Gender Equality And Climate Change

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Why consider how climate change will affect men and women differently?
Understanding how the different social expectations, roles, status, and economic power of men and women affect, and are affected differently by, climate change will improve actions taken to reduce vulnerability and combat climate change in the developing world.

Food security
Climate change is predicted to reduce crop yields and food production in some regions, particularly the tropics. Women are responsible for 70–80 percent of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa, 65 percent in Asia, and 45 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. They achieve this despite unequal access to land, information, and inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizer. Traditional food sources may become more unpredictable and scarce as the climate changes. Women’s specific knowledge of maintaining biodiversity, through the conservation and domestication of wild edible plant seeds and food crop breeding, is key to adapting to climate change more effectively.

Water and other resource shortages
Climate change may exacerbate existing shortages of water. Women, largely responsible for water collection in their communities, are more sensitive to the changes in seasons and climatic conditions that affect water quantity and accessibility that make its collection even more time-consuming.

Health
Climate change may affect human health in a variety of ways, including:
• increased spread of vector- and water-borne diseases;
• reduced drinking water availability;
• food insecurity due to reduced agricultural production in some regions; and
• increased cases of heat stress and respiratory illness.

As primary caregivers in many families, women may see their responsibilities increase as family members suffer increased illness. Further, in the developing world, women often have less access to medical care than men.

What are some gender-specific vulnerabilities and responses to climate change?
• Male out-migration may happen due to resource shortages, generating increased work for women (though the effects on women’s autonomy can be complex, and female out-migration can also occur.)
• There may be increased difficulty in accessing resources, in particular, fuelwood and water, hence, creating an increased workload for women
• Crop and livestock production changes could affect the gendered division of labour and possibly have negative effects on both men’s and women’s incomes.
• As sea levels rise, the livelihoods of people living in low-lying coastal zones are threatened, flooding levels increase, erosion is accelerated, wetlands and mangroves are threatened, and seawater intrudes into freshwater resources. These impacts put further strain on limited resources and settlements.
• Women’s informal rights to resources could decrease or disappear as access to land natural resources dwindle due to climate change.
• Women and men experience different vulnerabilities and cope with natural disasters differently; therefore, an increase in the magnitude and frequency of natural disasters will have different implications for men and women.
CASE STUDY: Climate change and gender equality in China

A goal of the Canada-China Cooperation in Climate Change (C5) Project, funded through the Canada Climate Change Development Fund (CCCDF) and administered by CIDA, is to increase the contribution of women by empowering them to participate equally in the development and implementation of climate-change-related policies and programs, particularly within Chinese government agencies and research institutions. Specific objectives include:

- Increase awareness of gender inequalities and support for women’s full participation in decision-making and technical activities associated with climate change;
- Increase the capacity to analyze gender equality issues relevant to the project and incorporate the results of the analysis into project activities;
- Develop and implement appropriate targets for male/female participation in project activities, based on sex-disaggregated baseline research; the minimum expectation is 30% participation by women; and
- Increase the awareness, abilities, self-confidence and motivation of women working to address the issue of climate change.

Also in China, CIDA funded the Canada-China Cooperation Project in Cleaner Production, which took aim at emissions in the pulp and paper, fertilizer, plastics, and brewing industries. The project contained a specific component to increase the participation of women as workers, technicians, and managers. Women received training in process improvement, auditing practices, monitoring of equipment, computers, and other technical aspects of their work. At the same time, gender equality awareness sessions began to transform the attitudes of both men and women. Women not only applied the new clean-production techniques at work, they started taking initiatives on their own to help clean up the environment. This project has been the catalyst for the creation of a new organization: Women and Environment Network (WEN).

Source: www.cccsu.org.cn

Useful resources on gender equality and climate change

Cannon, T. “Gender and climate hazards in Bangladesh.” *Gender and Development* 10,2 (July 2002): 45–50

Gender and Climate Change website: www.gencc.interconnection.org/resources.htm