

Women & climate change

When natural disasters strike, they hit poor communities first and worst. And since women make up an estimated 70 percent of those living below the poverty line, they are most likely to bear the heaviest burdens. At the same time, women are often left out of the conversation about adapting to climate change and mitigating emissions, even though they are sometimes in the best position to provide solutions. Socially constructed roles and responsibilities usually put women at a disadvantage in preparing for climate change and responding to climate impacts, such as extreme floods, droughts and storms. However, a global climate agreement can work to ensure that the special needs of both women and men are met as the world comes together to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Key reasons why gender equity must be incorporated into a global climate agreement

- Women are the linchpins of societies. Women are the key providers for the family, and raise the children, care for the old and the sick. As a result, they are on the front lines of the devastating effects of climate change, and largely define the community's ability to adapt or recover from a disaster.
- Women produce up to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. They regularly do the jobs, such as cultivating crops, and collecting water and fuel, which are most affected by climate change.
- Women are disproportionately represented among the poor, making up roughly 70% of those living below the poverty line. They often have less access to resources and essential services before and after disaster strikes, and are more likely to die during natural disasters than men.
- Women often struggle to get their voices heard in the climate debate. Given their central role in the family and community, women have invaluable knowledge about creating and implementing innovative ways to adapt to a changing climate yet their opinions and experience is all too often overlooked.
- Other international agreements specifically address gender. Of the legally binding agreements that resulted from the 1992 Earth Summit, the UNFCCC is the only convention not to incorporate gender issues. The Convention on Biological Diversity has incorporated a gender plan of action that recognizes women's traditional knowledge and access to land assets.

State of Play

- One year ago at COP 14 in Poznan, Poland, there were no references to women and gender equality in the Long-term Cooperative Action (LCA) negotiating text. This

changed dramatically throughout the course of 2009, and the text now contains eleven references. It is important that language in the text which specifically addresses women's needs in a changing climate and ensuring their voices are heard remains strong.

- Iceland – along with the other Nordic countries – emerged as the biggest champion on gender issues speaking on the floor at almost every negotiating session this year on women's capacity to act as leaders and innovators in the shift towards a low-carbon energy economy, and they have been joined by strong statements from Ghana, the African Group and Least Developed Countries, the Philippines, Central American countries, and others. The European Union was a strong supporter of language supporting women and gender equality under the Czech Presidency, however, it remains to be seen whether the Swedish Presidency will continue this legacy.

Gender equity in a Copenhagen agreement

"Climate change affects women because they are usually the main food producers of crops like rice, millet, vegetables. Because of no rain, climate change affects them. And girls have to drop out of school because they need to start working for their families." Voré Gana Seck, executive director of Green Senegal and president of the international nongovernmental coalition, Conseil des ONG d'Appui au Développement.

- Language that recognizes women as critical agents of change in the effort to adapt to climate change and reduce global carbon emissions must be secured in a final Copenhagen agreement and in a subsequent legally-binding agreement. It is not enough to recognize women as disproportionately affected by climate change impacts. Additionally, women must be seen and understood as equal participants in both the negotiation process and in the implementation of a global climate change agreement. Parties in Copenhagen must ensure that:
- Gender equality is explicitly integrated in the Copenhagen outcome, taking into account that gender equality is a key component of the social and economic conditions called for by the Bali Action Plan, and a prerequisite for poverty eradication and sustainable development, identified as priorities in the Convention.
- The differentiated impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations, groups and communities are recognized and priority is given the most vulnerable (for example adaptation measures, capacity building and technology development and transfer are tailored to ensure they meet the needs of women).
- The active participation of all men and women is sought and fostered in decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation measures of the Copenhagen outcome.
- Promotion of policy approaches and positive incentives to foster participation and remove barriers to women's capacity to act and contribute to adaptation, mitigation, and all other activities.

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