

# The Danish Family Planning Association at COP24: How battling climate change contributes to women's liberation

*Sustainable Development*

**COP24 is both about street activism and parliamentarianism. But at the climate conference in Poland, there is also space for the Danish Family Planning Association's work on gender equality and the right to decide over one's own body.**

A dark and heavy cloud hangs over Katowice in Poland. The city, which is placed at the center of the coal industry belt, is hosting this year's climate conference, the COP24, where more than 28.000 delegates, experts, NGOs, activists and journalists from all over the world have gathered to follow the negotiations of making the Paris Agreement become reality.

In the corridors, climate activists from across the world call for the attention of the participants, saying that developing countries should not have to pay the price for the polluters in the rich countries. Meanwhile, the negotiation leaders power walk up and down the aisles, from one meeting to the next to make their imprints on the negotiation texts, which were finally adopted on Dec. 15th.

The Danish Family Planning Association (DFPA) is at COP24 to make the case that battling climate change must include consideration of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment – including sexual and reproductive health and rights – as well as population dynamics in some developing countries:

*- We are here to support the call made by many other stakeholders about the unfairness of the poorest countries having to suffer from the effects of climate change that stems from many years of irresponsible and unsustainable production and consumption in the richest countries. And the most vulnerable population groups – including women and girls – in the poorest countries should at least not also have to fight gender inequality, a lack of basic health services and violations of sexual and reproductive health and rights including unmet needs for modern contraceptives, making it even more difficult for them to resist climate changes and adapt to their consequences, says Cristina Hanson, International Director at DFPA, and continues:*

*- The consequences of climate changes are not gender neutral. Women and girls are much more vulnerable to climate change due to existing patriarchal, political and economic structures in many*



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*countries, which amongst other things prevent girls and women from deciding over their own bodies and fertility.*



When there are fewer natural resources available, the fight for them becomes tougher. We see this especially in the countries, where wealth is low. In many places now suffering from the effects of climate change, the high and rapid population growth from lack of fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights entails an increased pressure on natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity, which taken together with the effects of climate change make it more difficult for people to adapt and be resilient.

### **Women in Asia take up the fight**

At this year's COP, the DFPA launched WORTH – Women & Earth Initiative – together with Asian-Pacific partner; ARROW, to pave the way for environmental and climate change NGOs to increase their awareness about interlinkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights and climate change adaptation and resilience and developed innovative ways to integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights considerations for girls and women in their climate responses.

You can read more about the WORTH Initiative on our website: [www.worthinitiative.org](http://www.worthinitiative.org)

In many Asian countries, women and girls in particular suffer from the effects of climate change. Joan Castro, who is a trained doctor and the vice general secretary of the PATH Foundation in the Philippines has

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vast experience with working with poor women in the small fishing communities of the country:

- *The Filipino women are fighting the consequences of the climate changes, such as floods and fewer fish to catch. Many of the women are very poor and it is not uncommon for poor women in the deserted areas of the Philippines to have maybe eight children, partly because they lack contraception. Many young girls drop out of school, because they need to help their mothers with taking care of the younger children or the fishery of the family. And some of the girls end up travelling to the bigger cities and become involved in the sex industry, because they do not have enough money to survive, and they have not finished their education so they cannot get a proper job with a proper salary. My biggest motivation is to give these women in small, poor areas the opportunity to fend for themselves, she says.*



As a doctor, Joan Castro started working with young women in the sex industry. Now, her NGO the Path Foundation helps them understand that they have a right to decide if they want children, provides them with information and education, and helps them secure a stable income.

### **From the Philippines to Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, Shaila Shahid is a lawyer and climate activist who works through the NGO called Gender & Water Alliance to ensure that issues related to gender and equality are integrated into climate politics:

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*-The government of Bangladesh has taken important steps in the direction to recognize women's fight for equality and reproductive rights, but now the challenge is to proceed from this national, political recognition towards changing the everyday lives of women in the countryside. Many women in Bangladesh are vulnerable to catastrophes like floods or if they lack water because of droughts. It is the task of women and girls to fetch clean water, and that usually takes 2-5 hours, and on the way they are often assaulted or raped, she says and continues:*

*- Women and girls in Bangladesh are often either malnourished or lack the right nutrition, because they are fed last, when the family eats dinner. This mal- and undernourishment, poor sanitary conditions and lack of clean water affects girls in particular. Due to cultural norms, they do not have the same access to a doctor as men do, and they lack for instance sanitary towels and access to clean water, when they are menstruating. Therefore, many girls miss parts of their education, because they do not want to be teased, when they are bleeding at school and need sanitary towels and proper toilet facilities.*



Gender & Water Alliance organizes workshops for political leaders to gain a better understanding of issues related to gender and water. They organize courses for women in rural Bangladesh, where they educate the women, speak to them about their problems and build their capabilities in order for them to continue the fight.

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