

GENDER, WATER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a reality, and poses a serious long term threat to society and to the environment. Scientists have generated significant evidence that the use of fossil fuels, deforestation, and changes in land use have led to an increase in greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, causing the Earth's surface temperature to rise.



This has already and will continue to result in changing rainfall patterns: heat waves; melting of glaciers; increases in frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events such as storms, floods and droughts; and rising sea levels. These climate-related events—compounded by poverty, environmental degradation, and inadequate disaster management—have profound impacts particularly on poor women, men and children who may have less capacity, skills and resources to adapt.

Water—the basis for human life—is particularly threatened by climate change.

With rising temperatures, changes in runoff patterns and increased water evaporation, climate change will greatly affect the distribution of the world's water and the timing of flowsⁱⁱ. It is estimated that by 2025, almost two-thirds of the world's population are likely to experience some kind of water stress, and for one billion of them the shortage will be severe and socially disruptiveⁱⁱⁱ. Water-related challenges arising from climate change include:

Decrease in water availability and deteriorating water quality will reduce access to drinking water and negatively affect the health of the poor.

Shifts in rainfall patterns and growing seasons, escalating floods and droughts, reduced soil moisture and fertility combined with land use degradation will result in decreased agricultural and livestock production and food insecurity.

Increases in storms and flooding will lead to loss of lives and infrastructure; loss of property and assets including crops, livestock and seeds; and spreading disease.

Accelerated glacial melt, decreasing run-off and changes in hydrological flow will affect crop production and fisheries as well as energy production dependent on hydropower systems, potentially exacerbating cross-boundary tensions. Seven major river systems of Asia that provide and sustain food supplies for over 2 billion people will be affected.

Rising sea levels will directly threaten the livelihoods of millions of people living in low-lying coastal areas, with increased flooding, coastal erosion, and seawater intrusion.

Such challenges of climate change are not gender neutral. Women and men have different vulnerability and capacity to adapt to climate impacts due to differing roles, opportunities, and access to resources. And it is women making up 70% of the world's poor who are often the most vulnerable to climate change. They are hindered by discriminatory social practices, diverse work responsibilities that may augment their exposure to climate hazards, and less access or rights to financial and productive resources, information and services that may help them cope with impacts. Despite this, women will play a significant role in supporting households and communities to adapt to and mitigate climate change through labour, natural resource management, provisioning of food and water. However, women are seldom involved in decision-making processes related to water or other resource use, or in short or long-term planning for climate change. As a result their concerns are less likely to be addressed in relevant policies.

Mitigation policies and practice are also gendered. Since the energy sector counts for 60% of total greenhouse gas emissions worldwideiv, mitigation efforts concentrate on ‘greening’ energy production and consumption, in addition to addressing the other main causes of emissions by reducing deforestation and land degradation. Energy production will also be a key factor for economic development and poverty alleviation. However, few policies or political decision-making processes consider that energy use—whether at household or industry levels—differs among women and men, as does access to energy efficient technologies. Nor do these policies consider how roles and relationships of women and men are critical for REDD (Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Degradation) programmes. As a result, women and men’s differential concerns are not considered in mitigation efforts, potentially limiting their effectiveness and creating inequities in access to energy, new technologies, and benefits of climate change financing.

Despite the critical importance of gender in effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate changev, gender issues continue to receive minimal attention in UNFCCC processes dealing with international policy responses on climate changev and in national level strategies.

Source:

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