



Climate & Development
Knowledge Network

SYNTHESIS PAPER

GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE COMPATIBLE DEVELOPMENT

Prepared by Lisa Schipper & Lara Langston, ODI - March 2015

This paper summarises the key knowledge gaps and important issues for the CDKN research project Gender equality and Climate Compatible Development – Drivers and challenges to people’s empowerment. The original literature review highlighted how and where gender mainstreaming is carried out in climate change alongside key gaps and issues that participants need to consider within project design. This summary paper presents the key issues and major knowledge gaps to the gender dimension of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and development.

Societies construct different roles for men and women, which has led to discrimination in society, reducing opportunities, means and power of women, as well as raising expectations, responsibilities and status of men. The direct outcome is that climate change will affect men and women in distinct ways, and it is not only women who suffer. Because women and men play different roles in the household and because they must follow different gendered roles, they are differently affected by climate. This can be illustrated by the way in which men are distressed to the point of suicide in India due to agricultural losses leading to an inability to repay loans and the way in which women are more likely to die from floods because they cannot leave their houses to escape the floods without being accompanied by a male relative.

Further, climate change will exacerbate these differences and worsen discrimination because it makes people worse off in general. Progress in gender equality that has been made to date is likely to erode because climate change will upset livelihoods in such a way that the attached social norms and networks will be recast, and the expectation is that ‘traditional’ gender roles will resurface. Unfortunately, because women and men are differentially vulnerable due to the roles that society has constructed for them, and these roles will be exaggerated by climate change, the final outcome is a double-hit.

Often statements about the gendered impacts of CC are not substantiated by empirical evidence. Although studies have been carried out, there are a number of assumptions that are taken for truths, but do not appear to be based in data. One of the knowledge gaps for which further evidence is required is on the effect of integrating more gender awareness into projects on addressing climate change.

Despite several years of work on gender and climate change, it is still unclear what the impact of integrating gender into climate change projects has had, in particular whether it has been able to

generate greater gender equality. As a consequence, there is limited evidence on the potential gains of a gender-sensitive approach, and the potential losses associated with a gender blind approach. We have summarised some key points about gender and climate change here to help provide some background to the broad topic, including insights into the key issues and knowledge gaps.

Gender, Climate Change and Urban areas

There are disparities between urban and rural gender roles, but we know less about how climate change impacts will influence heterogeneous groups in urban settings. Because of the limited studies that examine gender, climate change and urban areas at once, concerns about the existing knowledge on gender and climate change come primarily from studying rural contexts, but we need to ask whether these are the same?

A starting point is to understand what the differences are between men and women in rural areas and men and women in urban areas, however there is also an informal sector that is particularly relevant in urban areas. Informal work such as street vendors, construction workers and waste pickers are rarely acknowledged in relation to climate change and gender equality. The growing formal and informal divide may also have the potential to widen the gap between men and women due to their roles within society in urban systems. There are also differences in threats to consider, particularly flash floods, vector-borne diseases and heat waves in urban area which need to be acknowledged.

Gender and Mitigation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The discussion about mitigation and gender is less visible than the discussion on impacts and adaptation and gender. What is less well understood, and less studied, is the way in which these gender roles also influence the experiences of actions to mitigation greenhouse gas emissions, as well as access to financing for mitigation activities. For example, women are primarily excluded from decision-making as climate policy is mostly driven by decision by men. Women are also primarily seen as victims, rather than as actors in the task to find solutions to the climate change problem. Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions is seen as less of a social issue and more of a technical issue, generally resulting in gender, social inclusion and empowerment not being as central to debates.

Integrating gender into climate change projects

There are numerous toolkits to help integrate gender into climate change or development projects, focusing on, among other things, gender equity and equality, women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming and gender transformative approaches. These are written from several different perspectives, including rights-based, livelihoods, and resilience.

In reviewing and critiquing the methodologies, it is evident that gender typically translates to a focus on women, solely addressing women's needs and issues, leaving an overriding absence of men-focussed discussion. This creates problems, given that women are part of families and society, and not isolated from them. What is lost in a women-only focus is the fact that women and men (and girls and boys) experience climate change in different ways.

There is also widespread acknowledgment of the number of inadequate studies that provide gender-disaggregated data. There is the need to inform assessments, programmes and projects alongside strategies, policies and monitoring and evaluation with gender disaggregated information, and this

will be a 'critical starting point for implementing a systematic, gender-sensitive approach to risk management'.

Knowledge Gaps

Currently, there are substantial gaps in the study of urban and rural settings. In an urban setting, there may not be such a difference between the way in which income-generating activities affect men and women in a changing climate. There may also be less of a discrepancy between men and women in urban areas when it comes to education and healthcare.

Much of the work that has been done focuses on women, and most policies and practice focus on addressing women's practical needs, rather than looking at broader gender relations and people's strategic interests. Women being seen as vulnerable is consistent with most images of women created by society and culture, even though there is sufficient evidence to show that women can be as creative and flexible than men because of their need to adjust to a male-dominated society.

Studies need to be nuanced, because of dominating assumptions about gender and poverty linkages. However, in Lagos, Nigeria, evidence has shown that there are wide differences in risks between low-, middle- and high income women experiencing flash floods in cities. This finding underscores the need for greater social differentiation, in addition to gender disaggregation, in order to provide a better understanding of the specific needs and capabilities of different groups of men and women.

A focus on the way in which climate change affects social relations is also important, but appears to intimidate project teams because it requires dealing with numerous, deep, underlying societal and cultural issues. Thinking about culture is still missing in most climate change, and as such the cultural issues around gender are not at the forefront. It needs to be recognised that the different cultural contexts mean that integrating gender into projects will require different levels of effort and creativity, and in some cases be extremely challenging. This is problematic, as gender never stands alone: it is always mediated by multiple intersections between gender, class, ethnicity, age and other power relations.

In order to better understand the solutions to achieving and maintaining gender equality in a changing climate, it is necessary to understand why men and women are differentially vulnerable. Is it rooted in particular societal institutions or norms? Are these similar across countries? What role do cultural factors play, such as religion or beliefs about different roles of men and women with regard to family (reproduction), economy (production) and participation in decision-making (power)? To what extent is the cultural context the main driver of gender differentiated vulnerability to climate change? What are other drivers of gender differentiated vulnerability to climate change?

Caution is urged when approaching gender and climate change projects. It is important to be aware of assumptions that lack evidence from the field, such as the common link made between poverty and gender inequality, which are in reality two distinct forms of disadvantage. In fact, there may be more equality in poor households than in wealthier ones (based on studies in India). It is useful to know to what extent climate change projects that seek to integrate gender are relying on relevant expertise. What are the sources that are being drawn on to inform project design? And, crucially, to what extent are the recommendations from gender and development literature being considered? It is also necessary to be honest about the relative importance of gender as a driver of climate change risk. Despite the discomfort of identifying individuals, groups or institutional structures that

encourage gender inequality, if climate change impacts are indeed more significant because of disparities between men and women, it will be necessary to challenge the underlying social status quo in order to truly reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience to climate change. Bringing forth the observation that socially constructed gender differences and discrimination exist should be accompanied by solutions for how to remove these biases, which can be so inherently interwoven in socio-cultural fabric that it may be impossible for the people in such a society to imagine a world beyond discrimination. This way, rather than only being seen as critique, those involved will also be given the opportunity to reflect constructively on how they could engage with gender equality as a means to reducing the risk posed by climate change.