

FACT SHEET: CLIMATE CHANGE



Climate change is acknowledged to be a universal problem at the forefront of international policy discussions; but its gender aspects are less frequently considered. Climate change does not affect men and women in the same ways; nor will women's and men's responses to climate change and their roles in managing its effects be the same. Climate change is known to widen existing economic and social inequalities¹; but with gender-aware planning and programming, action to mitigate climate change may instead have the capacity to empower women within their communities and to make them agents of gender-positive change.

GENDER IN CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

Women's roles in families and communities put them at the center of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Women and girls are often tasked with providing food for families and collecting fuelwood and water, resources which may be increasingly difficult to find as the effects of climate change are felt; this means that women may be forced to take more time away from education or other productive economic activities³. Women are also active in forest based on their knowledge of local environments, soils, and farming and production methods; but they too often lack the decision-making power within their homes and communities – often linked to land ownership – to make large-scale changes to agricultural or forestry practices, or to push for mitigation measures such as cleaner cookstoves².

GENDER DIFFERENTIATED EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Women are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, such as droughts, floods, changing weather patterns and food and water shortages. This is in large part due to the fact that they constitute a majority of the world's poor and rural populations, and typically have less mobility and less access to information and resources than men. Sociocultural norms can also disadvantage women from acquiring the information and skills necessary to escape or avoid hazards (e.g. swimming and climbing trees to escape rising water levels). Dress codes imposed on women can restrict their mobility in times of disaster, as can their responsibility for small children who cannot swim or run⁴. Women are also particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of disasters, as they often do not own or have access to land or other resources to help them recover². Men, too, can be disadvantaged in certain scenarios; cultural conditioning that rewards independence in men, for example, makes them less likely to seek assistance in times of crisis, and they may also be more exposed to risk during disasters due to the nature of their work.

GENDER-POSITIVE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

Policies and strategies that address the gender dimensions in climate change should consider not only how women can contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change, but how the implementation of the strategies themselves can benefit women. Programmes that turn women's existing knowledge or activities into economically viable assets – for example agroforestry, payments for ecosystem services and emissions trading – are one way of achieving this; training women to build, install and maintain solar and other renewable energy technologies is another². Women are also highly effective at mobilizing action in communities, and programmes that acknowledge their capacities in this regard by involving them in community decision-making bodies are likely to see greater success in meeting their objectives, as well as contributing to formalizing women's leadership roles.

Sources: 1. German Development Institute 2009, "Climate Change Adaptation from a Gender Perspective," 2009. 2. GTZ, "Climate change and gender: Economic Empowerment of women through climate mitigation and adaptation," 2010. 3. UNDP, "Gender, Climate Change and Community Adaptation" guidebook, 2010. 4. BRIDGE/IDS. "Gender and climate change: mapping the linkages – A scoping study on knowledge and gaps," 2008. Photo Credits: 1. CIFOR (Olivier Girard) on Flickr: CC-BY-NC <http://bit.ly/1OBjQL>.

14 times more
women's and children's
lives are lost in natural
disasters².