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# On the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women

Assessing progress in  
achieving meaningful  
gender-balance  
in environmental  
policy making and  
management

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**Abstract.** This paper reviews the contribution of the Beijing Platform to achieve gender sensitive environmental policy, based on a number of examples covering a range of scales, regions and timings of their inclusion of gender: the EU; the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; IOC-UNESCO's Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development which launches in 2021; and municipalities in Europe responsible for implementing waste reduction initiatives. The broader context of gender mainstreaming provides a critical conceptual and analytical framework.

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It acknowledges some limited and isolated progress, but concludes that, overall, a lack of structural change leaves unequal gender relations broadly intact, while environmental conditions continue to deteriorate.

**Keywords:** climate change, gender mainstreaming, ocean science research, sustainable development, waste reduction.

**No 25.º aniversário da Conferência de Pequim sobre as Mulheres – avaliação dos progressos alcançados no que se refere ao equilíbrio de género na adopção e gestão das políticas ambientais.** *O artigo faz uma avaliação da contribuição da Plataforma de Pequim para uma política ambiental sensível às questões de género, com base numa série de exemplos abrangendo patamares, regiões e momentos de inclusão desta perspectiva: a UE, a Convenção-Quadro das Nações Unidas sobre Alterações Climáticas, a Década das Ciências dos Oceanos para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável da COI-UNESCO, que será lançada em 2021, e os municípios europeus responsáveis pela implementação de iniciativas para a redução de resíduos. O contexto alargado de integração da perspectiva de género constitui o quadro de referência analítico e conceptual, e através dele reconhece-se a existência de algum progresso, embora limitado e isolado; conclui-se, porém, que, em última análise, a falta de uma mudança estrutural faz com que a desigualdade nas relações de género permaneça intacta, ao mesmo tempo que as condições climáticas continuam a deteriorar-se.*

**Palavras-chave:** *alterações climáticas, integração da perspectiva de género, investigação sobre a ciência dos oceanos, desenvolvimento sustentável, redução de resíduos.*



## WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

In Beijing, 1995, The Fourth Platform for Action on Women determined – amongst other things – to ‘promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through the provision of basic education, life-long education, literacy and training, and primary health care for women and children.’ The inclusion of a section on the Environment was itself ground-breaking. Together with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, it identified gender inequality and environmental problems as interlinked, and stressed the need to tackle both in an integrated way. In a dedicated section on the Environment (Area K), the Fourth Platform for Action on Women (hereinafter referred to as the Platform) noted women’s essential role in the development of ecologically sound consumption and production patterns, and in natural resource management. It also noted women’s particular vulnerability to ‘resource depletion, the degradation of natural systems and pollution’. The recognition that poverty and environmental degradation are closely linked, requires that women, more of whom fall within categories of poverty than men, are likewise recognised as especially vulnerable.

Area K also identified the gendered health impacts of environmental degradation.

It anticipated the potential for, particularly rural, women to make a positive contribution to sustainable development through their roles as main care giver in the family and as managers of subsistence resources, citing Agenda 21’s commitment to integrate environmental sustainability with gender equality and intergenerational justice (United Nations, 1992). Area K observed that women were either marginalised or ‘largely absent from all levels of policy formulation and decision making in natural resource and environmental management’ across a range of sectors and institutions. This is despite that at the grass roots women have knowledge and experience regarding local environmental management. By associating women’s expertise with a more ‘holistic, multidisciplinary and intersectional approach’ needed for sustainable development, the Platform argued that ‘[w]omen’s experiences and contributions to an ecologically sound environment must...be central to the agenda for the twenty-first century’,

and that '[s]ustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognised and supported.' As a way of ensuring this, the Platform called for actively and visibly mainstreaming a gender perspective, and agreed two 'Strategic Objectives' for the environment in which:

1. Women should be actively involved in environmental decision making at all levels (K1);
2. Gender concerns and perspectives should be integrated into policies and programmes for sustainable development (K2).

These strategic objectives, and their justification, beg a number of questions twenty five years after they were established, which this paper attempts to address:

- I. Are women now actively involved in environmental decision making at all levels?
- II. Are gender concerns and perspectives integrated into policies and programmes for sustainable development?  
and
- III. If these two objectives have been achieved, is this leading to sustainable development being less elusive?

## CASE STUDIES

To address these questions, I draw on material from a number of sources which are useful at various scales. To explore the integration of women in global environmental programmes I examine the inclusion of gender in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since it entered mainstream UNFCCC discourse in 2011. I then explore the later decision of the IOC-UNESCO to embed gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable

Development from 2021. I speculate on this from the position of an ‘insider’ as I have been recruited as a gender expert for an early phase of this work<sup>(1)</sup>.

For the regional scale, I draw on EIGE’s (European Institute for Gender Equality) assessment of how far the goals of Area K have been achieved in the European Union in 25 years<sup>(2)</sup>. To represent the local scale I draw on an EU Horizon 2020 Innovations project in waste reduction which integrated gender mainstreaming from early project design to final evaluation, and included gender mainstreaming training<sup>(3)</sup>. This project worked with municipalities in 11 cities across 8 European countries, and the awareness of gender in these municipalities is likely to be transferable across municipal functions.

Clearly, these specific areas do not approach the full range of environmental initiatives and agreements, amongst which the Millennium Development Goals since 2000, replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals running from 2015 to 2030 are important. SDG 5 on Gender Equality should inform each of the other 16 goals. SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production); SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) are particularly relevant to this discussion as they relate to waste reduction, climate change and ocean science for sustainability respectively, and a reflection on progress on these goals is included as appropriate. But it is worth noting here that the UN Secretary General announced in 2019 that ‘It is abundantly clear that a much deeper, faster and more ambitious response is needed to unleash the social and economic transformation needed to achieve our 2030 goals.’

## CHANGES IN GENDER EQUALITY AND CARBON EMISSIONS SINCE 1995

First it is important to explore what changes have taken place regarding ‘sustainable development’ and environmental problems during the past 25

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1 Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (ICO) comes under the umbrella of UNESCO – the United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization. The World Maritime University has been commissioned to undertake research to further gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Decade, to which I have been appointed the External Gender Expert. <https://www.wmu.se/empowering-women>.

2 I was an External Expert reviewing Area K on the Environment for Beijing + 25 (EIGE, 2020).

3 I was the Gender Auditor for the *Urban Waste* Grant Agreement Number: WASTE-6a-2015 690452.

years. Sustainable development has always been a problematic concept as it is a contradiction in terms. For a while in the 2000s and early 2010s, the term 'resilience' gained traction, which prioritised adaptation over mitigation. However, by the later 2010s it was becoming increasingly apparent that the world was fast reaching a tipping point, as global carbon emissions had increased substantially from 23.4 billion tonnes in 1995 to 36.2 billion tonnes in 2017 (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). Linked to carbon emissions, global temperatures have been steadily warming since the 1980s (by 0.1 to 0.3° centigrade a decade), and the five years up to 2019 have been the warmest on record (WMO, 2019). Ocean acidity is 26% higher than in pre-industrial times and is projected to increase by 100% to 150% by 2100 at the current rate of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (UN, 2019). In 2019 some national governments, and many local governments, were proclaiming climate and biodiversity emergencies and committing to responding to these, though few have been able to identify just how. The 2019 SDG assessment of goals relevant to this paper are that levels of carbon dioxide concentration continue to increase, the pace of poverty decline is starting to decelerate; global hunger is again on the rise after a prolonged decline; and women and girls still face barriers to achieving equality.

Just as the world was psychologically adjusting to treating global warming and its likely and actual impacts and wondering how to manage this, the pandemic Covid-19 forced countries into lock-downs which, at the time of writing, have a very uncertain outcome, but which should require us all to demand a very different way of living in which social (including gender) justice and environmental care are central. The UN is concerned that any gains which have been made towards gender equality since the Beijing Platform for Action, are potentially under threat and that the impacts of Covid-19 are exacerbating women's and girl's vulnerable situations (UN, 2020). While this UN report does not identify environment as a specific field, the areas it does focus on – gendered violence, economy, health, unpaid care, and human rights – all contribute to the relationship between gender and the environment. It is important to note that the global gender gap is still marked, and while some improvements have been made, these are precarious and volatile. The Gender Inequality Index reports that gender inequality has dropped from a world average of 0.547 in 1995 to 0.439 in 2018, but this disguises increases in gender inequality in some countries

(Chad, Papua New Guinea, Uzbekistan and Yemen) and flat lining in others (Sao Tome and Principe and South Africa) (UNDP, 2019).

Before turning to the specific areas I have chosen to assess, I examine the progress and limitations of a key outcome of the Platform: gender mainstreaming.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is arguably one of the most memorable outcomes of the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations World Conference on Women, and it has informed many environmental programmes. A number of UN and some other international programmes with environmental mandates (such as C40Cities) have adopted gender mainstreaming, but with differing degrees of enthusiasm by individual member states. The OECD notes that member states do not routinely undertake gender impact assessment, nor do they consistently collect gender disaggregated environment data (13 and 7 countries respectively, out of 36; OECD, 2020).

The nature of the institutions adopting gender mainstreaming influences their motivations with, for example, international development banks noting better financial returns when gender mainstreaming is applied (World Bank, 2019). Such adoptions appear to be highly instrumental to furthering neoliberal policies which are inherently unequal, while elsewhere the motivation to adopt gender mainstreaming may be more mixed. Here, gender mainstreaming can be seen to have a dual role which, if effectively implemented, requires that women should have equal rights to men (for example, to participate in careers and in civic engagement), and that operational benefits accrue to organisations which strive to achieve gender balance in decision making. Grosser and Moon have argued that gender mainstreaming benefits the corporate social responsibility agenda, “simultaneously good for both business and wider society” (Walby, 2005, p. 457).

Mieke Verloo was positive about the aims of gender mainstreaming to prioritize the lives and experiences of individuals; in its potential to lead to better government, to involve women as well as men; in acknowledging the diversity amongst men and women; and to make gender equality issues visible “in the mainstream of society” (1999, p. 8). However, as a



tool, gender mainstreaming is likely to reflect the values which underpin the organisation implementing it. The EU has been observed to strategically frame the concept of gender mainstreaming within a discourse of competitiveness and employment policies (Vida, 2017) and this may have contributed to criticisms of the EU's use of gender mainstreaming, including its reliance on 'soft' strategies such as training, for implementing gender sensitivity. Moreover, those expected to implement and 'police' gender mainstreaming are not always well equipped to do so (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014). Verloo has also been sceptical that sufficient expertise existed amongst professionals to challenge prevailing discourses, and to align the necessary interests from those "at the top" with those "down under" (1999, p. 8). While Verloo's conclusion is now 20 years old, similar observations continue to be registered, despite the substantial body of expertise provided by feminists, consultants and trainers, which informs development policy and practice (Prugl, 2013). Minto and Mergaert (2018) remain unconvinced that gender mainstreaming is institutionally embedded within the EU, observing a lack of resources for comprehensive gender mainstreaming training and a lack of gender mainstreaming in evaluation at an institutional level. These technical difficulties associated with gender mainstreaming are compounded by ideological difficulties.

As global institutions have utilised 'gender mainstreaming' and employed higher numbers of women, a liberal version of feminism – individualised and femocratic – appears to have been co-opted as, in Nancy Fraser's words, capitalism's 'handmaidens' (2013). Her concept of 'misframing' illustrates how structural gender differences are diluted into differences in cultural gender identities. Penny Griffin examines 'the promotion of co-opted, governance-friendly, 'feminist knowledge' which can be applied to international political as well as economic activity. She specifically refers to how a 'crisis governance feminism' is 'a form of feminist strategy friendly to existing neo-liberal governance and supportive of the resuscitation of neo-liberal global finance' (Griffin, 2015, p. 51). In the development context, Bernadette Resurreccion and Rebecca Elmhirst note how gender mainstreaming is 'streamed away' as it is framed 'through a neoliberal discourse with a vocabulary of effectiveness, efficiency, impact assessment and 'smart' economics [which] diminishes any power to address feminist

agendas' (Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2020, forthcoming). They explore the tensions that gender experts face as they seek transformative social change while the technical-environmental contexts in which they work demand easy solutions and technical fixes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the need to address climate change both at the global scale and in local and sectoral organisations, where the transformative potential of feminism offers at least the possibility to make real and lasting change.

That gender mainstreaming has not been transformative is found in the persistence of gender inequality, and the disproportionate impact on women of the global financial crisis (Griffin, 2015), and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic (EIGE, 2020; UN, 2020). Griffin quotes Otto as arguing that 'crises everywhere are a particularly dangerous time for feminism, and indeed for all progressive ways of thinking' (Griffin, 2015, p. 58).

Griffin characterises a form of influential international decision-making through groupings of individual states (G7, G20), supra-national bureaucracies (European Union), intergovernmental organisations (World Bank and IMF), and UN agencies as 'neo-liberal global governance' (Griffin, 2015, p. 53). She particularly focuses on recent global financial crises, and the international financial sector which, for centuries has been 'dominated not just by men but by dominant models of behaviour that have concentrated historical privilege in the hands of white men' (Griffin, 2015, p. 55). The persistence of such 'masculine subjectivities' encouraged Virginia Held to cite Carol Gilligan's argument that women who 'advance occupationally learn to think like men' (Held, 2006, p. 27), implying the existence of a dominant masculinity in occupational structures. A similar observation has also been made by Magnusdottir & Kronsell (2015) in their research into climate change planning policy making in Swedish municipalities. They observed that numerical balance between women and men in this policy area did not appear to make a difference, and proposed that this may be because women policy makers had been trained in the same masculinised structures as their male colleagues. Beth Bee's analysis of REDD+ in Mexico illustrates how the appointment of urban senior professional women to the national programme ENAREDD+ has done little to promote the needs and interests of rural women who do not own land. She also reports that women are appointed as legal representatives in order to score the points now needed for successful forestry applications, but that

while they can participate as agents of change they can just as likely be included instrumentally, as signers of forms under the guidance of male figures of authority (Bee, 2017). Bee's work shows clearly how an emphasis on numerical parity does not, in itself, secure social equality. The EU refers to descriptive and substantive equal representation, which recognises that while equal numbers are important to achieve a critical mass to provide a decision making environment in which both women and men have the confidence to make effective interventions that are respectfully received, it is not in itself sufficient (EIGE, 2015). This is worth bearing in mind as we consider the success or otherwise of selected examples of how gender and environment have been integrated.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

**The European Union.** Comprehensive gender mainstreaming legislation was enacted in the EU in 1996. The European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) oversees issues pertaining to gender across the EU. This includes providing resources and training on gender mainstreaming and otherwise achieving gender equality. EIGE's assessment of progress, or otherwise, on gender and environment in its fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is damning; reporting that 'gender mainstreaming is strikingly weak within the EU's environmental policies'. (EIGE, 2020a, p. 18)

In EIGE's review of the Platform it is found that

Currently, women remain under-represented in environmental policymaking, planning and implementation' (European Parliament, 2017d). Women are also substantially under-represented in key sectors such as energy; transport; water and waste; and agriculture, forestry and fishery. The low level of gender diversity in the energy sector is considered to affect innovation and restrict efforts to address climate change (Vaughan, 2018). (EIGE, 2020b, p. 128)

Not only are women under-represented in environmental decision making, but environmental policy areas are found to lack gender sensitivity or any kind of gender perspective. (EIGE, 2020b). The EIGE report notes that

EU climate change policy remains largely gender blind, citing the environmental action programme, EU energy policy, 2015 Energy Union strategy and 2016 clean energy for all Europeans policy framework. This is also true for the EU's European Green Deal designed to 'reset the Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges'. The document, which exceeds 13,500 words, does not mention gender or women once (EC, 2019). So while there is some progress noted in the use of gender impact assessments on environmental policies, and a requirement for gender awareness in Horizon 2020 research and innovations projects (although as this author knows from working on one, the expertise in evaluating this is lacking), overall the EU has a long way to go to embed gender equality across its environmental work. As the consideration of gender mainstreaming waste reduction initiatives in European municipalities will later show, there are regional variations. For example, EIGE reports that gendered perspectives in national energy and climate plans are more advanced in Finland and Spain.

These under-representations are not, however, reflected in the delegates to the UNFCCC of EU member states. As the section below documents, the UNFCCC requires signatory states to increase the proportion of women in their delegates to the Convention, and EU member states have achieved this, on average. But the gender balance of delegates does not reflect the EU proportion of women government ministers dealing with environment climate change, energy and transport, which in 2018 was only a fifth (21.6 %), compared with 30.2 % of all ministers (EIGE, 2020a).

The poor representation of women in government departments responsible for environmentally related portfolios, and in the associated industries, is likely to contribute to the 'largely fragmented' integration of a gender perspective in EU environmental policy. This fragmentation has led to EU commitments on gender equality in climate change and other environmental legislation failing to be concretised into actions (EIGE, 2020a).

This apparent dissonance between gender balanced delegations and propensity to enact gender sensitive climate change policy, or to have national gender balanced climate change decision making in signatory states, is important to bear in mind when exploring the gender actions in international climate change policy.

**Gender mainstreaming in municipalities – the case of waste reduction.** Waste management is a highly male-dominated and masculinist profession, as evident from Table 1. From 2016 to 2019 the *Urban Waste* Innovation project funded by the European Commission under Horizon2020 sought to gender mainstream (as part of a wider project on tourist cities) the setting up, development and evaluation of waste reduction initiatives in 11 pilot cities of various sizes and characterised by different kinds of natural contexts, in 8 countries across the EU<sup>(4)</sup>.

To start with, it was virtually impossible to establish baseline gender data. As suggested by the OECD above, and despite the EU requirements of gender mainstreaming, gendered employment data at sector level is still not comprehensive (if available at all), and there is no cross-EU comparison of gendered employment in waste management. The OECD data is only available for 5 of *Urban Waste's* 8 case study countries, and it does not break down jobs by seniority, although from data elsewhere it is probably safe to assume that senior decision making and technical jobs are more likely to be held by men (see also Buckingham et al, 2005; EY, 2016), just as they are across science and research-related jobs (European Commission, 2019), and in the energy sector (Catalyst, 2018; IRENA, 2019).

**Table 1** – Employment by gender in water supply, sewerage, waste management & remediation activities, 2017

COUNTRY	MALE (%)	FEMALE (%)
Denmark	96,000 (72.2%)	37,000 (27.8%)
Greece	212,000 (77.4%)	62,000 (22.6%)
Italy	2,015,000 (87.5%)	287,000 (12.5%)
Portugal	286,000 (78.4%)	79,000 (21.6%)
Spain	1,128,000 (84.2%)	244,000 (17.8%)

Source: OECD, 2017

4 The pilots comprised: Cyprus (Nicosia); Denmark (Copenhagen); Dubrovnik (Croatia); France (Nice); Italy (Florence and Siracusa); Kavala (Greece); Portugal (Lisbon and Ponta Delgada); Spain (Santander and Tenerife).

The EU's own Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) for the environment (which includes waste management) makes no reference to gender (Dri et al., 2018), although studies and reports, including those from the sector itself, have stated the importance of a gender sensitive perspective (Charrington, 2017; EY 2016).

The 8 countries which participated in the *Urban Waste* project had different profiles of women in paid work, and experience of overall gender equality. Discussion of the project's findings on gender suggests that these experiences may have had a material impact on their enthusiasm to acknowledge and address gender inequality. It was apparent that the level of knowledge about gender amongst most project participants was low, and there were many misconceptions (including over-estimations) about the extent of gender equality in participants' own countries and organisations. In some cases there was initial indifference. Using the outcomes of the baseline data collected, we identified that cities fell into one of the following: (i) already or almost immediately gender aware, which to a large extent informed processes and outcomes; (ii) developed gender awareness which impacted positively on the process; (iii) developed a modest gender awareness but with limited or no impact on the process; (iv) insistently gender denying, with no impact on outcomes.

From the outset, gender mainstreaming was signalled as a key dimension of the project which all partners were expected to incorporate. Indeed, it was a feature of the initial proposal and commended by the European Commission representative assigned to the project, aware of a lack of gender expertise in the Innovations programme (EC, pers comm). Recognising the low level of gender awareness and gender expertise amongst most participants, training was provided early on to build gender-awareness. The Danish partner provided input into this as Copenhagen's degree of gender awareness was significantly higher than other partners. This session was followed by other training events, including three gender webinars, which focused on gender sensitive communication, budgeting and reporting.

The evidence from this project is material to the discussion here as it signals that, almost 25 years after the EU enacted gender mainstreaming legislation subsequent to the Platform, awareness of this is by no means ubiquitous. After a sustained period of 3 years of training and

collaboration, the uptake was patchy, with results which varied between enthusiasm and resistance, as categorised above. It was, however, noticeable that there was some (though not complete) correspondence between offices which enthusiastically worked towards gender equality in the project and which achieved the greatest greenhouse gas emission reductions (Buckingham, 2020).

## INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

**UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.** It is notable that international climate change legislation was very slow to address gender equality in both impact and representation, despite the agreed Platform for Action on Women, and UNCED. Even though Agenda 21 had identified women as a major stakeholder group, it was almost the last of these to be included in UNFCCC considerations – receiving full constituency status in 2011, but only after considerable lobbying by a network of women’s organisations (Morrow, 2017). The inclusion of gender had been preceded by every other major stakeholder group except farmers and agriculture NGOs, with, for example, indigenous peoples being recognised in 2001 and young people in 2009 (Morrow, 2017).

In 2014 the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) established the first Lima work programme on gender<sup>(5)</sup> (LWPG) to advance gender balance and integrate gender considerations into the work of Parties and the secretariat in implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement. It was hoped that this would lead to a more gender responsive climate policy and action. COP 22 in 2016 decided on a three-year extension of the LWPG and this was duly reviewed in 2019<sup>(6)</sup>. The first gender action plan (GAP) was established at COP 23. It is interesting to note that these actions have been put into place at a time when the UNFCCC was led by Christiana Figueras as Executive Secretary (2010-2016) who is not only a woman, but is avowedly feminist and expressed her commitment to address continuing gender inequality in the climate change regime

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5 Decision 18/CP.20.

6 Decision 21/CP.22.

(Morrow, 2017). In an interview after her term ended, Figueras reflected on her management style which embraced collective leadership, deep listening and the importance of recognising the influence of masculinities and femininities (Figueras, 2018).

At COP 25 Parties agreed a 5-year enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan<sup>(7)</sup>, with priority given to:

- a) Capacity Building, Knowledge Management and Communication;
  - b) Gender balance, participation and women's leadership;
  - c) Coherence;
  - d) Gender response implementation and means of implementation;
  - e) Monitoring and reporting.
- (UNFCCC, 2019a, p. 4)

An annual gender composition report is required and a review of the various bodies which have consistently featured in every year reveals a volatile picture in which only one body – the Adaptation Committee – has shown a steady increase in its percentage of women members and which now has a majority (56%) of women members (see Table 2). Five other bodies have increased their percentage of women members between 2013 and 2019, but not consistently over the 7 years of recording. Four have recorded a decrease in the proportion of women, but also with a degree of volatility over time. One ended up with the same proportion of women as it started with. The COP in 2018 recorded the highest increase in the proportion of women overall, but this has not been uniformly sustained. Table 2 demonstrates the need to look at the data over time as annual changes can be deceptive. Indeed, the draft decision on the Gender and Climate Change proposal in 2019 highlights ‘the persistent lack of progress in and the urgent need for improving the representation of women in Party delegations and constituted bodies’ (UNFCCC, 2019a, p. 2).

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7 Decision 3/CP.25.



**Table 2** – Gender composition of constituted bodies established under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement

Body	% F 2019	Change in % 2018-19	Change in % 2017-18	Change in % 2016-17	Change in % 2015- 2016	Change in % 2014- 2015	Change in % 2013- 2014	% F 2013
Adaptation Committee	56	+6	+6	+4	+15	0	+5	20
Adaptation Fund Board	27	-6	+12	-6	-3	-3	0	31
CC Enforce- ment Branch	20	-2	+12	0	0	0	-10	20
CC Facilitative Branch	30	+8	-22	0	0	0	+29	11
CDM Exec Board	10	0	0	0	0	-10	0	20
Consultative Group of Experts	33	-15	+10	-14	+19	-10	-9	52
CTCN AB	38	0	+25	-12.5	+19	-7	0	13
Joint Imple- mentation Supervisory Committee	38	-2	+10	-10	0	0	0	40
LDC Advisory Group	39	0	+24	0	0	0	0	15
Standing Committee on Finance	32	-8	+15	-7	-3	0	+10	25
Technology Executive Committee	30	+1	+5	0	+10	-10	+4	11

Sources: UNFCCC Conference of the Parties 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019b.

Table 3 shows a fairly static picture as regards the proportion of women delegates to the Conference of the Parties, as well as the proportion of women heads of delegations.

**Table 3** – Conferences of the Parties Delegates

	COP24	COP23	COP22	COP21	COP20	COP19
<b>% Women Delegates</b>	38	37	32	32	36	36
<b>% Women Heads of Delegation</b>	27	24	27	20	26	nd

**Sources:** UNFCCC Conference of the Parties 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019b.

Kate Wilkinson Cross argues that the UNFCCC has adopted a rather superficial approach to introducing a concern with gender. It is top-down and arguably instrumental and, as Wilkinson Cross also states, it has not engaged with the ‘transformative potential of the participation of women’ (Wilkinson-Cross, 2018, p. 51). She contrasts this with the more inclusive and participatory approach of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Gender Plan of Action of the UNCCD, argues Wilkinson Cross, has a more transformative approach towards ‘gender recognition and gender mainstreaming’ starting, as it does, from a recognition of the structural barriers facing women (Wilkinson-Cross, 2018, p. 28-29). In 2017, Karen Morrow noted the minimal progress made in increasing parity between men and women in UNFCCC constituent bodies, and wondered whether this was merely slow progress, or a false dawn (Morrow, 2017). As noted above, while 2018 seems to have been a year in which more marked progress was made towards gender balance, this has not been sustained, and in some cases, as Table 2 demonstrates, it has regressed.

While international organisations agree frameworks for gender equality, they are only effective when adopted by signatories to the agreement. Adopting measures is one necessary step, but unless these are acted upon at the national level they remain aspirational. NGOs are beginning to challenge national decisions in the courts on the basis of international instruments. With regard to gender, a group of senior women – *KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz*

– brought a case against four government authorities in Switzerland claiming that their health, specifically as older women, was negatively impacted by the Swiss governments' failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to comply with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (Bahr et al, 2018). Although they ultimately lost their appeal against a negative judgement, there is hope that cases like this might become more successful in future, particularly since the UK Government's plan to allow the building of a third runway at London's Heathrow Airport was successfully challenged on the basis that it undermines the UK's commitment to the Paris Climate Change Agreement (Carrington, 2020).

### **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.**

Sustainable Development Goal 14 on Life Below Water makes no reference to gender equality or women's empowerment, or to SDG5, and this may be one contributor to the lack of attention to gender issues across international ocean instruments. Ten years later than the UNFCCC recognised gender as a particular constituency, and gender equality as a desideratum, this is now being adopted by the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development due to begin in January 2021 (sponsored by IOC-UNESCO). The draft Implementation Plan of the Decade states a desire to recognise gender diversity for ocean science to be transformative and gender balance is said to be a cross-cutting theme across all sectors. At the time of writing, however, gender considerations are concentrated in the area of capacity development. UNESCO has made gender one of its two main priorities since 2008, and while the IOC (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) is aligned with UNESCO, its stated commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is not evident in a number of its programmes. A research programme, the results of which aim to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in ocean science and governance, is currently mapping the state of gender awareness throughout global institutions with an oceans remit and finds that sex disaggregated data are rarely available, and that a commitment to gender equality is not well embedded throughout institutions. Equally, the draft text of the new Agreement on Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), which is being negotiated at the UN under the Law of the Sea Convention, fails to present gender equality and the empowerment of women scientists as

goals in their own right or as central to capacity building. Nevertheless, Long (2020) suggests that there may be scope for the negotiators to include additional gender equality provisions into the draft Agreement before the intergovernmental conference concludes in 2021.

A frequently cited, but unreliable, figure of women constituting 38% of ocean scientists, drawn from dubious sources, is repeatedly used within international marine organisations to justify their performance regarding gender sensitive employment. However, the Global Ocean Science report notes few women in senior professional or management professions.

Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry cites the Maritime Labour Convention (2006) as taking some early steps to eliminate harassment and bullying at sea, including providing separate sleeping quarters and sanitary provisions for women and men seafarers and promoting gender neutral terminology, but she argues that women's career opportunities need expanding, including maternity protection. It is notable that of women employed in maritime jobs, 94% are employed in the cruise industry, and those are primarily in catering and cleaning jobs (Doumbia-Henry, 2019). Barriers to female scientists working at sea have also been found by a European Union Horizon2020 funded project *Baltic Gender*.

*Baltic Gender* was devised to explore the barriers to women's participation in marine research, and their promotion to senior posts. As the project comes to a close, recommendations to change this culture are being put forward through the development of teaching and research guides for research and higher education institutions conducting marine research. One of the findings is the unequal and gendered division of care whereby women with prime caring responsibilities are less able to work at sea, or overseas, and that this hampers career progression (Baltic Gender, 2020). And while some positive changes have occurred in the 8 participating institutions around the Baltic Sea, this has taken four years of a dedicated gender mainstreaming programme and a network of staff paid to administer this. In reporting some of the outcomes of *Baltic Gender*, the European Commission observes a continuing gender pay gap in the sector, and few women in leadership and technical roles (EC, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper opened with three questions based on the Platform's strategic objectives. Whether women are now actively involved in environmental decision making at all levels; whether gender concerns and perspectives are integrated into policies and programmes for sustainable development; and, if these two objectives have been achieved, is this leading to sustainable development being less elusive?

Based on the examples provided here, the conclusion has to be that progress in achieving the Beijing Platform for Action is very limited, and even where this has been noted, it cannot be assumed to be secure, as concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic have drawn attention to.

Several responses to the Platform's requirement for gender mainstreaming can be noted. The first is that it is effectively ignored. This can be seen to have been the case with the International Law of the Sea and with international climate change legislation until 2011. Other institutions have adopted some aspects of gender but not all. Following Lombardo and Mergaert's analysis, in some municipalities governing waste management there can be seen to be active resistance. The second response is to accept a modicum of action towards gender equality, but without aiming for significant change. Again this was evident from work with some municipalities, some maritime organisations, and arguably this is the case with the UNFCCC's requirement for constituent bodies and delegations to be gender balanced. A third response is enthusiasm for greater gender equality as it enables organisations to achieve other goals of, for example, operational efficiency or sustainable development. This is, as Nancy Fraser, and Penny Griffin both describe, the co-option of feminism or gender mainstreaming into the broader neoliberal project. Arguably this underlies many of the international instruments as they are currently applied, and it also helps to justify gender sensitive measures at the municipal level. Finally, a transformative approach, as Resurreccion and Elmhirst suggest is possible in the development context, is furthest from being adopted. Little evidence for this has been found in the published and empirical data used for this paper. While IOC-UNESCO mentions gender equality as one of the ways in which a transformative approach can be developed towards ocean science for sustainable development, there is currently nothing further than a

single statement that shows how this can be possible. Perhaps the greatest potential for international instruments to be transformative is how, once they are agreed, they can be used to hold national governments to account.

As review data from EIGE and OECD showed for the countries most able to make a real difference in gender equality, there is a lack of data, and a lack of progress. The empirical and published data reviewed here also shows a marked lack of vertical and horizontal coherence whereby successful gender initiatives in the environmental field do not necessarily translate through different layers of governance, nor from one instrument to another. Gender mainstreaming initiatives seem to have to be continuously reinvented to overcome institutional, and individual, lacunae in knowledge and interest.

Overall, this review finds little evidence that, 25 years since the determination to achieve gender equality in environmental decision making, women are now actively involved in this at all levels, nor that gender concerns and perspectives are integrated into policies and programmes for sustainable development. However, at the local level, some evidence has been found for greater gender equality to be coexistent with greater sustainability – as others have found at the state level (Ergas and York, 2012). While this cannot be said to be definitive, it is not a reason to stop trying. It is, after all, notable that the efforts to create a transformative ‘Green New Deal’ to respond to the various environmental emergencies facing humanity are being championed, above all, by women from Caroline Lucas (UK, MP) Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (US Congresswoman) and Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand Prime Minister) to Greta Thunberg, not to mention the multitudes of women who form the core of many environmental movements worldwide.

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