

NGO CSW/NY Monthly Meeting – September 2021
Commission on the Status of Women

Intertwining Crises – Climate Change, COVID-19 and Debt

I attended a Zoom session with speakers from several different organization. The focus was to connect climate change with the COVID pandemic and the debt crisis. The panel featured experts in both climate change and debt.

Mara Dolan, Program and Advocacy Associate of Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), spoke about climate justice. She stated that those who have done the most harm to the environment, are impacted the least. COVID and the climate crisis haven't leveled the playing field; instead, they have exacerbated the disparities. She suggested that we need to heed grass-root feminists and the people on the front lines. Also care work is climate work and we need more support for both. Care jobs are green jobs, since they don't harm the environment in any way.

Lidy Nacpil, Coordinator of the Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development said that many Southern countries have big loans to deal with poverty and development. However, payment of these debts has become more difficult due to COVID. These debts have made more people, communities and women of the South much more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Debt and lending have been an obstacle for pursuing climate solutions. Most of the help that comes from Northern countries, comes in the form of more loans. Ms. Nacpil suggests that we need debt cancellation and systems change, as well as refusal of more loans, so government can work on climate change.

Victoria Diaz Garcia, Programme Specialist, Advocacy and Partnerships, Civil Society Division, UN Women spoke about the impact of COVID on women and girls. Ms. Garcia stated that there has been an increase in violence and unpaid care work. Government-led responses have been significant, but with variations. The main focus has been on violence against women. Community-led responses have often been invisible, unrecorded, hugely significant for low-income communities and largely reliant on women. According to Ms. Garcia, women's organizations fill gaps in essential services, advocate for gender-just policy responses and demand accountability through protests and monitoring. Key challenges have been that lockdowns have closed civic spaces and been used to quell dissent, funding shortages and changing donor priorities put organizations under significant strain and poor working conditions in the not-for-profit sector have been exacerbated by COVID. There have been hiring freezes, layoffs and salary reductions.

The recommendations put forth were:

- Ensure the meaningful participation of women's rights organizations in COVID decision-making;
- Recognize women's rights organizations in essential service providers and promote safe working conditions;
- Sustain and increase funding to support women's rights organizations and
- Safeguard civil society spaces and protect women human rights defenders.

As always with these meetings, the women on the panel were very bright and well-spoken and cared deeply about their roles. As has been said before (but is worth repeating), women must have a "seat at the table" in order for real change to occur.

Respectfully submitted,
Vivian Blumstein