

Policy pointers

A commitment to gender equality in the new agreement on climate change to be adopted in Paris in December this year is essential to ensure effective and inclusive climate policy and action post 2020.

Decisions already adopted under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol represent early progress in this direction and should help governments to advance gender equality in the provisions of the Paris agreement.

Parties to the Convention must do more than focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making, and commit to gender equality as a guiding principle of post-2020 climate policy and action.

They should also address gender considerations in provisions that crystallise decisions in all the thematic areas of the global climate response: mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, finance, technology development and transfer, capacity building and transparency of action and support.

Advancing gender equality in the post-2020 climate regime

Research and evidence show that women and men are vulnerable to climate change to varying degrees, and that they experience and respond to it in different ways. Policies and actions that overlook the gendered impacts of and responses to climate change yield inequitable outcomes and exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Actions that are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive — and therefore designed to yield benefits for the whole population — are not only fairer but also more effective. Yet the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has only recently turned its attention to gender equality. The focus, initially, was on enhancing women's participation in negotiations but gender issues are now beginning to influence decision-making in important thematic areas, with particular progress being made in adaptation, capacity building and finance. As the Parties to the Convention enter the final, critical stage of negotiations for a new, universal and legally binding agreement, they must build on these foundations so that strong provisions for gender equality take their place as an integral part of future global climate policy.

Policies and actions must include consideration of the gendered impacts of climate change and the gendered responses to it if they are to offer fair outcomes for both men and women. This briefing provides an overview of how the UNFCCC is moving towards gender equality. It describes how consideration of gender has begun to affect the decisions taken, despite a slow start, and suggests ways in which Parties negotiating the new agreement can build on this to ensure that future global climate policy responds to the needs and priorities of women and men in equal measure.

Decisions directly related to gender

In more than two decades of negotiations, the UNFCCC has only adopted three decisions explicitly focused on gender-related issues, two of them within the last three years. Progress has been incremental, and these provisions have concentrated more on enhancing women's participation and promoting gender balance in negotiating bodies than on addressing the bigger issue of gender equality. (For definitions of equality, balance and related terms, see Box 1.)

Stronger commitment to gender equality will not only make global climate policy fairer; it will also make it more effective

Recognising the need for greater participation

The first decision (decision 36/CP.7) was adopted in Marrakesh in 2001. It focused on “Improving the participation of women in the representation of Parties in bodies established under the UNFCCC or the Kyoto Protocol”, seeking to address the lack of balance between women and men in the Convention’s decision-making structure. However, among a number of weak and ineffective provisions it only invited Parties “to give active consideration to the nomination of women for elective posts in negotiating bodies”, and did not lead to any significant increase in women’s participation.

Establishing gender balance as a goal

More than a decade elapsed before the issue of women’s participation was taken up again. Then, in Doha in 2012, Parties adopted a decision that built on the principle established earlier and significantly enhanced the Marrakesh provisions. Dubbed the ‘Doha miracle’ by Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UNFCCC, decision 23/CP.18 adopted the goal of gender balance and encouraged Parties to strive for it in their national delegations. It focused on “Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations and in the representation of Parties in bodies established pursuant to the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol”. One of its important effects was the addition of “gender and climate change” as a standing item on the agenda of COP sessions, which elevated the issues from an ad hoc consideration under ‘any other business’.

This decision marked a turning point in the UNFCCC’s consideration of gender issues. Parties recognised for the first time that increasing women’s participation in the negotiations and achieving balanced representation of women and men from developing and developed countries would help ensure the formulation of climate policy that would be sensitive and responsive to the needs of both women and men. In other words: more women at the negotiating table would bring a greater variety of views and more representative perspectives of society, and facilitate the adoption of climate policy that addresses people’s diverse interests and priorities more comprehensively. The introduction of “gender and climate” as a standing item was equally momentous

because it ensured that, with regular discussion, gender issues would be better reflected in future sessions.

Promoting gender balance in practice

Building on the progress made in Doha, Parties at COP20 in 2014 adopted a third and stronger decision entitled the ‘Lima Work Programme on Gender’ (decision 18/CP.20). Initially tabled by the Least Developed Countries Group, it established a two-year work programme for promoting gender balance and achieving gender-responsive climate policy by guiding the effective participation of women in UNFCCC bodies. The programme encourages training and awareness-raising for all delegates on the issue of gender balance, and special sessions for female delegates to build their skills in negotiation and communication.

The Lima decision goes beyond gender balance: it seeks to achieve ‘gender-responsive climate policy’ by promoting gender sensitivity in its development and implementation. As a first step, Parties agreed on the need to clarify the meaning of this objective. To kick off the discussion, they set up two workshops on gender-responsive climate policy, the first focusing on mitigation and technology development and transfer (which took place in June 2015) and the second on adaptation and capacity-building (scheduled for May 2016).

Decisions taking gender into account

The last five COPs have seen a surge in the number of adopted decisions that take gender dimensions into account in the various thematic areas of the negotiations, reflecting growing recognition of the importance of addressing gender issues in the global response to climate change. Altogether, 29 decisions which consider a gender dimension have been adopted under the Convention and three under the Kyoto Protocol.¹ However, the theme of merely counting women continues to dominate: more than half of the 29 decisions include a call for gender balance or increased participation of women as decision-makers or stakeholders and, for seven of these, this is the only gender-related issue touched on.

One decision that did set in motion increased consideration of gender issues in all aspects of the climate talks is 1/CP.16, the ‘Cancun Agreements’. In its elaboration of a shared vision for long-term co-operative action, it refers to resolution 10/4 of the UN Human Rights Council, which acknowledges “that the adverse effects of climate change have a range of direct

and indirect implications for the effective enjoyment of human rights” and that they will be felt most acutely ‘by those segments of the population that are already vulnerable owing to geography, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, or disability’. It explicitly recognises the importance of gender equality and the effective participation of women for effective action on all aspects of climate change, and goes on to reflect gender dimensions in its sections on adaptation, mitigation, capacity-building and technology development and transfer.

Other examples of a gender-sensitive approach that goes beyond participation include decisions that request Parties to be guided by gender equality or consider gender issues, or that include provisions for the collection, sharing, management and use of gender-disaggregated data. For the most part, this language appears in decisions dealing with adaptation, but gender sensitivity is also a feature of recent decisions on capacity building and loss and damage as well as on finance, particularly in the context of setting up the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF represents best practice: it was designed to address gender considerations in its programmes and policies systematically from the outset, with guidance from the COP. In the areas of technology development and transfer and mitigation, on the other hand, very few decisions touch upon gender dimensions, and the language that does appear simply asks for gender considerations to be taken into account or refers to women in the context of vulnerable groups or segments of the population.

Advancing gender equality in the post-2020 climate regime

The UNFCCC negotiations are now at a critical juncture as governments prepare to adopt a new, universal and legally binding framework agreement on climate change this December in Paris. Alongside the legal agreement, the ‘package’ will include complementary COP decisions that elaborate on the highly technical and detailed elements of the future climate regime. The Parties have agreed on a draft text to form the basis of negotiations for the whole Paris package (the ‘Geneva text’), which they will only withdraw in the moments before they adopt the final agreement. They are now well into the complex process of consolidating overlaps and resolving differences to streamline the text and determine which issues can be addressed in the complementary decisions.

What is important now is to ensure that Parties agree to include the gender-related proposals that have been put forward, building on the provisions and commitments made in the last

Box 1. Questions of terminology

Over the years, there has been persistent opposition at the UNFCCC to wording on ‘gender equality’. In the final hours of negotiations this term tends to be replaced with ‘gender balance’ or deleted altogether. Parties also often request further clarification of terms such as ‘gender-sensitive climate policy’ and ‘gender-responsive climate policy’ — as they did during the negotiations in Lima last December. While participants in international negotiation processes are often criticised for fighting over words, defining terms can help to ensure that their meanings are understood and that they are used correctly in decision-making.

Gender equality

A clear definition for gender equality has not been agreed at intergovernmental level. However, the concept has been well described at the UN as:

“... equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.” (OSAGI, 2001)²

Gender balance

Gender balance refers to the ratio of women to men in any given situation. “Gender balance is achieved when there are approximately equal numbers of men and women present or participating” (UNDP, 2010; WEDO, 2015)³

Gender-sensitive and gender-responsive

The Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), a key member of the UNFCCC’s Gender Constituency, explains the difference between the terms gender-sensitive and gender-responsive as follows:

“Gender-sensitive programming refers to programmes where gender norms, roles and inequalities have been considered and awareness of these issues has been raised, although appropriate actions may not necessarily have been taken. [...] Gender-responsive programming refers to programmes where gender norms, roles and inequalities have been considered, and measures have been taken to actively address them. Such programmes go beyond raising sensitivity and awareness and actually do something about gender inequalities.” (WEDO, 2015)

two decades. Key among these is a call for gender equality to be a guiding principle for actions and future decision-making. The UNFCCC’s Women and Gender Constituency (a civil society stakeholder group) argues that including this principle in the core operative section of the agreement would give it legal rigour to challenge the actions that are set out in all sections of the text. Unfortunately, despite the existing commitment to gender equality set out in the Cancun Agreements, there is lingering opposition from a small number of Parties to including such a principle anywhere in the 2015 agreement, let alone as a guiding principle for post-2020 climate policy and action.

While they have not yet featured prominently in the negotiations, there are proposals that address gender aspects under the key themes of adaptation, loss and damage, finance, technology development and transfer, capacity building and transparency of action and support. The proposals on adaptation promote women's participation as leaders and key stakeholders, gender-sensitive long-term planning, and the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data. These provisions must be retained, if not strengthened, in the final agreement. Similarly, several proposals calling for a gender-sensitive approach to climate finance must stay in the finance section of the Paris agreement, to promote equitable access to, and management of, resources between women and men.

In comparison, proposals on technology and capacity building are minimal. With regard to technology, the focus is on women as technology users and on the need for a gender-sensitive approach to civil society participation. [In our opinion] this is inadequate: the Paris package should also ensure that the technology needs and contributions of both women and men are taken into account. Proposals in the section on capacity building call for gender-responsive action. These are valuable provisions and if they are retained they will complement calls elsewhere in the core agreement to enhance women's participation in decision-making and action on climate change. Provisions for gender-sensitive indicators and disaggregated data should also be kept in, to enhance transparency of action and support.

No Party has yet proposed addressing gender in the mitigation section of the agreement. This is

disconcerting because mitigation is such a major component of the global climate response and efforts to integrate gender issues into UNFCCC mitigation policies have always been limited. The areas of clean energy and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation have particularly clear gender dimensions, which should be addressed, either in the legal agreement or in the COP decisions that will accompany it.

Progress so far on mainstreaming gender equality as a cross-cutting factor in all the decisions of the UNFCCC and as an important issue to address in its own right has been mixed. But there are encouraging signs of change, with much momentum generated at recent COPs. The 2015 agreement and complementary COP decisions should build upon the normative gains that have been accumulated over the years, to ensure that future global climate policy strengthens its commitment to gender equality and responds to the needs and priorities of both women and men equally. This will not only make it fairer; it will also make it more effective in tackling the immense challenges posed by climate change.

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Notes

¹ UNFCCC (2015) *Draft compilation of decisions, subsidiary body reports and adopted conclusions related to gender and climate change by the Secretariat*, GCC/DRC/2015/1. / ² UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (2001) *Gender Mainstreaming: An overview*. / ³ WEDO presentation on 'Gender Equality and Climate Change: Setting the stage', delivered at the UNFCCC in-session workshop on gender-responsive climate policy with a focus on mitigation and technology transfer, 6 June 2015, Bonn, Germany: http://unfccc.int/files/gender_and_climate_change/application/pdf/01_burns_wedo.pdf