

No Climate Justice Without Gender Justice

A Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy Briefing

The Issue

The climate crisis is not only an issue of science and technology but also of fairness and justice. Those who contribute the least to the climate crisis are often the ones most impacted by it. The different responsibilities and vulnerabilities between countries in the Global North and Global South has been a subject of discussion since the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was developed. Yet, for many years, international climate crisis discourse has not put sufficient emphasis on the inequalities found within each country. Indeed, “[r]isks are unevenly distributed and are generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities in countries at all levels of development.”¹

This briefing will focus on how gender inequality is a contributor to vulnerability, which can be seen generally in a variety of ways, such the gender pay and pension gap, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and the gendered division of labour. In the context of the climate crisis, it is impossible to fully understand its causes and impacts without taking gender into consideration.

Key Arguments

Gender should be integrated into climate policy:

- To avoid adverse impacts of climate policy that might aggravate gender inequality;
- To consider how climate policy can be fairer and more equitable for vulnerable people;
- To speed up the transition to a low carbon society by better responding to the needs of vulnerable people;
- To ensure that climate policy is concerned with the wellbeing of everyone and not the few;
- To meet and strengthen gender mainstreaming commitments and gender mandates of international climate agreements.²

The Gendered Dimensions of the Climate Crisis

Climate policy development is largely male-dominated and women's representation has not improved much over the years. Particularly at UN Conferences considered to be crucial the share of women in national delegations is low. At the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, for example, women's representation was below 32%.³

Numerous studies show gendered mobility patterns and transportation choices: on average, men make longer trips, use cars more frequently, and own larger cars. Women's mobility is more climate-friendly with shorter trips and a higher reliance on public transportation. There has been some convergence in gendered mobility behaviour due to evolving gender roles, but trends still indicate that when women have their first child, there is a higher tendency for women to work part-time and closer to the home, while men's mobility behaviour hardly changes.⁴

Evidence shows that women are disproportionately affected by energy poverty, defined as inadequate access to warmth, cooling, lighting, and the energy to power appliances, which are essential services needed to guarantee decent health and a good standard of living. This is primarily due to three things: the gender income gap, the higher proportion of women as head of household among single parent households, and poverty among elderly women. Policies like carbon pricing (capturing the external costs of greenhouse gas emissions and tying these costs to the emitters of greenhouse gases), which can lead to an increase in energy prices, must take this into account e. g. by offering special tariffs or programmes which support energy efficiency improvements for poor households.⁵

Heat waves and other extreme weather patterns like cyclones and hurricanes also impact people differently. The mortality of women tends to be higher than that of men, mainly due to factors such as mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and socio-economic factors linked to poverty (like inadequate housing, for example) which lead to higher exposure to the impacts of climate variability.⁶

Gender Responsive Climate Policy

While gender parity in policymaking is a necessary step towards bringing new perspectives to the table, it is not sufficient for a gender responsive climate policy. In other words, it is not just *who* decides but *what* they discuss and *how* they look at the data.

A gender-transformative analysis of policies and measures is necessary. These analyses need to look at the care economy, the market economy, and labour markets; access and usability of public resources and infrastructures such as space, energy, and transport services; gender norms and hierarchies, also in institutions, values, and approaches; and finally the societal organisation of sexuality and intimacy, harassment, and gender-based violence.⁷

Gender is on the Agenda in International Climate Policy

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. In contrast to its sister conventions (Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention to Combat Desertification), the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 do not contain any references to gender or women. It was not until 25 years later that the preamble of the Paris Agreement of 2015 called upon Parties to respect, promote, and consider, among other things, human rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of women when taking action to address the climate crisis.⁸

In 2012, gender in relation to the climate crisis was introduced as a standing item on the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) agenda to the UNFCCC and a gender team was formed in the Secretariat. Due to this, governments are now expected to appoint gender focal points and include progress on gender parity and gender-responsive climate policy in their progress reports.

In 2014, a work programme on gender was developed to operationalise the gender mandates at the UNFCCC. In 2017, the UNFCCC's first ever Gender Action Plan was adopted COP 23 and served as a roadmap to integrate gender equality principles in climate change debates and actions at both national and international levels. The Gender Action Plan defines five priority areas: 1. Capacity building on how to develop gender-responsive policies, plans and programmes, knowledge sharing and communication; 2. Actions to enhance gender balance, participation, and women's leadership; 3. Coherence in integrating gender considerations into the work of UNFCCC bodies and other United Nation entities and stakeholders; 4. Gender-responsive implementation of climate commitments; 5. Monitoring and reporting. In December 2019 at COP25 in Madrid, these documents were reviewed, and despite strong opposition from some countries, a new 5-year Gender Action Plan was adopted. Gender is now also part of climate⁹ crisis finance instruments like the Green Climate Fund¹⁰ and the Adaptation Fund,¹¹ two organisations which provide support for low- and middle-income countries to implement mitigation and adaptation programmes and actions.

This is good progress. However, much remains to be done to maintain an effective focus on gender in the context of the climate crisis. The possible ways to achieve this as discussed in this briefing are: by seeking gender balance within UNFCCC bodies, delegations, and consultation mechanisms; pushing for references to gender equality to be incorporated into thematic decisions, work programmes, and action plans; basing recommended actions for adapting to the impacts of the climate crisis on a gender-responsive and participatory approach; and taking a gendered lens into account in the technology transfer and capacity building activities for climate change responsiveness. For all educational programmes, trainings, awareness raising activities, or information generation, gender should be taken into account as a cross-cutting issue and gender perspectives should be integrated in the preparation of strategies and action plans.

Learn More

1. Feminist Foreign Policy Discussion Series – Furthering Accountability & Centering Climate Change by Lyric Thompson of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Tara Daniel of the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) on ICRW, at: <https://www.icrw.org/publications/feminist-foreign-policy-discussion-series-sept2019>
2. The Beam Podcast *Women at the Forefront of Climate Action*, at: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/257043/2150570-women-at-the-forefront-of-climate-action>
3. *Pocket Guide to Gender Equality under the UNFCCC* by WEDO, at: <https://wedo.org/pocket-guide-gender-equality-unfccc>
4. *The Nature of Women, Peace and Security: Where is the Environment in WPS and where is WPS in Environmental Peacebuilding* by Keina Yoshida published at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2019/working-paper/wps22-Keina-Yoshida.pdf>
5. *Gender & Climate* by GenderCC, at: <https://www.gendercc.net/home.html>

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3. Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice (2016) Enhancing Gender Balance Under the UNFCCC <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/727.pdf>.
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8. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2020) . Chronology of Gender in the Intergovernmental Process. <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/chronology-of-gender-in-the-intergovernmental-process>.
9. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2018) Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-third session, held in Bonn from 6 to 18 November 2017. <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2017/cop23/eng/11a01.pdf#page=13>.
10. Green Climate Fund (2019) Gender Policy <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gender-policy>
11. Lee, Y.H. (2016) The Gender Policy and Action Plan of Adaptation Fund https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/AF-presentation-Gender_YL_DC.pdf.

Authored by Gotelind Alber, Co-Founder and Board Member of GenderCC
Edited by Marissa Conway, Damjan Denkovski, and Anna Provan