



# Gender and adaptation

## Background

*Gender mainstreaming must be an important part of the adaptation process to ensure the success and sustainability of climate projects and policies. Women bring unique capabilities to the adaptation effort. Adaptation responses, including for disaster risk reduction can be more effective if both women's and men's capabilities and strengths are incorporated.*

The adverse impacts of climate change will be disproportionately harsh for the poorest countries and the most vulnerable people and groups, a large majority among them rural communities, particularly women. Recognizing the unavoidable impacts of the changing climate, international climate efforts have been steadily shifting to include a focus on adaptation. There is a growing recognition of gender-based vulnerability to climate change and the need for a gender-conscious response informed by the differences in needs, responsibilities and unique contributions of both women and men.

## Gender gaps and climate change

- *Two thirds of the poorest people on the planet are women*
- *Around 45 million people — at least 6 million of them women — fish for a living and are threatened by overfishing and climate change*
- *In most countries, the share of female smallholders who can access credit is 5 to 10 percentage points lower than that of male smallholders*
- *Of 141 countries, 103 have legal differences between men and women that may hinder women's economic opportunities, including access to credit*
- *A recent study of seven low Human Development Index countries found that 56 to 86 percent of rural women fetched water, compared with 8 to 40 percent of rural men*
- *Collecting firewood and water has been linked in women to spinal damage, complications during pregnancy and maternal mortality*

Sources: (World Bank 2011, FAO 2011, UNDP HDR 2011).

water and forest resources often leads to women having to travel longer distances for a longer time to fetch water or wood, exposing them to health risks<sup>3</sup> and limiting their prospects for engaging in high-return ventures such as education, politics, and business.<sup>4</sup>

## Gender disparities increase vulnerability of women and girls to climatic risks

Climate change is affecting men and women differently, given their distinguished roles and responsibilities at the household and community levels. Yet women are disproportionately vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change.<sup>1</sup> Women are often poorer, receive less education, and are excluded from political and household decision-making processes that affect their lives.<sup>2</sup> Such economic and social inequities translate into women possessing fewer assets and meagre means to cope with the ill effects of the changing climate. In addition, women depend more on natural resources for their livelihoods, which lends itself to increased vulnerability of women and girls.

For instance, climatic stress on

## Steps for gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction

- *Include gender perspectives into disaster reduction efforts at the national, regional and international levels, including in policies, strategies, action plans, and programmes*
- *Analyse climate change data (such as desertification, floods, drought, deforestation) from a gender-sensitive perspective*
- *Take gender-conscious steps to reduce the negative impacts of natural disasters on women, particularly in relation to their critical roles in rural areas in the provision of water, food and energy*
- *Increase the participation and representation of women at all levels of the decision-making process*
- *Include the traditional knowledge and perspectives of women in the analysis and evaluation of the characteristics of key disaster risks*
- *Ensure that women are visible agents of change at all levels of disaster preparedness, including early warning systems, education, communication, information and networking opportunities*
- *Build the capacity of national and local women's groups and provide them with a platform to be heard and to engage optimally*
- *Consider the level of a woman's access to technology and finances in times of disaster*
- *Include gender-specific indicators to monitor and track progress on gender equality targets*

## Adaptation actions could have unintended effects on women

Adaptation initiatives that do not take gender perspectives into account may unintentionally replicate gender inequality. For example, diverting fresh water to areas where there is a water shortage (through dikes, water transfers or irrigation canals) may have the unintended consequence of lengthening and intensifying women's productive and reproductive working day by placing water sources in distant zones.<sup>5</sup> The design of adaptation plans – such as the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)<sup>6</sup> – should recognize and effectively integrate gender considerations for efficient and sustainable outcomes.<sup>7</sup> These examples underscore the need for proper consideration of the interests and contributions of all members of the society, especially women and other vulnerable groups, in the design, planning and financing of adaptation actions.

## Steps for gender mainstreaming in adaptation

- Analyse the effects of climate change from both men and women's perspective
- Ensure disaggregation of qualitative and quantitative data by sex, in all assessments and stocktaking
- Incorporate a women's perspective when designing and implementing projects
- Capitalize on the talents and contributions of both women and men
- Set targets for women's participation in activities
- Ensure that women are adequately represented in all decision-making processes, at all levels
- Ensure that gender expertise is involved and consulted throughout the project implementation process
- Make women's equal access to information, economic resources and education a priority
- Address gender differences in capabilities to cope with climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Develop and apply gender-sensitive criteria and indicators for progress monitoring and evaluation of results
- Undertake a gender analysis of applicable budget lines and financial instruments to determine the differentiated impact on women and men of the budget
- Consider reallocation of resources, if relevant, to achieve gender equality outcomes from the actions planned
- Develop and apply gender-sensitive criteria and indicators

promoting women's unique capacities in adaptation would allow decision makers to pursue policies that build resilience in communities while also promoting gender equality.<sup>11</sup>

## Women contribute to adaptation

The Human Development Report (2011) observes that the enhanced participation of women at the national and local level leads to environmental gains, with multiplier effects across all the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>8</sup> Their knowledge and experience in resource management equip them with unique skills that would benefit the adaptation effort at all levels.<sup>9</sup> For example, during a drought in the small islands of the Federal States of Micronesia, the knowledge of island hydrology that the women had as a result of their land-based work enabled them to find potable water by digging a new well.<sup>10</sup>

Based on recent case studies in countries like India and South Africa, World Resources Institute's *World Resources 2010-11* report has stressed that measures taken to address the vulnerability of women can strengthen the capacity of society to act in a changing climate. In addition, recognizing, engaging and

## Recommendations for action

- **Gender mainstreaming must be an important part of the adaptation process to ensure the success and sustainability of climate projects and policies.** Women bring unique capabilities to the adaptation effort. Adaptation responses, including for disaster risk reduction, can be more effective if both women's and men's capabilities and strengths are incorporated; this could lead to greater returns for environmental sustainability, the MDGs, and broader development objectives.
- **Adaptation planning and financing need to be attuned to the varied needs and interests of women and men.** It is essential to integrate gender perspectives into the planning and implementation of adaptation initiatives at all levels. The implementation of the Cancun Adaptation Framework, including the development of National Adaptation Plans, should be used as an opportunity to do so.
- **Any adaptation effort should aim to enhance women's adaptive capacity** by building up the asset base of women.
- **Adaptation is a pressing developmental and cross-cutting challenge and provides an opportunity to improve the well-being of humans and the ecosystem.** Adaptation initiatives at the programmatic and planning levels need to ensure women's greater participation and empowerment. Through pro-poor and gender-sensitive planning, poor and marginalized communities should be enabled to develop climate-resilient livelihoods.
- **Adaptation finance, whatever its source, should be used to promote climate and development objectives, including gender equality.**<sup>12</sup> By the same token, gender-sensitive operational frameworks need to be developed for all climate change financing mechanisms supporting adaptation.<sup>13</sup>
- **All stakeholders and the adaptation community should make the empowerment of women and poor and marginalized groups a strategic priority** in the fight against climate change.

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*Adaptation is a pressing developmental and cross-cutting challenge and provides an opportunity to improve the well-being of humans and the ecosystem. All adaptation initiatives need to ensure women's greater participation and empowerment. Through pro-poor and gender-sensitive planning, poor and marginalized communities will be enabled to develop climate-resilient livelihoods.*



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