

**IS THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE CLIMATE  
DEBATE FORGOTTEN ?**

**Engendering the Climate Debate:  
Vulnerability, Adaptation, Mitigation and Financial  
Mechanisms**

**29th October at COP8**

**11 AM to 1 PM, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi**

**ENDA Tiers Monde**

**Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADe)**

**(With financial support from UNDP)**

# **Gender and Climate Change Event at COP8**

**Conveners: J. Parikh, Executive Director, IRADe, New Delhi.  
F. Denton, ENDA, Senegal.**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Gender and Climate Change event at COP8**

29<sup>th</sup> October, New Delhi

**Organisers: ENDA and IRADe**

**Sponsor: UNDP, New York**

The event was attended by men and women from development organizations, women's organizations, funding organizations, specialized agencies such as WHO, corporate sectors and so on. Both men and women participated in roughly equal numbers, perhaps slightly in favour of women (55 : 45). Professor Jyoti Parikh and the convener of the event and Executive Director, Integrated Research for Action and Development (IRADe) welcomed the participants and remarked that while climate debate is going on for 15 years, gender issues are seldom on the agenda. This is the only event at COP8 where gender issues are being discussed. She introduced the subject by saying that poor women are extremely vulnerable to climate change and may bear unreasonably large share of adaptation burden. Climate change could mean extra hardship for farming activities often carried out by women, especially in Africa but also in Asia where they farm e.g. in paddy cultivation, cash crops such as cotton and tea plantations and so on. Moreover, livelihoods from fishing in which women are equally involved may also be affected as the sea level rises and intrusion of saline water in freshwater systems takes place. Typically, the task of supplying water and fuel for the family is the responsibility of women, which will be also affected due to climate change, especially the problems of water supply.

Professor Parikh added that increase in extreme events such as storms, floods, cyclones etc even today put the burden of devastation and destruction on women who have to keep the family together. During the time of catastrophe, the burden to nurture the family, especially young children, with daily essentials often largely is borne by women.

On the other hand, women's knowledge in adaptation could be used as a resource and needs to be documented. Often, this knowledge may be community-specific. By documenting these, one could connect various communities around the world. She also highlighted the possible role of women in Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and mitigation as women are engaged in a number of activities such as brick making, charcoal making and agro processing where energy efficiency can lead to CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation. CDM through afforestation and carbon sequestration also can be done by poor rural women.

She stressed that under the name of climate change, further constraints on women should be discouraged. For example, there are concerns expressed that if women will switch to modern fuels, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will increase. Some even point out problems with balance of payment or fossil fuel scarcity. Whether a woman want to use traditional biofuels, petroleum products or renewable energy sources should be entirely her choice as women are neither responsible for excessive GHG emissions nor foreign exchange imbalance nor fossil fuels scarcity. Poor rural women have not contributed to any of these problems. These responsibilities lie with those rich who over consume, regardless of wherever they are. For example, a rural poor person in India emits only 50 to 60 kg of carbon as compared to the world average of 1100 kg and 5000 kg in the USA. Further discussion can be found in the theme paper by F. Denton and J. Parikh.

Ms. Fatma Denton of ENDA gave her presentation which is attached. She emphasized that gender is absent institutionally, in decision making, in semantics and in financial terms. Climate change will pose challenge to women in terms of land degradation, drought, loss of biodiversity and so on and hence, vulnerability, adaptation and mitigation issues are very important. Arun Kashyap, Climate Change and CDM Adviser put the problems also in the context of millennium development goals for which energy services will be needed. Along with huge investments, efforts to reduce climate change and to face the challenge of adaptation and mitigation will be needed.

During the discussions, Ms. Gayatri Ramachandran, Director EPTRI and her colleagues said that it is not enough to factor in gender but we must focus on it. They emphasized that poverty reduction and integrated approach to local resources management is a key to development. Forests are vital for food resources and unsustainable use of forests and especially lack of non-timber forest products (NTFP) could lead to malnutrition and infant mortality. Mr. Shrinivas Mishra emphasized gender sensitivity for macro economic policies, ensuring FDI and other measures to benefit women. S. Bera of Sri Ram Institute highlighted the role of women in waste disposal.

There were other suggestions from Ritu Prasad of WHO, Geneva and Urmila Bendre of CIDA who expressed an interest in further work in this area. Many participants from official organizations participated and said that the views expressed are in their personal capacities and stressed the role of gender, in particular in strategies for risk management. Other points made by various participants are summarized as follows :

- There was consensus among all the participants that there are definite links between gender and climate change
- Gender issues are important but still not mainstreamed.
- There is a need to see gender issues in a broader scope since they are still seen within rigid and restrictive lenses (gender activists in some ways may have contributed to this misperceptions by narrowly tying it down to women's issues). Women would have to work

in partnership with men in most aspects of climate change in countering vulnerability, in adaptation and engaging in mitigation.

- Environmental problems in India and poverty were often discussed and how these continue to impact on the livelihoods of the poor especially women was emphasized. Climate change may make it worse for women, particularly poor women.
- Unless we take gender matters seriously and find effective ways of mainstreaming gender issues, development alternatives of reaching out to the poor will remain incomplete.
- The recurrent problem of poor implementation of development programmes was also mentioned and that they remained largely sectoral is also seen as part of the problem.
- There are a number of viable development projects on waste management, afforestation, reforestation and energy projects such as charcoal making that could make potentially good CDM projects that can benefit women but these need to be made known, scaled up and replicated for greater impacts.
- Lack of information and understanding is still a problem and unless the relevant information is made available such opportunities are not going to be exploited by potential beneficiaries
- CDM is not a panacea but it can offer alternative approaches of integrating gender issues into climate change
- Concerns were raised on the lack of synergies between the conventions. Mainstreaming gender is not just relevant to climate change but to all three conventions.
- There was certainly a lot of interest expressed in having similar discussions and workshops to increase our understanding of the issues and promote further research and action.

### **Recommendations:**

- It is the poor women who are vulnerable and will bear the adaptation burden despite their miniscule contributions to GHG emissions.
- Mainstream gender into climate change – adaptation and vulnerability studies
- Raise visibility on the potential impacts of climate variability and climate change on vulnerable groups
- Ensure that vulnerable groups i.e. women are not *a priori* excluded from potential CDM and adaptation projects
- Promote CDM projects integrating gender concerns with regard sustainable development of forests, management of biomass resources and renewable energy.
- Build capacity and resilience to enable women and men to cope with the negative impacts of climate variability and indeed climate change
- Mobilise fund for greater research in understanding the complex links between gender and poverty (with regard to climate change) and how to build the adaptive capacity of the poor.

- While ensuring that if they wish to use modern fuels, they should not be denied their fuels of their choice in the name of climate change.
- *Mainstreaming gender in climate change debate and negotiation*
  - Climate change bodies like IPCC, SBSTA and especially SBI should ensure that this issue gets attention. A fair balance of gender participation is also needed. Perhaps a special report could be commissioned so that more information and analysis is generated.
  - The future COP should have gender-specific event, not only such as this one, but more formal discussion is needed.
  - UNFCCC should also ensure gender involvement in CDM projects, technology transfer, capacity building and other initiatives.

The meeting concluded with unanimous expression of interest in further work and follow up in this area and with thanks to UNDP, New York for sponsoring the event. Continuous support of Susan McDade, Team Manager, Sustainable Energy Programme of UNDP New York and her interest were much appreciated.

## **Gender and climate change at COP8: A forgotten element**

**Fatma Dentan**

**Enda Tiers Monde, Senegal**

**and**

**Jyoti Parikh**

**Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADe), New Delhi**

**India Habitat Centre, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2002, 11 a.m. 1.00 p.m.**

### **Background**

Human activities are having an impact on the composition of the atmosphere. The natural background greenhouse effect is gradually becoming the 'green house problem'. Why should anyone care? It has been estimated that if the current trends continue unabated, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere will reach double the pre-industrial level by 2050. Physical impacts such as rising sea levels will dramatically alter the natural balance of local and global ecosystems and will infringe on human settlements. Consequently, vulnerable groups such as poor women and men will be faced with problems such as food insecurity, loss of livelihood, hardship due to environmental degradation which also leads to displacement and a whole host of potentially devastating economic and social consequences.

Most developing countries especially in Africa, South Asia and small islands have few resources to contend for these impacts. For instance, agriculture will be seriously affected as developing countries, largely characterised by their vulnerability, weak institutional capacity and precarious financial situation trying to grapple with the problems of climate change. As an illustration of this limited capacity, one can review the experience of Mozambique in which extensive floods left hundreds of thousands of citizens homeless and destroyed much of the local infrastructure. If extreme climate events are the tip of the iceberg then it is quite clear that building the necessary capacity to enable the developing countries to adjust is of absolute importance.

Initial attempts to link gender and climate change may seem rather far-fetched especially for the sceptic. Publications on the linkages between gender and climate change have been few although *Energia News*<sup>1</sup> has dedicated considerable coverage on the issue and recently Oxfam's quarterly periodical *Gender and Development*<sup>2</sup> has devoted a whole edition on climate change. However, analysing the issues from a poverty, vulnerability, environmental resource management, equity and sustainability angle the links become inherently obvious. Climate change has largely been

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<sup>1</sup> F. Denton. 'Gendered Impacts of Climate Change – A human security dimension', *Energia News*, Volume 3, Issue 3, October 2000

N.Wamukonya and M.Skutch 'Is there a gender angle in the climate negotiations?' Paper prepared for *Energia* for the CSD9 (Commission on Sustainable Development, Session 9, New York, 16-27 April 2001 and 'COP 6: the gender issue forgotten?' *Energia News*4(1): March 2001

<sup>2</sup> *Gender and Development, Climate Change*, Volume 10, Number 2, July 2002 – Oxfam Journal

conceived as a scientific process. The human aspect of potential sea level rise and other equally potentially damaging environmental hazards remain under-analysed. Proponents of the sustainable development debate have been lobbying hard to ensure that the sustainability component of the climate negotiating process does not remain commitment on paper. Ensuring that key development issues such as poverty, adaptation and equity are given a primary role within the overall climate policy is of equal importance. Nations stand divided on the very principle of climate change, who should undertake the burden of mitigation and a number of procedural issues. Within this maze of fragile consensus and deep-rooted divergence, addressing gender disparities in an environment where the very notion of gender remains alien is a huge challenge. Raising the visibility of gender issues at COP8 is immensely crucial in order to include gender issues are mainstreamed into the debate and ensure that adaptation and vulnerability More importantly, a number of key strategic decisions on climate change and its policies are reached at different COP meetings, hence it is important to ensure that gender component is giving the relevant attention and that poor women and men do not become the big losers within the wide range of stakeholders and competing interests. While the climate debate is going on for nearly 15 years, gender issues are seldom discussed.

Vulnerability and adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change is one of the most crucial concerns of many developing countries and particularly the Sahelian countries. More gender-disaggregated research is required in order to shed more light on levels of vulnerability and coping mechanisms of different social groups. These findings should feed into the climate negotiating process to enable decision makers to have a better understanding of how different people are affected and what kind of capacity and support are needed.

Adaptation - In addition, adaptation to climate change or indeed climate variability is dependent on issues such as wealth, technological power, access to information, all of which are major problem areas for women. Resilience or vulnerability to climate change will largely dependent on the adaptive capacity of different stakeholders, their social and environmental context, and their ability to draw on one or all of the above components<sup>3</sup>. Climate change will inevitably mean loss of livelihoods from vital productive sectors, i.e. agriculture, fisheries, tourism and the like. It is not simply that the effects of climate change will be devastating for both women and men – what is needed is an inventory of vulnerability to distinguish the various coping mechanisms of both groups and ways of ensuring and evaluating that potential economic or capacity building spin offs from adaptation projects are not enjoyed by one group only. Women will face unlikely large burden of adaptation despite their insignificant contribution in the emissions.

Mitigation : If climate change problem requires the reduction of use of fossil fuels, then different stakeholders, are required to play a key role in mitigating GHG emissions rather than poor women. This is perhaps even more relevant since a number of women are faced with problems relating to indoor air pollution and bear the huge health burdens that as a result of high incidences in bronchitis, emphysema, miscarriages and other health problems. Consequently, projects on potential renewable options should not leave women yet again on the margins of decision-making. Part of reducing vulnerability to climate change would mean finding the appropriate technologies that

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Masika, Editorial Gender and Development , Volume 10, Number 2, July 2002, p4

would take into account the specific socio-economic realities of different rural areas, reduce women's workload, free up time and enable them to become rural micro or macro entrepreneurs.

Bottom 50% rural poor persons in India emit only 60 kg emissions<sup>4</sup> per person that includes embodied emissions in various materials they use. World average is 30 times more and the US average citizen requires 150 times more.

Women can choose if they wish to have either traditional fuels or petroleum products or renewable energy. This choice should be theirs and should not be taken away in the name of climate change problem<sup>5</sup>.

Women are increasingly involved in agriculture, food-processing industry – all of these are potential income generating activities. Increasing number of women depend on forest resources as a major source of their livelihood. Forest products also serve as a source of nutritional and food supplement thus providing alternative nutrients, minerals and vitamins to the usual staple food. Land clearance for agriculture and commercial purposes is causing deforestation, restricting access to forestry products and placing women under increasing strain given the fact the amount of time spent trekking in search of diminishing fuelwood. Consequently, this will lead to severe adverse changes in soils, arid-lands, coastal zones, tropical and boreal forests<sup>6</sup>. In addition, wetlands and vulnerable species would be under severe threat. Climate change is also predicted to exacerbate existing shortfalls in water resources. The large river basins of the Niger, Senegal and Lake Chad as well as those of South Asia have experienced total water decrease of between 40-60%.<sup>7</sup>

Taking preventive measures well in advance has more benefits than reacting to unexpected catastrophes. Already there are a number of forest management programmes in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nepal and India and are contributing a lot to agricultural and community forest management.<sup>8</sup> The developing Countries fund can be seen as a good enough vantage point to implement climate adaptation and as such target women and men in reducing deforestation, promoting cleaner biomass projects and assist poorer households to reach more sustainable options.

Women's contribution and participation can help or hinder in environmental resource management.<sup>9</sup> High dependency on agriculture, forest sectors and bio-fuels could increase vulnerability and heighten the risk of environmental depletion. Women's active involvement in agriculture and their dependence on biomass energy would mean effective environmental management. The need to diversify energy resources and facilitate the introduction of substitution

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<sup>4</sup> Parikh J. Murthy N., Panda M. (1995) consumption pattern of rural and urban income groups in India (1995), WRI paper.

<sup>5</sup> J. Parikh., Mainstreaming gender issue in rural energy(2002) ENERGIA paper prepared for WSSD.

<sup>6</sup> Downing T .E., Sokona Y and Smith J.B., Action on Adaptation to Climate Change, Presentation to the UNFCCC Workshop on Article 4.8 and 4.9 of the Convention: Adverse Effects of climate Change 9-11 March 2000, Bonn, Germany, Oxford Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> «Water resources» in **Climate Change, Information Sheet** 13, Geneva, UNEP Information Unit for Conventions, <http://www.unep.ch/conventions>.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret M. Skutsch, 'Protocols, treaties, and action : the 'climate change process' viewed through gender spectacles' in **Gender and Development**, Volume 10, No 2, July 2002, p 31.

<sup>9</sup> Fatma Denton, 'Climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation: why does gender matter?' **Gender and Development**, Volume 10, Number 2, July 2002, pp 10-18

fuels for household energy consumption could well constitute the essential part of adaptation strategies and potential CDM projects.

Poverty - Development literature is prolific with references, indicators and figures that clearly point to the increase of poor women-headed households. However, empirical findings that clearly substantiate that poor women are poor simply because they are women are few and far between. Nonetheless, it is true that women due to power dynamics within the household and the gender division of labour are more likely to be affected from incidences of poverty and vulnerability. However, it is worth noting that more and more people find themselves socially excluded and men are just as likely to be made redundant in the face of growing economic austerity.

Equity- Climate change is often perceived as a result of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. Yet there are inherent inequities since three quarters of the world's poor are faced with energy poverty whilst the remainder basks in over-consumption and unsustainable lifestyles. To put it in figures, eight countries in the Sahel are using only 1% of energy consumption that is used by the entire New York agglomeration<sup>10</sup>. Also due to high dependency of biomass as the main fuel in most developing countries, women who are the primary end-users and children are mainly at the receiving end of energy shortage and inefficiency. Climate change is about mitigating the harmful effects of greenhouse gases but it is also helping countries especially those most vulnerable to negative and harmful effects of climate change to build their adaptive capacity and develop a sense of preparedness. Climate change is also about injecting social equity within the overall climate policy so that vulnerable people are not worse off as a result of environmental degradation. However, putting the key development issues such as poverty, adaptation and equity have been sidetracked at best and patently omitted at worst in the general climate policy, which is seemed to be driven by economic payoffs and considerations. Assessing the degree of vulnerability of poorer communities is essential to addressing some of the stark asymmetries that are present particularly in key areas such as the productive sectors where women's contributions remain undervalued and invisible.

## Objectives

- It is the poor women who are vulnerable and will bear the adaptation burden despite their miniscule contributions to GHG emissions.
- Mainstream gender into climate change – adaptation and vulnerability studies
- Raise visibility on the potential impacts of climate variability and climate change on vulnerable groups
- Ensure that vulnerable groups i.e. women are not *a priori* excluded from potential CDM and adaptation projects
- Promote CDM projects integrating gender concerns with regard sustainable development of forests, management of biomass resources and renewable energy.
- Build capacity and resilience to enable women and men to cope with the negative impacts of climate variability and indeed climate change

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Miniville, 'La question énergétique au Sahel', Editions Karthala, Paris, p23.

- Mobilise fund for greater research in understanding the complex links between gender and poverty (with regard to climate change) and how to build the adaptive capacity of the poor.
- While ensuring that if they wish to use modern fuels, they should not be denied their fuels of their choice in the name of climate change.

### **Main topics to be covered**

- A general discussion of climate change negotiating process. Now it is a time to consult stakeholders
- Vulnerability and adaptation issues: Integrating gender into National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)
- CDM – the sustainability component – how can we inject the gender into CDM energy project?
- How do we ensure that institutions such as Global Environment Facility and other UN specialised agencies start mainstreaming gender into adaptation programmes?
- Way forward – How to engender key negotiating issues at COP8
- Mainstreaming gender in the on-going processes, such as, Inter-Governmental panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Conference of Parties (COP) and various discussions relating to vulnerability adaptation and mitigation.

## **List of Participants**

Jyoti Parikh, IRADe, New Delhi	Tel : 022 28402754
Denton, Fatma ENDA, Senegal	Tel: 8225983
A. Kashyap, UNDP, New York	Tel: 7015828
Michael Pedersen, UNDP,N.Delhi	Tel:4628877
Divya Sehgal, Free Lancer,	Tel: 6419774
Shannon Orr, Sierra Club, Canada,	Tel: 15199483541
P. Prasada Rao, Programme Officer,	Tel: 3001241
Urmila Bandare, CIDA, India	Tel: 6144051/6652
Leni, INECC-JPC, Mumbai	Tel: 8756953
Maria Aniao, INECC-JPC, Mumbai	Tel: 8756953
Chella Parthasarthy, AIWA, N.Delhi	Tel: 3381165
Ritu Prasad, WHO, Geneva	Tel: +41223286413
T.N.Anuradha,Development Alternative,N.Delhi	Tel:6967938
Indrani Phukan, Indo German Project	Tel: 6141539
N.Hagen, Indo German Project	Tel: 6141539
Adihit Mishra, Educational and Dev.Consultancy Services	Tel: 4672004
R. Apeetur, National News	
Madhu Bajpai, All India Womens Conference, AIWC	Tel
S.K.Pande, FAO	
L.R.Jagadheesan, Reporter,BBC	Tel:3355751-52
Anil Bhaskar, Hindustan Lever Ltd.,Mumbai	Tel: 3736308
V.N.V.K.Sastry, EPTRI, Hyderabad	Tel: 40-3001241-42
S.Bera, Shriram Institute for Industrial Research,Delhi	Tel: 7667267
R.Ajeet Kumar, Spl.Correspondent, Financial News	Tel: 3365149

Some participants did not sign as they came in late.