
Climate change policy – does gender make a difference?

International negotiations about global climate protection have been slow, delivering meagre results. The debate began over 20 years ago, articulating the target of achieving 20 per cent in CO₂ emissions reductions, and ended up in the Kyoto Protocol with a mere 5 per cent – and even this has been questioned time and again.

This chapter is written from our perspective as gender experts and civil society activists working to raise awareness of gender and climate-change issues, and to integrate gender considerations into climate-change policy making, particularly at the international level. We have been active in this area and the broader gender and sustainable development discourse for the past ten plus years, and founded the network GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice. GenderCC is connecting women and gender experts from around the world, providing information and capacity development on the issues, as well as information on the process of political engagement, in order to achieve gender mainstreaming in climate-change-related policy making through increased knowledge and active participation in decision-making.

The quality of policy making will remain unacceptably low, if the discourse does not consider the gender issues, including relevant differences between women's and men's experience. If getting the social impact of climate-protection commitments and targets, mitigation and adaptation policies onto the agenda broadens the debate and changes it into a discussion framed by the principles of sustainability, then this will also provide entry points for gender considerations.

Broadening the debate may have the following positive effects for climate protection:

- The debate on climate change has been very narrow, focusing on the economic effects of climate change, efficiency, and technological problems. However, it would be better if policies and measures that aim to mitigate climate change were based on a more holistic understanding of human perception, values, and behavioural choices. That would include considering the specifics for different groups in society, including women and men. If policies are tailored to respond to the interests and needs of both women and men, and to further the goal of gender equality, they will be more effective – for example, campaigning for energy efficiency should involve consideration of who uses which appliances and for which purposes.
- Taking into account a variety of perspectives from different social groups would lead to improved measures and mechanisms – that is, solutions that reflect the interests not only of the powerful, but also of less influential groups whose voices are rarely heard at international conferences.
- If the terms of the debate are broadened to include the social impact of climate change, this would attract representatives from women's organizations to take part in the policy process and influence the debate.
- Being more inclusive of different voices, and ultimately developing policy which is more appropriate and hence more effective, would also improve the recognition and acceptance of the international

policy process by the general public.

Taking a gender perspective on climate change into account in negotiations might also enable us to avoid possible negative effects of climate-change measures and mechanisms on gender equality. For example:

- Market-based instruments can affect women in different ways from men, because of differences in income levels, and in access to markets and services. These policies would need to be very carefully designed, and informed by a full gender analysis, in order to avoid worsening gender inequality.
- Commitments made to reduce the carbon emitted by private households may have an adverse impact on gender equality. The gender division of labour, and stereotypes about women's and men's roles, leads to a disproportionate amount of work in the home being done by women. Requirements that households should use less energy would therefore have most impact on women. In general, private households are the societal institutions with the least influence and representation of their interests in the context of climate negotiations.
- Technological solutions are not always the solutions preferred by women: 'faster, bigger, further' are rather masculine principles, which one may also find in the climate-change policy process. Women tend to believe that technical solutions, such as further development of biofuels, or carbon capture and storage, are not sufficient to meet the requirements of developing a low-carbon economy.

In conclusion, climate-protection instruments and measures have potential to exacerbate existing inequalities, if they do not take full account of gender differences, and gender relations. However, when integrating gender considerations, such instruments and measures can indeed contribute to increasing gender equality.

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