

Brief
of
Presentation
on

Revisioning Security: Gender, Development
and Climate Change

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Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai speaking to the UN Climate change Conference in Bali in 2007 described climate change as the single biggest threat to world peace. She called upon all people to “live more lightly on the planet by embracing cleaner technologies and less resource intensive lifestyles. She asked for the protection of natural resources, indigenous life styles, forests and forest dwelling communities that have been the custodians of biodiversity. She exhorted the developed world to bear the moral responsibility as the main contributors to global warming and to take redemptive action. While women are disproportionately affected by climate change, and it is they who everyday work most directly with the Earth’s resources and often lead the way in their communities in conserving precious natural resources, adapting their food crops to changing soil and climate conditions and rebuilding following earthquakes and natural disasters, she expressed concern that women’s voices are largely absent from policy discussions and negotiations around climate change. Women’s experiences creativity and leadership she felt must be part of the solution.

Women’s networks working in the area of gender and climate change, have consistently lobbied for the acknowledgement that women have a strong body of traditional knowledge that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation mechanisms. Proper acknowledgement, protection and financial support should be available to sustain this knowledge. Emphasizing that technologies should be adapted, where desirable to women’s needs, they advocate alternatives to market based approaches to stem the deleterious effects of climate change. They demand that adaptation and mitigation strategies uphold **basic human security** and the right to sustainable development.

Climate change has risen to the top of the International policy agenda, and the link between environmental hazards (global warming in particular) and human activity is acknowledged scientifically. It is also undisputed in research and policy making that climate change will most hit those who contributed least to the problem. **This is an important Justice issue** since it is the poorest regions of the world and the most impoverished social groups that will suffer most. About 70% of the world’s poor are women and they are especially vulnerable due to cultural, religious and economic factors. There needs to be greater consideration of gender aspects in the area of

adaptation to climate change. This holds true for research as well as political debates. Ironically climate change effects and related disasters have occurred **predominantly** in the developing world.

Hurricane Katrina, excepted, Typhoons cyclones, hurricanes, mud floods, have affected hundreds of thousands in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Caribbean, Venezuela, Mozambique in recent history. China and India suffered 5500 deaths in 1998 on account of melting glaciers.

Climate change is often erroneously seen as a technical problem requiring technical solutions although there are many social and political aspects to this complex issue.

Climate change is not gender neutral. It affects women and men in different ways. Many communities interact with their physical environment in gender- differentiated ways.

The issue of **adaptation** (along with that of mitigation) is of key importance to issues of climate change. Owing to the feminization of poverty, and the five mechanisms through which gender inequality can arise, i.e, differences in power, differences in income and economic resources, division of labour, cultural patterns / social roles and biological differences --- there are gender differences in climate change impacts and in adaptive capacities. These differences in vulnerability and also adaptive opportunities need to be more squarely factored into policy.

For example, in the 1991 cyclone and floods in Bangladesh, the death rate for women was almost five times higher than men. Some of the reasons for this were strongly related to gendered cultural patterns. Warning information was posted in public spaces but did not reach women who were bound to their homes. Most women had not learnt to swim which further reduced their survival chances. Even in the Global North, women are more dependent on public transportation, but existing transport systems, it is claimed, have been defined by a specific perspective of full jobbing men.

In the Indonesian villages that were worst hit by the 2004 tsunami up to 80 percent of the victims were female (Oxfam International study). And during the 2003 heat wave in Europe women accounted for 60% of the deaths in France, which totaled 15,500. In Sri Lanka, swimming and tree climbing were taught mainly to boys; this helped males cope

better and allowed more of them to survive when the waves of the tsunami hit. Social prejudice keeps girls and women from learning to swim, which severely reduces their chances of survival in flooding disasters. In Aceh many women were found dead with babies still clutched in their arms. In times of disaster and environmental stress women become less mobile since they are primary care givers. The Women's Manifesto on Climate Change U K points out that 85% of people who die from climate induced disasters are women and 75% of environmental refugees are women.

Even in the UK, 19.2% of single pensioner households and 16.8% of lone parent households are facing energy poverty – the majority of whom are women.

Several studies illustrate the different roles that women have in the management and use of land, water, energy and biodiversity. Women do play a major role in actions to safeguard the environment and manage climate change. Women were a force in the Chipko movement in India that protested deforestation. When in the 1970s, Cape Verde was struck with severe drought, a women's organization put environmental issues high on its agenda. It later became Friends of the Earth Brazil.

Another example of the difference women make to climate change programs comes from La Masica, a village in Honduras that unlike nearby communities reported no deaths during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Six months before the storm hit a disaster agency provided gender sensitive education on early warning which enabled the village to evacuate properly. A successful agro-forestry project in Yatenga in Burkina Faso, for example, which relies on harvesting scant rainfall to keep fields and crops moist combines traditional techniques of collecting water in small pits, with women's way of cultivation, that implements biodiversity. Similar experiments from the world over show that for women biodiversity is the preferred approach. The environment is to women many things, "a classroom, a pharmacy, a supermarket". Movements are occurring in parts of India, Kerala for example, where communities are declaring bio diversity and indigenous knowledge as the common heritage of local communities claiming that privatization of biodiversity through patents is theft. Women constitute sizable parts of these movements.

In the context of the present food crisis, the prospects of climate change are particularly alarming since agriculture is now increasingly recognized as a crucial element in addressing poverty and food security. According to the 2008 Trends *in Sustainable Development* report of the UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, **strong agricultural growth is four times more effective** than growth in other sectors in benefiting the poorest half of the population.

Yet efforts to improve food security are tempered by declining support, especially in developing countries for strong agricultural growth. Typically, people living in areas of high inequality and in isolation from the broader economy benefit little from the gains posted in developing countries in agricultural production, distribution and exports. Public spending on agriculture has fallen in all regions except Asia, over the past generation, with the drop in Latin America being most dramatic. Foreign assistance for agriculture is at low levels. In real terms, agriculture accounted for just 4 percent of bilateral assistance in 2003, down from 16 percent in 1986.

Also the 'green debate' that pits food against biofuel is flawed, and needs interrogation. Amidst growing fears over biofuels stealing from dinner plates to fill fuel tanks, the very act of producing certain biofuels (e.g. foreign grown palm oil and soybeans as source) generates greenhouse gases and destroys rainforests that contribute to climate change. **The competition between food and fuel will possibly intensify hitting developing countries the hardest.** It is important to remember that 1.4 billion rural people particularly women who depend on small scale farming will be differently vulnerable to climate change owing to pre-existing inequalities.

A purely sectoral approach to climate change is not sustainable. To be truly prepared for the impacts of climate change on food security, it is important to acknowledge who the most vulnerable are and how they can be engaged in addressing a global issue that deeply impacts the realization of the MDGs, especially its seventh goal on sustainability.

International agricultural commodity prices are rising because of a combination of factors (1) increased demand for food due to rapid growth in China and India, (2) unprecedented and rapid migration from rural to urban areas (3) recent poor harvests in

some countries on account of climate change (4) conversion of land use from food crops to biofuel crops.

Women's groups are attempting to move the debate over climate change away from purely scientific and economic viewpoints, reframing it as a cross cutting sustainable development issue, a socio political issue. **The Gender – Climate change – Human Security** connection is now being foregrounded.

The discourse is being framed in terms of security of survival, security of livelihood and dignity. Climate change and gender have wide array of interstices including justice, human rights and human security. National and global policies, it is being increasingly argued and demanded, **must** include gender components of climate change, incorporate the experiences and expertise of women both at the policy and operational levels and be guided by international human rights treaties such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women). Also, the high level of female mortality rates resulting from climate change calamities, must be accorded due priority.

There is simultaneously enormous concern that neither the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012 and aims to reduce green house gas emissions by that date through legally binding measures, nor the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the first international treaty to address global warming which entered into force in 1994, mention women or gender. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has thankfully begun to redress the (im)balance. Women play a limited role as producers in the energy sector or energy policies and climate change negotiations, although in developing country households women are often primary providers and users of energy.

The technological changes and instruments that are being proposed to mitigate carbon emissions which are implicitly presented as gender-neutral, may in fact negatively affect women or bypass them.

The fact that the Marrakech Accords on Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) exclude the questions of avoided deforestation and forest management and thus exclude all intervention designed to improve traditional bio mass fuel supply and use, despite the fact that 2 billion women are dependent on this, is cited as cause for

concern. Besides international carbon trade and credits, trend to upset bio diversity and water tables as in the case of MNC sponsored eucalyptus plantations in the developing world.

Carbon accounting systems marginalize non- expert contributions towards climate stability and are creating new exclusionary forms of property rights. They favour large scale carbon sequestration projects in the south that can have negative social and environmental consequences. The case of the monoculture eucalyptus plantations in Minas, Gerais, Brazil is well known. These plantations occupy public lands that should go to poor peasants.

Questions have been raised by feminist environmentalists about the impact of the gendered discourse on climate change. Do they reinforce cultures of militarism? Do they deploy technical approaches that are exclusionary? Do they continue to frame women – especially poor women – in terms of the population threat to the environment? Above all do they side step the issue that militaries are the greatest culprits in global warming. Do they undermine democratic freedoms, push women out of the public arena, and reduce the space for inclusive debate on climate change?

It is significant that even though solar – or wind – powered energy sources are key to curbing climate change such new technologies especially in the developing world are marketed primarily to men even though women often determine household energy use.

There seems to be evidence to suggest that women can become agents of change especially if more of them get into decision making positions and have the opportunity to define the good life in less consumerist ways. Studies from Sweden (conducted by Gerd Johnson – Latham, Deputy Director, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and others) suggest that women live in a sustainable manner and leave a smaller Ecological Footprint than men, and cause less carbon emissions. More for example, women opt to use public transportation as opposed to private cars. They are also on average more prone to take future risks seriously and opt for measures to cope with them.

This is not meant to be a “men warm the globe, women feel the heat” type of argument. Only, an emphasis that women’s knowledge and participation are critical to the survival

of communities in general, but especially in disaster situations. It is time their skills, insights and wisdom informed approaches to mitigation and adaptation. The challenge of Global change transitions are about the ability to internalize the ethics of care and laying the foundations of the **social dialogue** that transcends the traditional distinctions between 'science' and values that develop openness and transparency and democratic debate about contemporary research and praxis and where women and men **co-produce** appropriate technology and appropriate society.