

Climate change briefing

Gender and climate change

Women as agents of change

December 2007

Although climate change impacts will affect all countries, its impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations and genders.

The poor (of which 70% are women) will be disproportionately affected. Women are also powerful agents of change by playing a key role in energy consumption, deforestation, burning of vegetation, population growth and economic growth.

Key facts

- Women are the main producers of the world's staple crops, providing up to 90% of food for the rural poor and producing 60–80% of the food in most developing countries.
- Women already struggle to cope with year-to-year variability of maize, sorghum, millet and groundnut yields associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation. Crop productivity in extreme El Niño years is expected to drop a further 20–50% in southern Africa.
- Women are already more vulnerable to nutritional problems. 50% of the women and children in developing countries are anaemic.
- Climate variability plays an important role in initiating malaria epidemics in the East African highlands and accounts for 70% of variation of recent cholera outbreaks in Bangladesh. This increase has more severe impacts on women who often have less access to medical services than men. Women's workloads also increase as they spend time caring for the sick.
- There is decisive evidence that gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women's economic and social rights. In societies that are more inequitable, men are likely to receive preferential treatment in rescue efforts and women are likely to suffer more from shortages of food and other resources in the aftermath of disasters. Women made up 90% of the 140,000 people killed in the 1991 cyclone disaster



in Bangladesh. During Hurricane Katrina in the USA, African-American women faced greater obstacles to survival.

- Many key decision-making institutions related to climate change have a male-dominated hierarchical structure. At the COP 7 meeting in Marrakech, the ratio of male to female professionals deciding on forestry and energy projects was 11 to 1.

- Women's empowerment is now being linked to climate change solutions. In November 2006, Kenya's Greenbelt Movement, founded by Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai, and the World Bank's Community Development Carbon Fund signed an emissions reductions purchase agreement to reforest two mountain areas in Kenya. Women's groups will plant thousands of trees, an activity that will also provide income to poor rural women. Women's empowerment through this process will also capture 350,000 tons of carbon dioxide, restore soil lost to erosion, and support regular rainfall essential to Kenya's farmers and hydro-electric power plants.

What IUCN is doing

- Influencing climate change mitigation and adaptation policies include gender and biodiversity concerns from local to global level (i.e. development of gender-biodiversity criteria and guidelines for national adaptation policies, capacity building for decision makers, elaboration of national adaptation platforms).
- Mainstreaming gender equity and gender into all post-Kyoto climate-related policies (i.e. incorporating gender into financing mechanisms to ensure equitable access to resources and incentives).
- Facilitating more equal participation of women in decision making for climate change mitigation and adaptation at the national, regional and international level.
- Providing guidance to decision makers to implement adaptation measures which take into account gender.
- Conducting research in gender-specific resource-use patterns; gender-specific effects of climate change; gender aspects of mitigation and adaptation; women's and men's capacities to cope with climate change; and gender-related patterns of vulnerability.
- Providing support and capacity building for women at risk to enhance their adaptive capacity (i.e. poverty alleviation projects, sharing information through networks of women in the South).



More information

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