



A gender approach to climate change resilience

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Abstract

Climate change is disrupting national economies and affecting everyone's lives. Weather patterns are changing and becoming extreme, sea levels are rising, determinants of health are deteriorating, and food security is threatened.

Women are increasingly being seen as more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change, mainly because they represent most of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. However, while climate change's impact is more problematic in regard to women, their role as a key agent of adaptation and resilience is also predominant and essential. At national levels, efforts should be made to mainstream gender perspectives into national policies, strategies, and related sustainable development and climate change plans and interventions.

Keywords— Climate change, gender, sustainable development, equality, strategy, policies, adaptation.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is now clear that climate change represents a serious threat to economic and social development. This impact is more likely to be perceived in vulnerable

countries, especially in Africa, where global warming has increased significantly over the past 50 to 100 years, with clear effects on African people's health, livelihoods, and food security.

The United Nations clearly state that “Climate Change is the defining issue of our time and we are at a defining moment”. Climate change is effectively one of the greatest global challenges of the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, the impacts of climate change vary amongst regions, age, class, and gender. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), provide evidence that people who are already most vulnerable and marginalized will also experience the greatest impacts [1].



The poor, primarily in developing countries, are expected to be disproportionately affected and consequently in the greatest need of adaptation strategies in the face of climate variability and change. Both women and men working in natural resource sectors, such as agriculture, are likely to be affected.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE GENDER GAP

It is unfortunately clear that the poor are more at risk from climate change as they have less ability to adapt to severe events like droughts or floods, which directly affects their livelihoods and ability to produce food. Extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have a greater impact on the poor and most vulnerable.

Moreover, the impacts of climate change affect women and men differently across societies. Women are often responsible for gathering and producing food, collecting water and sourcing fuel for heating and cooking. With climate change, these tasks are becoming more difficult.

This means that climate change exacerbates existing inequalities between men and women. When women are unable to access education and decent employment opportunities, when they represent 70 per cent of the world's poor, they are far less likely to access information and support that could help them manage the impact of climate change [2].

The difference between men and women also resides in their assigned roles, responsibilities, decision-making positions, access to land and natural resources, access to opportunities and satisfaction of needs.

Worldwide, women have less access than men to resources, such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training, and extension services, curtailing their capacity to adapt to climate change.

Furthermore, women in many developing countries suffer gender inequalities apropos human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, access to education and health, and exposure to violence. Climate change will be an added stressor that will magnify women's



vulnerability. It is widely known that women face heightened domestic violence, sexual intimidation, human trafficking, and rape during conflict.

Women's vulnerability to climate change stems from several social, economic and cultural factors. While women predominate in the world's food production (50-80 per cent), they own less than 10 per cent of the land.

Local natural resources are extremely important for women who live in poor communities for their livelihoods, particularly in rural areas where they shoulder major household responsibilities and food security. In many countries, women are responsible for fishing in shallow waters and coastal lagoons, producing secondary crops, gathering food and firewood, processing, storing and preparing family food, and fetching water for the family.

Additionally, Sub-Saharan and near Eastern women play a major role in household animal-production enterprises. They tend to have the primary responsibility for the husbandry of small animals and ruminants

and take care of large-animal systems herding, providing water and feed, cleaning stalls and milking. In all types of animal-production systems, women have a predominant role in processing, particularly milk products and are commonly responsible for their marketing.

In practice, women contribute up to 50 per cent of the agricultural workforce. They are primarily responsible for the more time-consuming and labor-intensive tasks that are carried out manually or using simple tools.

But, since women have limited access to and control over environmental goods and services, they have negligible participation in decision-making and are not involved in environmental management benefits distribution. Consequently, women are less able to confront climate change.

During extreme weather such as droughts and floods, women will tend to work more to secure household livelihoods, which leave them less time to access training and education, develop skills or earn income. For instance, Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest level of adult female literacy at 57



per cent. When coupled with inaccessibility to resources and decision-making processes, limited mobility, illiteracy places women where they are disproportionately affected by climate change.

In many societies, socio-cultural norms and childcare responsibilities prevent women from migrating or seeking refuge in other places or working when a disaster hits. Such a situation is likely to burden women, such as travelling longer to get drinking water and wood for fuel.

With all these efforts and faced with these various constraints, resilience remains the most realistic solution to face climate change's multiple and diversified effects.

Adapting to climate change is one way to address vulnerability and strengthen communities' resilience. Climate change adaptation is a cross-sector, multi-level strategy, including gender gaps and inequalities that require inclusive, sustainable solutions.

Therefore, one of the many ways to confront climate change effects is to improve women's adaptation and resilience.

III. *WOMEN'S ROLE IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE*

Despite their vulnerability, women should not only be seen as victims of climate change but they can also be seen as active and effective agents and promoters of adaptation and mitigation [3]. For a long time, women have historically developed knowledge and skills related to water harvesting and storage, food preservation and rationing, and natural resources management. In Africa, for example, older women represent wisdom pools with their inherited knowledge and expertise related to early warnings and mitigating the impacts of disasters.

Women have the knowledge and understanding of what is needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and come up with practical solutions, but they are still largely untapped resources. Restricted land rights, lack of access to financial resources, training and technology, and limited access to political decision-making spheres often prevent them from playing a full role in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges.



Unleashing women's knowledge and capabilities represents an important opportunity to craft effective climate change solutions for the benefit of all.

Knowledge and experience passed down through generations will be able to contribute effectively to enhancing local adaptive capacity and sustaining a community's livelihood.

For this to be achieved, and to improve women's adaptive capacity, particularly in developing countries, adaptation initiatives should identify and address climate change gender-specific impacts, mostly in areas related to water, food security, agriculture, energy, health, and health disaster management, and conflict.

Crucial gender issues associated with climate change adaptation should also be taken into consideration, such as inequalities in access to resources, including credit, extension and training services, information and technology.

Evidence shows that women's empowerment and advancing gender equality can deliver results across various sectors, including food, economic security

and health. It can also lead to more environmentally friendly decision-making at household and national levels.

IV. GENDER POSITIVE RESPONSES

Gender-responsive actions reflect and answer women's priorities and needs [4]. Indeed, the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches while crafting programmes and action plans for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building will reduce existing economic and social gender disparities. Factually, the most sustainable and efficient climate change adaptation programmes are those that consider women-specific circumstances, constraints and barriers.

In addition to that, women should be part of the decision-making at local and national levels regarding resources allocation for climate change initiatives and the development and introduction of climate-related technologies both in terms of planning and funding.

It is important to ensure equal space and resources for women and men to participate



in climate change decision-making and action at all levels. When women participate in decision-making at community and national levels, they can help devise effective climate change solutions that build stronger communities.

As climate change represents the most complex challenge of our time and requires a concerted, proactive and holistic response, gender inequality may dramatically limit women's resilience and adaptive capacity, and that of their families and communities. It may also restrict options for climate change mitigation.

Investing in participatory, multi-stakeholder, and multi-sectoral Climate Change Gender Action Plans can help countries develop comprehensive action that integrates gender concerns and builds on women's unique knowledge and perspectives.

For instance, Uganda and Tanzania are amongst the East African countries that have developed gender mainstreaming strategies and applied them to integrate gender issues in sectoral policies and

programs, while the various other countries have integrated women to some degree.

We can also cite another example from Morocco where specific development projects and programs have been drawn up in the most vulnerable areas, such as the oasis. These programs, in support of local organizations, try to counter the difficult access of women to basic rights, empower them economically and raise their awareness towards biodiversity and their capacity to adapt to climate change [5].

In Morocco, several reform projects launched over the past decade aimed at anchoring the principles of gender equality within its legislative and legal system and its development programs to reduce barriers faced by women [6] [7].

Gender equality, equity, and women's fair representation indeed have a transversal dimension and meet the noble objectives to reduce disparities between men and women while providing them with a decent life. The Moroccan government has developed since 2012 a plan for equality (PGE), making equality between women and men a central and strategic issue for human rights



promotion and protection and an important lever in its vision of human, sustainable and inclusive development.

Climate change is a major issue for Morocco's economy and growth, given the significant dependence on the agricultural sector. Therefore, Morocco intends to preserve its territory and its population most appropriately by adequately reacting to its ecosystems' vulnerabilities and anticipating an adaptation policy that prepares all of the population, including the economic actors, to deal with these challenges.

Climate finance is also a key element in supporting mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.

Climate finance should yet be accessible to both men and women and designed to generate mutual benefits, not exacerbate patterns of inequity.

UNDP indicated in its 2016 report on "Gender equality in national climate action: Planning for gender-responsive nationally determined contributions", that only 63 countries of the 161 referred to gender equality or women while submitting

Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs).

Governments still have efforts to make to consolidate the status of gender equality in their national climate policies. They also need a gender-inclusive framework in planning and implementing strategies, applying climate finance instruments and promoting mitigation approaches [8].

V. CONCLUSION

We are all concerned, and we must all act for the climate and the planet, just as we must encourage all actions, no matter how small they can be, because they strengthen our adaptation and collective effort.

It is crucial to consider the different roles that stakeholders may play in tackling climate change consequences, evaluate properly, and assess the implications of particular choices across sectors and scales to maximize co-benefits, avoid unintended impacts, and understand net effects across different areas of decision-making.

The development and use of resources, tools and decision-support data should be accessible to everyone to fully and clearly



understand the meanings and impacts of each action on climate, biodiversity and human conditions [9].

Governments should develop more partnerships and cooperative work with civil society to address climate change and implement adaptive actions and sustainable solutions to fix the logistical obstacles caused by climate change and create more employment opportunities through small enterprises.

Finally, climate change advocacy groups are great allies in raising awareness to make governments and international organizations recognize the trivial role women play in rural parts of Morocco and elsewhere, at the grassroots level.

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