

Mainstreaming Gender into the Climate Change Regime

14 December 2004 COP10 Buenos Aires

The UN is formally committed to gender mainstreaming within all United Nations policies and programmes. In all societies, in all parts of the world, gender equality is not yet realised. Men and women have different roles, responsibilities and decision-making powers. Many people, however, find it difficult to understand in what way gender might be a factor in Climate Change or how it should be addressed. This paper summarises the issues as discussed at two gender focused side events organised by LIFE, WECF, ENERGIA and ETC foundation during COP10, one focusing specifically on adaptation and one on the UNFCCC process in general.

Gender and Adaptation

The issue of adaptation is emerging as an important and extremely urgent aspect of Climate Change policy and projects and was a focus of the COP10 discussions. Since it is agreed that vulnerability and adaptation are largely social issues (as opposed to purely biophysical or technological), it is surprising that the issue of gender is not yet playing a more explicit role in adaptation studies, projects and policy. Because of the feminization of poverty, other existing gender inequalities, and men's and women's gendered roles in society and in the division of labour, there are gender differences in Climate Change impacts and in adaptive capacities. These differences should be acknowledged in the adaptation process to avoid further increases in gender inequality and to ensure the successfulness of adaptation policies and measures.

Gender and vulnerability

It is widely acknowledged that the negative effects of Climate Change are likely to hit the poorest people in the poorest countries hardest, in other words: that the poor are most vulnerable to Climate Change. Since women form a disproportionate share of the poor in developing countries and communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources, women are likely to be disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of Climate Change. Moreover, because of gender differences in property rights, access to information and in cultural, social and economic roles, the effects of Climate Change are likely to affect men and women differently.

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.¹ Moreover, as in many other Asian countries, most Bengali women have never learned to swim which significantly reduces their survival chances in the case of flooding. Another clear illustration of the different vulnerabilities women and men face is offered by the fact that more men died than women during Hurricane Mitch. It has been suggested that this was due to existing gender norms in which ideas about masculinity encouraged risky ‘heroic’ action in a disaster.²

Impacts of Climate Change on gender relations

The effects of Climate Change on gender inequality are not limited to immediate impacts and changing behaviours but also lead to subsequent changes in gender relations. Spending more time on traditional reproductive tasks re-enforces traditional work roles and works against a change in which women might begin to play other roles. For instance, because women are primary care-givers in times of disaster and environmental stress, the occurrence of magnified burdens of care-giving is likely to make them less mobile. Also, since Climate Change is expected to exacerbate existing shortfalls in water resources and fuelwood the time taken to fetch water or wood (which in most countries is the responsibility of women) will certainly increase women’s workloads, thus, limiting their opportunities to branch out into other, non-traditional activities.

Gender in adaptation measures

To be successful, adaptation policies and 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. 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.³ Women, however, are often expected to contribute to unpaid labour for soil and water conservation efforts while absent from the planning and governance processes. 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, i.e. knowledge from men *and* women, is integrated into policy and projects.

¹ Lorena Aguilar (2004) Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation (IUCN) available on-line: <http://www.iucn.org/congress/women/Climate.pdf>

² Nelson, Valerie et.al. (2002) ‘Uncertain predictions, invisible impacts, and the need to mainstream gender in Climate Change adaptation’ *Gender and Development* Vol. 10

³ Cheryl Anderson (2002) ‘Gender Matters: implications for climate variability and Climate Change and for disaster management in the pacific islands’ available on-line from www.gencec.interconnection.org

The way forward in gender and adaptation

What became clear from the gender and adaptation side event is that the current problem is not a lack of willingness to incorporate a gender perspective but a lack of knowledge and available approaches or toolkits to do so. For instance, the Adaptation Policy Framework and the other tools referred to in the UNFCCC compendium for adaptation do not explicitly take gender issues into account. In principle gender could be relatively easily integrated into e.g. stakeholder analyses, livelihoods analyses and multi-criteria decision tools if the users are aware of the need and opportunity to do this. Several recommendations were made to increase awareness of the importance of gender and the knowledge of possible approaches and to include a gender perspective in adaptation studies, projects and policymaking. Above all, there is a need for empirical, case-study based illustrations demonstrating (a) the gender differences in climate impacts and adaptive capacities, and (b) the effect of using gender analysis on the choice of investment in particular adaptation projects, which demonstrate the advantages of doing this. Secondly, existing and future toolkits related to vulnerability analysis as well as adaptation project implementation need to be reviewed by gender experts to answer (a) how gender awareness among users can be stimulated, and (b) whether gender should be integrated in the existing tools or whether new tools are needed.

Incorporating gender issues in the full range of climate policy worldwide

As also became clear during the second gender-focused side event organised at COP10, for all activities relevant to Climate Change, in both industrialised and developing countries, and in both adaptation or mitigation, there is a gender dimension which should be taken into consideration. For instance, in the case of mobility, undoubtedly an important sector for mitigation strategies, substantial work has already been done to analyse the gender dimension of policies and measures. It became obvious that existing transport systems had been defined by the special perspective on middle-aged full-time working men, neglecting women's higher dependency of public transport means, and their specific needs due to gender-related division of labour. If these aspects were fully taken into consideration, both more user-friendly and climate-friendly transport systems would be possible. A paper was also presented which demonstrated that the energy options likely to be taken up under CDM entirely miss the primary energy needs of poor women.

Recommendations

Based on the examples provided here, and numerous studies and experiences in other fields of environmental policy, it was unanimously agreed that taking the different daily realities of women and men into account can produce a qualitative improvement in Climate Change policy and measures. We therefore strongly argue that gender should be integrated into all mechanisms, policies and measures, and tools and guidelines within the Climate Change debate, leading to the following recommendations:⁴

- Global and national studies on the gender-differentiated impacts of global Climate Change with a focus on gender differences in capabilities to cope with Climate Change adaptation and mitigation are urgently required. These need to be published as case studies and made widely available.
- A gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments regarding Climate Change should be undertaken.
- Gender-sensitive criteria and indicators should be developed and applied in the UN FCCC and Kyoto Protocol mechanisms and instruments, starting with instruments related to adaptation and vulnerability as this is the area in which gender differences are most crucial and most visible.
- In the course of the revision of the guidelines for the National Communications under the UN FCCC, the inclusion of the gender dimension should be ensured.⁵

For more information about gender and Climate Change please go to the website:
<http://www.gence.interconnection.org/resources.htm>
and
<http://www.genanet.de>

LIFE/WECEF: Ulrike Roehr

CLIMATE ALLIANCE: Gotelind Alber

ENERGIA: Margaret Skutsch

ETC FOUNDATION: Joanne Rose and Roselyne van der Heul

More information:

r.vanderheul@etcnl.nl for adaptation/developing countries

roehr@life-online.de for mitigation/industrialised countries

⁴ Most of these recommendations have been supported by the UNEP Women's Assembly, held in Nairobi in October 2004.

⁵ This means that all statistical social data should be disaggregated by gender, and in the reporting and evaluation of policies and measures, within both adaptation and mitigation, gender dimensions should be assessed.