



Social equity for effective climate action

Gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and age are some of the key variables that influence how individuals experience climate change and adapt to its impacts.

Background

Although climate change affects everyone, it has a greater impact on women, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, the poor and youth, even though they contribute the least to the phenomenon of climate change (e.g. in terms of emissions of greenhouse gases). Achieving social equity not only leads to increased effectiveness and efficiency of funding and scaling actions; it is also a question of social justice. The importance of the link between gender and climate change has been recognized in global and national poli-

Key messages

- For climate action to be effective, it must be based on research that goes beyond studying bio-physical risk factors or individual aspects of social vulnerability in isolation.
- Research for development can play a key role in recognizing gender-based and social inequalities and contribute to attempts to change the power structures that constrain effective action.
- Facilitating on-the-ground changes that enable women, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, the poor, and youth to increase their climate resilience is crucial will allow them to become positive agents of transformation.

cies and initiatives on climate change since the mid-2000s. In 2002, the Commission on the Status of Women called for action to “mainstream a gender perspective into ongoing research on the impacts and causes of climate change, and to encourage the application of results of this research in policies and programmes”. Addressing social equity goes one step further to international efforts such as the Government of Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), including Action Area 4 on Environment and Climate Action, and the recent UNFCCC Conference of the Parties Gender Action Plan.

What have we learned?

The differentiated impacts of climate change are due to complex and interrelated climatic, environmental, social, cultural, economic, institutional and political factors which determine a person’s access to and control over resources, knowledge and decision-making opportunities. A comprehensive understanding of these factors can inform policies, programs and support mechanisms that promote socially equitable climate action. Results from IDRC research demonstrate that research for development projects can play a key role in recognizing gender-based and social inequalities and in contributing to attempts to change the power structures that constrain action. In recent years, gender research in IDRC’s climate change program has sought to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the differentiated vulnerabilities, and to contribute to the parallel development of more equitable climate actions:

Identifying the root causes of vulnerability and increasing agency of vulnerable groups

Climatic, environmental and socio-economic changes have increased the vulnerability of families living in climate hotspots – regions with large numbers of people that are especially vulnerable to the expected impacts of climate change. Providing socially equitable climate change adaptation solutions in response to these risks requires adopting **an integrated perspective** that challenges existing assumptions about who is vulnerable. Gender research needs to go beyond

simply collecting sex-disaggregated data and strive to understand and address the root causes of vulnerability. For instance, research in Latin America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that it is possible to increase women’s agency, capacities and long-term wellbeing by improving their access to jobs while: providing support for domestic tasks (e.g. childcare); ensuring access to resources, finance, legal and productive assets (land, credits, inputs); improving access to data and information; and working with men and policymakers to challenge social norms.

Migration is often a distress response, and it often brings women into new roles

Emerging research results on the gender-climate-migration nexus in Asia and Africa have shown that: **ii) internal migration is higher than previously documented, and international migration is mostly South-South.** This has not received enough attention in recent policy and economic debates; **ii) the percentage of women migrants is increasingly significant and some gender roles are shifting** with migration and environmental stress. This requires more attention to services to migrants, especially linked to gender; and **iii) the narratives framing human mobility influence where migration can be a positive development strategy, a failure to adapt, or a way to transfer vulnerability in time and place.** These patterns of migration are changing households’ configurations, with implications on gendered work burdens, how households manage risk, their overall wellbeing and on the adaptation strategies they use to protect against the effects of climate change

Climate finance can empower women as entrepreneurs

Businesses are emerging as major actors in shaping climate change adaptation and development discussions. While the Paris Agreement does not explicitly mention gender equality as an important theme of climate finance (UNFCCC, 2016), it is understood that successful climate action is entirely dependent on gender-responsive implementation. Women entrepreneurs and those from other vulnerable groups usually face significant barriers and risks. Hence, making climate finance

“gender smart” is key and requires involving the private sector to invest in new avenues to maximize the development of co-benefits in social equity and climate action. Research with the private sector shows that **building the capacity of future women entrepreneurs** to respond to the interest of the private sector in the field of climate change adaptation will provide new avenues for increasing women’s roles in climate financing and boost investments in women-led enterprises. This step will also **catalyze business leadership on resilience and climate action** and **build the capacity of the next generation of business leaders** interested in being involved in adaptation.

What’s next? The way forward

In order to remove barriers and create opportunities for socially equitable climate action that strengthens the resilience of all people, future research must:

- **Enable implementation of gender-responsive climate action**—In light of the recently agreed upon UNFCCC Gender Action Plan, it is clear that research is the cornerstone to providing innovative new thinking as well as practical and applied research support to policy makers to ensure lasting socially equitable climate action – a requirement under the Paris Agreement. Based on existing knowledge about gender and climate, it is now necessary to move towards gender-responsive and gender-transformative climate action during research for development. Supporting effective climate action will require non-traditional forms of engagement, and networks of knowledge brokers who strive for evidence-informed climate policy and action across the developing world will be key.
- **Focus on structural**—This can in turn create enabling environments for vulnerable groups to control and make decisions about their activities, responsibilities and assets in the context of climate change. In doing so, agency of vulnerable groups will be highlighted as potential sources of resilience, as social actors who constantly negotiate their way through change.
- **Further the research on the gender-climate-**

migration nexus—Future research will also need to examine the linkages between (i) impacts of environmental and climate change and social inequality on migration patterns, and (ii) migration as a proactive adaptation strategy that can contribute to equitable access to economic, health, educational and employment services. These can help deepen the understanding of the gender and social equity issues in the face of climate impacts and create appropriate policies that recognize both the threats and opportunities that migration poses.

- **Go beyond gender and tackle social equity**—It is crucial to find ways to facilitate on-the-ground changes that enable all vulnerable groups—women, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, the poor and youth—to contribute to increased climate resilience and become positive agents of transformation. Building on gender research that focuses on women’s empowerment in the face of climate change, it is now time to implement research that goes beyond narrowly focussing on gender to tackling the wider issue of social equity. Socially equitable climate action can enhance the resilience of all people.

Resources

- Accelerating Climate Action: Social Equity and Empowerment of Women and Girls: <https://www.idrc.ca/en/funding/accelerating-climate-action-social-equity-and-empowerment-women-and-girls>
- CARIAA Gender brief: <http://hdl.handle.net/10625/57370>
- CARIAA Migration brief: <http://hdl.handle.net/10625/57301>
- Mobilizing the Private Sector for Adaptation Finance: <https://www.idrc.ca/en/project/mobilizing-private-sector-adaptation-finance>
- Mobilizing Private Sector Investment in Adaptation to Climate Change: <https://www.idrc.ca/en/project/mobilizing-private-sector-investment-adaptation-climate-change>
- Gender Action Plan: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2017/sbi/eng/l29.pdf>

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