

# **Responding to Our Changing Climate:** **Consultation on a Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan for** **Wales**

## **1.Introduction**

1.1 Women's Voice, formerly Wales Women's National Coalition is an umbrella group for women's voluntary organisations in Wales. It represents over 75,000 women and over 33 member organisations. These organisations are predominantly national and have a membership consisting mainly of women. Women's Voice works with a wide variety of voluntary sector organisations and represents women from many different backgrounds, from a wide range of ethnic minorities to women graduates. Women's Voice provides its members with support, capacity building, information and consultation on key gender issues at a local, national and international level.

1.2 Women's Voice welcomes the opportunity to consult with the Welsh Assembly Government on a climate change adaptation action plan for Wales. Women's Voice believes that addressing the impact of climate change in Wales is a critical topic and is encouraged to see an action plan being put forward. Our members throughout Wales are concerned about this issue and many are involved in actions trying to decrease the effects of and adapt to climate change. For example the NFWI has been educating women on composting. Women's organisations are key partners for the Assembly to consult with on climate change adaptation. They are well placed to drive forward change and influence and become involved in local, regional and national initiatives.

## **2. Women and Climate Change**

2.1 Women are at the forefront of reactions to climate change due to their multiple roles in today's society. Women are still the main carers and home keepers but they also juggle these roles with full or part time employment. The changes needed to

adapt to climate change on an everyday activity and from an economic and policy driven basis are all relevant to and affecting women constantly. The action plan for adapting to climate change in Wales will affect women in many aspects of their lives and may have different impacts on those of men's. Women's role as carers and home keepers mean that changes such as allocated water usage would affect their daily tasks within the home. Changes in the mode of transport for taking the children to school will affect their ability to work full-time; this will have knock on economic affects within society. It is important that these factors are taken into account when drawing up the actions that need to be taken in Wales.

2.2 It is important that the Welsh Assembly Government consults with grassroots women's groups on all aspects of climate change as they have often been the foundation in putting forward women's progressive views on the environment. Local Women Environment Network groups have been at the forefront of getting hundreds of women involved in mapping breast cancer incidence and sources of environmental pollution. They have persuaded local authorities and health services to provide public information about real nappies and to support Real Nappy Week and started up local organic food growing groups. Groups like, Women's Environmental Network, raise awareness of climate change issues to women and can feedback positive steps to local authorities and services as well as the Assembly. Women are still underrepresented within aspects of decision making and this is the same for environmental areas. There is a lack of women decision makers in local government, where decisions are made about running recycling units or local infrastructures. It is essential to ensure that the newly proposed Local Service Boards, where major local priorities are set, are structured to allow women equal opportunity to be engaged. Women are also not greatly represented within the scientific and research fields on which this consultation is based.

Grassroots women's groups have successfully interwoven environmental consciousness into many of their everyday projects. A good example of this is Women Connect First, a voluntary organisation for black and minority ethnic women, who have incorporated environmental awareness within the recently launched project

‘Empowering Women’, a holistic service which will help BME women into employment and integration within Wales.

2.3 Women are very conscious of the future and are aware of how their actions impact on climate change and recognise the need to change. Women are the main child carers and will pass on their environmental consciousness to the next generation. They are also the main employees in administrative, service industry and caring professions. It is important to ensure women are aware of and are acting in an environmentally beneficial manner. This can be as simple as making women aware of water saving techniques, turning off electrical appliances or ensuring household waste is recycled or composted. These skills can then be passed on to children and help raise the next generations consciousness.

### **3. Strategic Actions**

3.1 The strategic actions put forward in the consultation are a welcome and positive move forward to addressing climate change in Wales. It is vital that the Assembly government consults with the voluntary and community sector on all its actions in establishing a baseline position on climate change. Utilising umbrella bodies such as Women’s Voice, as a key partner, will allow the strategies to be citizen centred. As the actions taken need to be part of everyday activity, the importance of a citizen centred focus is more vital than ever before.

3.2 Point 1.14 *“Carry out research to identify key equality issues arising from climate change in Wales.”*

Women's Voice welcomes the consultations commitment to promote equality and to address differential climate change impacts. It should be ensured that this is integrated within all of the action points. It should not be an end point to the strategic actions as it is within the consultation document, but should be fully integrated into all steps of the adaptation process. The equality strands should be taken into account with any implementation for action on climate change. Different groups will react in

alternative ways and their ability to comply with the actions set out by the Welsh Assembly Government could be affected by, for example, their race, age, gender, disability and class.

3.3 Women's Voice also feels that further research needs to be carried out into the aspect of race equality. Annex C quotes that an initial Race Equality Impact Assessment shows a low relevance result. It may be worth considering how global climate change could impact on inward migration to Wales. It may significantly alter the demographics of Wales. It is therefore vital to have an action plan for any impact this could have on Wales's resources, economy and infrastructure. It would be good to research what immigration is likely to happen and which ethnic groups are likely to arrive in Wales and how they will access services. Women's Voice urges the Welsh Assembly Government to complete a full REIA.

#### **4. Health**

4.1 It is important to breakdown the impacts of climate change on health to see the gender biases. Many of the impacts are going to affect men and women differently. Close scrutiny reveals the groups that are most affected by heat waves are the vulnerable groups of the elderly and infants. Statistics show that women live longer than men and therefore make up the majority of the elderly population. They are also far more likely to be poor in old age due to many employment and related pension schemes. The result is a high demographic of vulnerable older women who are going to be at risk to the affects of climate changes. Women are also more likely to have respiratory illnesses especially within the younger population of 16-44 years. They are more likely to be affected by air pollution and smog that is likely to increase with climate change.<sup>1</sup> Health is not a gender neutral area and when assessing the impact on the health service provided in the context of climate change it is important to be aware of gendered imbalance. A major assessment tool that could be used for this is Gender Budgeting which can provide value for money and improve the effectiveness

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics are taken from *A Statistical Focus on Men and Women in Wales : 2007 Edition*, published by Statistical Policy Unit, Welsh Assembly Government 2007

and transparency of government policy. It would enable policies on climate change and health to fulfil the equality duties.

4.2 There is a clear connection between health risks of climate change and the advantages of education.

The provision of sun protection for children is of vital importance to prevent further rises in skin cancer cases. In order to do this there needs to be links between women as carers of children and education at schools. Mothers and the education system need to work together to ensure children understand the heightened dangers from over exposure to the sun's rays and are provided with adequate protection.

## **5. Buildings and Infrastructure**

5.1 It is necessary that equality strands are taken into account when assessing the impact of infrastructural change. Access is a vitally important aspect of any change in infrastructure for equality strand groups. Women's Voice would particularly like to call reference to point 5.3:

*“Wales Transport Strategy requires future transport plans, programmes and projects to consider the impact of climate change and take appropriate action.”*

We recognise the need to change transport strategies to combat climate change and support action being taken. It is important to be aware of how the transport system is accessed by different groups of people. For example women are more likely to use public transport to travel to work and commute a shorter distance. They also travel at different times of the day due to working part-time. The affect of changing public transport systems and cutting bus services will be felt by women more greatly. Men on the other hand are more likely to be affected by rising air travel costs as they take more business trips and to greater distances.<sup>2</sup> A gender budgeting approach would also be a useful assessment tool here.

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics are taken from *A Statistical Focus on Men and Women in Wales : 2007 Edition*, published by Statistical Policy Unit, Welsh Assembly Government 2007

5.2 Women would be good partners in localising infrastructures as they already travel less distance than men to access amenities. Women are twice as likely to walk to work as men.<sup>3</sup> They do the households main shopping, enabling women to access amenities locally and encouraging them to buy local produce, will reduce their carbon footprint. The localising of resources can be a benefit to the economy as well as reduce carbon emissions. According to the Stern Review the growth and use of biodiversity fuels will allow communities to self sustain their energy supplies and at the same time reduce carbon emissions. It also will reduce the expenditure for vulnerable individuals and reduce fuel poverty with the rise in prices for fossil fuels.

5.2 Poverty will be a major factor in allowing all individuals to react to climate change. Those living in poverty will not be able to afford high water tariffs. The implementation of water meters as a measure to monitor usage must be backed up with a clear commitment that utility companies do not cut water supplies from the poorest households. It is worth noting that cost alone will not necessarily reduce water consumption by those who can afford to pay.

The assembly should be aware that poverty will affect people's ability to react and should monitor the affects accordingly. An impact assessment approach to water management will be vital to ensure equity to water supplies.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 Women's Voice welcomes this strategic plan for adapting to climate change in Wales. We recognise the importance of the need for environmental action. We welcome the move towards encouraging key organisations in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to assess their impacts on climate change and take action to adapt. Women's Voice believes, it is important that the Assembly 'ensures and enables' these key organisations to take action on adapting to climate change and are required to assess their impact on it.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics are taken from *A Statistical Focus on Men and Women in Wales : 2007 Edition*, published by Statistical Policy Unit, Welsh Assembly Government 2007

It is important that the Assembly recognises, especially within the voluntary and community sector, that building the capacity for these organisation to assess and adapt to climate change is vital before insisting that they act but it is time to move beyond encouraging action to ensuring action happens. As the Stern Review has stated “a delay in actions would be dangerous and much more costly than acting now”.

**For any information or queries regarding the content of the above consultation, please contact Gwendolyn Sterk; [gwen-sterk@wwnc.org.uk](mailto:gwen-sterk@wwnc.org.uk) or 029 20 478 919**