SUPPORT WOMEN TO BUILD THEIR ADAPTIVE CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE

Climate change affects everyone, but not equally. Understanding this provides the basis for designing climate change adaptation policies and activities that build social resilience. Women are among the most vulnerable to climate change due to the inequality, marginalization and poverty they experience—and the corresponding weak access they have to essential livelihood assets. These same factors put women at greatest risk of climate related conflicts. Ensuring that these realities are well understood and that women’s voices and interests underpin policy-making is essential for conflict-sensitive adaptation.

Social, economic and political realities provide the context in which adaptation takes place. How resources and opportunities are shared in society and who decides on how these should be used are critical factors in adaptation. While much policy attention focuses on the impacts on the poorest in society, less attention has been paid to gender differences and ensuring that climate change does not further erode gender equality.

The importance of gender within the adaptation context has been described as follows:

The IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] has predicted “that climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders and that the poor, primarily but by no means exclusively in developing countries, will be disproportionately affected.” Gender inequalities are directly linked to poverty. It is expected that the vulnerability of poor men and women to climate change will aggravate inequities in health and access to food, clean water, and other resources.

Climate change affects men and women differently because of gender differences, for example in access to resources, property rights, the divisions of labour, decision-making power, accessing information, and cultural, social and economic roles. Most of the women in developing nations are responsible for climatically sensitive tasks such as securing food, water and energy which ensure household wellbeing, while men are responsible for climatically sensitive tasks such as livestock farming, land management and forestry. Women are the majority in rural areas, and they depend heavily on natural and rain-fed resources that are sensitive to climate change. These differences make women more vulnerable to climate change for a number of reasons.

Where climate change amplifies social conflict around resource entitlements, women are likely to be even worse off. In these circumstances they are at increased risk of physical attack, including rape, when they carry out daily activities such as farming, trading and collecting wood. They also face the risk of their produce being appropriated. Emerging evidence also shows that women are increasingly victims of household gender violence during times of stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

认定 that women play key roles in society, including as food producers, and can be powerful agents of change.

☑ Facilitate and support women leadership and equal participation in decision-making.
☑ Strengthen gender mainstreaming at all levels, especially local government, to ensure that adaptation policy is responsive to women’s needs and aspirations.
☑ Ensure that adaptation policy does not further aggravate gender inequalities and inequities.
☑ Be aware that women and girls are more likely than men to be the unseen victims of resource conflict and associated violence.
☑ Improve the access women have to services that support adaptation including to agricultural services and early warning systems.
☑ Commit more resources to research to understand better the links between climate change, gender inequity and adverse impacts including vulnerability and conflict.
Climate change has a gendered face, so should adaptation

Women’s responsibility for adaptation is different from that of men. In a Gender Links study, all the participating women reported that, because it is their role to ensure household food security, they work harder than men to find the means and resources to sustain food supply. Interviewees noted that they had to diversify their livelihoods and this created an extra workload, adding to the difference in the distribution of work between men and women. The poor access that women have to agricultural extension services and land amplify these challenges. At the same time, these important social roles make women potentially powerful agents of change. Ensuring that adaptation strategies take account of these complex realities is essential for reducing the vulnerability of women and developing conflict-sensitive adaptation strategies.

Adaptive strategies need to take account of the specific realities of women and how these might change in contexts of conflict:

Table 1. Why a gendered approach to conflict-sensitive adaptation is needed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered Factors</th>
<th>Weak rights and marginalization underpin the negative experiences that women face</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Security</td>
<td>Agricultural productivity in Southern Africa is expected to drop by 20-50% in extreme El Niño years. Women are the main producers of crops, accounting for up to 90% of available food for poor rural people. Climate change will put new levels of pressure on women to put food on the table. Women are also among those most vulnerable to food insecurity. When there is conflict, women face additional risks from violence and may be unable to undertake productive activities and sell their produce on the market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water Security</td>
<td>Climate change is likely to exacerbate water shortages. Women are largely responsible for water management in communities and in the home. Shortages will result in an increase in the time spent fetching water as well as disease. This exposes women to conflict around access to water. Consequently, water adaptation strategies need to take account of these realities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Women’s already tenuous rights to land could be eroded further. Where physical control is lost due to floods and a male titleholder dies, women, given their insecure land rights, may not be able to regain access to land or compensation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Stress levels and related diseases may increase for both women and men. Because of expectations around providing for the family, men experience and express stress in different, often more devastating ways than women.</td>
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<td>Gender violence</td>
<td>Adolescent girls report high levels of sexual harassment and abuse in the aftermath of disasters. This is associated with women having a lack of privacy for dressing and bathing and having to share sleeping spaces.Scarce resources exacerbate conflict, and there is often a gender dimension to this conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortality</td>
<td>A London School of Economics study of disasters shows that women and children are 1-4 times more likely to die than men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>Men dominate decision-making in most institutions concerned with climate change and adaptation policy and actions. This lack of inclusion over key decisions about the distribution of resources could increase the vulnerability women experience.</td>
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</table>
Strengthening women’s rights can transform them into powerful agents of social change and strengthen the resilience of society as a whole.

Gender equality is a right not a privilege, and a right that is recognized in the Cancun Agreements. The mobilization of women and their participation and empowerment in adaptation activities is a priority for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) establishes the global framework for building gender justice and addressing inequality. Women are entitled to equal participation in decision-making, as well as equal treatment and access to resources and services.

CEDAW draws attention to the need for policy makers to address the specific realities of women, and in particular of the rural poor. It notes, for example, that addressing inequality requires: “access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes” [Article 14.2 (g)]. The importance of this is echoed in the findings of the 2011 State of Food and Agriculture report, which found that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30% and total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4%. This would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17% and lift 100–150 million people out of hunger.

Poor urban women as well as rural women who live in drylands, low-lying or mountainous areas will need to be singled out for support, given the high levels of exposure they face and their social status. In addition, older women, indigenous women and those that practice pastoral livelihoods or hunter-gathering will also require additional support.

An improved understanding of women’s needs and the impacts they experience under climate change will require investment in generating gender-differentiated data; methodologies that improve dialogues with women ensure their interests are heard. This requires policies and practices that not only address the vulnerability women experience but improve their coping capacity. This includes policies, strategies and actions that:

- Recognize the right of women to participate in all levels of decision-making, including in the design of adaptation actions;
- Improve women’s access to land, credit and information that supports productive and marketing activities;
- Ensure women are included in early warning and disaster response systems;
- Address the links between climate change and health, including reproductive health and nutrition;
- Advance women’s access to education and other knowledge-generating systems.

Campaign for Addendum on Gender and Climate Change in the SADC Gender Protocol

The SADC Gender Protocol Campaign views the SADC Gender Protocol as a living document that should constantly be reviewed and enriched. Certain aspects of adaptation—financing clean energy sources, capacity building on climate change, and including more women in climate related decision-making positions—came out strongly during the campaign as areas that need to be addressed. This campaign is multifaceted as it highlights glaring issues of lack of access to resources, coordination and vulnerability particularly affecting women. By December 2013, Gender Links had collected 1,067 signatures for the campaign on the climate change addendum. The campaign has gained momentum for an inclusive protocol which shows gender-responsive mitigation strategies on the adaptation aspects identified. It has opened a platform to review in its entirety the SADC Gender Protocol to include stand-alone provisions and targets on gender and climate change post-2015 as the deadline for the existing protocol targets approaches. The review of the Protocol will ensure that access and control of natural resources, which are at the core of the climate change crisis, are viewed with gender sensitivity. Research into the effects of gender and climate change remains critical to enable evidence-based advocacy strategies on gender, climate change and conflict resolution.
Women are particularly vulnerable to climate change owing to gender inequality in access to resources, their role in decision-making, and lack of livelihood assets. The ‘discriminatory’ impact of climate change makes it imperative for policy makers to ensure that adaptation is gender sensitive.

When adaptation policies are blind to gender realities they are likely to reinforce existing inequality and inequity, causing further breakdowns in social relations and the escalation of violence to which women and girls are subjected in contexts of instability.

Investing in women and girls can help unleash their potential, making them powerful agents of change given the central roles they play for example in food production and energy consumption, and help build more resilient societies. Food productivity, for example, can be dramatically increased by improving women’s access to services and productive resources such as land and credit.

Some women are more vulnerable than others. Policy and strategic and practical interventions need to recognize the differences not only between men and women but also among women. This requires taking account of gender at all stages of conflict-sensitive adaptation, and tailoring interventions to address the specific needs of poor urban women, rural women, and the women most exposed to adverse climate impacts including those living in drylands, low-lying or mountainous areas, and pastoral and hunter-gatherer women.

Taking a gendered and participatory approach to vulnerability assessments and social and environmental impact assessments can help to identify areas in which women require most support, and where better decisions need to be made. This can help decision makers better understand possible impacts of their decisions, strengthening integration of gender equality, poverty alleviation, and adaptation.

Women may be subjected to violence in their homes and in society more widely; social instability from climate change could increase the risk of gender-based violence. It is imperative that climate adaptation communities invest in researching this relationship and take actions to address gender-based violence.

End Notes

1 Working Group on Streamlining Climate Change and Gender 2008
2 World Bank 2008
3 Working Group on Streamlining Climate Change and Gender 2008
4 Angula 2010
5 UNEP, UN-Women, PBSO and UNDP 2013
6 ibid
7 FAO
8 UNFCCC 2014
9 CEDAW 2009
10 Gender Links 2013

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