

# Climate Justice for *All*: putting gender justice at the heart of the Paris climate change agreement

The stage is set for the world's governments to negotiate an ambitious new binding agreement on climate change in 2015. In the run-up to talks to agree a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a new global climate agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), civil society organisations stress the need for solutions to climate disruption that are based on gender-responsive policies, and for processes to adequately address the developmental and human rights impacts of climate change.

## Introduction

The need for a successfully negotiated, fair and ambitious climate agreement in 2015 is clear. With weather patterns becoming increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather events more common, it is the world's poorest women and men whose lives and livelihoods are most threatened. Indeed, there is increasing acknowledgement of the differential impacts of climate change both within and between countries. These impacts are a function of three factors: the risk posed by different climatic changes, the numbers of people exposed to them, and their degree of vulnerability (which depends on their ability to avoid or cope with the worst effects). Thus, physical location, economic and social status and institutional capacity must be taken into consideration when responding to climate change.

Women and men may be affected by climate change differently, as a result of different needs, resources, power and capacity to cope with risk of natural disasters and adapt to environmental changes. It is often women, with unequal access to assets and employment opportunities, who are hit the hardest when natural resources are eroded. It is often women's specific needs that are obscured and not responded to when disaster strikes. Gender inequality impacts upon ability to participate in and influence responses to climate change, from the domestic to the global level. Finally, women's role as stakeholders to, and mitigation of climate

change is often overlooked, yet remains key in designing effective responses.

A people-centred approach to climate change cannot ignore the crucial dimension of gender, and must therefore be accompanied by gender-responsive climate change dialogue, processes and policies. To this end, a successful response to climate change must be able to accelerate progress towards gender justice, which is at the heart of achieving a climate change deal in 2015 that is fair and ambitious for all.

## Why does gender matter for tackling climate change?

### How gender shapes the impact of climate change

Unequal gender relations mean that often women face specific challenges as a result of an increasing number of natural disasters and slow onset environmental changes. When flooding, cyclones, hurricanes and other natural disasters occur, higher rates of illiteracy, lack of access to information and lower incidence of survival skills such as swimming can mean that women are left more vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies have found that women often make up a disproportionate number of casualties of natural disasters; in the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia, women are estimated to have made up 55-70% of casualties.<sup>2</sup> A 2007 study found that in natural disasters, the commonly higher proportion of women victims is directly linked to levels of gender inequality.<sup>3</sup>

**Climate mitigation and adaptation strategies must be developed with women, not for them, and women must be involved alongside men in every stage of climate and development policy-making.**

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**Gender provides a lens not only to differences in impacts, but opportunities for agency**

Moreover, in the wake of disaster, the study found that existing gender inequalities impacted access to relief efforts – in some cases, boys were given preferential treatment during rescue efforts, and both women and girls overall suffered more from shortages of food, sanitation and economic resources. It is important to note that developed countries are not excluded from this gender-differentiated impact of disasters; when Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana and Mississippi in the United States in 2005, it was single African-American women, one of lowest socio-economic groups in the country, who were the worst impacted.<sup>4</sup>

Gender inequality may mean women are more affected by longer-term environmental change, particularly in developing countries where they are more dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, do a majority of agricultural labour, and have responsibilities such as collecting water and fuel. In some parts of Kenya, fetching water has been reported to

use up to 85% of a woman's daily energy intake and in times of drought, women's workload increases greatly.<sup>5</sup> Other aspects of gender inequality also have an influence; for example, women's lack of rights to own land can result in having to work on less productive land, and exclusion from agricultural training or services that might enable them to diversify their livelihoods or increase their resilience to climate-related shocks.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the FAO estimates that while 90% of weeding on smallholder plots in sub-Saharan Africa is done by women, they own less than 20% of smallholder plots and are often prevented by customary laws from owning and inheriting land.<sup>7</sup> Inability to own land in rural areas can mean lack of access to farming land and financial capital, which then limits ability to diversify their livelihoods. Women generally also have fewer alternative employment opportunities. These inequalities compound the impact of climate change –

**Understanding the gendered impacts of climate change in Bangladesh**

**Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change and erratic rainfall, and an increasing number of floods, cyclones and drought now pose considerable challenges. Natural disasters are invariably accompanied by a heavy loss of life, property, income and household belongings; pushing vulnerable groups and communities further into a cycle of poverty.**

**In the run-up to natural disasters, women in rural areas of Bangladesh have been reported to have limited access to early warning information. During the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone, early warning signals were found not to have reached large numbers of women because information was passed to men in public spaces and was not subsequently passed on.<sup>10</sup> As a result, women were uninformed and unable to prepare and respond to the risks of disaster for themselves, their children, and their belongings – factors which may explain why 90% of the victims of the 1991 cyclone disaster were women and children.<sup>11</sup> In the immediate aftermath of heavy floods or cyclones, women in Bangladesh suffer from limited access to critical services and facilities such as family planning and sanitation systems, which can have subsequent health consequences.**

**The long-term impact of floods and cyclones on women's livelihoods include the destructions of houses in disaster prone areas, loss of income through the loss of valuable assets, crop and livestock loss, and subsequent reduced employment opportunities, especially for women working in agricultural fields.<sup>12</sup> With increasing climate variability, salinisation of drinking water is becoming a major problem, and given that women are usually responsible for providing drinking water, they have been reported to travel up to 10km on foot every day in search of water.<sup>13</sup>**

**Women in Bangladesh often play a leading role in household recovery and community resilience capacity-building after natural disasters, and evidence of social change suggests that many communities are increasingly prepared for women to lead local risk reduction activities.<sup>14</sup> Oxfam reports women organising flood preparation committees and receiving training to make portable clay ovens, to raise their houses, save seeds, use radios to hear of possible floods and train on disaster risk management.<sup>15</sup> Christian Aid partner Shushilan provides human rights and leadership training, in addition to gardening and veterinary skills training, to empower women to step into leadership roles to respond to climate change.**

if women who live in poverty are unable to build resilience and diversify sources of livelihood, they can fall into worse poverty and become even less able to respond to climate change.

In turn, the effects of climate change exacerbate existing gender inequalities. As in the example of Ethiopia later in this briefing, when climate change leads to shortages of food or water, social norms may lead to greater malnutrition among girls and women because of expectations that women are to eat only once they have fed their families, often meaning there is little left for them. In southern Africa, studies show that climate-linked migration – usually of men – often results in women being left to work on unproductive land and bear the burden of increased responsibility to provide for the family.<sup>8</sup> This rising unpaid care burden can mean that women and girls have less time and opportunity for education, paid work and participation in decision-making processes to respond to climate change.

### **Women are key agents for responding to climate change**

Using a gender lens to understand climate change also reveals potential contributions to the design of adaptation and mitigation policies, as women and men may have different knowledge and skills to contribute. A 2011 study of women subsistence farmers in north-east Ghana demonstrates that women at local levels have considerable knowledge of adaptation because of their agricultural expertise, long-standing knowledge of practices about growing food in less optimal conditions, and sensitivity to local conditions.<sup>9</sup> Gender provides a lens not only to differences in impacts, but opportunities for agency, and the paths to more effective responses to climate change this understanding of agency can offer. The knowledge and skills of women in reducing the risks and coping with disasters are also crucial but too often overlooked. In particular, the role of women to affect change should be guiding approaches to adaptation and mitigation. There are many examples of women organising themselves as activists and leaders in disaster risk management, recovery and longer-term responses to climate change. However, a lack of meaningful representation in designing responses to climate change means that this potential has yet to be fully recognised.

## **Towards climate and gender justice in 2015**

- **Gender justice at the heart of responses to climate change:** Transforming gender relations is an essential part of adapting to climate change and building resilience – for example, to diversify livelihoods, women require increased access and security of tenure of farmland and more participation in decisions on how that land is used. These changes require a focus on wider systems of structural discrimination, access and rights, often considering other factors such as class or race. For example, one study of adaptation in Mexico highlights a need to improve women’s access to the labour market, which in turn requires increased access to secondary education, as the key to successful climate policies.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, if women are to take a bigger role in responding to climate change, consideration must be made of how to redistribute the burden of unpaid care which prevents their full participation, for example by increasing the provision of public services.

Central to effective policies is an improved ability to participate in decision-making on adapting to climate change as part of overarching development strategies. In rural India, one study advocates strengthening women’s voices in community-level environmental management as a central part of effective responses to climate change.<sup>17</sup> The issues of unpaid care, economic equality and voice must be addressed if women are to meaningfully participate in responding to climate change, and responses to climate change are to be effective.

- **Gender-sensitive adaptation:** Equal active and meaningful participation of women in adaptation efforts is essential to successful programmes, which range from changes to crops and increased access to insurance to diversified sources of livelihood. Women have a vital role to play in adaptation because of their knowledge, for instance in managing water resources. Moreover, gender justice should be at the heart of decisions regarding the allocation of resources for adaptation both through gender mainstreaming and the allocation of resources to respond to the specific needs of women.

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- **Gender-sensitive mitigation:** To be effective, mitigation policies will need to be based on a sound understanding of gender-differentiated relationships with the environment that are the result of social norms. Women's energy needs, for example, can be different from that of men, requiring energy for clean cooking, water pumping for agriculture and drinking water, and access to public services such as health clinics and education. The gender differentiation of roles of men and women in transitions to clean energy is therefore considerable. Mitigation policies and initiatives, including the SDG on sustainable energy, must strive to be gender aware to be effective – indeed, the UN's Sustainable Energy for All platform works with organisations which seek to use gender perspectives to identify how men and women participate and benefit from energy developments differently, and improve access to efficient energy accordingly.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, different roles in forest conservation must be understood with regards to carbon capture policies, and gender awareness in sustainable consumption policies must be explicitly gender-sensitive because of the strong role of women in household consumption decisions.

However, policies around mitigation and low carbon development remain largely blind to gendered engagement with climate change and to their impact on gender equality. For example, approaches to 'offsetting' carbon emissions through economic incentives in programmes such as the UN's Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) have been criticised for commercialising natural resources – this excludes landless women who depend on forests for their livelihoods – and for failing to take account of the multiple factors that limit women's ability to participate in or benefit from these economic incentives.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, there is concern that such market-based approaches can serve to worsen gender inequality.<sup>20</sup> Consideration of gendered roles in mitigation and the gendered impact of mitigation policies being implemented will be vital to ensuring that these responses to climate change are successful.

### **BRACED for change: building climate resilience and empowering women in Ethiopia**

**In January 2015, Christian Aid and partners began work in Ethiopia to implement the UK Department for International Development's Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters programme (BRACED), which seeks to build the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate extremes and disasters in high-risk locations across the country. Ethiopia faces major challenges linked to climate change such as food insecurity, cyclical disasters, population pressure, loss of livelihood, disease and natural resource degradation. Natural disasters, particularly droughts and floods, occur frequently in Ethiopia, and 2.9 million people will require humanitarian food assistance in 2015.<sup>21</sup>**

**As primary caretakers in the home, women's food security in rural Ethiopia is directly impacted by environmental changes, particularly as there is a tendency to prioritise family members and reduce what they eat when food is scarce. Women often take on extra activities to support the family during times of climatic stress, for example,**

**becoming involved in small trading on top of their workload in the household. As climate extremes affect water availability, women and girls have to travel longer distances in search of water. In the areas targeted by the BRACED programme, women are often excluded from discussions and decision-making around livelihoods.**

**To deal with these challenges, there is an urgent need for reliable climate information and increased capacity to deal with long-term environmental change. As part of wider community resilience-building efforts, the programme uses participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments to ensure that women have equal voice when assessing the risks arising from climate change and in the design of community-wide action plans. This format allows for self-assessed, gender-differentiated indicators of success**

**to be built into responses to climate change, placing gender perspectives at the centre of approaches to resilience-building.**

## Ensuring gender justice is at the heart of the UNFCCC

### Implement existing policy commitments for gender equality in climate change

While the UN is committed to gender mainstreaming in its policies, gender has yet to be fully considered in climate change processes, and gender is less likely to be discussed or addressed in climate change policy at national and international levels. Recent steps have been a move in the right direction. The first meeting of the 2015 climate talks in Geneva in February – where a draft text was agreed to form the foundation of negotiations in December – saw states call for *'all Parties [to] be guided by gender equality and ensure the full and equal participation of women in all climate actions and decision making processes'*.<sup>22</sup> This wording has now been integrated into the draft agreement for consideration during negotiations. Similarly, in March 2015 the Green Climate Fund adopted its 'Gender Policy and Action Plan', which seeks to ensure that the Fund's activities are inclusive, that resource allocation for adaptation and mitigation activities is equitable and that the Fund and states are accountable for gender and climate change impacts.<sup>23</sup>

This momentum is a positive sign but must not be lost – inclusion of gender aspects within key documents will ensure that governments and policies can be held accountable to their commitments in future. Gender must be a key element of every stage of the process. Gender-disaggregated data should be promoted as well as documentation of processes of change and trade-offs within local contexts.<sup>24</sup> Gender and development experts, alongside women's groups, must be part of policy development and design. Indicators and other tools to monitor changes in gender relations – some of which have already been developed in sustainable development processes – must form a core part of monitoring requirements. Existing commitments outside the UNFCCC such as those in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should guide states' action towards increased coherence for gender equality to be at the heart of policymaking and resource allocation. Finally, gender justice will require states to champion the issue within the UNFCCC process and actively push the agenda in Paris.

### Reducing the gender gap in decision-making on climate change

The gender gap in climate decision-making exists at every level. Although the UNFCCC agreed in 2001 to improve women's participation in decision-making processes, by 2010 women constituted less than 30% of all delegation parties to UNFCCC talks.<sup>25</sup> Steps have already been taken to address this gap. In 2012, at the UN Climate Change Conference in Doha, Qatar, states committed to promoting gender balance and working towards equal participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations and the representation in bodies established under the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol, with progress to be reported annually.<sup>26</sup> However, there are still improvements to be made, as women's rights organisations and experts have had low levels of participation throughout the UNFCCC process. In order for the gap to be addressed, there is a need to listen to the experiences of the most affected and draw on their expertise so that approaches to climate change are suitably informed.

**Inclusion of gender aspects within key documents will ensure that governments and policies can be held accountable**



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