

REFLECTION NOTE

Centering Inclusion as a Key Principle of Collective Advocacy

WOMEN
& GENDER
CONSTITUENCY

* African
* Feminist
* Taskforce

From African Feminist Taskforce to Africa WGC

“The essence of leadership lies in utilizing power transparently, collaboratively, and collectively, while respecting and valuing others. Where better to exemplify this than in a feminist space, which the WGC embodies!” - Zainab Yunusa

INTRODUCTION

The Women and Gender Constituency is one of the nine observer constituencies under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A 2001 decision—the first standalone decision related to gender, 36/CP.7—focused on the participation and representation of women, and “invited parties to give active consideration to the nomination of women to UNFCCC bodies, requested the secretariat to highlight this decision to parties when electing representatives for UNFCCC bodies (and committees) and requested the secretariat to maintain information on the gender composition of UNFCCC bodies.” However, little progress has been registered years later. Thus, the Women and Gender Constituency works to address the dire need to coordinate and support gender advocates to effectively engage in the UNFCCC, and to advocate for gender equality in the context of climate change and within the UNFCCC process.

Following its official status, the WGC charter was developed to provide a mandate, outline the governing structure and lay out a mode of operation, which included setting key principles.

Faced with the realities that not many women’s rights and feminists’ organizations work on climate change or engage in the UNFCCC, the WGC set three tiers of engagement to open spaces for women and gender advocates to engage and benefit from the collective work.

The first tier is WGC members, which is only open to organizations accredited to the UNFCCC and who signed up to uphold the WGC principles. The second tier is the advocacy network, which welcomes any individual or organization who agreed to uphold the WGC principles. And the last tier is the WGC caucus, a space created during Conferences of the Parties (COPs) or Subsidiary Body Conferences (SBs), which welcomes everyone who is interested in collective advocacy to advance gender equality within the UNFCCC. These tiers of engagement often complement each other; folks who come to the morning caucus, especially first-timers, often sign up to join advocacy networks. In turn, some folks in the advocacy network get inspired to become accredited and become WGC members. To date, WGC has 44 members, more than 700 advocates in advocacy networks, and a caucus that hosts on average at least 70 women and gender advocates daily.

While the three tiers of engagement guarantee multiple entry points to the collective advocacy within the WGC, members of the WGC still felt the need to be more intentional in operationalizing principle 6: Participation processes that allow for effective participation of members from all regions and backgrounds of the WGC charter. The shared view was that the WGC needed to be reflective of the diversity of our human race as well as a testimony of our collective identities. In that quest, the WGC started inviting different groups to join the morning caucus to share their agendas and priorities and to celebrate the beauty of our diversity. A dedicated “Indigenous Day” and “Young Feminist Day” were hosted within the WGC for the first time at COP23.

In the lead up to COP25, which was set to be hosted in Peru, the WGC decided to provide dedicated support to Latin American feminists to mobilize, organize, and engage in the COP processes. Unfortunately, one month before COP25, the conference was moved to Madrid, Spain, disrupting efforts to support and stand in solidarity with Latin American feminists. Nevertheless, a number of the feminists were supported to attend the conference in Madrid, and WGC hosted a dedicated session to stand in solidarity with Latin American feminists.

As the WGC prepared to institutionalize its support to regional groupings and continue to nurture a diverse community of feminists and gender advocates, the world was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, which demanded suspension of COP26. A year later, when COP26 was held, advocates from global majority countries faced the usual complications of accessing a visa and the high costs of traveling in the UK combined with health protocols in the middle of vaccine apartheid. Thus, the WGC saw COP27 hosted in Egypt as a unique opportunity for the WGC to move the inclusion needle a step further by creating and resourcing a dedicated African Feminists Taskforce (AFT) which is the focus of this reflection note.

WHAT IS THE AFRICAN FEMINIST TASKFORCE?

In January 2022, a small group of African feminists, mostly advocates with long-standing engagement with the WGC, started the journey of building on the steady work of the WGC towards being more intentionally inclusive. After three months of laying the foundation for the African Feminist Taskforce (AFT) launch, a public call was made through the WGC members and advocacy networks, as well as other allies' platforms, for African feminists to join. Those who wished to join had to identify and align with the WGC principles and be working on the intersection of gender and climate justice. This public call—which was shared in various networks and communities in Africa, especially women's rights and feminists' spaces—inspired more than 150 members to join the Taskforce. As of May 2023, the African Feminist Taskforce (AFT) has more than 170 members self-organizing across movements, geographies, language blocks and thematic areas. While the immediate aim of the Taskforce was to mobilize African feminists ahead of COP27 and ensure their voices, demands, aspirations, and visions were at the center of COP27 processes and outcomes, AFT has become yet another bold step towards operationalization of WGC principle 6.

WHO LED THE AFT? AND HOW DID IT CONNECT WITH THE MAIN WGC?

The Taskforce was led by African feminists, with logistical support from the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) on behalf of WGC. In the lead up to SB56, the WGC launched a travel grant support solely dedicated to African feminists. Members of the WGC Facilitative Committee led the review process to select seven African feminist delegates who would be supported to attend SB56. On the margins of the SB56, the group organized, strategized, and concretized the vision of the AFT. Later, this group of seven became the sounding board and AFT mantra holder.

From April 2022 to January 2023, AFT hosted monthly calls for all members to update on progress and coordinate collective actions. Often these monthly calls resulted in small teams being formed to lead or deliver on specific tasks; for example, teams were formed to conceptualize and develop collective demands, form communication strategies, and organize side events and manifestos. These teams would host their own meetings and workshops as per their mandates and use monthly calls to seek feedback or endorsement from the broader membership.

As the AFT organized in their own space, and on their own terms and conditions, a trustful feedback loop was created for backward and forward communication and support with broader WGC membership. Members of the WGC Facilitative Committee consciously supported AFT members to occupy spaces and speak their truth to power. For example, during SB56 and COP27, most of the WGC formal interventions were delivered by members of the AFT. Importantly, the [27 African Feminist Demands for COP27](#) become the main advocacy tool within the WGC.

WHAT ARE THE KEY GAINS AND OUTCOMES OF THE AFT?

On 12 October, 2022, the Taskforce launched its [27 demands for COP27](#) in six languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, French, and Swahili) via an integrated communications and advocacy strategy. A [virtual webinar](#) anchored the launch, accompanied by a number of national-level, in-person launch events across [13 countries](#). These gatherings allowed feminist advocates to invite diverse stakeholders to watch the virtual event together and engage in a follow-up Q&A session; in Egypt, for example, the launch event included members of the Egyptian Government. On 19 October, the young African feminists in the Taskforce hosted a dedicated [Twitter space](#) to launch the demands towards COP27 from the youth perspective. The demands were highlighted by global partners, including via a takeover of [The Elders Instagram](#) account, a stories spotlight in [Earthrise](#), communications from the Climate Action Network, and a feature on young African feminists in [Dazed Magazine](#).

12 October also marked the kickoff of an associated digital campaign—[#AfricanFeministCOP27](#)—to amplify the voices, demands and aspirations of African women and girls towards COP27 and beyond. Several digital assets were produced, including illustrations of the demands via a [series of quote graphics](#) and three short videos that accompanied the launch of the demands ([conflict and human rights defenders](#), [land rights and ecology](#) and [youth leadership and inclusion](#).) An [Overarching video](#), [“we demand” video](#), and other additional campaign materials can be found in this [link](#).

Prior to this, in Ghana, the African Feminist Taskforce met with gender negotiators for Africa and engaged in intergenerational dialogues, reviewing key gender decisions made by the African Group. They further mapped these gender decisions and found key ways to influence decisions ahead of COP 27 while also networking with these negotiators.

The process resulted in greater understanding, visibility and buy-in of the work of the Taskforce in pushing gender decisions of importance. Some members of the Taskforce who were present formed part of the technical gender negotiators at COP 27.

In the lead up to COP27, AFT published an opinion piece as a curtain raiser communication product, followed by a dedicated AFT press conference in the first days of the climate conference that generated a number of articles—especially in national and regional media. The Taskforce also published an ECO article to amplify African feminist leadership.

At COP27, digital actions were accompanied by a number of onsite actions—including a COP27 African Feminist COP27 Action and Gender Day Celebration—which contributed to the mainstreaming of gender discussions and considerations in Africa. The youth contingent of the AFT also organized a powerful action, and in collaboration with other young feminists across the globe, hosted a “Young Feminist Day” within the WGC.

The African Feminist Day on 8th November was a clear indication of the strong linkages between the broader WGC community, as well as the broader civil society movement. Members of diverse civil society groups wore their green attire to embrace and appreciate African Feminist leadership during COP27.

Of the 60+ media articles that interviewed and quoted members of the WGC—the most coverage the constituency has received at a COP—32 focused on the African Feminist Taskforce. Coverage of the AFT includes prominent dailies such as The Citizen in Tanzania, The Nation in Kenya, and the Daily Maverick in South Africa, as well as regional outlets like AllAfrica, and global outlets such as Reuters. A number of African feminists were also quoted in the joint WGC press release and other media outlets reflecting on the outcome of COP27. A comprehensive list of media coverage and policy gains will be shared in the annual report.

The WGC reached over 300,000 people via social media over the 30 days before and after COP27, generating 34,100 profile views and nearly 1,000 new followers. According to a social listening exercise conducted by the Global Strategic Communications Council (GSCC), “African feminist voices” emerged as the primary topic within the “gender and climate” topic.

WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS?

The WGC feminist inclusion journey has been steadily powered with passion and dedication to build inclusive feminist communities. The systematic building block approach used by WGC for the last 10 years created the conditions necessary for the regional group to mobilize and organize using the WGC resources. Recognizing that to create a truly inclusive WGC is still a long way ahead, key lessons learned from AFT are yet another important building block for the next steps.

Ownership of the Taskforce: For collective self-organizing to happen, members must feel and know with certainty that they own the space. Because of shared ownership and decision-making among members, AFT members provided both technical and political leadership of the Taskforce. WEDO team and WGC members stepped in when called upon to solve problems, share knowledge or provide additional capacities when deemed necessary. At COP27, the Taskforce was a safe space for women and girls in all their diversity.

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Cross movement building: The WGC acknowledged nurturing a movement with strong horizontal (local and across themes) and vertical (regional and global) membership is crucial for the success and sustainability of the movement. The WGC highly benefited from the local and diverse ally movements that engaged and supported the AFT demands and aspirations, and amplified the voices of the African women and girls. In turn, the AFT members benefited from connecting with regional and global organizations in pursuit of gender equality and climate justice.

“The UNFCCC space remains one of the high level convening grounds focused on international negotiations and advocacies around climate change and justice and most at times spaces like that of the UNFCCC are void of the local voices especially that of young women and girls from the communities, many of whom are the ones leading local climate solutions as well as witnessing and experiencing the first hand effects of climate change.

Being part of a feminist collective like the AFT (WGC Africa), we are able to strategize, build momentum, exchange perspectives and connect local actions to global spaces like the UNFCCC.” - Dr. Zoneziwoh Mbongdulo-Wondieh, Women for a Change, Cameroon (Wfac).

The power of unrestricted resources for organizing: While the advancement of technology allowed cost-effective organizing and timely consultation for AFT members, the June and August in-person planning meetings proved to be extremely important in shaping the focus and the direction of the Taskforce. Convenings on the margins of COP27 were momentous in strengthening trust among members—which is crucial for sustained organizing. Digital assets amplified the voices and aspirations of African women beyond the walls of the conference. This work required financial resources that were able to be made available in a timely manner and at the scale needed. Inclusion comes with a financial, logistical, and potentially process cost, and the WGC must be equipped with the resources needed to sustain meaningful and feminist engagements of members.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE AFT AND THE WGC’S INCLUSION JOURNEY?

The WGC is set to use COP28 to jump to the next bold and exciting step in its inclusion journey: **regionalizing the WGC**. The exceptional work led by African feminists—the passion and energy poured into collective organizing on behalf of the feminists in the continent and broader WGC community—will be channeled toward Africa-WGC. While regionalization will cross all regions at different paces and times, the AFT (now Africa WGC) is ready to model the prosperity of collective organizing at the regional level on behalf of the WGC. Informed by decades of internal learning and external observation, the WGC regionalization intends to accomplish four main goals.

1. To lead and support regional collective mobilization and organizing on behalf of WGC.
2. Advance feminist climate justice in the regional and national policy-making processes.
3. Advance feminist climate justice in the regional and national policy-making processes.

Parallel to regionalization work, which is ongoing, the WGC has been mobilizing and supporting feminists from the MENA region to equally and unapologetically own and occupy the WGC and COP28 space as the conference is set to be hosted in their land. A land known for extraction of natural resources and women's labor. Recognizing that engagement of activists from the MENA region has been minimal across civil society platforms, the WGC is making deliberate efforts to reach out and create necessary conditions for engagement, including having consistent Arabic interpreters in most WGC meetings.

“At the heart of our work as Feminists, should be our commitment to increasing the voice, visibility and collective power of women, particularly women excluded and marginalized politically and economically.” – Mela Chiponda.

From the journey traveled thus far, the WGC is aware that rules of engagement need to change to sustain collective gains. This includes challenging the dominant voices in space and supporting them to live the realities of altered power; and fighting against systemic exclusion, invisibility and ideologies that normalize and legitimize exclusion of the women that are on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

“...[We] support societies that empower women -- because no country will reach its potential unless it draws on the talents of our wives and our mothers, and our sisters and our daughters... You can measure how well a country does by how it treats its women.” – President Obama, Cape Town, South Africa, June 30, 2013

“If you've come here to help us, you're wasting your time. But if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with ours, then let us work together.” – Lilla Watson, Australian Aboriginal Elder

The voice of a Black woman should always be HERSELF ... No edits - no erasure - no pressure - no expectations - no additions - no intruders.” – Malebo Sephodi

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.” – Secretary-General Kofi Annan