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Gender in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

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The United Nations has assumed obligations in all policy areas and programs of gender mainstreaming. Gender equality has yet to be attained anywhere in the world, however. Women and men have different societal and social roles and responsibilities. The legal situation of women and men differs greatly in many countries, as does their economic situation and their involvement and participation in decision-making. That is why it is not surprising that gender relations also play a role in climate change mitigation and adaptation to climate change. This has not yet been sufficiently taken into account, however, in the concrete implementation of climate policy at the local or national levels.

It is apparent that there is a paucity of data in the area of gender and climate change mitigation. Nevertheless, there is much to indicate what an important role gender relations play in seeking to understand the causes of climate change and its mitigation. Taking this role into account is of crucial importance if we are to successfully adapt to the consequences of climate change, some of which have already manifested themselves.

1. Greater burdens and less time for education and gainful employment by women and girls

In most societies women are responsible for the household and for taking care of children and older people. They have the task of feeding the family, providing clean water and energy for the home. At the same time they generate income, thus making a considerable contribution to combating poverty. Climate change can cause an additional strain on women who already bear a double or even triple burden.

The exhaustion of natural resources and drop in agricultural productivity, for instance, increases the time which has to be devoted to growing and harvesting plants and crops for household use or to sell on the local market. In many regions of the world women perform most of the agricultural

work, but their access to, and control over, land is restricted. Often they are only able to farm land which is less fertile and hence not suited for the production of cash crops for export. The accelerated deterioration of soil productivity caused by climate change is forcing many women to devote more time to producing food for their families.

The tools and measures used to mitigate climate change may possibly exacerbate this situation. Skyrocketing food prices in early 2008 clearly indicate what impact reforestation measures (on plantations) or the use of agro-fuels can have – especially for the poor strata of the population.

2. Disadvantages resulting from market-based climate change mitigation

The expansion of environmental services to include commonly used resources and environmental resources marginalizes those who are not able to purchase water, wood to build fires or medicine. The group of economically disadvantaged people for the most part includes women, indigenous and landless persons. These people lack formal land rights, marketing capabilities, investment capital and the information they need to be able to compete in the markets for environmental services.

In addition to this, market-based tools tend to benefit those agents causing the problem: for instance, some climate change mitigation tools provide for compensation for foregone profits to be paid to those persons who have been responsible for deforestation. Those persons who have protected the forest, living off of it and in it, come out empty-handed. What is worse, they are prohibited from using the forest in a sustainable manner as they have in the past when the forest is placed under protection. Once again, it is above all women who are affected, as they were not the ones who profited from deforestation in the past and hence will not be the beneficiaries of measures aimed at protecting forests in the future, either.

This is why all market-based strategies - and almost all international tools and measures aimed at mitigating climate change are based on market mechanisms – require a careful analysis of their positive and negative effects on all potential actors.

3. Differing perceptions of climate change and ways of coping with its effects

Studies have repeatedly shown that women have a more highly developed awareness of risk than men, and that they also perceive climate change as more threatening. Among other things, this is reflected in the fact that women would like policy-makers to be more resolute in the implementation of policies to mitigate climate change. Gender differences are also of importance when it comes to the assessment of actual measures aimed at mitigating climate change. While men tend to place their trust in technological solutions to problems, women are more inclined to work for a change in lifestyles and a general reduction in energy consumption.

The most clear-cut example of this is the use of nuclear energy, which tends to be rejected by women much more often than by men everywhere in the world. In negotiations over climate change mitigation, atomic energy is increasingly being forwarded as a solution which can help mitigate climate change – a proposal which many developing countries are open to. This fails to take risks into account, however – risks which are repeatedly cited by women such as nuclear waste, uranium mining, reactor accidents, terrorist attacks, the greater availability of uranium with which to manufacture nuclear weapons, health hazards caused by low-level radiation given off from reactors in normal operation, and much more.

4. Different contributions to climate change

Energy consumption and CO₂ emissions by women and men differ in terms of quantity and the reasons for consumption. Data from Sweden aptly illustrate this: energy consumption by men is considerably higher than for women – in all age and income groups. Differences in the area of mobility are particularly pronounced, but they are also to be found in the area of food and nutrition, which is taking on increasing importance with respect to gases which have an impact on climate: according to a study conducted by the FAO, both the significantly higher consumption of meat by men and the greater consumption of milk products by women now contribute just as much to climate change as the entire transportation sector.

5. Gender-specific health hazards

Climate change causes additional stress and strain on health. As a result of their special physical vul-

nerability and their role in caring for families, women are especially affected here. Diseases communicated by water or animals are more widespread in a warmer world. Pregnant and nursing mothers, whose immune systems are weakened, are especially vulnerable here. Anaemia, which can develop as a result of malarial infections, is already responsible for one-fourth of maternal mortality in malarial areas.

Undernutrition and hunger will grow as a result of declining agricultural productivity throughout the world. The physical strain resulting from the need to carry heavy loads over ever greater distances will also have a negative impact on health.

The heat wave which hit Western Europe in 2003 demonstrated that women are more sensitive to hot weather than men, as reflected in the higher mortality rate among women in all age groups that summer.

6. Increased dangers to women and children as a result of natural disasters and conflicts over natural resources

In addition to weather-related disasters such as hurricanes, flooding as a result of torrential rainfall or drought, conflicts and wars will also become more frequent in the scramble for re-sources such as oil and water – with serious consequences for the civilian population and especially women and children.

Gender differences in natural disasters are well documented: they are evident when preventative measures are taken. Early warning systems are designed in such a manner, for instance, that they are not able to warn women. Cultural norms cause different mortality rates in and during crisis situations (for instance, women are not allowed to leave the home without being accompanied by a man), as do family responsibilities of women or also riskier behavior on the part of men. It is frequently reported that the work load on women doubles or even triples in the wake of natural disasters, while the conditions under which income is earned at the same time deteriorate. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that men migrate more often in search of opportunities to earn money. Older people, children and women remain behind and have to perform the work which the males did previously as well. On the other hand, it is precisely this situation which offers an opportunity to change gender roles, as is occasionally reported in post-disaster situations.

Women are subject to increased sexual violence following all types of disasters, but this is also the case with respect to conflicts and wars. This means that women are not only victims of disasters – they are also victims of the male victims of disasters in the ensuing period – in industrialized countries as well as developing countries.

7. Low level of participation by women – deficits in the gender perspective in climate policy

The level of participation by women in decisions affecting climate policy – climate change mitigation as well as adaptation to climate policy – and the implementation of these decisions at the local, national and international levels are very low.

This marginalization of women leads to male perspectives generally being given greater attention in planning processes. This once again results in climate protection measures and measures aimed at adjusting to climate change often failing to take into account the practical and strategic needs of a large part of the population. This is particularly evident in international negotiations over climate change mitigation. Although the percentage of women in government delegations has risen from 20% to 28% since the beginning of negotiations, there was a considerable period of time during which women's organizations and gender experts were not involved at all. As a result, nobody attended to the interests of women or took the gender perspective into account on a continuous basis. This situation has changed in the last few years.

For some years now a growing network which calls itself *Gendercc – Women for Climate Justice* has been discussing how the gender perspective can be integrated into the negotiations and has sought the support of delegations in this effort. These activities and the growing attention which climate change mitigation has been receiving in general in the media and the public arena have motivated national and international women's organizations to also address the problem of climate change.

International organizations such as the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) or the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have stepped up their activities in the area of gender and climate change mitigation. Especially developing countries, but also the European Union, pledged to work for gender mainstreaming in the negotiations at the climate conference in Bali in 2007. The growing number of publications and analyses addressing the gender perspective in the area of climate change mitigation will provide support in this endeavor.

This pledge does not mean, however, that the gender perspective will also be reflected in the results. The negotiations are tough and very technocratic at times. This does not make it easy to include social aspects in general and gender aspects in particular in the specific documents under negotiation. But the more organizations which address gender aspects at the local and national levels and which show whether and how this improves the measures they take, the more this experience will also be perceived at the international level and be reflected in the results. At the latest, gender mainstreaming should be enshrined in the agreement superseding the Kyoto Protocol, which is to address climate change mitigation after 2012.

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