

Gender And Climate Change

Introduction

Climate change **impacts will be spread differently among regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders** (IPCC, 2001). The people likely to suffer most from the impacts of climate change are those least responsible for causing it. It is widely recognised that the developing countries are expected to suffer more from the devastating effect of climate change than the developed countries and within the developing countries, the poor will be worst affected.

The majority of the poor are women living in developing countries. Within Africa, women and girls in the rural areas are the ones most immediately affected by climate change because they are likely to have the **least access to resources to manage the changes**. In many parts of the African continent, climate change threatens to unravel women's lives undermining decades of efforts aimed at improving women's lives and livelihoods.

Gender and climate change in the UNFCCC COP process

Women and gender groups have been engaging in the UNFCCC COP process for many years and their lobbying for greater gender integration in the negotiation text towards a global climate change deal have been gaining momentum. However, recently many women and gender advocates have started questioning whether there will be real gender integration in the UNFCCC COP negotiations or if countries just pay a lip-service to this important issue in order to attract funding and support.

A lot of women, gender advocacy and lobby groups are being challenged to regroup and strategise how they can effectively influence the global climate change negotiations to integrate gender justice. **Gender justice in the global climate change regime** will result in a bottom up approach where UNFCCC Parties come to the COP with clear positions on gender justice within the global climate change deal that have been influenced by their citizens, including women in their countries. This will also ensure that UNFCCC Parties are held accountable by their female constituents should they fail to keep up with their commitments.

Gender-specific vulnerabilities and responses to climate change

Climate change impacts are not gender neutral. Men and women are affected differently in all phases of a disaster, from exposure to risk and risk perception; to preparedness behaviour, warning communication and response; physical, psychological, social and economic impacts; emergency response; and ultimately to recovery and reconstruction.

Some of the factors that influence the higher vulnerability of women to disasters include **lack of means and assets to ensure their own safety** in situations of flooding, landslides and storms. With changes in the climate, traditional **food sources become more unpredictable** and scarce. This exposes women to loss of harvests, often their sole sources of food and income.

Women also face higher risks during and after disaster. They have **less access to information** such as early warnings. Due to **inequitable distribution** of aid they may receive less resources and be at risk of **sexual violence**.

These existing gender differential impacts of climate change are the result of existing inequalities between men and women, including unequal access to resources, gendered division of labour and decision-making power which affects their ability to respond to the effects of climate change. For example, after a climate-related disaster like flooding, women are among the first to lose their homes, their jobs and have to work long hours to control the situation and get their households back in order. Men, on the other hand, are more mobile and continue with their daily activities which mostly involve going to work.

Although women are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, they are also the most **important change agents on households and community levels** with regard to natural resource management as well as conflict resolution and peace building efforts. As such, women's knowledge of natural resources and their responsibilities in households and communities can be crucial for climate change adaptation and disaster management.

According to study conducted by Babugura (2010), gender roles in South Africa are undergoing change due to climate related impacts which are further heightened by factors such as unemployment, HIV/AIDS and poverty which forces men and women to engage in different activities leading to new roles. In the study it was evident that women are now involved in activities that generate earnings, thus **reshaping relationships between men and women**. The income generated by women through trade may be used to sustain the household. Women generating an income also have more opportunities and power to decide what the income can be used for.

Thus women may be **effective agents of change for both mitigation and adaptation**. They have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction, and adaptation strategies.

Women and climate change mitigation

Women already play an important role in the mitigation of climate change by **changing buying habits, educating family members, conservation efforts**, and their willingness to take action. They are also the ones who will have to **work with the renewable forms of energy** such as biomass, biogas and solar, necessary in order to tackle climate change. More importantly, they have a crucial role to play in the promotion of **behavior change in economic and societal activities**.

Gender differences are also of importance when it comes to the assessment of actual measures aimed at mitigating climate change. While men tend to place their trust in technological solutions to problems, women are more inclined to work for a change in lifestyles and a general reduction in energy consumption (Roehr 2009). Moreover, women tend to reject unproven technologies such as nuclear power and carbon capture and storage much more strongly than men do (Alber 2010).

Women and climate change adaptation

One of the key components of global action on climate change will be measures to adapt to changes that are already unavoidable. Involving both women and men and their respective viewpoints in the climate adaptation process of planning and implementation is critical to ensure that the **final solutions will actually benefit all members of a community**. Women have a lot of **knowledge useful for adaptation**, for example, seed selection, medicinal plants, local hydrology, community organisation, and coping strategies that can promote adaptation to climate change.

When developing and implementing adaptation strategies at the local level, either in rural or urban settings, it is

critical to recognise and respect the greater vulnerability of women to the impacts of climate change as well as the difference in the way they are affected in comparison to men. For instance, women **are more strongly dependent on well-functioning infrastructure for water and sanitation, energy services, and mobility** -- all at risk due to extreme weather events.

Women and climate change technology

Technological developments related to climate change should take account of women's specific priorities and needs and make full use of their knowledge and expertise. Women's involvement in the development of new technologies can ensure that they are **user friendly, effective and sustainable**. Women should have **equal access to training, credit and skill-development programs** to ensure their full participation in climate change initiatives. Women's **indigenous knowledge** towards enhancing adaptive capacity should be recognized. Needs assessment for any technology transfer must be strictly adhered to and capacity building of stakeholder women before transfer of the technology must be a prerequisite. Technology to be transferred to the community must be benign to women.

Women and climate change finance

A just and sustainable financing framework for mitigation and adaptation must guarantee that the financial burdens of coping with climate change risks are not transferred to those who contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions. Financing policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation must explicitly **consider as well as respond to different experiences and needs of women**, especially those women who are on the socio-economic margins of society.

Gender budgeting and gender audits of all climate change funds must be applied. Investments in programmes for adaptation and mitigation, technology transfer, capacity building, etc. should also be **measured by their contribution to social justice, and gender justice** in particular.

Glossary

1. **Adaptive** capacity is the ability or potential of a system to respond successfully to climate change (including climate variability and extremes), to moderate potential damages, to take advantage of opportunities or to cope with the consequences. It includes adjustments in both behaviour and in resources and technologies. Adaptive capacity varies with social characteristics such as gender.
2. **Empowerment** – refers to a situation where people take control of their lives, pursuing their goals and

living according to their values. Empowered people make their own choices and exert influence upon what affects their lives, both individually and collectively. Empowerment is a complex, long-term process, particularly when it concerns people who have been oppressed and marginalised, and who need to develop capacities and acquire resources.

3. **Gender Blindness** refers to a conscious or unconscious lack of attention to different gender roles and responsibilities, and, consequently, the failure to analyse policies and projects in terms of the differences in their effects on women and men.
4. **Gender Disparity** (or difference) occurs when women and men, girls and boys, have different access to resources, services or rights because of their gender. For example, in a number of countries (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) women lack an independent right to own land or property, or conduct/own a business.

Additional Resources

Global organisations Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) <http://www.wedo.org/>

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)(Office of the Global Senior Gender Adviser) <http://generoyambiente.com/home.php>

ENERGIA International Secretariat <http://www.energia.org>

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) secretariat@gwalliance.org

Gender and Disaster Network gdn@gdnonline.org

GenderCC Southern Africa www.gendercc.net

Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) <http://www.fara-africa.org/>

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Gender equality: A policy concept which supposes that women and men will benefit in equal measure from goods, opportunities, resources and rewards recognised by the society but recognising that women and men are different.

5. **Gender mainstreaming:** The process of identifying, incorporating and integrating the needs and interests of women and men in every programme, policy, strategy, administrative or financial activities.
6. **Sustainable** development necessarily associates preservation of the environment, social progress and economic good governance, but also the gender perspective.
7. **Vulnerability** – In the most general sense, a susceptibility to harm or change. More specifically, the degree to which a system or a community is exposed to, susceptible to, and unable to cope with, the adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes.

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3. Röhr, U.2009. Gender in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation. Factsheet in the Dialogue on Globalisation journal. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
4. www.ipcc.ch
5. www.gendercc.net