

Gender and climate: levers for sustainable development

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Women are first in line when it comes to tackling climate change. Whether they are involved in producing and managing resources or in climate negotiations, women are fully-fledged stakeholders in the quest for climate solutions. However, they must contend with specific types of vulnerability that exacerbate the impact of climate change both on themselves and on their communities.

Faced with the urgency of climate change, many organisations have committed to the Paris Climate Agreement, including AFD Group, which has adopted a “100% climate” posture in its POS IV strategic focuses for 2018-2022. The goal is to promote “low-carbon” practices that help combat climate change and promote eco-friendly and pro-biodiversity norms of behaviour. At the same time, AFD has made “social ties” a central focus of its policy and one of the key underlying components of this policy is gender equality. Therefore, both gender and climate are now key focuses of a major international development agency. Moreover, both of these themes were tackled at COP25, in which AFD participated.

Despite the lack of progress in commitments made by the Parties, COP25¹ at least unanimously adopted the second Gender Action Plan (GAP2)² for the next five years. GAP2 broadly reflects the concerns of civil society, particularly in relation to climate justice and incorporating human rights into all UNFCCC processes³. It accords major importance to female leadership and women’s access to green finance. However, while GAP2 sets out recommendations, they are not legally binding and governments are free to implement them (or not).

GENDER AND CLIMATE: CONSIDERABLE INTERSECTIONALITY

To understand the links between climate and gender, we need to grasp the reality of intersectionality, otherwise it would be hard to assess the differentiated impact of climate change. Therefore, while we need gender-specific data that makes it possible to assess this impact, little such data currently exists that is capable of highlighting such wide-ranging intersectionality.

Just like in other international processes, women are still ignored when climate and environment public policies are being prepared, especially in Africa. Historically, in most countries, women have been restricted to producing the lowest-margin foodstuffs – higher-value products have generally been left to men. The same applies to land access (and not just land for agricultural production – see insert), which remains central to the empowerment of women in developing countries.



Access to cemetery land in Tanzania

In Tanzania, access to land is a crucial issue for women, and not merely in terms of the resources it provides. In certain regions, women must find a husband if they want to be buried with dignity after they die: men own the land so a woman without a husband may not be able to get a proper burial. In such cases, they are put in a common grave which represents a highly undignified end.

The indigenous Amerindian women who travelled to COP25 wished to highlight a number of challenges currently faced by their people: the increasing scarcity of seeds that now cost a fortune to buy, unemployment and migration, and urbanization that is gradually encroaching upon the forest under the impetus of agribusiness and transforming the traditional way of life of indigenous people. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of Amazonian rainforest are disappearing – especially in Brazil – and with them the medicinal plants traditionally used by women.

Private sector water management is a hot topic for women, notably in Chile. In developing countries, women are often in charge of the supply and day-to-day use of water, but water companies are draining rivers and lakes when this common resource should be enshrined in public policy. Water shortages have numerous consequences on socio-economic and environmental equilibria that can trigger massive population flight.

Because of their role in society, climate change affects women a lot more than men. In the Philippines, civil society is battling to have the no-harm rule – characterised by its “neutrality” in project management terms – replaced by the loss and damage mechanism. The climate emergency is dictating an approach that mainstreams the situation of women already impacted by climate change and, above all, provides some solutions.

Obviously, women are not just victims and they are also important stakeholders in the fight against climate change. There are numerous examples of their role in promoting socio-ecological system resilience by contributing to food security, economic value chains or climate solutions.

GENDER AND CLIMATE IN AFD’S OPERATIONS

It is therefore important to recognize the key role played by women in battling climate change. For example, AFD-sponsored projects are evaluated using the OECD “gender marker”. Even though AFD is much more focused on investment in infrastructure, renewable energies and biodiversity, as the following examples show, it is just as important to mainstream gender and the climate variable into

projects that are designed to enhance adaptation, mitigation and resilience.

SPECIFIC FINANCING SOLUTIONS

The Adapt'Action Facility is a study and capacity-building fund designed to support the implementation of the nationally-determined contributions of 15 countries and regional organizations (Africa, least developed countries and small island developing states). As the preferred instrument for continued cross-cutting mainstreaming of gender and climate issues, this facility has been allocated €30 million over four years (2017-2021) and reflects the commitments given under the first Gender Action Plan adopted at COP23.

Among several gender mainstreaming solutions, a gender-based mechanism providing venture capital and project preparation and monitoring (FAPS) was rolled out in 2019 with a budget of 5 million euros. It includes project support field studies and technical assistance. The aim is to identify women's practical and strategic needs through detailed analyses of socio-economic, demographic and ecological realities on the ground.

With €75 million in loans and a €7 million grant, Mauritius-based Sunref III enables local banks to finance projects with a climate change adaptation and professional gender equality focus. It provides financial incentives to companies that invest in climate change and/or gender equality solutions by offering an additional investment premium of 1% of the loan amount.

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PROJECTS BACKED BY CIVIL SOCIETY

The AFD-sponsored Solutions prize awarded to Women Engaged for a Common Future (WECF) recognized this NGO's role in promoting local solutions for a global cause. This award recognises initiatives by and/or for women to reduce current inequalities in the battle against climate change. In 2019, the three projects awarded prizes included the Univers-Sel Deduram project, which aims to improve the living conditions of mangrove dwellers in Guinea-Bissau by exchanging know-how with salt workers from Guérande, France.

Another project, headed up by Agrisud, focuses on Khmu communities living in the mountainous area of northern Laos and aims to build and rehabilitate water supply networks. In Khmu communities, fetching water is an exclusively female task so this project directly reduces the hardship involved in this work by allowing the women time to attend technical agroecology training.

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A resilient agriculture project set up by Oxfam is helping to boost the capacity of local communities and organizations affected by Hurricane Irma, which severely damaged livelihoods, basic services and infrastructure in the centre of the country. The project aims to raise awareness of the role of women in these reconstruction and resilience processes and to strengthen their leadership.

CONCLUSION

These few examples provide an overview of the approach and the solutions being deployed by AFD in order to get "gender and climate"-labelled projects off the ground. Mainstreaming gender into private sector-backed initiatives continues to be a guarantee of their effectiveness and sustainability

and while there is still quite a way to go, AFD Group has made considerable strides in this area. For example, nearly €4 billion worth of project volumes incorporate DAC gender equality policy markers 1 or 2⁴. Loan and grant projects dedicated to gender equality (DAC 2) alone amount to €500 million, including €250 million worth of subsidies.

Aside from the realisation that the links between gender and climate are fundamental to building climate justice, recognising women as fully-fledged stakeholders in change is essential to any sustainable development project.

1 Held in Madrid, from 2 to 13 December 2019.

2 The first Gender Action Plan was adopted at COP23.

3 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

4 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gender equality policy marker.