Session 7
Environmental justice and empowering women and youth

2020 Global Forum on Environment

MAINSTREAMING GENDER AND EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Paris, 5-6 March
Session 7: Environmental justice for empowering women and youth

Environmental justice broadly refers to fair and inclusive engagements in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation at national and international levels. Girls and boys, youth, indigenous peoples and women in general are often not represented or lack a voice in decision-making processes, and, as a result, their environment-related needs and preferences may be disregarded. Developing countries, small island developing states (SIDS) and indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to environmental threats and have been trying to get their voices heard. In addition to governments and the international community, businesses and philanthropy could play important roles in promoting environmental and climate justice.

Environmental justice: from a fringe to a world-wide phenomenon

Even though there is no internationally accepted definition, environmental justice broadly covers fair and inclusive engagements of all in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation. It, therefore, refers directly to access to environment-related goods, such as clean water and energy or safe urban areas, or to protection from negative environmental pressures, like air and water pollution or deforestation (distributional justice). It also translates into equal access to the decision-making process of environmental policies (procedural justice) (Brulle and Pellow, 2006). Finally, it has been argued that environmental justice should also achieve a healthy environment for all (substantive justice) (Bell, 2016).

The environmental justice grassroots movement started in the United States in the 1970s, when indigenous people and local communities of different racial background and of poorer socio-economic status (a majority of them being women) raised the alarm over the impact of environmental degradation on their communities. The movement was very successful in advocating for environmental protection, and in engaging with the US Environmental Protection Agency and state governments in addressing, ever since, environmental degradation at the local level (OECD, 2017). Environmental justice has only recently gained ground as an issue in Europe (EEA, 2018; Lakes et al., 2014), while in other parts of the developed world the movement is still at an initial stage (OECD, 2017). Some countries in Latin America [e.g. Colombia and Costa Rica (UNHR, 2013)] have also made important strides towards environmental justice by including a right to a healthy environment in their constitutions.

A recent study on environmental justice in Austria showed that environmental inequalities mainly affected immigrants from former Yugoslavia, Turkey, and other European countries that were not EU member states prior to 2004; people with no tertiary education; and people forced to live in restricted spaces. The study acknowledges that issues of environmental justice exists in Europe, and that these should be tackled by policy-

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1 The definition provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency is the following: “Environmental justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies” (EPA. 2020)

2 Although some projects are still at early stages, there are some success stories. See for instance the work of Waterlex in sustainable water use and support in improving access to safe water for all (https://www.waterlex.org/).
Environmental justice is a major concern in developing countries, given that large industrial and infrastructure projects are not always subject to strict environmental and social impact controls. Well known feminists, such as Vandana Shiva and Wangari Maathai, have been vocal on the role of women as agents of change for environmental protection. Vandana Shiva, a leader in the eco-feminist movement (Mies and Vandana, 1993), has long been arguing about the role of women in biodiversity conservation and in sustainable management of natural resources. She has established Navdanya, a community seed bank, which provides local farmers resources, training, and other tools to advance their business and at the same time protect biological and cultural diversity (Navdanya International, 2020). Wangari Maathai initiated the Green Belt Movement in Africa, linking environmental conservation to democracy and peace. Women held decision-making roles within the movement, as they were the ones holding the knowledge on local natural resources (Carmel Sophia and Suguna, 2007).

Environmental human rights defenders – often women – also continue to be persecuted and harassed in many countries (Front Line Defenders, 2018). A 2018 Report by Front Line Defenders – an international non-governmental organization protecting human rights defenders at risk - reported that from the 321 human rights’ defenders who were killed in 2018 (an increase of 67% from 2017), 77% were working on land, indigenous peoples and environmental rights. Women are very much at the forefront of the human rights’ movement worldwide, especially in Africa (Front Line Defenders, 2018). The 2019 United Nations High Human Rights Council Resolution “[recognises] the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development” (UNHRC, 2019).

The global community has long recognised environmental justice as a basic right. The 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development called for citizens’ access to information, public participation and access to justice. The 1998 UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) set the ground for civil society and citizens’ engagement: (i) to request information on the state of environment and the impact on human heath, (ii) to participate in public consultations for environment-related decision-making, and (iii) to proceed to legal action when their environmental rights are at stake. References to both the Rio Declaration and the Aarhus Convention are made in the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which set the framework for business conduct relating to environmental matters (OECD, 2011).

Much action has taken place in the international arena ever since. The European Union translated the Aarhus Convention into EU legislation (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). UNEP developed in 2010 the Bali Guidelines to support countries in developing national legislation on these issues (UNEP, 2015), and has since presented its own Environmental Rights Initiative. This Initiative brings together country representatives and other stakeholders, and with a rights-based approach enhances access to environmental information, promotes environmental justice and assists to developing a compliance culture (UNEP, n.d.). Further engagement on the topic has been spreading in other Organisations, such as the World Bank and the UNDP (UNDP, 2014), as well as at regional level, as with the recently agreed Escazú Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN, 2018). The Escazú Agreement has already been ratified by 8 Latin American countries, but requires 11 countries to ratify before entering into force. At the same time, only 46 states and the EU have so far ratified the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 2017), and among those, there are different levels of commitment to the principles set.3

In its preamble, the Paris Agreement refers to the concept of “climate justice”. Furthermore, in Article 7.5 states that “adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on

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3 For example, EU member states’ approaches on granting legal standing vary (see: European Commission, 2019). In Latin America and the Caribbean progress is noted, but not in a linear way (see UN, 2018)
and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate (United Nations, 2015). There is also a growing debate on the rights of nature, rooted in ecocentric philosophy.

Women and youth movements

As women account for a larger share of the world’s poor, and because of their traditional roles related to household and community responsibilities in many societies, they are more likely to be negatively affected by environmental degradation. In developing countries, women and children are often most affected by the erosion of ecosystems, the unsustainable use of natural resources and the effects of climate change - such as increased frequency and intensity of droughts and floods - because of their greater dependence on traditional household and community life and small-scale farming and wetlands (UNFCCC, 2007). They are also most likely to be excluded from the decision-making process with regards to such issues.

Children, youth, and women often lack a voice and representation in decision-making processes. This is especially the case for those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. As identified in the OECD Development Centre Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI), women in many countries, are still the subject of discriminatory laws, social norms and practices, which hamper their ability to not only own land and therefore manage natural resources, including water, but also to seek redress for environmental damage brought on them.

Women – especially of colour and from indigenous communities - have been the majority of those engaged in the environmental justice movement in the US, among other countries, as they are the ones usually experiencing more closely environmental degradation at the local level, influencing theirs and their families’ daily lives (Unger, 2008). Women in developed countries are also increasingly concerned about residue of hormones, pesticides and micro-biotics and plastics in the water (and agriculture products) and the impact this may have on their health. In developing countries, women are usually most affected by the unsustainable use of natural resources and the effects of climate change, such as increased frequency and intensity of droughts and floods. They are also most likely to be excluded from the decision-making process with regards to such issues.

Youth and children also have limited opportunities to raise awareness on their case, as they hardly participate in decision-making processes. Beyond the formality of not being able to vote under a certain age, the OECD Youth Stocktaking Report demonstrates that young people continue to be significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions and engage less in institutionalised forms of participation such as voting and party membership, undermining their ability to shape environmental policy decisions and outcomes. While expressing lower levels of trust in governments (OECD, 2018a), young people demonstrate strong awareness for inequalities and climate change. In particular, younger generations of men and women are showing growing awareness and agency to drive change towards more sustainable consumption, travel, and overall lifestyles.

An intergenerational equity perspective on environmental policy is key to ensure that benefits and costs are distributed in a fair way across generations, even among generations that are yet to be born, as today’s actions affect all now and in the future. Businesses and the civil society, including women and youth groups, also have an important role to play in ensuring environmental justice. There is a growing number of grassroots initiatives worldwide that seek to incorporate women and youth considerations into environment-related policies.

4 See the work of GARN (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature) for more background on these efforts https://therightsofnature.org/ron-conference-articles/

5 For more information you may read the Issues Notes for Sessions 3 and 6.1.
In particular, women and youth are prominent among the leading global campaigners against climate change. The climate justice movement has been rapidly expanding in reach and impact in recent years, as people have raised their voice to call for action against phenomena that are becoming more and more visible. The growth of social media has allowed local communities, grassroots movements, and civil society organisations to magnify their voice and impact. Women are raising their own voice in the debate on climate change adaptation, not only because they often experience directly the impact of climate change, but also because they may have a different sense of what constitutes a bigger climate risk than men (Terry, 2009). Women have been requesting for climate justice since the 1990s, and they are continuing to do so, raising awareness and campaigning for a gender-just transition.

The Beijing Platform for action on gender equality contains a specific chapter on the environment, but it has only been debated once at the Commission on the status of Women (CSW) and falls short when it comes to implementation. Explicit recommendations from the Commission on Sustainable Development have been accepted but then largely ignored (CSD 2004, CSD 17, CSD 19 etc.). So while there are good intentions at the international level, action is often lacking.

Concerns about intergenerational fairness are also mobilising thousands of young people around the globe calling for bold government action against climate change, as exemplified by the #FridaysforFuture movement. The youth movement against climate change can be traced back to 2015, when students from around the world decided to act by skipping school to protest against adults who are shirking their responsibility for “avoiding dangerous climate change” (Climate Strike, n.d.). A student climate strike was organised around COP21. In 2018, Greta Thunberg camped outside the Swedish Parliament requesting action against climate change. Ever since, students are striking every Friday around the world. The student movement started with scattered youth initiatives and has now grown into a global one. The 3rd global climate strike, which took place on 20-27 September 2019, saw — according to the movement’s own estimates - 7.6 million people in 185 different countries taking action demanding “an end to the age of fossil fuels” (Global Climate Strike, n.d.; Fridays for Future, n.d.). The strike was organised through social media – with banners, widgets and push notifications – and received support from more than 10,000 companies, non-governmental organisations and on-line platforms.

The 2018 OECD Youth Stocktaking Report shows that, even though young people engage less in institutionalised forms of participation such as voting and party membership, they are using digital technologies to discuss social and political issues and to mobilise others. 27 out of 35 OECD countries have, at some point, drafted a multi-year youth strategy, however only 14 of these countries had in 2018 an operational strategy. It is worth noting that, from the 27 national youth strategies, 89% set gender-specific objectives, and 52% provide gender-disaggregated data. Even though in 67% of the strategies there is a reference to monitoring and evaluating their implementation, only a few have enacted such mechanisms, engaging with youth representatives (OECD, 2018a).

Such an example is Denmark, where in 2019, the Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate set up Ungeklimarådet, the Youth Climate Council. The Council has an advisory role to the government, submitting concrete recommendations towards adapting society to a more sustainable lifestyle, raising awareness among youth on the imminent need for action, and empowering youth by providing a way for direct participation. The Youth Climate Council has already set ambitious targets: among others, it proposed for Denmark to become carbon neutral by 2040; it requested the integration of climate considerations in all policy spheres by moving towards sustainable production and consumption patterns; it called for a tripartite dialogue to be established between

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6 WEDO, the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation, a non-governmental organisation, was founded in 1991, and has successfully put women’s rights at the forefront of international conferences and actions (https://wedo.org/about-us-2/)

government, business and youth; and it requested for green budgeting and for integrating negative environmental, economic and social externalities based on the cost of climate-damaging behaviour (Energy Ministry Denmark, 2019).

At the broader national and local level, various movements of conflicting nature, including France’s “Gilets Jaunes”, as well as increasing number of lawsuits against governments around the world for damages caused by air pollution, are putting pressure on governments to address social, economic and environmental challenges in an integrated manner. Citizens are actively asking for more transparency and accountability in policy actions. The recent fire in a chemicals’ factory in Rouen, France, has led local civil society to take legal action requesting for all information available about the health and environmental effects of possible pollution caused by the fire (L’express, 2019).

The Urgenda Foundation, a Dutch non-governmental organisation, sued the Dutch government requesting action to be taken for CO2 emissions reduction, in line with the 2 degrees international goal. The Court, examining the case from an intergenerational perspective, ruled in favour of Urgenda, setting a worldwide legal precedent. The Dutch government had appealed twice, and the Supreme Court reached its final decision on December 20th, 2019, ruling in favour of Urgenda. The Dutch government is now required to reduce emissions, in line with its human rights obligations (Urgenda, 2019).

In 2018, the Supreme Court of Colombia issued a decision in the favour of young Colombians, who sued public authorities asking the state to take immediate action to reduce deforestation rates in Colombian Amazon to zero by 2020 (Tolosa Villabona, 2018). The young claimed that deforestation increase in Colombia affects the ecosystems, and therefore negatively influences their lives. The legal argumentation for the case was built on the right to a healthy environment included in the Colombian Constitution.

Indigenous communities and the role of women

According to the United Nations, indigenous people constitute around 5% of the world’s population, and 15% of the world’s poor (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). Based on a recent OECD Report on Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development, indigenous populations are mainly concentrated in rural areas, compared to non-indigenous populations (OECD, 2019). This makes them more susceptible to changes in the local environment. For indigenous communities, the unsustainable use of natural resources, along with clarification of property rights over land and water, is not just a question of human rights, but also of survival. Where local populations are dependent on local natural resources, climate change and economic activity are damaging existing community-based natural resources management patterns. A pointed example of this is the Arctic (Nymand Larsen and Fondahl, 2014).

Women have been traditionally active in ecosystem preservation and maintenance of traditional knowledge, playing a fundamental role in environmental protection and conservation. However, changes depicted from increased interaction with other communities, have marginalized women’s role in natural resource management (OECD, 2018b).

Safeguarding indigenous land and water rights has also been important for these communities, as it is linked with protecting their cultural and language diversity, and with mitigating the effects of climate change (as indigenous peoples are managing forests, which act as carbon sinks) (OECD, 2019). Indigenous women have been strongly advocating for sustainable development and environmental protection, and have been active in claiming land rights. In Sri Lanka, for example, they actively requested, and managed to get most of their land back, changing initial plans for a tourist resort project. Such achievements depend critically on guaranteeing equal access to the decision-making and to land rights (Oxfam 2016).

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8 There are myriads examples of indigenous women’s environmental activist groups, both in countries with and without a framework linked to environmental justice, see (Herrera, 2017; Bioneers, 2019; Verve, 2019). There are also more women getting engaged in representing their indigenous communities (Ford Foundation, 2018)
The Native Women’s Association of Canada, an umbrella organization for 12 indigenous women’s organisations, has argued that indigenous women are more “likely to suffer disproportionate negative environmental effects from mining activities locally”. They have also argued that the positive economic effects of the mining activities may not counterbalance the negative ones, unless supported by women’s engagement in the decision-making processes, by more vocational education and training aligned to the cultural characteristics of the peoples and of women, and by limiting discrimination and violence against women.

According to their analysis, and despite the existing companies-communities agreements that are in place, indigenous women face a greater risk of exposure to mining-related toxic substances and climate change, because of both physiological and socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including their role in managing local land and water sources. Indigenous women generally also have less access to education and therefore do not have the same opportunities to work in the mining sector; they are most often the victims of sexual and other types of violence and abuse from people outside their communities; and they experience some of the negative effects from substance abuse from the men occupied in the sector (Bond and Quinlan, 2019).

Small Island Developing States

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), some of the smallest and most remote countries in the world, may not constitute a homogenous group; they are at different level of economic development, their demographics and social fabric vary. They have, however, been facing similar challenges jeopardising their future development, and the fight for climate justice has also been raised by those countries as they are influenced the most by climate change. Based on a recent OECD report, when compared with upper middle-income countries in the same income group, SIDS are 73% more vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards (OECD, 2018c). Combined with a lack of economic diversification and volatile growth, this vulnerability makes most SIDS highly dependent on development aid (of which 79% comes from bilateral providers and 21% from multilateral ones) and fragmented concessional finance.

The increasing needs for a more sustainable development requires more innovative climate finance instruments, greening fiscal reforms, and adequate debt relief mechanisms for these countries, that will support the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient choices (OECD, 2018c). So far, gender equality and women’s empowerment has been prioritised as a component of such concessional finance. 24% of concessional finance allocated to SIDS in the period 2012-2015 had a gender component, as inequalities are persistent.

Women are among those most affected by climate change in SIDS, as they are often tasked with gathering water, fishing, or farming – all of which are highly affected by flooding and other natural hazards. Women in SIDS have been advocating for better representation in all future discussions about the future of their countries (SIDS, 2014). The SAMOA Pathway agreed during the 2014 International Year for Small Island Development States, acknowledged women’s role as agents of change for sustainable development (UN, 2014). The Pathway set up a Partnership Framework that enables durable partnerships for the sustainable development of SIDS. Environmental protection and climate change, and gender equality play a prominent role in the priorities set. However, in the recently released SAMOA Pathway mid-term review, even though climate and environment-related global partnerships are well underway, gender remains under-represented as a priority (UN, 2019).

The Private sector and Philanthropy as actors in the environmental justice debate

Businesses also have an important role to play in ensuring environmental and climate justice. The US Environment Protection Agency is taking the lead in promoting environmental justice in local communities, engaging also with local businesses. The US EPA has encouraged businesses to take voluntary action based on environmental justice, examples of which include the setting up of a local health clinic, the public disclosure of post compliance monitoring information, and the signing of “good neighbour agreements” between local
communities and business to facilitate licensing issues not covered by legislation. (EPA, 2011). But as the private sector is engaging in resource-intensive activities and in natural resources management, a more systematic approach could be considered.

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and related Due Diligence guidance call on the private sector to avoid contributing to adverse impacts through their own activities or to mitigate such impacts in their supply chains. An important step is to apply a gender-perspective to risk-based due diligence to think through how real or potential adverse impacts may differ for or may be specific to women. The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct recommends that in assessing adverse impacts, businesses pay special attention “to populations that may have a heightened risk of vulnerability or marginalisation, and to different risks that may be faced by women and men” (OECD, 2018: 27). In particular, businesses should be aware of gender issues and women’s human rights in situations where women may be disproportionately impacted. The Guidelines include also specific recommendations that promote the well-being of women. National Contact Points set up in 48 adherent countries under the Guidelines are a non-judicial mechanism providing access to remedy to stakeholders (including civil society) for bad business practices and harms committed (e.g. relating to environmental, labour or human rights standards) (OECD, 2016).

Philanthropic institutions are also engaged in women’s empowerment and climate justice. For example, the Ford Foundation has been supporting initiatives through grants and fellowships in areas that are challenging multiple drivers of inequality. The Foundation identifies the following five drivers of inequality: (1) entrenched cultural narratives that undermine fairness, tolerance and inclusion; (2) failure to invest in and protect vital public goods, such as education and natural resources; (3) unfair rules of the economy that magnify unequal opportunity and outcomes; (4) unequal access to government decision making and resources; and (5) persistent prejudice and discrimination against women, people with disabilities and racial, ethnic, and caste minorities. Within this framework the Ford Foundation supports efforts across the globe to strengthen civil society, to enhance fair and inclusive political participation, to empower women and girls, and to reduce environmental crimes associate with the natural resource sector (Ford Foundation, 2018). Although philanthropic institutions seems to be more active in supporting women’s issues and organisations, here, only 2.5% of all financial support reaches women’s organisations directly (OECD netFWD, 2019).

Women in decision-making

Public decision-making systems and mechanisms have a key role to play in ensuring that all voices are presented when discussing issues of environmental and climate justice. It has been widely argued that a more equal participation of women in public life and in decision-making around environment- and climate-related issues would provide for both more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policies, leading to women’s empowerment, to gender equality and to alternative solutions to climate change (Bonewit, 2015).

The 2014 OECD Report on Women’s Access to Public Life shows that gender diversity in decision-making bodies provides further trust from the public, and enhances the promotion of women’s and children’s interests. It also shows that gender diversity in the judicial system improves the quality of the decisions taken, and upholds the courts’ legitimacy. Women jurists are also expected to advance gender-responsive decisions on actions directed against women (OECD, 2014).

At the same time, women are increasingly represented in high-level positions linked to environmental decision-making in the OECD countries. At the time this paper was written, women did occupy less than 40% of positions (OECD average) as Ministers of Environment, National Focal Points to UNCCD, and 47% of positions as National Focal Points to UNFCCC. Women exceed men as National Focal Points to CBD, supporting the argument that they are more active in issues relating to biodiversity, both on the ground and in decision-making (Figure 1). However, women are largely underrepresented in high-level public positions in finance and infrastructure, and therefore the agenda setting and financial and construction prioritisation still remains in the hands of men.
Figure 1. Environment-related high level representation by gender in OECD countries in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment Ministers</th>
<th>National Focal Points to CBD</th>
<th>National Focal Points to UNCCD</th>
<th>National Focal Points to UNFCCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (39%) Female (61%)</td>
<td>Male (58%) Female (42%)</td>
<td>Male (47%) Female (53%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on OECD research (data collected on 11 February 2020).

As shows the example of Parliaments, where national budgets are approved, and women have a different preferences in prioritisation. A 2019 study by 50:50 Parliament used machine learning to review 1.2 million parliamentary interventions by men and women in the UK’s House of Commons, and 500,000 interventions in the US House of Representation, in an attempt to capture the gender differences on the issues Parliamentarians addressed. Women, across all political parties, spent more time addressing environment-related topics (D’Souza, 2018).

Gender and youth considerations in environmental policy-making tools

Beyond high-level representation, mainstreaming gender and youth aspects in environmental policy-making – and vice versa – requires also a bottom up approach, whereby justice and governance frameworks at the international, national and local level need to be adjusted to incorporate the views and needs of such groups. Many OECD countries already integrate the impact of proposed policies on gender equality, when conducting regulatory impact assessments (OECD, 2015). Some OECD countries are developing the so-called youth checks, in an attempt to integrate the impact on youth, based on existing paradigms of Child Regulatory Impact Assessments (OECD, 2018a).
Environmental Impact Assessments are already widespread in OECD countries, mainstreaming the environment in project decision-making, as the OECD had adopted a Recommendation on the Assessment of Projects with Significant Impact on the Environment in 1979 (OECD, 1979). The Recommendation was amended in November 2019, to integrate environmental assessment also in the drawing and development of plans and programmes. The 2012 OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance did highlight, in its set of principles, the need to “adopt \textit{ex ante} impact assessment practices that are proportional to the significance of the regulation, and include benefit cost analyses that consider the welfare impacts of regulation taking into account economic, social and environmental impacts including the distributional effects over time, identifying who is likely to benefit and who is likely to bear costs” (OECD, 2012). An integrated impact assessment framework, encompassing both gender/youth, as well as indigenous or other groups’, and environmental considerations in the different stages of policy development and implementation, as well as at the programme and project level, would help both overcome adverse socioeconomic and environmental effects at the implementation phase, and empower women and youth who would not be excluded from the process.

The OECD has also been arguing for both gender- and youth- responsive budgets, as these could ensure that the needs and interests of these groups are better addressed in future policies (OECD, 2018a). This practice should also become the norm for environment-related budgeting. Canada applies a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to all government decisions relating to taxation, budgeting and expenditures, domestically and internationally, in all policy sectors, including infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2018). Through this inclusive analytical tool, Canada is assessing how different groups (based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability etc.) can maximise positive benefits and address identified challenges. The GBA+ lens is being integrated in climate change policies, and Canada’s International Climate Change Action Programme is integrating gender considerations in the design, decision-making, and implementation of projects (Government of Canada, 2019).

SIDA, the Swedish Development Agency, has also been following a gender analysis in all of its environmental programming and projects, covering areas such as exposure to chemicals and pollution, participation in waste management, access and management of water and energy resources, participation in agriculture and fishing, and engaging in forestry management. Through applying SIDA’s Gender Toolbox in environmental work, development experts map opportunities and challenges, and the gender differentiated impact of their approach. They also collect the necessary gender-disaggregated data, which enable them to measure the impact of the policies proposed. Finally, they engage with local women and girls, financially supporting women entrepreneurs and workers in environment-related sectors (SIDA, 2016).

Other initiatives for introducing a gender and youth lens on environmental policies, for future consideration, could also include educating the public, especially women and youth, on externalities, climate change, need for action; use and intergenerational approach considering that today’s young people will be the decision-makers and agenda setters of tomorrow.
Questions for consideration

- What actions are required at the international level to strengthen access to environmental information, environmental justice and transparency, in particular for women, youth and vulnerable groups?
- How can the international response to the urgent needs of SIDS and less developed countries affected by extreme climate events be better channelled and accelerated?
- What policy initiatives have countries undertaken or could undertake to support women’s, youth’s and indigenous groups’ engagement in decision-making, in policy-making and in advocating for environmental justice and progress?
- How can governments best balance their role as regulator with partnerships with the private sector and philanthropy to support environmental justice and women’s empowerment?
- How can the OECD support countries in developing their environmental justice frameworks?
- How do current international expectations on responsible business conduct (RBC) extend to environmental justice and women’s empowerment issues? How can OECD tools and instruments on RBC better support business in taking into account environmental justice and women’s empowerment as part of their risk assessments?
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