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**GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat  
Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD)

Commonwealth Secretariat  
Marlborough House  
London SW1Y 5HX

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## LINKING GENDER TO CLIMATE CHANGE

It is in the context of this year's theme for the Finance Ministers Meeting, '*Climate Change: the Challenges facing Finance Ministers*', that this brief focuses on the importance of understanding the links between gender and climate change.

2. The predominant approach to dealing with climate change has been to see and assess it in terms of a technical problem that requires technical solutions. It is clearly evident that there has been very little attention to gender issues in the international processes concerning the development of climate change, whether in protocols, treaties or debates around them. (See box on Climate Change Milestones, page 7).

3. However, when understanding environmental change, gender is an important dimension to take into account. Environmental management is not gender neutral and it is important that climate vulnerability assessments adequately reflect the different circumstances of men and women within communities.

4. **The differential impacts of climate change on men and women can be illustrated by the following:**

### Poverty and Vulnerability

- All conventions underline the fact that livelihoods of the poor are directly threatened by the loss of biodiversity, climate change and desertification.
- Poverty is a key factor affecting people's ability to provide adequate self-protection, and it is generally accepted that women comprise a larger proportion of the world's poor. Women's status and activities make them experience poverty differently from men and they are more vulnerable.
- Within the developing world, women represent the majority of low-income earners, with lower education levels and unequal access to social, economic and political resources. Gender differences in property rights and in issues related to access to information and the different cultural, social and economic roles for men and women means that climate change is likely to affect them differentially.
- Since women form the disproportionate share of the poor in developing countries and communities that are highly dependent on natural resources, they are likely to be disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of Climate Change.
- Giving an example, 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 by men to men in public spaces, but rarely communicated to the rest of the family and as many women are not allowed to leave the house without a male relative they therefore perished waiting for their relatives to return home and take them to a safe place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lorena Aguilar, Global Senior Gender Advisor, IUCN - The World Conservation Union. 2004 fact sheet on Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation.

## **Roles and responsibilities of men and women**

5. The socially ascribed roles for men and women also result in greater impact on women in climate change.

### **a) Households**

- In most societies, women are largely responsible for all the roles related to management of the household – caring, cooking, cleaning and responsibility for water, fuel and fodder. Extreme weather events have a negative impact on women’s time management in the household. Water shortages have significant implications for women and children. When wells and water sources run dry or are covered by floods, women have to walk long distances to surrounding neighbourhoods in search of clean water.
- Women can be more vulnerable in terms of health, with higher incidence of respiratory illness from exposure to toxic pollutants inherently associated with cooking and using poorer forms of energy such as biomass.
- The lower than average education of women will mean that their awareness of mitigation options such as the use of energy-efficient devices is limited, and even if they are aware they may not have the resources to enable them to change.

### **b) Agriculture**

- A recent report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation states that in some 40 poor, developing countries, with a combined population of two billion, including 450 million undernourished people, production losses due to climate change may drastically increase the number of undernourished people, severely hindering progress in combating poverty and food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>
- Climate change could mean extra hardship for farming activities which are often carried out by women. This is particularly so in Africa but also in Asia where women undertake such activities as paddy cultivation and farming cash crops such as cotton and tea plantations.
- Women have a high share of agricultural activities but little decision-making power or control over inputs and outputs. And, food security is an important issue with women’s key roles with respect to crop production.
- Climate change reduces crop yields and food production particularly in developing countries affecting women’s livelihood strategies and food security, and therefore their right to food. Traditional food sources may become more unpredictable and scarce. Drought and flooding can be detrimental to women who keep livestock as a source of income and for security.

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<sup>2</sup> (FAO report presented at the 31st Session of the Committee on World Food Security in May 2005 in Rome. - Special Event on Impact of Climate Change, Pests and Diseases on Food Security and Poverty Reduction.)

c) **Forests**

- Forests are vital for the healthy state of our global environment. In many societies, women have for centuries been the firewood and minor forest product gatherers. They are the herbalists and ritualists. An increasing number of women depend on forest resources for their livelihood. Forest products serve as a source of nutritional and food supplement, thus providing alternative nutrients, minerals and vitamins to the usual staple foods and fuel.
- Land clearance for agriculture and commercial purposes is causing deforestation, contributing to the greenhouse problem as well as making access to forestry products difficult and placing women under increasing strain as they have to trek further and further.
- The Community Development Carbon Fund whose purpose is extending the benefits of carbon finance to the poorest countries and poor communities in all developing countries could target women and men in reducing deforestation, promoting cleaner biomass projects and assisting poorer households to reach more sustainable options.

6. The challenge is to elaborate responses not imposed from above, but modelled on needs, aspirations, knowledge and capabilities of individuals that are then actively involved as crucial partners in these efforts.

**THE WAY FORWARD – MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA**

7. There are two inter-linked responses to climate change. The first is the prevention of climate change (mitigation) by measures to reduce the emission of greenhouses gases such as carbon dioxide; and secondly, efforts to prepare for, and respond to, the impacts of climate change (adaptation). In addition, it is critically important that women have a voice and participate in negotiations and decision-making at all levels where policies, conventions and programmes for climate change are being formulated and implemented.

**Mitigation**

8. Mitigation measures have been the focus of lengthy and difficult international negotiations under the UNFCCC. The progress to date suggests that climate change will persist for many years and that Commonwealth member states are predicted to face significant impacts from the changes over the coming decades, according to a Commonwealth Secretariat's paper on Adaptation to Climate Change: Technical Assistance to Highly Vulnerable Commonwealth countries. Reports from the IPCC indicate that climate change is likely to have the most significant impact on societies with the lowest capacity to cope, especially developing countries and the poorest people in all countries. The principal concerns are impacts on agriculture, food security and water resources, resulting from more frequent droughts, floods and other extreme weather events.

9. In Africa and Asia, areas that will be most adversely affected are those that are already most vulnerable to food insecurity. For low-lying and Small Island developing states there are

also major concerns with respect to sea level rise and increased incidence of sea surges and encroachment. For all, there is an increased risk from more extreme and more frequent adverse weather events that could lead to natural disasters. All of these impacts are a significant challenge to attainment of the Millennium Development Goals on poverty and hunger, water and sanitation, health, and environmental sustainability.

10. Therefore, environmental management needs to be highly gendered and conservation measures should take into account gendered divisions of labour in order to achieve gender equity.

11. There is a need to avert the rapid environmental and economic degradation that generally affects the lives of women and children in rural areas in a more exacerbated manner through impacts of drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsustainable agro-chemical products.

### **Adaptation**

12. The issue of sustainable energy development is a key consideration for climate change adaptation initiatives, and is an integral component in ability to achieve the inter-related economic, social, and environmental aims of sustainable development.

13. The opportunities and challenges that men and women will face in responding to climate change are uncertain and unclear. And the role that gender issues play in global efforts is more significant in adaptation measures where gender concerns are most stark, and where gender advocates can meaningfully contribute to developing gender-sensitive policies and initiatives. Recommendations to mainstream gender in adaptation measures are outlined below:

- To be successful, adaptation measures within both developed and developing countries need to be gender sensitive. 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.
- For instance, during a drought in the small islands of the Federal States of Micronesia, the knowledge of island hydrology from women as a result of their land-based work enabled them to find potable water by digging a new well that reached the freshwater lens.
- Equal involvement of men and women in adaptation planning is important not only to ensure that the measures developed are actually beneficial for those who are supposed to implement them, but also to ensure that all relevant knowledge is integrated into policy and projects.
- Examples of adaptation to climate change projects in Commonwealth countries can be shared. In Makueni District, Kenya for instance, women in the community have teamed up and come up with a project on 'Increasing Community Resilience to Drought.'

- Relevant research needs to be developed and financed. This requires gender experts and climate researchers to engage in the issues, and it requires donors and other funding institutions to support such research projects.
- Based on existing knowledge in the area of climate change as well as in other areas, specific suggestions for research projects can easily be developed and advocated.
- Interventions that create greater awareness and understanding of the complex links between gender equality and the environment can help to build the capacity of the poor, especially poor women, to adapt to the impacts of and take action on climate change.
- There need to be greater effort to develop and collect gender disaggregated data to analyse climate change-related data and scenarios. Generally, gender-disaggregated data are particularly lacking for the developed world.
- Promoting cleaner-burning fuel for household use will help to reduce pollution and harmful emissions, and will benefit women by cutting their annual cooking costs by 25 per cent.
- Policies must positively promote sustainable agriculture to encourage better land use management; preserve water and tree cover and enhance food production, balance fiscal stabilisation objectives with employment and social protection in order to strengthen livelihoods and coping strategies of the poor.

## **Participation**

### **14. Lastly, it is imperative, as stated earlier that women play a role in decision making processes**

- Women must be involved in climate protection negotiations at all levels and in all decisions on climate protection. Representation by numbers is not enough. There is need for gender experts to be involved.
- Governments should aim to ensure the involvement of women and gender experts when they prepare their contributions for the international process, and ensure women's participation at international meetings.
- Empowerment through capacity building and technical training will increase women's capacity to effectively participate in energy policy-making and decision-making bodies. It is necessary to build capacity and resilience to enable women and men to cope with the negative impacts of climate variability and climate change.
- Women must be recognised as agents of change who have a significant role to play creating sustainable models for energy consumption and production, and in responsible climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

- Addressing the absence of the gender dimensions in the UNFCCC, and the scarcity of research focusing on the gender aspects of climate change will also help to build a more consistent and solid approach regarding climate change policies.
- Initiatives must include efforts aimed at assuring women's access to funds to meet climate change objectives with the generation of beneficial gender-based effects, for instance, the possibility for women to acquire improved energy technologies, traditionally out of their reach.

## **CONCLUSION**

15. It is important that efforts should consider carefully where and how gender issues should be incorporated in the climate change debate.

16. All climate protection measures, programmes and all instruments for mitigating climate change or adapting to climate change must be subject to a gender-focused analysis.

17. In order to successfully create programmes that reduce the impact of climate change, the differential impacts on men and women need to be considered. How women use their environment in comparison to men and how women are affected by environmental change are important factors in a successful climate change programme.

### **Climate Change: Key Milestones**

The United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, ages, classes, income groups, occupations and genders (IPCC 2001). It notes that the impact of climate change will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and poor persons within all countries. This will exacerbate inequities in health status and access to adequate food, clean water and other resources. When natural disasters and environmental change occur, women and men are affected differently because of traditional and socially based roles and responsibilities.

In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, at an Earth Summit, governments agreed to tackle climate change. During that meeting, leaders created a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which set a non-binding goal of stabilising emissions at 1990 levels by 2000.

The 1997 Kyoto protocol was a follow-up to this first initiative and the first legally binding agreement to cut greenhouse gases. Compliance to the targets by those that have signed up to the Protocol is required over the period 2008-2012 and countries are now working on their proposals for what happens after 2012. Negotiators have agreed to ensure a smooth transition to a new set of rules starting in 2013. The way in which this will be achieved will be the subject of negotiations in Bali in December 2007.

Notwithstanding all vital documents and despite a strong move by women away from viewing women as vulnerable victims of this global phenomenon, neither the UNFCCC nor the Kyoto Protocol make any mention of gender or women's issues relative to global Environmental change.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is mentioned in Agenda 21 - a United Nations (UN) blueprint related to sustainable development. Agenda 21 is a comprehensive outline of actions to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organisations of the UN, governments and major groups in every area in which human impact on the environment. It draws upon a number of international instruments supportive to gender equality, and in particular, it recommends the strengthening of elements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) related to environment and development.

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<sup>3</sup> (Christie E. Dennison's paper 'From Beijing to Kyoto: Gendering the International Climate Change Negotiation Process' at the *53rd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs*. The paper refers to Skutsch, Margaret M. (2002). "Protocols, treaties, and action: the 'climate change process' viewed through gender spectacles". *Gender and Development* Vol 10, No 2, pp. 30-39.