

# IS THERE A GENDER ANGLE TO THE CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS?

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful for helpful comments from Elizabeth Cecelski on an earlier draft of this paper. This paper has been revised based on comments from various readers after distribution at the CSD9.

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## Abstract

The South is likely to suffer more from climate change than the North due to the already vulnerable situation and lack of the necessary resources to adapt to change. But do the interests of men and of women differ as regards climate change and does this have a South-North dimension? This paper attempts to establish whether gender issues need to be addressed in the climate change debate. Towards this goal, a number of different issues within the climate change debate, in particular the instruments proposed are analysed. These include responsibility for emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), studies on vulnerability to the effects of climate change, mitigation of emissions, capacity building for participation in flexible mechanisms and adaptation to climate change.

We conclude that while there are many gender angles related to the climate change convention and the instruments therein, some are more strategic than others. There is little to be gained by looking at the responsibility for emissions on a gendered basis. But in mitigation activities, Clean Development Mechanism, capacity building, technology transfer, vulnerability studies and projects for adaptation, the poor, the majority of who are women, should be targeted and active participants in decision-making.

## 1. Introduction

Everyone is likely to suffer from climate change: from changing rainfall patterns that threaten to disrupt agricultural and fish production, from forest fires, from heat and water related diseases, and from storms that will devastate lives and property. It is also clear that the Southern countries will suffer disproportionately because of their already vulnerable situation, and because they do not have the financial, technical, information and social capital that the North does to adapt to change and to defend against its consequences.

The question this paper considers is whether the interests of men and of women differ as regards climate change and whether this has a South-North dimension. Very little appears to have been written on the subject, the article by Fatma Denton in **Energia News** 3.3 being an exception. At the CoP6 meeting in The Hague in November 2000, very little was said on the topic of gender. A sole speaker, the youth representative, mentioned the issue in her speech briefly, noting that 'in developing countries where the woman's role includes management of energy in the home, women need to be given incentives and recognition to promote clean energy' (<http://youthcorner.climatechnage2000.org/modules/none.asp?pageid=48>).

Chairman Pronk, interviewed after the proceedings were over, said :

Encouraging the widest participation in the process of promoting and cooperating in education, training and public awareness related to climate change is crucial. In developing country households women are often the primary providers and users of energy. Therefore, the participation of women and women's organisations is crucial.

But it was clearly not an issue which riveted the attention of the majority at the Hague meeting. This despite the fact that the spokespeople for three of the major NGOs – WWF, Friends of the Earth and Climate Action Network – were women, and nearly 20% of all the environment ministers present were female,<sup>2</sup> some of whom had key negotiating roles as heads of groups discussing the themes as grouped by the president. Their lack of attention to gender issues may be attributed to their perceived need to focus on the more universal issues and not divert attention towards gender aspects given the limited human resource for negotiation and the crisis in which the whole debate on the Kyoto found itself at that time. A 'Women's Climate Coalition' had been set up at the Berlin Climate Change meeting in 1995, where 200 women

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<sup>2</sup> From Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, EU, France, Gambia, Guinea, Honduras, Iceland, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Surinam, Tunisia, Venezuela, South Africa rep.

from numerous NGOs created the wonderfully named forum 'Solidarity in the greenhouse' ([www.alternatives.com/library/env/envclimate/wa060015.txt](http://www.alternatives.com/library/env/envclimate/wa060015.txt)). At the time of preparation of this article the website appeared to be inactive (though it was still open in January of 2001), and the group could not be contacted by phone, fax or email<sup>3</sup>. It was certainly not active at CoP6.<sup>4</sup>

However, the silence on gender in The Hague did not go unnoticed. The issue came up as one of the very first conclusions at the International Conference for the Earth Summit 2002, held shortly after CoP6 in Berlin ([www.earthsummit2002.org/workshop](http://www.earthsummit2002.org/workshop)). Participants at this meeting, which was also in preparation for the CSD9 in New York, called for development of a gender analysis in all international energy related processes, including the Climate Change Convention, and more immediately for a Women and Climate Change Forum at the resumed CoP6 in July 2001. Given the latest turn of events with respect to the Kyoto Protocol, some might question whether this is a wise strategy since the focus of the negotiations will mainly be on more other political issues relating to survival of the protocol, and on gaining support for it by as many nations as possible.

Despite women's caucus participation in the CSD process, they had limited influence in integrating decisive text into the energy draft decision text deliberated by the ad hoc Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development in Feb 2001, an area which is extremely relevant for climate change. The group was however able to persuade the G77 and China to introduce the issue of women and energy no less than 5 times in the Outcome Document at the CSD-9 meeting on New York in April 2001 (where there had been only one before). It is unlikely that the Kyoto Protocol will stand or fall as a result of some lobbying on gender, and it is the function of the Women's Caucus and organisations such as Energia to fight for this issue. The fact that their influence has up to now been relatively limited does not mean that attempts to include more attention to gender issues should be stopped.

What is really important however is that such efforts should consider carefully where, and how, gender issues need to be addressed in the climate change debate, rather than tackling the problem broadside. In particular, it is necessary to develop a strategy that is practical, translating general concerns expressed in terms of the need to involve women in decision-making and the need to respond to women's needs into real opportunities for intervention. For this reason we here attempt to analyse a number of different issues within the climate change debate, in particular the instruments proposed, with a view to assessing whether or not there is a 'gender angle' to be argued, and whether this is worth pursuing in the negotiations. In our view, there are five aspects of the climate change debate which can be analysed as regards the need for and potential for special attention to gender:

1. Responsibility for emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs).
2. Studies on vulnerability to the effects of climate change .
3. Mitigation of emissions.

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<sup>3</sup> We are grateful for Sharon Taylor of the Climate Change Secretariat for this information.

<sup>4</sup> The platform of the coalition had been to promote women's participation in policy and expert levels of UN decision making, to reject Joint Implementation and nuclear power as climate strategies, to ensure that women's needs were explicitly dealt with at CoP1, and to lobby for financial support for women's renewable energy networks. They further stated that environmental policymakers should not instrumentalise women of the South by holding them responsible for population growth (as this is a means of trying to shift the blame for environmental degradation from the industrialised to the developing countries). Within industrialised countries, the Coalition argued, responsibilities must not be shifted to the private households entirely, as this will only conceal the role of industrial production processes.

4. Capacity building for participation in flexible mechanisms.
5. Adaptation to climate change.

## **2. Responsibility for emissions of GHGs**

There is a school of thought that notes that major and global environmental threats stem primarily from industrial patterns of production and consumption. They are not due primarily to gender relations, nor will they be solved by improving gender relationships (Martine and Villareal, 1997). For this point of view, there is no need to pose a gender position in climate change. One can contrast this with the Ecofeminist school which explicitly relates modern economies and their production processes to a male-dominated culture, arguing that economies based on feminine principles would look very different and would be much more environmentally friendly (Shiva, 1989). Although this is an interesting theoretical topic to debate, here we will simply look in more detail at the gender distribution of GHG emissions and consider whether this is an item that should be made explicit in the climate negotiations.

There is no doubt that at present the majority of GHG emissions are the result of activities in Northern countries. In fact, the core of the debate on climate change revolves around this inequality, and about how much money and resources the North should transfer to the South to make up for the damage, as well as how the South can help the North clean up its mess. The primary sources in the North are the power industry, household use and transport, followed by various industrial processes. Primary sources in the South are the power industry and land-use change, including clearing of forests. But is it feasible to allocate the emissions between men and women, within any given country? And would it be useful or expedient to do so?

It would not be difficult to show that the power and the petroleum industries and many industrial processes are managed by men, both in the North and in the South, and if a shareholders' survey is made, the probability is that where these companies are on the stock market, the majority of their ownership will also be found to be male (in that more capital is in the hands of the male population in general).

More uncertainty surrounds the gender distribution as regards use of the services of these industries. Car ownership, for example: although it has become increasingly less skewed over the last few decades in Europe and North America, and is slowly changing in Eastern Europe, it is clear that cars are still used more by men than by women, with the side-effect that women are often disproportionately dependent on public transport (the situation in developing countries is even more extreme in this regard). A survey of 57% of the passengers in an omnibus in the UK showed that 67% and 50% of the men and women respectively owned cars (TNS Harris, 2000). The products of industrial processes – the end-goods – are, however, by and large purchased by the population as a whole and, while men in many countries still have more purchasing power than women, it can often be argued that they purchase on behalf of the family (with some exceptions, of course – alcohol is often cited in this respect). Household energy use in the North is mostly related to heating and cooling, and thus the choice of both men and women (although in most countries women are still at home more than men). It has therefore been claimed that there is no evidence that women in developed countries use resources more sustainably than men (Martine & Villareal, 1997).

The situation in the North is not particularly different. Taking the position of the devil's advocate, it might even be argued that women are higher polluters than men when taking into account emissions from land use in areas where women farmers predominate (although even in this case, the task of clearing land from forest – the activity that physically releases the carbon – is often carried out by men, albeit for the family). Besides, as they are the majority of household cooks, women could then be blamed for GHG emissions from unsustainably managed fuelwood supplies! (Although there is a high and increasing number of men cooks in the commercial sector, such as hotels.) The Nairobi garbage problem might be another case worth mentioning. A city which was once called the 'green city in the sun' is now commonly referred to as the

‘stinking city in the garbage’ due to huge piles of refuse in many of the city dumps. The Dandora dump, for example, holds over 1.3 million m<sup>3</sup> of garbage. Tonnes of emissions are produced from the dumps, causing health and environmental damages. One could argue that, since women are major consumers and buyers of the stuff that ends up in the dumps, they are more responsible for the environmental degradation. But perhaps the blame should be placed on the local government officials who have failed to perform their duty of collecting garbage. In fact, an assistant minister has described these officials as the biggest polluters of the environment (Muiruri, 2001). Piles of garbage are also common in Mogadishu where gunmen interrupt its collection, demanding payment for allowing refuse removal (Barise, 2001). Thus, one could blame the gunmen for pollution emanating from the dumps – although, the accusation might be against the United Nations Mission who between 1992 and 1995 created the market by paying NGOs lucratively to remove the garbage. The absurdity, and the dangers, of this kind of argument are clear, especially when one considers that these services undertaken by women but resulting in GHG emissions are often for the family and not just for her own ends.

The question is, who is responsible for the emission of the GHGs: the factory that emits them, the shareholders, or the customer that wants the products that they produce? Does it make sense to argue that men own (most of) the emission-generating factories and men also run them, therefore they are responsible? While the arguments of ecofeminism should not be ignored, the evidence around us is that the nature of businesses most women are currently involved in is dictated more by access to resources, skills and information than by their concern for the environment. This is especially true for the Southern rural woman who focuses on micro-enterprises such as food-processing, weaving baskets, etc. But in West Africa, where women have been able to relatively progress economically, the urban woman is also heavily involved in the transport business, and in the context of globalisation these trends look set to stay. So it is doubtful whether increased ownership of business by women, in the current form of the economy, would in any great way reduce carbon emissions. Likewise it is difficult to assign the consumption of goods produced, and thus the GHGs that result, to male and female consumers in a way that is convincing and generalisable. Although the effects of this difference – and car ownership as a case in point – are important socially, pursuing this argument in terms of GHGs is likely to detract from more important gender issues as regards the climate convention and likely to stir up more opposition than support.

### **3. Vulnerability studies**

Denton (2000), argues that women in the south are more vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change. Her point is that women are in general poorer than men, and more dependent on the kinds primary resources that are most threatened by the changes in climate, both in agriculture and in fisheries. As (climate) refugees they will also be more than proportionately affected. Moreover, it is women who bear the burden of caring for the sick, and in that increased levels of sickness are to be expected, the cost will largely be borne by women. The question is, is it better to approach this problem from the point of view of *gender*, or from the point of view of *poverty* – that is, is it essentially because they are poor that women suffer these hardships?

Studies on vulnerability should without doubt recognise poverty as the primary variable. However, poverty research is increasingly becoming sensitive to gender issues and recognition of the feminisation of poverty as a central issue. Methodologies and frameworks for such analysis are now widely available in the development literature. What is important is that such methods are taken on board and used in any vulnerability studies that are undertaken in the context of the climate convention. This needs to be explicitly mentioned in the texts which define the contents of such studies.

## **4. Mitigation**

In the climate change negotiations, it is foreseen that mitigation will mainly occur not through reduction of production and economic growth but by substitution of old technology with clean technology, both in North and South. Such changes will be implemented through a system of incentives and penalties on the Parties that are internationally held responsible for reduction of emissions (Annex 1 countries – i.e. the North). There is increasing pressure from the leading emitter, the USA, for non-Annex I countries to play a larger role in mitigation than was previously envisaged. This is likely to have implications on consumption and production patterns of women in the South. The Annex 1 Parties will have to divide up and transfer their responsibility to actors within their national boundaries (domestic action) and outside (for the case of the flexible mechanisms). Would it make sense for the Party to think in gender terms and direct different incentives and different penalties to men and to women? Or to target some technologies more to men and others towards women?

Depending on the key players within the context of an incentive, penalty or technology, a gendered approach might be the most efficient way to proceed. For the case of transfer of technology to the South under, for example, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), one of the flexible mechanisms, there is a strong argument that women might be targeted for a range of technologies in the areas of household energy, agricultural and food-processing, forest management, water-pumping, etc, in the rural areas, and energy appliances and processing equipment in the peri-urban areas. Literature abounds to show that extension messages related to technology are usually directed towards men, that men are considered the decision-makers and the eventual managers of technology, while field observations show that women, given half a chance, are avid users of technology provided it meets their particular needs. In recognition of the role of women in the use of energy technology, UNEP Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, with support from the Swedish government, initiated an 'Awareness and education programme for women leaders on update of renewable energy technologies' in 2000. The CDM offers a whole new opportunity to market technology to women on a large scale, mainly because the additional value of emission reduction may make investment projects attractive in cases where they otherwise might not have been. But this requires a marketing strategy which recognises gender differences in needs and in acquisition possibilities. CDM presents, in fact, an opportunity to be seized by those who have been campaigning for more technology for women, even those who have no immediate interest in carbon savings per se.

Given that CDM projects, besides reducing GHG emissions, are supposed to contribute positively to sustainable development in other ways, there is even more justification for an explicit focus on women and special programmes and criteria for the involvement of women. Moreover, the CDM (despite recent setbacks) is likely to be an instrument with considerable financial resources behind it. It is crucial that the women's lobby take up this issue and ensure that texts are written in such a way that women are able to take part in a substantial way, especially at the implementation level.

## **5. Capacity building**

Gender-based inequity in access to education and training has persisted, despite increased international efforts manifested in programmes promoting education for the girl child. Overall, the pool of women professionals in the fields of engineering, energy and other technical areas is small. There are few women who own or are involved in managing large business. Inadequate and lack of financial and management capacity has been the main cause for this imbalance.

Capacity building is a major area of focus to enable implementation of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol. Within the climate change negotiations, capacity building has been awarded attention in its own right, but also specifically within the context of technology transfer and the flexible mechanisms, particularly CDM. Capacity will be needed to identify, assess, access and assimilate technologies; for CDM, capacity is needed to access and later implement. Funding

and other resources have been, and will continue to be, allocated in increasing amounts. There is growing awareness of the need for capacity to negotiate at the climate change conventions. Should capacity building initiatives be based on gender? Should the ongoing negotiations acknowledge the gender imbalances in capacity or would such issues be unnecessary diversions?

Considering that Southern women are important actors in areas with potential for mitigating climate change, it is definitely important to design gender-sensitive capacity building programmes. Cleaner technologies in the agricultural and water sector should target women. Community-based CDM projects will, by nature of their setting, involve more women than men. As increasingly active members in the economy, women need to be capacitated to facilitate the Convention agenda. There is a strong case for special allocation of funds for training women in this regard.

Furthermore, women's movements and other gender-sensitive organizations could provide the necessary stimulus for resumption in vigorous local campaigns for the environment. Under capacity building for women we should, therefore, not think only of training but also of financial support to gender-sensitive organisations to enable them to move forward on this issue.

## **6. Adaptation**

From the beginning, there have been claims from many Southern countries that what is needed, even more than reduced emissions, is assistance with adaptation to the damaging effects related to climate change. There has been talk of an adaptation fund to be levied from the flexible mechanisms, but as yet there is little agreement about how this will work – and, in any case, the sums proposed are minute in comparison with the scale of the problems to be solved. Assuming, however, that the international community does pull itself together over this (and climate change in general) and agree on a programme for adaptation, the question remains whether, and how, this should take gender into account.

The means of adaptation, particularly in the South, are likely to include changing agricultural systems to deal with less reliable weather, migration, civil engineering works for flood control, health services, etc. There is nothing very new about these strategies; they are the kinds of investments which have been carried out under the rubric of 'development' (which is elevated to sustainable development) for many generations. Some might be similar to today's poverty alleviation strategies. The question then arises as to whether it is more strategic to target these explicitly at women, or at populations in general. Probably there is room for both approaches, depending on the local circumstances. Some such strategies have targeted women but found the gains lower than anticipated. In places there has been a backlash of resentment on the part of men against what they see as excessive emphasis on women in development programme (FAO, 1998). A family or partnership focus is therefore advocated by an increasing number of practitioners.

Given this background, it might in many cases be better to take the socially focused poverty approach as opposed to gender approach in addressing adaptation to climate change. As we noted above, efficiently designed frameworks to address the needs of the vulnerable poor should, if properly carried out, take women into account. Such approaches are these days increasingly concerned with the inclusion of women and their needs. The current efforts to mainstream gender into planning and management undoubtedly need, however, to be strengthened and encouraged. This would include – as a minimum – consultation with women's groups as well as men's, and gender analysis to assure that the impacts of such interventions do not have unintended negative impacts. This implies that there is need to explicitly acknowledge the gender dimension within the adaptation negotiating text – in case it is forgotten.



## 7 Conclusions

There are many gender angles related to the climate change convention and the instruments therein. Some, however, seem to be more strategic than others. While there is little to be gained by looking at the responsibility for emissions on a gendered basis, there would be much benefit in ensuring that, in mitigation activities, women's involvement is specially catered for but mainly based on their placement within the social ladder, as the poor rather than as women per se. In the definition of rules and programmes for CDM, as a largest proportion of the poor, women's participation should be actively sought and technologies targeted towards this very important section of the population. Associated with this there should be capacity building programmes which take into account the poor, hence women and their roles in emission reduction and sustainable development, and thus capacitate them to take part effectively. As regards vulnerability studies and projects for adaptation, approaches which target poor population groups in general should follow best practice in this field and utilise existing methodologies which already recognise and incorporate a gender approach .

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