

Background

There is a direct relationship between gender equality, women's empowerment and climate change. On the one hand, women are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which could thus worsen gender inequality. On the other, the knowledge and contributions of women can inform the response to climate change to make it more effective and sustainable. In turn, policies and funding related to climate change could offer opportunities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. As the world moves towards the post-Kyoto climate regime, it is essential that climate initiatives at all levels pay particular attention to poverty and gender-based vulnerability, and that women are engaged at all levels of the decision-making process

Climate change could deepen poverty and reverse progress towards achievement of MDGs

It is likely that the effects of climate change on people's lives and livelihoods could derail progress toward sustainable development and reverse progress towards achievement of the MDGs.¹ The 2011 Human Development Report observes that global temperatures and sea levels continue to rise and the likelihood of natural disasters is increasing (the average annual number has doubled over the past 25 years). These changes and the loss of ecosystems threaten livelihoods in many countries that are ranked low on the Human Development Index (HDI).² Moreover, these changes exacerbate chronic environmental threats (such as deforestation, water scarcity and land degradation) which hurt the poorest the most.³

Gender and Climate Change Africa

Policy Brief 1— General Overview

Working Draft



Climate change and gender gaps

- Seventy percent of those who live on less than a dollar a day are women and 75 percent of the world's 876 million illiterate adults are women.
- Globally, only 8 percent of cabinet and 19 percent of parliament members are women.
- Women work two thirds of the world's working hours yet receive only 10 percent of the world's income.
- Women own only 1 percent of the world's property. Although they predominate in world food production (50 to 80 percent), women own less than 10 percent of land.
- Women do not have easy and adequate access to funds to cover weather-related losses, or adaptation technologies.
- There are 2 million deaths/year, (mainly women and children) related to the burning of biomass fuel indoors.
- Women face gender-based barriers to access to land, financial services, social capital and technology, which render them vulnerable to food insecurity.

Sources: (World Bank 2011; FAO 2011; Perch 2011; OECD 2008; IPCC 2007; Schalteck 2009; WHO 2011).¹²

Poor and marginalized segments of society are especially vulnerable to climate change since their livelihoods are often highly dependent on natural resources sensitive to climate variability.⁴ For example, agriculture, a highly climate-sensitive sector, supports the livelihoods of 70 percent of Africans, contributes to about 30 percent of the continent's GDP and about 50 percent of the total export value, and employs 65 percent of the continent's labour force.⁵

Climate change affects men and women differently

Climate change impacts men and women differently, given their different roles and responsibilities at the household and community levels. Women are more exposed and vulnerable to climate change because they are often poorer, receive less education, and are excluded from political and household decision-making processes that affect their lives. Sociocultural barriers that are manifested in gendered roles and social status also inhibit women from effectively responding to climatic risk.⁶ Additionally, women tend to possess fewer assets and depend more on natural resources for their livelihoods.⁷ A recent study by the World Bank indicates that 103 out of 141 countries (25 of 35 economies in sub-Saharan Africa) have legal distinctions between men and women that likely hinder women's economic opportunities.⁸

Empowerment of women is vital to the efficacy of climate change projects and policies

In addition to the fact that gender equality is a fundamental human right, there are other imperatives for promoting gender equality in climate and development policy. Studies demonstrate the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to development and

the achievement of the MDGs. The enhanced participation of women is crucial in the fight against climate change. For example, women effectively mobilize the community in the different phases of the risk-management cycle and their greater involvement would enhance disaster risk management and reduction.¹⁰ The lack of participation by women could undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of climate change projects and programmes.

Although today there is an improved understanding of the need to incorporate gender perspectives into climate change policy, there are still considerable gender-based barriers across the major pillars of international and national policy processes on climate change (see box 'Climate change and gender gaps').

Recommendations for action

- **Integrate gender perspectives into mitigation and adaptation initiatives.** Investing in women as part of the climate change response leads to environmental gains and greater returns across the MDGs and broader development objectives. Decision makers and development partners at all levels need to bring women into the planning, financing and implementation of climate responses, including adaptation and mitigation, food security and agriculture, health, water and sanitation, forestry, disaster risk reduction, energy and technologies, and infrastructure.
- **Ensure that adaptive actions aim to build up the asset base of women.** As assets largely determine the extent to which people are affected by climate change and their response to it, their adaptive capacity needs to be built. Moreover, pro-poor and gender-sensitive planning is needed to help them develop sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

Women as positive agents of change

The Niger Delta is one of the world's largest natural resource-rich areas. The region, however, has suffered from environmental and human rights abuses including oil spills, gas flaring and resulting destruction of ecosystems.

Nigerian women mobilized themselves at the community level into a social movement to protest against transnational oil companies, as part of a world movement to stop the actions that involved ecological destruction and corporate irresponsibility. Most of the natural gas in the region was being used up through gas flaring due to efforts to cut maintenance costs. As a result, more gas was being burnt there than in any other part of the world, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions greater than in the entire sub-Saharan region. In 2006, these protests led to a ruling by the Nigerian courts that gas flaring violated citizens' constitutional rights to life and dignity, and a court order to end the practice.

- **Plan mitigation initiatives such that they promote poverty reduction and the empowerment of women.** Mitigation planning at all levels, including its financing, needs to be pro-poor and gender conscious. The same holds true for forestry and related REDD/REDD+ activities.
- **Integrate principles of gender equality and women's empowerment into financing for climate change.**¹¹ Gender-sensitive criteria need to be developed for all climate change financing mechanisms supporting adaptation, mitigation, capacity-building and technological cooperation.



In sum, every effort should be made to ensure that women and men contribute to and benefit equitably from climate change policies and financing at all levels.

“Recent studies reveal that not only is women’s participation important but also how they participate – and how much. And because women often show more concern for the environment, support proenvironmental policies and vote for proenvironmental leaders, their greater involvement in politics and in nongovernmental organizations could result in environmental gains, with multiplier effects across all the Millennium Development Goals.”

UNDP Human Development Report (2011)

References

- ¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report* (2010, 2007); Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, “Chapter 9: Africa,” 2007; World Bank, *World Development Report – 2010*, 2010.
- ² The HDI is a UNDP yardstick for measuring human development, which is described as the expansion of people’s freedoms and capabilities to lead lives that they value and have reason to value. See Note 1 UNDP (2011).
- ³ UNDP, Note 1, 2011; see also IPCC (2007) Note 1; UNDP *Human Development Report* (2007).
- ⁴ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), *The State of Food and Agriculture* (2011); I. Dankelman, *Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction Earthscan* (2010); Women Watch, “Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality & Climate Change,” 2009.
- ⁵ IPCC, Note 1, 2007; C. Toulmin, *Climate Change in Africa*, Zed Books (2009).
- ⁶ U. Röhr, “Gender and Climate Change,” in *Tiempo* Issue 59 (2006); World Bank, “Social Dimensions of Climate Change,” 2010; UNDP, “Africa Adaptation Experiences Gender and Climate Change: Advancing Development through an Integrated Gender Perspective,” Vol. 1, 2011.
- ⁷ FAO, Note 4, 2011; World Bank “*World Development Report 2012 - Gender Equality and Development*” (2011).
- ⁸ FAO, Note 4, 2011; World Bank, Note 7, 2011.
- ⁹ World Bank, Note 7, 2011.
- ¹⁰ Y. Carvajal-Escobar, M. Quintero-Angel, and M. Garcia-Vargas, “Women’s Role in Adapting to Climate Change and Variability” in *Advances in Geo Sciences* Issue 14, 277–280 (2008).
- ¹¹ UNDP “CDM: Exploring the Gender Dimensions of Climate Finance Mechanisms,” (2010); UNDP, “Climate Investment Fund: Exploring the Gender Dimensions of Climate Finance Mechanisms,” 2010; UNDP “Ensuring Gender Equity in Climate Change Financing,” 2011.
- ¹² World Bank, Note 7, 2011; FAO, Note 4, 2011; Leisa Perch, Mitigation of What and by What? “Adaptation by Whom and for Whom? Dilemmas in Delivering for the Poor and the Vulnerable in International Climate Policy,” International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC - IG), Working Paper 79 (2011); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Gender and sustainable development, “Maximising the economic, social and Environmental role of women,” (2008); IPCC, Note 1, 2007; Liane Schalatek, “Gender and Climate Finance: Double Mainstreaming for Sustainable Development,” (2009); World Health Organization, *Gender, Climate Change and Health* (2011).

Copyright © November 2011 by the United Nations Development Programme

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or their Member States.

Author: Zerisenay Habtezion | Contributors: Tim Scott, Lucy Wanjiru | Reviewers: Stacy Alboher, Elizabeth Eggerts |

Editor: Anita Palathingal | Designer: First Kiss Creative | Photography: UN Photo/John Isaac (Cover), IPS Interpress Service (Box 1), UN Photo/Jeffrey Foxx (back).