stakeholder to enhance climate commitment into an action. During the workshop, representatives from Indigenous Groups also shared how they already took initiatives as 'guardian of the land.' They are maintaining and governing it for a long time with their own funding/resources. But ironically public funding distributed through Green Climate Fund is put more into industries, while Indigenous People are on the ground trying to guard their land.

To recognize and support people perspectives and initiatives in solving the climate crisis it is important to ensure meaningful participation of people, especially to open this opportunity for any parties to involve in climate action. But of course with a clear understanding that there is a difference between actors/stakeholders who represent people's interests and business' interests, especially polluters companies. In the parallel discussion of the workshop, civil society had also shared about their experiences, knowledge, and ideas to enhance participation and involvement of civil society, particularly the impacted groups. Some ideas and thoughts were also identified, such as to ensure national mechanism of parties, to give information and spaces for civil society to be able to involve meaningfully, enhance capacity building and awareness raising, translation of documents so that local people can understand about the negotiations, as well the recognition of CSOs as participants instead of observers. It is also important to see and consider the specific situation of women, who have limited access and control in many aspects and create affirmative action to encourage their involvement.

This process showed that civil society has succeeded, at least in making 'noise' about the issue. Therefore, it is important to monitor the follow up of the workshop and keep making noise and raising awareness, until UNFCCC really takes it into account and brings it in the negotiations. Business sectors should be regulated and obligated in climate actions, but not to involve and use their power to influence climate negotiations.

In conclusion, pull out big polluters from business sectors from the negotiations is a very important issue. We need to have clear definition and indicators to involve only those who

are contributing to the solutions of the climate crisis in the negotiation. As long as these big polluters have the opportunity to use their power in influencing negotiations, UNFCCC will keep continuing producing false solutions that are increasing inequality and impoverishment. All this time, the negotiations have been reflected as a manifestation of inequality between capital owners who destroy the earth and the people who forcedly evicted from their livelihood in the name of climate change mitigation. Indigenous people, peasants, and fisher folk in global south are already impacted by the climate crisis, but all of the climate projects are not able to save them and solve the root cause. Moreover, they lose their livelihood resources and are forced to conduct or get involved in projects that are not giving any benefit for them, to conserve the earth from the disaster that not caused by them. For women, who also experience the impact of climate change and climate projects, they even face layered of impact and injustice caused by social, economic, political and cultural barriers that limit their access to and control over resources, capacities and decision making.

A Lesson Learned

The experiences in this conference give me a lot of lessons learnt and reflection. It was a very great opportunity to know better about the issue, as well as to feel the 'atmosphere' of international high level negotiation. This process requires skills, passion, patience, and courage, especially to bring local struggle to be talked and discussed on the negotiations' table. The negotiation itself contained a lot of topics and issues, and sometimes I got lost between terminologies. It is important to prioritize the topic, so we can put realistic targets in the conference. It is impossible to follow all of the topics, even they all really related with our issues/works.

As feminist activist, of course I don't want to be alienated only in one kind of forum, for example, only in gender related forums. Talking about women means all aspects of life. It relates with accountability mechanisms, with forestry projects and REDD, climate finance, conflict of interests and how to expand people's engagement, and off course Gender Action Plan. But I really need to identify, what kind of issue will be my priority in the forum, especially the most related to our struggle with grassroots women in Indonesia. It needs to be prepared even before we arrive at Bonn. This wasn't happen in previous process, because I faced difficulties, even to understand about the website.

Besides, it was also my first time to involve in international negotiation. Courage and confidence are two things that I really need to be accelerated. Before, I had experiences talking and interfering in regional space, but when it came to international level, especially in countries negotiation, it felt different, it was really challenging.

Therefore, I feel really glad to be a part of this project. It was a great opportunity to involve in the conference. Not only to absorb information and delivering women's situation in Indonesia, but how to really bring the local struggle. Means meaningfully involved in the global movement, and global struggle, including exercising my courage and confidence to be together with this movement. The previous experience is really helpful to improve strategy in the next meeting.