

## **Gender, climate change and adaptation. Introduction to the gender dimensions**

This paper aims at introducing *why gender* is an important factor in climate change debates and particularly in adaptation to climate change. It starts with a brief overview of gender aspects in climate change and a description of the impacts of climate change on women's lives. How these gender aspects and women's needs are taken into account in climate change debates, what is needed to implement gender mainstreaming in adaptation programmes and measures, and how to assure that women benefit from adaptation funds is discussed subsequently. In the end you will find a list of gender dimensions which should be taken into account in planning and implementation of measures that aim at adapting to climate change. These dimensions are based on the (very limited) data currently available on gender and climate change.

### **I. Gender and climate change: Introduction to the debate**

The United Nations are formally committed to gender mainstreaming within all policies and programmes. However, gender equality is not yet realized in any society, in any part of the world. Men and women have different roles, responsibilities and decision-making power, leading to disadvantages for women. It is therefore not surprising that gender also plays a role in relation to climate change. Yet the topic has not been explored sufficiently, and many people still find it difficult to comprehend the ways in which gender might be a factor in climate change, or how it should be politically addressed.

Gender aspects are rarely addressed in climate change policy. This applies – with few exceptions – to the national as well as the international level. Various reasons account for this neglect: gender aspects in climate change are often not self-evident, and there is little data, research, or case studies clarifying and exemplifying the linkages between gender justice and climate change.

Nevertheless, there are a number of issues that point to the crucial role of gender when understanding the causes of climate change, aiming to mitigate it, and working towards successful adaptation to inevitable climate change:

- ♦ Women and men – in their respective social roles – are differently affected by the *effects of climate change*. Reasons are inter alia to be found in different responsibilities for care work and income generating work, in dependency on natural resources because of lacking access to environmental services, or in knowledge and capacities to cope with the effects because of differences in the access to education and information systems.
- ♦ Women and men – in their respective social roles – are differently affected by *climate protection and adaptation instruments and measures*. If these mechanisms and measures are developed in a non-gender-sensitive way – which most often is the case – they again do not take into account different responsibilities and financial options.
- ♦ Women and men differ with regard to their respective *perceptions of and reactions to climate change*. It is well known, especially in industrialised countries, that women have a higher risk perception than men, and thus also recognize climate change as a more serious problem than men do. Gender differences are crucial when it comes to assessing adequate measures, too. While men trust in technical solutions, women vote stronger for lifestyle changes and reduction of energy consumption.
- ♦ Women's and men's *contribution to climate change* differs, especially with regard to their

respective CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This is especially proven in regard to transport systems. For example, in Sweden men consume up to double amounts of energy compared to women. Difference results mostly from gendered car use and mobility patterns.

- ♦ Social roles and responsibilities of women and men lead to different degrees of *dependency on the natural environment*. Women are usually the ones engaged in household subsistence activities, thus degradation of forests, watersheds, foreshores and agricultural land in developing countries can have a severe effect on their ability to perform the daily household maintenance tasks.
- ♦ As the male perspective is dominating, climate protection and climate adaptation measures often fail to take into account the *practical and strategic needs* of large parts of the population (e.g. infrastructure, energy supply);
- ♦ The *participation of women in decision-making* regarding climate policy – mitigation and adaptation – and its implementation in instruments and measures is very low. Thus, in general it is men's perspectives which is taken into account in planning processes.

Women and men are not homogenous groups but include people of various age, ethnicity, education, income. These social categories also relate to differences in influence, attitude and in contribution to climate change, to how people are affected by it and which possibilities they possess to adapt to climate change. This applies to developing as well as to developed countries. Principally, however, the situation of women in the global South differs significantly from the situation in the global North. While women in the South are more dramatically affected by climate change, women in the North are expected to play a significant role as consumers without having appreciable influence on decision-making as it relates to emission reduction (Röhr/Hemmati 2007).

The same holds true for the adaptation to climate change: women in the South suffer most and have least capacities (economic, information, education etc.) to adapt to climate change and to prepare for the effects. Whereas both women *and* men in the global North need to adapt their consumption behaviour and daily life routines in order to mitigate climate change, they are differently affected by natural disasters and changing weather conditions too. Research about extreme weather conditions show that women and elderly people are most sensitive to hot summer weather in terms of mortality, and that women perceive hot and dry summer weather more unfavourably than men and are more likely to change their behaviour (PIK 2000).

## **II. Impacts of climate change on women's lives**

As predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders” (IPCC, 2001). The IPCC also notes that the impacts of climate change will hamper development and harm human living conditions and lifestyles. The effects will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and the poor within all countries, and thereby exacerbate inequities in health status and access to adequate food, clean water, and other resources. Today, women represent about 70 per cent of the poor throughout the world.

Most of the key areas of the negative consequences of climate change are strongly connected to gender equality issues. “Women in developing (and developed) countries are generally considered part of the vulnerable groups. High dependence from agriculture, forest resources, fisheries and biofuels can increase the vulnerability and the risk of environmental depletion. (...) Moreover, the problems relating to the management of the environmental common assets can become worse under the pressure of global warming.” (Lambrou and Piana 2005:20) These problems include food security, freshwater

supply, rural and urban settlements and their infrastructures. The impact on women's lives varies between regions and cultures, thus planning for adaptation to climate change need to take a close look at each individual and concrete situation. However, there are some general subjects, which are effected throughout regions and cultures:

*1) Care work, poverty reduction, income generating activities*

In most societies, women are responsible for household tasks and care for children and the elderly. They have to secure food, provide clean water and household energy, and care for the sick. At the same time, due to the need for poverty reduction, they have to run income generating activities. Climate change may put additional burdens to the double and triple burdened women.

- Depletion of natural resources and agricultural productivity could place additional burdens on women who will have to spend more time for collecting plants and cultivating their crops for subsistence and local markets. In many regions of the world women make up the majority of the agricultural workforce. Due to patrilinear inheritance, women's access to and control over land is often limited, and if they own or control land, it is often the less fertile ones. Thus, additional depletion of soil productivity forces women to spend more time providing food for their families and thus have limited time to participate in decision-making and income-generation activities. So climate change might lead to a vicious cycle aggravating injustice.
- Decreased availability of water in both quantity and quality as well as heavy rainfalls and more frequent floods will have the same negative impacts on workloads and economic resource base. In general, it is women who are responsible for collecting and storing the water for drinking/household needs, while men are responsible for irrigation. Often the norm is that irrigation water should only serve men's businesses. Because of a lack of participation of women in water related decision making and planning, it is often men's interests that are served in such planning. Additionally, droughts and floods can be particularly detrimental to women who keep livestock as a source of income and food security (Lambrou and Piana 2005; Women's Statement at COP10/2004).
- A similar situation is to be found where energy consumption/use is concerned. Decreased availability of firewood to provide household energy has the same negative impact as water scarcity in terms of time to be spend for collection of biomass, of workloads and income-generating activities. In addition, indoor air pollution by burning biomass in inefficient ovens causes heavy respiratory diseases, accounting for about 2 Mio deaths a year worldwide, most of them women and children.

*2) Health impacts*

Climate change will also place additional burdens on women's health and have a triple effect on women. First, they are affected because of special physical vulnerabilities, second because of their caring roles in families, and third because the additional work which is required due to depletion of environmental conditions may lead to health damage.

- Waterborne and vector-borne diseases will increase in a warmer world. Pregnant women for example are particularly vulnerable to malaria, because they are twice as attractive to malaria carrying mosquitos than non-pregnant women. Additionally, pregnancy reduces women's immunity to malaria, making them more susceptible to infection and increasing their risks to illness and secondary diseases, too. Anaemia which can result from malaria infection is responsible for a quarter of maternal mortality (Duncan 2007).
- Decreased agricultural productivity is supposed to increase malnutrition and hunger by 10 per cent

(Duncan 2007). Women are responsible for up to 80 per cent percent of household food production in Africa and Asia, and 45 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Because women usually are involved in a very labour-intensive, low-emission subsistence agriculture, while men are more often found in mechanized agriculture, women's livelihood strategies and efforts to ensure food security are seen to be disproportionately affected by impacts of climate change.

- As described above, climate change may put additional work on women. More work, heavier loads to carry, longer ways to find water or biomass in a sufficient amount - this all has a negative impact on women's health. Additionally, due to the gendered division of labour, women have to take care of sick family members, which is again contributing to time constraints.

### 3) *Climate change related natural disasters*

Natural disasters like floods or droughts, hurricanes or heavy rains, are already impacting livelihoods in many regions of the world. There are clear gender differences in the prevention of disasters (e.g. early warning systems don't get through to women), in emergency response (e.g. different risk reduction strategies and different needs), and in the reconstruction phase (e.g. gender differences in migration). It is often reported that women's workloads double or triple in the aftermath of disasters, while their income generating conditions deteriorate. The following are only a few examples out of the wide range of research and reports available<sup>1</sup>.

- Because of gender differences in property rights, access to information and in cultural, social and economic roles, natural disasters are likely to affect men and women differently: Following the cyclone and flood of 1991 in Bangladesh, the death rate was almost five times as high for women as for men. Warning information was transmitted to men by men in public spaces, but rarely communicated to the rest of the family. As many women are not allowed to leave the house without a male relative they perished while waiting for their relatives to return home and take them to a safe place (Aguilar 2004).
- Another clear illustration of the different vulnerabilities women and men face is offered by the fact that *more men than women died* during Hurricane Mitch. It has been suggested that this was due to existing gender norms in which ideas about 'heroic' masculinity encouraged men to take risky actions (Nelson 2002). This means: women are at risk mostly during the disaster (and often in post-disaster situations), when they find themselves thrown into situations where they are unable to decide whether to stay or leave. Men on the contrary are most at risk in the search for survivors and cleanup after disasters and are more likely to be able to decide for themselves how to act.
- Men and women also have different needs and priorities following a disaster. Some women have clear physical needs such as obstetric-gynaecological care or feminine hygiene products. More broadly, they also tend to prioritize different activities from their male counterparts. "Men tend to focus almost exclusively on productive activity, including agriculture and waged income. Women tend to prioritize physical and psychological health, economic opportunities, and their children's welfare." (Delaney et al. 2000:15)
- While women are known as experts in post-disaster management, their involvement in institutionalized disaster mitigation and response efforts is often lacking.

The effects of climate change on gender inequality are not limited to immediate impacts and needs for changing behaviour patterns but may also lead to subsequent changes in gender relations. The shortfall

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<sup>1</sup> See the resources of the Gender and Disaster Network, [www.gdnonline.org](http://www.gdnonline.org)

of resources like water and fuel wood or the role of care-giver in post-disaster-situations may increase women's workloads. Due to increased burdens, a negative cycle is starting: if time for information and income-generating measures is lacking, girls have to take on more tasks in the household and don't have time to attend schools. Poor education of girls results in high number of children and marginal participation in community planning, and then the poverty-cycle starts all over – chances to break it are diminished in the long run. Spending more time on traditional reproductive tasks additionally re-enforces traditional work roles and works against a change in which women might begin to play other roles or take up non-traditional activities.

Each of the issues mentioned before is highlighting women's vulnerability due to gendered roles in society and the impacts of climate change on daily life. Nevertheless, that's only half of the picture: On the other side, these special situations sometimes bear opportunities for women and men to change their gendered status in society and to go beyond traditional roles. "As destructive as they are, natural disasters clearly offer rich opportunities for social change. But, too often, opportunities to address gender inequalities are overlooked in the rush to return to "normal" life, including normal or routine gender norms." (Enarson 2004:14) But there is also ample evidence that long-established rules lose force when people are forced to respond to emergency conditions produced by natural disasters. Following hurricane Mitch in 1998, women in Guatemala and Honduras were seen building houses, digging wells and ditches, hauling water and building shelters. Though often against men's wishes, women have been willing and able to take an active role in what are traditionally considered "male" tasks. This can have the effect of changing society's conceptions of women's capabilities (Pan American Health Organisation). On the other hand it was observed during the hurricane, "that more men did more cooking and took more responsibility for child care. During a drought period in Sri Lanka, men took on more of the work of providing drinking water as people became more dependent upon government-provided water ferried home in five-gallon plastic containers by men on push bicycles or tractors." (Enarson 2004:14).

### **III. Mainstreaming gender into climate change debates: experiences and recommended strategies**

As mentioned in the beginning, gender aspects currently are poorly addressed in climate change debates. This is due to lacking gender sensibility of those shaping the debates, leading to a strong technical and economical bias in the contents – best to be seen in the Kyoto Protocol. Social issues and gender issues do not have a space in these discussions and documents. In 1997, at UNFCCC COP3 in Kyoto, a female environmentalist asked via a mailing list why women's organizations did not take part in the process leading to the Kyoto Protocol. The answer she gave was that "the arguments used here are almost entirely economic. Decisions are made mostly with little consideration being given to survival. Perhaps women felt they could not penetrate this masculine perspective – and stayed at home" (Sargent 1997). This assumption is backed by experiences in other UN processes: If women's organizations are not actively involved, gender and women's aspects will not be addressed. Thus, it is like a vicious circle: because women's organization or gender experts are not involved, women's /gender aspects are hardly addressed. And because they are not addressed, women's organizations don't take part. Recently some efforts have been undertaken to sensitize the parties of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol as well as the constituencies taking part in the process on gender issues. Because negotiations were coming into a new phase, because the post-Kyoto regime may provide an entry point for gender perspective, situation is improving slowly. There are more women's organizations interested in the UNFCCC process now, and thus hopefully the vicious circle will be opened.

Additionally there is another lack preventing the ‘mainstreaming of gender’ into climate change policies, which is the lack of data and research. This applies to the IPCC Assessment Reports, for example: IPCC is not undertaking research by itself, but reviewing existing research. If there is no research available on gender and climate change, the issue cannot be highlighted in the Assessment Report. Regarding the Stern report we are facing a similar situation: the report is focussing on the economical impact of climate change only, based on a conventional perspective on economics: unpaid labour or care work is not taken into account. Both of the reports certainly would look different if gender experts were involved and gender perspectives were shaping the structures.

However, it is not only research and international institutions related to climate change that are lacking gender perspectives. The same applies to donor organizations and development departments in national governments of industrialized countries. And it is for the same reasons: lacking gender sensitivity and lacking knowledge on how to integrate gender perspectives and what the specific women/gender aspects are in a concrete situation/measure. In the same time it is the very technical and science orientated view to climate protection and often to adaptation to climate change too, that make people believe that the policies are ‘gender neutral’

So which strategy would be the best to overcome these shortcomings and to assure the integration of gender perspectives in climate change debates and measures? According to experiences in implementing gender mainstreaming into institutions, there are some preconditions for a successful re-organisation from a gender perspective:

1. It is more promising to integrate gender into new developments and new planning instead of trying to ‘gender’ projects, measures programs which are already running. That is why for example the post-Kyoto period might provide a better possibility than the already accepted Kyoto Protocol. This might be the case as well if new guidelines or methodologies are developed, e.g. for national reporting or national adaptation plans.
2. Gender mainstreaming needs the strong support of the top of the organisation/institution to force departments to include gender perspectives and undertake gender assessments of each policy and measure they are planning. Nevertheless, when it comes to implementation strong support and requirements from bottom up are needed.
3. And last but not least gender mainstreaming has to be done in every institution. Thus it has to be implemented into the UNFCCC as well as in the national and local organisations dealing with climate change. Experiences and findings from the lower levels will help the upper levels to argue for gender mainstreaming, and the other way around. Gender-disaggregated data taken at each of the levels will provide a strong database for future actions and measures to be gender-aware.
4. To support these processes, gender trainings have to be carried out, aiming to sensitize people for the gender relevance of the work they are doing. Gender experts must be involved in all stages of the planning to back the people planning or carrying out the projects/programmes with gender knowledge.

#### **IV. Mainstreaming gender into adaptation programmes and measures**

##### *Gender in adaptation measures*

As shown above, climate change impacts women's lives differently than men's. Consequently, adaptation policies and measures need to be gender sensitive: restricted access to economic resources may lead to less possibilities to adapt to climate change (e.g. to changing weather conditions and their impacts on agricultural activities), less possibilities of protection against natural disasters and

recovering in the aftermath. Lacking control over land/property effects the ability to crop changes or switching to other fields of income generation; lack of transport systems leads to more time consumption and physical burdens (like transportation of heavy loads over long distances). The lacking access to political resources, like influence, networks, informations, skills or control over decision-making leads to poor participation in project and programme development and poor recognition of the practical and strategic needs of women and girls.

**The concurrence of economic disadvantage, lacking access to resources and information, dependency on male family members, and lack of power contribute to women's situation as a particular vulnerable group.**

To understand the implications of adaptation measures for all people involved, it is necessary that all members of an adapting community are represented in climate change planning and governance processes. Women, however, are often expected to contribute unpaid labour while being absent from the planning and governance processes. But equal involvement of men and women and their respective needs and perspectives in adaptation planning are important not only to ensure that the measures developed actually benefit those who are supposed to implement them, but also to ensure that all relevant knowledge is integrated into policy and projects (COP10 Women's Statement). Additionally, it is reported from post-disaster situations that natural disasters may provide women with unique opportunities to challenge and change their gendered status in society: in the aftermath, they take active role in traditionally male tasks and develop new skills, such as natural resource and agricultural management which, in the right environment, they could transfer into the job market. To support women in these situations may help to valorise their usually under-valuated work and products.

*Available knowledge about impacts in areas where women are involved in/dependent on*

Areas which will be effected by climate change and where adaptation measures should be implemented include water, agriculture/nutrition, energy, transport, housing, forestry, fishery/coastal zone management, biodiversity, natural disasters/conflicts/risk management. Currently a research review funded by the FAO is collecting available data and knowledge in most of these fields. The study is expected to be published in autumn 2007, and will provide a more in-depth insight to gender aspects in these issues. Detailed information and support are also provided by international gender networks. Regarding the *energy* issue a wide range of studies from many developing countries can be found at the website of ENERGIA, the International Network for Gender and Sustainable Energy ([www.energia.org](http://www.energia.org)). The Gender and Water Alliance has a website with detailed information and recourses on gender aspects in *integrated water resource management* ([www.genderandwater.org](http://www.genderandwater.org)). The same applies for the Gender and Disaster Network ([www.gdnonline.org](http://www.gdnonline.org)), which provides a *gender and disaster* sourcebook on their website as well as checklists and practical guidance.

## **V. Financing adaptation – assuring benefits for women**

Most available environmental finance mechanisms have limited benefits for disadvantaged, given their lack of capital, skills and knowledge, and market access. Typically these funds are dominated by men's interests and require strengthening of gender concerns, and making them accessible for women. The same holds true for financing mechanisms under the UNFCCC. Therefore, a basic requirement is to undertake a gender analysis for each new funding mechanism. Questions to be asked are for example: Who has access to and control over funds and benefits? How are expenditures allocated amongst women and men? Are (cultural, societal, religious, educational) inequalities addressed in the

allocation criteria?

One of the most serious general problems is the small amount of money available in the adaptation funds. If funds are small, it is even harder to promote gender sensible criteria or projects which address women's needs, because pressure of demand on the small budget is high and women's needs usually do not have the power to prevail. Nevertheless, it is important to steer adaptation projects towards the most vulnerable group: women. The best way to do so is to develop the projects to be founded on grassroot level, in a participatory process by women and men.

Gender responsible funding mechanisms need to be supported by appropriate rules, inter alia:

- Projects to be funded must follow clearly defined sustainable development criteria.
- Gender analysis is mandatory for projects funded (ex ante and ex post),
- The formulation of explicit quantitative and qualitative targets to address gender concerns are to be supported.

To provide good arguments, cost benefits of gender responsible funding mechanisms should be highlighted (e.g. gender responsible projects may lower health costs because of less of the additional burdens explicated under I., higher productivity of women's work).

On institutional level, integrated strategies are required that promote **creative and innovative thinking** and link funding mechanisms to sustainable livelihoods, capacity development, and assure access to markets and cash economy for women.

## V. Further recommendations and tools

To ensure success, adaptation policies and measures need to be gender sensitive. In principle, gender could be integrated relatively easy into, for example, stakeholder analyses, livelihoods analyses and multi-criteria decision tools if the users were aware of the need and choose to do this. There are a lot of tools available aiming at integrating gender perspectives into development planning. These tools need to be adopted into adaptation policies, programmes and measures and should be tested and evaluated. Another critical question is how gender awareness among planners and project developers can be stimulated. Gender training is the common instrument to sensitize those persons. In the long term, it should be part of education of each planner. Until then it must be an obligatory part of advanced vocational training.

Some critical points should be mentioned in the end:

- 1) It is important to have in mind that equal participation in terms of numbers does not automatically guarantee representation of women's concerns. Therefore, there is a need to include gender expertise into projects wherever possible.
- 2) Particular emphasis should be put on conflicting effects: e.g. relief assistance in response to natural disaster may cultivate dependency on foreign help instead of strengthening empowering people.
- 3) When looking at women's and men's different needs, it is mostly the immediate necessities (water, shelter, food, income and health care) within a specific situations which are addressed. "Strategic interests, on the other hand, refer to the relative status of women and men within society. These interests vary in each context and are related to roles and expectations, as well as to gender divisions of labour, resources and power. Strategic interests may include gaining legal rights, closing wage gaps, protection from domestic violence, increased decision making, and

women's control over their bodies. To ensure sustainable benefits, both practical needs and strategic interests must be taken into account in the design of policies, programs and projects.” (CIDA1999)

### ***Addendum: General gender dimensions***

Gender dimensions can serve as ‘searchlights’ for different degrees of gender-specific implications of climate change:

#### Gendered division of labour:

This refers to the gendered responsibility for certain types of work, e.g. gender aspects related to income-generating activities, (paid work, self-employment, subsistence production), domestic work and care work (caring for children, sick or elderly people). Regarding adaptation to climate change, it is necessary to look at:

- Gendered additional burdens caused e.g. by degradation of natural resources like water scarcity, fuel scarcity, disasters etc.
- Gendered effects of climate change in certain types or areas of income-generating work (those areas women/men are mostly involved in, e.g. agriculture for local markets/cash crops)
- Gendered effects of climate change on areas relevant for family subsistence
- Gendered contributions to family subsistence (in terms of time, burdens, money, food etc.)
- Gendered valuation/worth of work, working areas and products

#### Human reproduction, health

This dimension refers to the physio-biological conditions of women’s/men’s constitutions; gendered sensitivities/vulnerabilities, gendered perceptions of environmental change.

Regarding adaptation to climate change, the focus should be on

- Gendered impacts of climate change on health (carrying heavy loads, air pollution, vector-borne and waterborne diseases, disasters)
- Special vulnerabilities during pregnancy or breastfeeding (at any given time, an average of 18-20 percent of the female population of reproductive age is either pregnant or lactating)
- Personal security issues (e.g. when searching for firewood/fetching water way beyond their villages, domestic violence after disasters)
- Socio-cultural construction of male/female identities (risk perception and risk behaviour, attitudes towards appropriate mechanisms and measures)

#### Power and decision-making:

These are gender aspects related to self-determination, participation in decision-making (participation of women/men in decision-making, participation of women/men in project development, proportion of women/men in stakeholder groups, etc.), participation in community planning.

Questions to be answered should refer to:

- Gendered participation in community policy and community development (decision making, representation, participation in development)
- Gendered participation in project planning (decision making, participation in project development)
- Recognition of gendered needs and interests (valuation of work and products, which situations are taken to be superior)
- Gendered information and knowledge (both directions: providing information and knowledge – taking knowledge into account)
- Traditional norms and socially constructed ideologies (exclusion of women from the public sphere, male role expectations to represent the household)
- Gendered communication patterns (restricted articulation in the public sphere, shyness, dominance)

Institutional organisation of society:

Aspects to be assessed include:

- Gendered patterns of mobility (gendered ability to move in other regions, gendered access to transport services)
- Access to financial and technological support (e.g. for adaptation efforts, that is relief assistance, recovery/reconstruction assistance)
- Gendered access to education
- Gendered access to information (e.g. impacts of climate change on crops, how to adapt income generating activities, early warning systems)
- Gendered access to health systems/services

Cultural and legal situation:

This dimension refers to the way in which gender equality is supported or constricted by religious and cultural norms and legal rights.

- Legal situation (land rights, entitlement of inheritance, anti-discrimination laws etc.)
- Cultural, traditional and religious norms (arranged marriages, dependence on male family members, reproductive health and rights, mobility outside homes, gendered abilities)

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