



Briefing Paper

Can Climate Policies Foster Gender Equality?

By Nomfazwe Matimba

Summary

This briefing paper presents an overview of how current climate policies are taking gender into consideration; focusing on climate policies at both national (i.e. in developed and developing countries) and multilateral levels (i.e. in UNFCCC). The paper also highlights some pioneers and ways forward on how such policies can better take into account the specific impacts of climate change on women. It summarises a study on “Climate change policies: Tools towards more gender equality?” prepared by Leslie Sajous, CUTS International, Geneva and available at <https://bit.ly/2GIFr0h>.

Introduction

The fight against climate change and its devastated impacts are of concerns to all countries, developed and developing, and all World citizens. However, vulnerable communities, including women, are the frontline victims. Notably, due to historical, social and cultural structures – women tend to work more with natural resources such that when these natural resources are affected due to climate change—women are at the harsh receiving end. For instance, in rural settings, women are more responsible for fetching water, gathering food, such that in the instance of droughts, women have to take long trips in search of water.

Although not all climate policies expressly highlight the specific impacts of climate change on women, there seems to be a positive move towards including women in climate change policies' texts as well as the policy making processes. Such steps are more prominent in developing African countries, where some have included gender considerations and the specific impacts of climate change on women. On the international scene, recommendations have been put forward by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to ensure gender conscious climate policies, through its Gender Action Plan (GAP).

Although, gender inclusion in national and international climate change policies is not moving at a fast and desirable rate, the initial inclusion of women who were once marginalized in climate change talks is a pivotal change. There is however a lot that ought to be done to ensure the relevant involvement of women, as true agents of change, in the climate policy sphere.

The specific effects of climate change on women

Climate change is one way in which the gender disparities in the world are being exposed. Women generally suffer the greater amount of effects and climate change has not left women unscathed by its effects. They are affected more by climate change as they primarily rely on natural resources for their survival. Further, women face social, economic and political barriers that make disaster coping mechanisms more difficult to implement.¹

For instance in Senegal, the 35% decline in rainfall has made it harder for women to collect water, resulting in them walking extremely long distances especially in areas where there are no boreholes.² Indian women continuously suffer from skin diseases and reproductive tract infections due to fishing in salty waters, which are a result of climate change.³ Hurricane Maria after knocking off the power systems left women in Puerto Rico struggling to find water as they are the managers of the household.⁴ Finally, in Ethiopia, for example, where climate change is leading to food or water shortages, social norms, especially in rural areas, are worsening malnutrition among girls and women as they eat only after feeding the rest of the family, which often means there is barely any food for them.

Whenever there are instabilities in a society, human rights violations are on the rise and women are at the receiving end of these violations. Environmental stressors like droughts and floods have fuelled the rise of organizations that engage in human trafficking and extreme labour conditions for women. Women displaced by droughts in Nigeria have been abducted and trafficked by the infamous Boko Haram; a terrorist

¹ UNWomenWatch, Fact Sheet, Gender Equality & Climate Change, The UN Internet Gateway on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women available at www.un.org/womenwatch.

² Oxfam America, Fact Sheet| Climate Change and Gender

³ Manipadma Jena, "Women in India Face Health Problems & Other Risks as the Rivers Grow Saltier," Thomson Reuters Foundation, October 31, 2018, available at

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-india-water-saltier/> accessed on 1/11/2020.

⁴ Oxfam, "Hurricane Maria puts disproportionate burden on women," September 17, 2018 available at <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/hurricane-maria-put-a-disproportionate-burden-on-women/> accessed on 1/11/2020.

organization.⁵ Sexual and gender-based violence is also prevalent in the wake of natural disasters. Already in existence, these abuses are exacerbated in disaster-stricken areas. In an attempt to flee those particular areas, women are physically and sexually abused by smugglers, unfamiliar and familiar men, in relief camps and it is almost impossible for them to have access to family planning solutions or even psychological counselling in these camps.⁶

Women as agents of change

Women are agents of positive change and hence their involvement and input in the climate change decisions and policy making would result in a desirable change in meeting the climate change goals. The Niger Delta, one of the world's largest natural resource-rich areas was suffering from environmental and human rights abuses including oil spills, gas flaring and resulting destruction of ecosystems. To face that, Nigerian women mobilized themselves at the community level into a social movement to protest against transnational oil companies as part of a world movement to stop the actions of these companies that led to ecological destruction. Most of the natural gas in the region was being used for gas flaring to cut maintenance costs. As a result, more gas was being burnt there than in any other part of the world, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions greater than in the entire sub-Saharan region. In 2006, these protests led to a ruling by the Nigerian courts that gas flaring violated the constitutional rights of citizens to life and dignity, and the courts ordered an end to the practice.⁷ This example indicates that women can have a voice that can result in positive changes that preserves the ecological system as it is and limits the negative impacts of climate change.

However, women are more than often being left out of (climate) policy at their country level, and

are not brought in the decision-making platforms. Thus, if they have a limited say in decision-making and their skills are not fully utilised, half the population is unable to contribute adequately to climate change adaptation, mitigation and overall sustainable development.⁸ This results in policies that are one-sided and do not take into account the whole situation on the ground. This is because the men in control of the land and water hardly manage the resources hence their policies are divorced from the actual facts on the ground. This disparity in the role of men and women and the inequality thereof results in women suffering the harsh impact of climate change and not having any power to contribute to the policy making to mitigate such impacts.

Gender at UNFCCC negotiations & existing frameworks

The issue of gender in climate talks appeared at the 7th Conference of Parties (COP) in Marrakech held from the 29th of October to the 10th of November 2001. The language put forward at the 7th COP in Marrakech was weak and not strong enough to capture the intent of the goal to ratify the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol. A step further was taken in Doha in 2012 with a decision entitled "Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women", and mentioning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) adopted at the COP 14 held in Lima, Peru from the 1st to the 12th of December 2014 moves further in adopting a global approach and covers several strands of work (political and technical). It decides anew, two years after Doha, to 'enhance the implementation of prior decisions to advance 'gender balance' and call for 'additional efforts' as

⁵ (n 1) Joe McCarthy.

⁶ Dana Kirkegaard, Women and Climate Change: How Our Unstable World Affects Sexual and Reproductive Health, available at <https://www.friendsofunfpa.org/women-and-climate-change/> accessed 9/11/2020.

⁷ L Aguilar et al. "Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change." Published by IUCN, UNDP and GGCA. (2009) San Jose: Costa Rica

⁸ UN Women, Why is Climate Change a Gender Issue? Available at <https://www.uncclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/unwomen704.pdf> accessed 8/11/2020.

regards to participation' of women.⁹

The LWPG became the first instrument to highlight and put across the steps that ought to be taken in ensuring that gender is included in climate change talks and policies. In doing so, the LWPG sets out five priority areas that ought to be taken into consideration in ensuring that climate change addresses gender and put forth measures to ensure that there is knowledge regarding that subject. The priority areas include capacity building and knowledge sharing. This is essential for in the absence of knowledge, the root problem will never be adequately addressed. Thus educating both men and women on how women suffer more in the face of climate ensures that the men are also aware of how to aid women in the face of climate change.

More recently, the Bonn Conference the Parties of 2017 set up the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) and called Parties, observers and organizations to provide submissions on how gender is being mainstreamed by the respective governments.¹⁰ The ccGAP is an enhanced gender action plan that sets out objectives and activities under five priority areas that aim to advance knowledge and understanding of gender-responsive climate action and its coherent mainstreaming in the implementation of the UNFCCC and the work of Parties, the secretariat, United Nations entities and all stakeholders at all levels, as well as women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the UNFCCC process.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the gender inequality gap, including in climate change sphere. To ensure that the gains of the UNFCCC pre-COVID-19 are not lost, the UNFCCC continued advocating for gender mainstreaming during COVID-19. The progress has continued in 2020

with virtual meetings looking at how the gender issue is being considered in the COVID-19 era. The workshops were continent and region specific and were organized on different occasions.¹¹

The success of the UNFCCC is dependent on the response by the signatory members hence the continuous urge to engender climate change in national policies and action.

Gender consideration of current national climate policies

A theoretical analysis was undertaken of climate policies of 25 countries across the world, both developed and developing in all continents, to assess as to what extent climate change related policies and strategies are inclusive of women and embed gender equality in the policy text.¹² The analysis also looked as to whether the policy when mentioning gender also dives into the explicit impacts of climate change on women.

More than half of the climate policies analysed from the sample of countries do not mention gender or women. When women are mentioned, it is in regards to inclusivity of the policy, overall policy objectives, and to ensure they are put on an equal footing with men. However, in most cases, policies are absent of explicit mention of how women are impacted by climate change and relevant actions to be taken by the governments to ensure that such effects are combated. This illustrates the marginalization of women in climate change policies. Given the effects that climate change has on women as indicated earlier, it is reasonably expected that governments and organisations, in drafting their climate policies will treat women and the gender impacts of climate

⁹ United Nations Climate Change, 'The Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender' available at <https://newsroom.unfccc.int/topics/gender/the-big-picture/introduction-to-gender-and-climate-change/the-enhanced-lima-work-programme-on-gender>.

¹⁰ United Nations Climate Change, "Chronology of Gender in the Intergovernmental Process," available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/chronology-of-gender-in-the-intergovernmental-process#eq-5>

¹¹ United Nations Climate Change, 'Virtual workshops - Gender integration into national climate actions' available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/events-meetings/workshops-dialogues/virtual-workshops-gender-integration-into-national-climate-actions#eq-1>.

¹² CUTS. Leslie Sajous, "Climate change policies: Tools towards more gender equality?" available at <https://bit.ly/2GIFr0h>

change in a more holistic and explicit way.

While many developing and developed countries have not embedded gender into their climate policies, the European Union (EU) in its European Parliament Resolution of April 2012, highlighted the need to develop strategies for integrating gender perspective into climate change-related policy-making process, monitoring gender equality in decision-making in the field of climate change and the relevant educational fields on a regular basis by using the developed indicators, taking actions towards increasing women's participation in high-level climate-related decision-making positions, among others.¹³

The European Union is not the only one to make good efforts in order to make their climate policies and strategies more gender-conscious. Some developing countries' climate change policies are not lagging behind, with some of them appearing to be at the forefront of illustrating how climate change impacts women specifically. Looking at their policy texts, they even seem to be more advanced than developed countries in developing gender-conscious climate change policies.

A closer look at climate policies in Africa

African countries are not lagging behind when it comes to take action to make their climate policies more gender-conscious. Below are a few striking examples of the efforts made in the region.

The National Climate Change Framework Policy of Kenya highlights that gender mainstreaming is at the core of their priority. The 'Enabling Regulatory Framework' states that the adoption of a gender mainstreaming approach involves assessing the

implications for women and men of any planned climate change action and achieve gender equality at all levels. The Kenyan policymakers are aware that a successful policy targeting gender mainstreaming requires impact assessments.¹⁴ The objective of the policy is to adopt intergenerational, special needs and gender mainstreaming approaches across all aspects of Kenya's climate change response. To achieve this objective, public awareness on climate change is supposed to integrate knowledge on cross-cutting policy issues. Therefore, public awareness in the form of education campaigns and knowledge sharing would be crucial in ensuring that the engendered aspect of climate change is successful in Kenya.

Liberia's 2018 Climate Change Plan includes women in their cross-cutting issues that require special attention¹⁵. The Climate Change Policy intends to mainstream gender in the planning, decision making and implementation of climate change responses across the landscape of Liberia.¹⁶ The Policy also goes a step further in ensuring that there is adequate information on the impacts of climate change on women by requiring that there be research data to highlight the significance and response measures that ought to be taken with regards to gender. Such a move is highly commendable, as without adequate data it is impossible to accurately implement measures that combat specific climate change effects on women. Therefore, the initiative by the Government of Liberia in recognising the implications and looking for ways to aid women affected by climate change is a step forward in the gender inclusivity on climate change discussion.

However, it is important to note that despite the written scripts accounting for gender equality that

¹³European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2012 on women and climate change (2011/2197(INI), 20 April 2012, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0145_EN.html?redirect Article 8. European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality and Climate Change: The Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU.

¹⁴ Sessional Paper No. 3 of 2016 on National Climate Change Framework Policy, available at <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/kenya/docs/energy>.

¹⁵ National Policy and Response Strategy on Climate Change of Liberia available at http://www.epa.gov.lr/sites/default/files/National%20Policy%20and%20Response%20Strategy%20on%20Climate%20Change%20Final%20Document-min_0.pdf 8.3.5 page 38.

¹⁶Ibid.

are available across the region, the same is not always present in the actual development and implementation of the policy, which is even more difficult to assess. In Malawi for instance, in the development of the National Adaptation Programmes of Action, only 5% of the participants were women.¹⁷

Development and Implementation of Climate Policies: Are women involved?

Due to the severe impacts that climate change has on women, it would be coherent and fair to have them included in the development and implementation of climate change policies. Although this is the desired outcome, very few to no women are actually involved in the process of the development and implementation of the climate policy. A research undertaken in 2015 in 69 villages and 18 REDD+ (National Strategy for the Reduction of Greenhouse Gases resulting from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects and 19 sites in Brazil, Cameroon, Indonesia, Tanzania and Vietnam indicates that involvement of women in developing climate related plans and strategies is limited - being only 17%.¹⁸ This is rather disheartening as women are “not mere victims but agents of change”¹⁹ The poor representation of women in climate-related plans and strategies stifles the agenda of gender mainstreaming in climate change as there is no inclusion right from the beginning.

Some countries like Mozambique are at the frontline of including women in climate change talks. The country has been hailed as a trailblazer in becoming the first country in the world to create

a Gender, Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2010.²⁰ The policy does not only aim to including women but went further to train over 12 000 women in sustainable use and management of natural resources; 36 communities were taught effective methods for preventing and controlling fires, planting crops resistant to drought, and producing and using improved stoves.²¹ Liberia is ensuring that it meets its 2030 objective under the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed into Liberia’s climate change policies, programs and interventions by incorporating women in all climate change endeavours. Some of the actions that have been undertaken by the Republic of Liberia include ensuring women have the right to land access and ownership; training and empowering women coastal monitors; and developing initiatives to arrange women to use renewable green energy.²² In Malawi, during the preparation of the NAPA, women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were consulted, and gender was used as one of the eight criteria for project selection. However, there is an under representation of women in the NAPA Coordination Team which consists of 20 members with only 1 woman.²³

To note is that African countries are at the forefront of including women in the development of the policy. However as illustrated by the example of Malawi, there can be disparities as women at times are included on a consultative basis and not on a decision-making basis which may defeat the aim of gender inclusion in climate change.

One of the reasons why gender mainstreaming is taking longer than anticipated in developing countries is lack of capacities, including financial

¹⁷ Malawi’s National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) available at <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/napa/mwi01.pdf> Acknowledgements vii.

¹⁸ R. K. Ulluwishewa, “Women’s indigenous knowledge of water management in Sri Lanka” In: *IK Monitor* Vol. 2(3) page 11.

¹⁹ UN WomenWatch, “Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change” available at https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf.

²⁰ USAID, Climatelinks, “Mozambique Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) Report” December 2014 available at

<https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/mozambique-climate-change-gender-action-plan-ccgap-report>.

²¹ Mozambique Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) Report, December 2014, available at <https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/mozambique-climate-change-gender-action-plan-ccgap-report>.

²² Liberia Climate Change and Gender Action Plan available at https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2012_IUCN_Climate-Change-Gender-Action-Plan-Liberia_Fact-Sheet.pdf

²³ *Ibid*, vii.

resources, to adequately develop and implement gender-conscious policies. Organizations are working to aid Africa in the financing of their initiatives to address climate change and gender. UN Women has carried out several capacity-building strategies around the globe, such as training government officials in Bangladesh, mainstreaming gender in climate change adaptation in the Caribbean, and strengthening the capacity of government, civil society and United Nations experts in gender-responsive post-disaster needs assessment in 11 African countries.²⁴

Move towards gender-conscious climate policies: The pre-requisites

A gender-conscious climate policy requires strategic approach to ensure that gender is continuously included in the policy. This requires that the development and implementation of a climate policy be gender centric. Gender-consciousness in a policy can be achieved in 4 stages, namely:

Include women in policy development

To ensure a climate change policy is gender-centric, there is need to be inclusive in the development and implementation of such a policy. Women remain underrepresented across policymaking institutions. Looking at the proportion of women in fields relevant to climate change policies and decision-making in the 10 European cities (from Germany, Finland, Italy and Sweden) involved in the 'Climate for Change' project reveals that, women make up around 30 % of all staff in fields relevant to climate change policies (except in Naples and Venice,

where the proportion is less), while in executive positions their proportion is even lower, varying between 0 % in Frankfurt (Germany) to 34 % in Ferrara (Italy).²⁵

Gender inclusion cannot be underestimated. There is need to improve the gender balance in positions of power. The team of people tasked by UNFCCC with coordinating the global climate change negotiations for the COP26 in 2021, consists entirely of men. While not surprising to many feminists in this space, this blatant disregard of gender diversity and women's perspectives in climate policy space is all too common. And it reflects broader ignorance of how gender and climate change intersect.²⁶

Ensure genuine community participation in climate policy

For some, climate change becomes either overwhelmingly challenging or abstract enough that it is easy to ignore, more so the impacts of climate change on women. For this reason, there is a need to ensure there is genuine community participation in climate policy at all levels.

Gender dimensions of climate change must simultaneously be integrated into the planning of local and national actions at the community level.²⁷ Genuine participation may ensure that the concerns of women, especially in vulnerable communities, are taken note of and they are integrated in the development of climate change policies. This can be achieved by involving all stakeholders in the preparation of the policy, undertaking surveys, and ensuring the communities are well educated so that they can participate adequately.

²⁴ Subsidiary Body for Implementation, 51st session Santiago, 2–9 December 2019, Synthesis report on Implementation of the Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan, Item 17 of the provisional agenda.

²⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality, Review of the Implementation in the EU of area K of the Beijing Platform for

Action: Women and the Environment Gender Equality and Climate Change, 2012.

²⁶ M. Dolan, J. Olson, "Integrate Gender when Designing Climate Policy" 2 November 2020 available at <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/74486>.

²⁷ Ibid page 15.

Conduct gender impact assessments

It was defined by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) as an ‘estimation of the different effects (positive, negative or neutral) of any policy or activity implemented to specific items in terms of gender equality.’²⁸ Gender impact assessments are important as they allow knowledge dispensation on the effects of climate change on women, both negative and positive. The EIGE provides a Guide to Gender Assessment which highlights the stages that ought to be undertaken, and these are: defining the policy purpose, checking the gender relevance of the policy, conducting a gender-sensitive analysis, weighing gender impact and findings, and proposals for improvement.²⁹

Institute climate finance and gender budgeting

Climate change comes with a big price tag; such costs require financing hence there is need for more gender-conscious climate financing. Presently only 0.01 percent of all worldwide funding supports projects addressing both climate change and women’s rights.³⁰ A gender perspective needs to be taken into account when developing resource mobilization strategies, applying climate finance instruments, and ensuring equal participation in the deployment of financial resources, particularly at the local level.³¹ Marginalization of women has resulted in them being the world’s poorest most vulnerable to climate impacts³² and with very limited access

to financial assistance. Therefore, finance and budget schemes designed to assist women in climate change ought to be included in the development of climate policies that are gender centric. Climate financing ensures that all the above steps that ought to be taken in the development of a gender centric policy are easily attainable.

²⁸ European Institute of Gender Equality, ‘Gender Impact Assessment’ available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-impact-assessment/what-gender-impact-assessment#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20defines%20gender%20impact%20assessment%20as,resulting%20from%20the%20introduction%20of%20the%20proposed%20policy.%E2%80%9D>.

²⁹ European Institute for Gender Equality, ‘Gender Impact Assessment’ available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-impact-assessment/guide-gender-impact-assessment>.

³⁰ UNDP, Gender & Climate Change: Gender and Climate Finance available at

<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library.PDF>

³¹ United Nations Climate Change, “Gender & Climate Change Finance” available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/gender-and-unfccc-topics/gender-and-climate-change-finance>.

³² International Labour Organisation, “Women Swell Ranks of Working Poor, says ILO,” Press Release; 30 July 1996 available at https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_008066/lang--en/index.htm



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