



**GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE NETWORK – WOMEN FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE
POSITION PAPER**

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Prepared by MADRE – International Women’s Rights Organization and
the *genderCC Network – Women for Climate Justice*,
together with women’s organisations and gender experts from around the world

“There will be no climate justice without gender justice”

AGROFUELS ARE NO SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Women urge all parties and stakeholders to build a future climate regime that is effective, sustainable and just; design gender sensitive mitigation and adaptation policies and measures; and provide the necessary resources.

Calling upon governments, international agencies, and all stakeholders:

TAKE 6 KEY STEPS TOWARDS GENDER AND CLIMATE JUSTICE REGARDING AGROFUELS

1. Pursue policies recognizing that the primary action needed to avert the worst impacts of climate change is a vast reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, requiring a reduction of energy consumption and consumption in general.
2. Include ecological, consumer behavior, human rights, and gender perspectives in education programs seeking to encourage a reduction in energy consumption and consumption in general.
3. Promote policy coherence to ensure that energy policies are compliant with human rights commitments and with the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goals 1, 3, and 7.
4. Support the call of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food for a five-year moratorium on agrofuel development.
5. Devote resources to the development of truly renewable and sustainable energy sources.
6. Protect, respect, and fulfill the four dimensions of food security – availability, access, stability, and utilization – in all decision-making processes, and promote food sovereignty.

What are Agrofuels?

Agrofuels, also known as biofuels, are produced from plant biomass converted into liquid fuel mainly for transportation. The biofuels to be adopted are biodiesel (obtained from oilseeds) and ethanol (obtained from fermentation of plant cellulose). Among the many possible crops for this purpose are soybeans, corn, colza, groundnuts, sunflower seeds, oil palms, sugarcane, poplar and eucalyptus trees. The prefix "agro" is used to convey a primary danger inherent in emergent patterns of agrofuel production: namely, that agrofuels compete directly with food production for land, water, and other limited resources. The result is rising food prices and increased hunger and food insecurity in poor communities.¹ Local communities have a right to use biomass energy in environmentally sustainable ways and to make their own determinations about energy production and use.

Though the term "biofuels" suggests that these fuels have fewer and less severe repercussions for the environment than fossil fuels, recent evidence suggests that bio-diesel fuel made of plant oils and ethanol made of corn actually produce up to 70 percent and 50 percent more greenhouse gases respectively than fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas.²

Why are Agrofuels a Threat to Human Rights?

In addition to triggering violent evictions and displacement of local and Indigenous Peoples who live in areas designated as fuel plantations, the rapidly expanding production of agrofuels is creating a contest for agricultural resources such as land, labor, and water. This contest pits the desire for cheap, abundant fuel against the fulfillment of people's basic right to food. Already, the UN FAO, the OECD, and the International Monetary Fund have stated that demand for agrofuels is inducing fundamental changes to the agricultural market that could drive up food prices for the long-term.³

In his latest report, "The Right to Food," the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, supports the above findings, and states that the expanding production of agrofuels is likely to cause:

- Vast and rapidly increasing food prices, causing food shortages and making basic food products inaccessible for the poorest people; and eventually increasing the number of hungry people.
- Increasing competition over land, forest, and natural resources, resulting in forced evictions of small peasant farmers and Indigenous communities.
- Competition over water resources causing rising water prices.⁴

Mass production of industrial agrofuels will therefore affect the four dimensions of food security, namely, that all people have access, availability, stability and utilization of food. By threatening food sovereignty and worsening hunger for the poorest, agrofuel production will induce violations of the human rights of women, children, and men, particularly in marginalized communities.

Moreover, the predominant methods of agrofuel production reproduce environmental hazards associated with industrialized agriculture and deforestation. These include monoculture plantations that destroy rainforests, as well as other ecosystems, and drain peat-lands, threatening biodiversity and releasing many tons of carbon into the atmosphere; and reliance on vast quantities of water, toxic pesticides, and chemical fertilizers.

¹ U.N. General Assembly, 62nd Session. Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler (A/62/289). New York, 2007.

² Corbyn, Zoe. "Biofuels could boost global warming, finds study". *Chemistry World* September 21, 2007: <http://www.rsc.org/chemistryworld/News/2007/September/21090701.asp> (Accessed November 6, 2007).

³ Santa Barbara, Jack. "The False Promise of Biofuels". The International Forum on Globalization and the Institute of Policy Studies. September 2007: p. 19. (Accessed November 6, 2007) <<http://www.ifg.org/pdf/biofuels.pdf>>.

⁴ U.N. General Assembly, 62nd Session. Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler (A/62/289). New York, 2007: p. 11-15.

Why are Agrofuels a Women's Issue?

Because of gender discrimination, women and girls face extreme burdens in times of food shortages and water scarcity. Women—including pregnant and nursing women, who have the greatest need for nutritious food—tend to eat last and least when food is made scarce.⁵ Moreover, as the time-consuming and labor intensive task of gathering and transporting water generally falls to women, their workload increases dramatically when water becomes scarce. One result of this increased burden is that girls' school enrollment drops as they trek longer distances to find water.

Yet, as those charged with meeting their families food needs, women in most communities hold the most reliable knowledge about promoting food sovereignty, preserving threatened food supplies, managing and maintaining water sources, and ensuring their families' survival in the face of shortages.

As the expansion of agrofuel production worsens food and water scarcity, women will continue to bear primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of their families and communities. Women emphasize that governments—and not women at the household level—are the parties legally obligated to ensure people's fundamental needs, including access to food, water, livelihoods, and a decent standard of living, as codified in the Declaration of Human Rights, the Right to Food, and the Economic and Social Rights Covenant.

Moreover, agrofuel plantations impact women differently and disproportionately due to their gendered roles as primary care-takers. For example, women's responsibility for collecting wood for fuel, household water, wild food, and medicinal plants is hindered by agrofuel plantations. Women's livelihoods are further threatened because the few jobs created by agrofuel schemes are almost exclusively offered to men. Women's health is also disproportionately threatened by chemical fertilizers and pesticides that are known health hazards and increasingly used in agrofuel plantations.

Recommendations

In light of the abovementioned points, we call upon governments, international agencies, and all stakeholders to take eight key steps towards gender and climate justice regarding agro/biofuels and mitigation-and-adaptation policies.

1. Pursue policies recognizing that the primary action needed to avert the worst impacts of climate change is a vast reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This can only be achieved by decreasing the overall demand for fuel, not by substituting agrofuels for fossil fuels.
2. Include ecological, consumer behavior, human rights, and gender perspectives in education programs seeking to sensitize citizens and reduce energy consumption and consumption in general.
3. Promote policy coherence to ensure that energy policies are compliant with human rights commitments and with the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), Goal 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) and Goal 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability).
4. Support the call of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food for a five-year moratorium on agrofuel development. The lack of scientific consensus about the net energy provided by agrofuels and the carbon emissions they generate, coupled with the lack of mechanisms to protect the nearly 900 million people who already suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition, warrants a freeze on agrofuel production.
5. Devote resources to the development of truly renewable and sustainable energy sources.

⁵ "Women: The Key to Food Security". International Food Policy Research Institute. June 2000 (Accessed November 6, 2007) <<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/ib/ib3.pdf>>.

6. Protect, respect, and fulfill the four dimensions of food security—availability, access, stability, and utilization—in all decision-making processes and promote food sovereignty.
7. Appoint a Special Rapporteur on Agrofuels, empowered to conduct independent research to collect data on existent soil degradation, water pollution, displacement, human and animal health impacts, loss of biodiversity, and human rights abuses associated with the cultivation of energy commodities, including soy, palm, sugarcane, maize, jatropha, large-scale tree plantations, and others.

More Information

General information, research, and tools to facilitate the global network on gender and climate change: The **gendercc Network – Women for Climate Justice**: www.gendercc.net; listserv at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gender_cc

Information about the UNFCCC and other relevant international, regional and national processes on climate change and women's activities, campaign, research, networking, and tools: Genanet / LIFE e.V. www.genanet.de

General information - MADRE www.madre.org

General information - Women in Europe for A Common Future www.wecf.org

Information, research, and tools on gender and energy: ENERGIA, International Network for Gender and Sustainable Energy: www.energia.org

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) <http://www.awid.org>

"Gender and Food Security". Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <http://www.fao.org/gender/>.

WRM on agrofuels and women and plantations: www.wrm.org.uy

Lambrou, Yianna. "Gender Perspectives on the Conventions: Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification". Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_pe1/pe1_050301a1_en.htm

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