

IS CLIMATE CHANGE GENDER NEUTRAL?

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is one of the most threatening challenges mankind has every faced. Change in climate magnifies the inequalities between men and women as they exhibit different vulnerability and coping up capabilities. Climate change remains at the forefront of agendas throughout the global environmental meetings and the subject of intersection of gender-related aspects gain more attention. The extent to which the men and women are affected by the climate change also depends on their gender, status, power, poverty and their access/control over available resources for their livelihood. It is very important to identify and address the climatic change vulnerabilities towards gender and to recognize gender-sensitive strategies that could be adopted for addressing environmental crisis towards women. The data and the objectives for the study were gathered and compiled from different secondary sources. Climate change has gender-specific effects. Exposure of women towards climatic change when compared to men is equal to (Illiteracy + Decision making + Primary Education + Economic Activity) / 4. During the international negotiations, regional and national climate policies on research, analysis and plan for mitigation implementation, gender equality principles are adopted.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Mitigation, Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the most threatening challenges humanity has every faced. Climate change exhibits different effects on different people, especially among men and women. The topic of climate change remains on top of every environmental agenda throughout the world and the subject of intersection of gender-related aspects attract more attention.

The extent to which the human beings are affected by the change in climate is partly dependent on their social status, poverty, power, gender and their availability/access over resources. The differences in the skills and experiences between men and women towards development and environmental sustainability efforts have been increasingly acknowledged by the international community. Despite this, women still have lesser influence economically, politically and legally. Furthermore, they are not able to cope with the adverse effects of the changing climate as they are more exposed to climate change than men. The climatic change responses could be more effective only by increasing women's knowledge, skills, and experiences and by supporting their empowerment.

Climatic change is one of the most threatening global challenges of our period. Time between the years 1997 and 2011 have been recorded as the warmest average global temperatures. In 2011, Arctic sea ice has been indicated on the record as the second lowest and its volume to be the lowest by the World Meteorological Organization. In addition to this,

other global warming effects like melting permafrost, increase in sea water level, increasing floods and changes in seasons, have negative consequences on biodiversity, freshwater resources, coastal systems and other livelihoods. UNFCCC 2007 indicates that there will be billions of people facing scarcity of water, food and will be facing risks with their lives due to the climate change over the next few decades. Asia-Pacific region would face key climatic changes including increased frequency of disasters and life-threatening events like tropical cyclones, heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, tornadoes, heat waves, prolonged dry spells, sea level rise and severe dust storms.

Till now, the connectivity between the climate change and gender relations have been concealed due to several reasons. Firstly, the typical policy discourse is masculine, i.e., whatever we read and hear about complicated computer models, researches on quick-fix technologies like cars that are eco-friendly, carbon trading economic approaches are all basically masculine. Indeed, multiple approaches have been put forward for thinking through the social phases of change in climate like climate justice, sustainable development, human ethics and human rights. Nevertheless, gender equality has not yet been exposed in these alternative examples. Secondly, climate change is not something that is void. As per the opinion of several authors in this book, climate change is a trend that has connection with others including global economic crisis; economic liberalization; conflict; population growth; globalization; and government policies that threaten global South poor men and women.

In the developing countries, women are very much dependent on available natural resources for their livelihood, which make them more vulnerable to climate change. This is because the women have the greatest responsibilities of storing water, making food and securing fuel for heating and cooking. When this is coupled with unequal exposure to decision-making processes and resources along with limited movement of women in rural areas, they face extreme climatic change challenges. Therefore, it is very important to identify strategies and crisis responses for women.

With this backdrop, this submission attempts to cover the climatic change impact on gender issues. The objectives are:

- Addressing neutrality of change in climate towards gender.
- Identification of gender-sensitive strategies that address women calamity due to climate change.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The information related to objectives of the study were gathered from the following sources.

- Human Development Report 2012
- United Nations Development Programme
- Global Gender and Climate Alliance
- World Meteorological Organization

The data collected were analyzed through applicable statistical techniques and the results were driven.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Climate Change is Gender Biased

Climate change causes harmful effects that can be felt both in the short-term and long-term. The effects could be recognized in short-term through natural catastrophe like floods, landslides and hurricanes. It can be recognized in the long-term through the gradual deprivation of the environment. The adverse effects have already been experienced in various areas including the industries related to human health, agriculture and food security; human settlements and migration patterns; water resources; biodiversity and ecosystems; and energy and transport industry.

In most situations, women are found to be more vulnerable than men, towards the effects of climate changes. This is because women depend on the natural resources for their livelihood, which are threatened by the change in climate. Primarily, they constitute world's poor dependents on natural resources. In addition to this, they also face political, economic and importantly social barriers that limit their coping skills. Especially in the rural areas of the developing countries, women and men become more vulnerable when majority of their livelihood is dependent on local natural resources. The greatest challenges lies with the responsibility in securing food, water, fuel for heating and cooking. When these responsibilities are coupled with unequal rights in accessing the resources and in developing decision-making skills along with limited rights for them to mobility, the women in rural areas are disproportionately affected by climate change. Therefore, it is very important to identify the gender-sensitive strategies and respond to the humanitarian and environmental crisis created by the change in climate.

Men and women are vulnerable to climate changes differently. They are not affected in the same way. There are number of factors that act as a reason behind this discrepancy in exposure and climate change risks.

First, women have lot of constraints in accessing the assets on time. There are also differences in the crediting the women and treatment of women by markets and formal institutions including legal and regulatory bodies. This act reduces the availability of opportunities for women. This also results in a world-wide gender gap in productivity and in earnings. It is found that the women make 30-80% from what men produce annually. A survey has been conducted by World Bank in 141 countries. The study revealed that among 141 countries, 103 countries still impose legal differences on gender basis. This in turn hinders the economic opportunities for women. Furthermore, two thirds of the world's 743 million uneducated adults are women. Studies reveal that women comprise 43% of the overall agricultural labor (percentages may vary between regions and countries). In the least developing countries, women comprise half of the agricultural labor strength. Data says that women own between 10 to 20 percentages of land in the developing countries. Collectively, the social barriers, poverty, political and economic barriers reduce the advantage of women in coping with the adverse impacts caused due to the change in the climate.

Second, when compared to men, women face huge challenges in accessing all levels of policy and decision-making processes. This renders less ability in influencing programs, policies and decisions that products impact on their lives.

Third, the factors limiting women from obtaining skills and necessary information are socio-cultural norms. Examples of skills necessary to avoid hazards and escape from crisis are climbing trees for escaping water level increase and swimming. In addition to these, the dress codes for women and their responsibility in saving small children who cannot run or swim during such natural crisis, restrict their ability to move at the times of disaster. All such social

influences make women disproportionately vulnerable to natural hazards that are caused due to the negative effects of climatic change.

Fourth, underestimation of the roles and contributions of women. This is caused due to lack of sex disaggregated data in almost all the industries like protection of environment, livelihoods, disaster's preparedness, health and well-being. This condition results in climate change programming and policies that are gender biased, which does not consider the differentiated roles of men and women such as their distinct needs, priorities and constraints. When the policies and programming are gender biased, they may have unintentional effect on the increasing gender-based vulnerability.

Vulnerability to climate change= f (exposure to hazard, inability to cope)

Chances of women being exposed to climatic changes when compared to men is equal to

(Illiteracy + Decision making + Primary Education + Economic Activity) / 4

Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies- Actions on Gender Equality

Mitigation and adaptation concepts are found and accepted globally to balance the impacts on climate changes. According to the review of Stern, adaptation strategies are seen only as an available measure that could better the climate change impacts more than mitigation over the next few decades. Adaptations/responses have been proven to have gender impacts and are situation-specific as per the evidences revealed by the documents.

Women are overloaded with work in India. They need to involve themselves in intensive labor work and spend more energy and time in daily chores. While this is the situation in India, Australia depicts a different picture. In Australia, men lead isolated lives that result in stress and over-emotions. They are also stressful because of migration due to soil-erosion, loss of farming and livestock dying. Women are overloaded with family responsibilities, on- and off the farm events.

Women are the embodiment of knowledge and they have expertise that could be utilized for disaster reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Furthermore, women's social and household responsibilities, their stewardship in household and natural resources, make them to contribute well to their livelihood strategies that are adapted to the environmental change realities. The strategies that are followed to mitigate gender bias regarding the climate change are:

- National and global studies should be carried out about impacts of sex-differentiation.
- To identify gender aspects of the technology and supporting the climate change projects financially.
- Gender-sensitive criteria and indicators to be developed and applied in all Kyoto and UNFCCC protocol instruments and mechanisms.
- Incorporation of gender equality in the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) of the UNFCCC.
- Promotion of gender criteria inclusion in international environment markets.
- Understanding on different outlines of using natural resources, gender- differentiated impacts and climate change effects to work with it effectively.

- Investigation on mechanisms that disempower men and finding new definition of masculinity. Masculinity is defined to be self-mastery rather than overpowering other men, women, children and nature.
- Principles of gender equality have been adopted in international negotiations on climate changes and on the policies that are regional, national and local during all the stages of negotiating processes like research, analysis and strategy to the implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies were already based on gender strategies in livestock raising, agriculture, coastal zones management, water resources management and disaster risk management.
- To develop local and national government strategies for improving natural resources and to ensure that the resources are accessible and controlled by them.
- Bioenergy policy-making and planning should include gender approach. This is to ensure that the needs and concerns of women and men are attended equally.
- Information, credit and carbon fund markets should be accessible by women, so as to ensure that they learn and make decisions on the resources and technologies that satisfy their needs.
- Building capabilities on methods for both women and men, which can increase carbon retention by using new forestry technologies.
- Promotion of access and equal distribution of the economic benefits derived from forestry services.

CONCLUSIONS

Women come across lot of issues during adverse climatic changes. A focused discussion on adaptations that are gender-responsive has remarkable potential to balance adverse impacts of climate change. Pro-poor, pro-women strategies should be focused on by the research and development policies. This is to concentrate on the methods to reduce unwanted labor and vulnerabilities. This will also help to integrate social consequences that occur from the climate change impacts and demand a rights-based framework equally for both women and men.

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