



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
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Gender Equality And Climate Change

Why consider gender equality when taking action on climate change?

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Canada 

GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Why consider gender equality when taking action on climate change?

Why consider how climate change will affect men and women differently?

Understanding how the different social expectations, roles, status, and economic power of men and women affect, and are affected differently by, climate change will improve actions taken to reduce vulnerability and combat climate change in the developing world.

Food security

Climate change is predicted to reduce crop yields and food production in some regions, particularly the tropics. Women are responsible for 70–80 percent of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa, 65 percent in Asia, and 45 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. They achieve this despite unequal access to land, information, and inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizer. Traditional food sources may become more unpredictable and scarce as the climate changes. Women's specific knowledge of maintaining biodiversity, through the conservation and domestication of wild edible plant seeds and food crop breeding, is key to adapting to climate change more effectively.

Water and other resource shortages

Climate change may exacerbate existing shortages of water. Women, largely responsible for water collection in their communities, are more sensitive to the changes in seasons and climatic conditions that affect water quantity and accessibility that make its collection even more time-consuming.

Health

Climate change may affect human health in a variety of ways, including:

- increased spread of vector- and water-borne diseases;
- reduced drinking water availability;
- food insecurity due to reduced agricultural production in some regions; and
- increased cases of heat stress and respiratory illness.

As primary caregivers in many families, women may see their responsibilities increase as family members suffer increased illness. Further, in the developing world, women often have less access to medical care than men.

What are some gender-specific vulnerabilities and responses to climate change?

- Male out-migration may happen due to resource shortages, generating increased work for women (though the effects on women's autonomy can be complex, and female out-migration can also occur.)
- There may be increased difficulty in accessing resources, in particular, fuelwood and water, hence, creating an increased workload for women
- Crop and livestock production changes could affect the gendered division of labour and possibly have negative effects on both men's and women's incomes.
- As sea levels rise, the livelihoods of people living in low-lying coastal zones are threatened, flooding levels increase, erosion is accelerated, wetlands and mangroves are threatened, and seawater intrudes into freshwater resources. These impacts put further strain on limited resources and settlements.
- Women's informal rights to resources could decrease or disappear as access to land natural resources dwindle due to climate change.
- Women and men experience different vulnerabilities and cope with natural disasters differently; therefore, an increase in the magnitude and frequency of natural disasters will have different implications for men and women.

Gender equality opportunities in climate change policy and programming

Interventions that create greater awareness and understanding of the complex links between gender equality and the environment can help to build the capacity of the poor, especially poor women, to adapt to the impacts of, and take action on, climate change. Policy and programming considerations include:

- promoting cleaner-burning fuel for household use, which will help to reduce air pollution and harmful emissions, and will benefit women by cutting their annual cooking costs by 25 percent;
- incorporating both women and men into the decision-making framework on climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives;
- supporting vulnerability-reduction measures that target women's needs;
- making use of technologies that are accessible, beneficial, and acceptable to both male and female stakeholders;
- facilitating extension studies, particularly for women, to improve the accessibility and use of new technology;
- supporting the provision of tools, including vulnerability assessments, that build on local and indigenous knowledge, held by women and men, of measures to adapt to, or mitigate the impacts of, climate change; and
- integrating gender analysis and gender equality indicators into programs and projects to identify where specific vulnerabilities to climate change lie, and where opportunities for mitigating and adapting to climate change can be found.

CASE STUDY: Climate change and gender equality in China

A goal of the Canada-China Cooperation in Climate Change (C5) Project, funded through the Canada Climate Change Development Fund (CCCDF) and administered by CIDA, is to increase the contribution of women by empowering them to participate equally in the development and implementation of climate-change-related policies and programs, particularly within Chinese government agencies and research institutions. Specific objectives include:

- Increase awareness of gender inequalities and support for women's full participation in decision-making and technical activities associated with climate change;
- Increase the capacity to analyze gender equality issues relevant to the project and incorporate the results of the analysis into project activities;
- Develop and implement appropriate targets for male/female participation in project activities, based on sex-disaggregated baseline research; the minimum expectation is 30% participation by women; and
- Increase the awareness, abilities, self-confidence and motivation of women working to address the issue of climate change.

Also in China, CIDA funded the Canada-China Cooperation Project in Cleaner Production, which took aim at emissions in the pulp and paper, fertilizer, plastics, and brewing industries. The project contained a specific component to increase the participation of women as workers, technicians, and managers. Women received training in process improvement, auditing practices, monitoring of equipment, computers, and other technical aspects of their work. At the same time, gender equality awareness sessions began to transform the attitudes of both men and women. Women not only applied the new clean-production techniques at work, they started taking initiatives on their own to help clean up the environment.

This project has been the catalyst for the creation of a new organization: Women and Environment Network (WEN).

Source: www.cccsu.org.cn

Useful resources on gender equality and climate change

Cannon, T. "Gender and climate hazards in Bangladesh." *Gender and Development* 10,2 (July 2002): 45–50

[Gender](http://www.gencc.interconnection.org/resources.htm) and Climate Change website: www.gencc.interconnection.org/resources.htm