



WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE: TOWARDS A CLIMATE AND GENDER JUSTICE APPROACH

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Women as Agents of Change: Towards a Climate and Gender Justice Approach

Produced by the Government of Ireland, this policy brief highlights the linkages between gender equality and climate change.¹ It draws on lessons from our international development cooperation programme, Irish Aid, and aims to raise awareness of the urgency of reflecting gender in efforts to address climate change. It seeks to challenge decision-makers and practitioners to change how they work at global and local levels to unlock the potential of women as agents of change, in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and achievement of the SDGs.

ABSTRACT

Climate change is one of the most serious threats facing the world. Left unchecked the rate of climate change is set to accelerate with even more significant impacts for our world, our economy and our society. We all have a responsibility to act to safeguard the planet for future generations. Gender equality and supporting social movements and institutional transformation are important elements in generating ambition in climate action and informing a people-centred global response.

Ireland is committed to championing the rights and responsibilities of women and girls, men and boys at all levels in the face of climate change. We recognise that gender inequalities mean there is unequal distribution of climate risks that affect different people based on their vulnerabilities and capacities. We need to unlock the unique capabilities and strengths that women have, to address this challenge of a generation.

WHY SHOULD WE CONSIDER GENDER IN CLIMATE ACTION?

Women are vital agents of change on climate action. Their unique knowledge, skillsets and perspectives borne out of how they interact with food systems, technology, and institutions can improve the effectiveness of climate action. Transformative and innovative approaches need to be identified and accelerated to unlock the potential of women and reverse current inequality trends. This message needs to be at the heart of a climate justice approach with high ambitions to tackle the march towards 2°C average temperature rise.

Unlocking women's contribution can help ensure the success of our mitigation and adaptation. Women's role in transformative climate action is important at community level, in government institutions, and at the UN, as well as in business.

GENDER EQUALITY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SDGs 5 and 13 address issues of gender equality and climate action respectively. The achievement of the other 15 Goals is directly dependent on the extent to which gender and climate issues, and especially the interaction between them are considered.

The 2018 UN Women's flagship report² revealed significant challenges for women's empowerment, including the rise of conflict, exclusion and environmental degradation. It concluded that disasters resulting from climate change are estimated to kill 14 times more women and girls than men and boys.

Urgent action is needed to close the gender gap in land access and ownership, in access to quality education, financial services and appropriate technology for women and girls. Better national gender and climate policies underpinned by credible gender and climate statistics are needed. Stronger participation and women's voice at climate-related decision-making fora should influence the direction of climate action to address specific vulnerabilities of women and girls.

1. The Policy Brief is accompanied by a longer paper which is available on request or at www.climatelearningplatform.org.

2. UN Women, 2018. Turning promises into action: Gender Equality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development



Photos credit: Farm Africa / Nichole Sobbecki

Before her death in 2011, Wangari Maathai (Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate) said, “In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called upon to switch to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground.” We have arrived at that time. And we must reach for that higher ground.

Excerpt from ‘Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience and the Fight for a Sustainable Future’ Mary Robinson[®], Bloomsbury Publishing 2018.

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In December 2015, 196 countries adopted the landmark ‘Paris Agreement’, during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of Parties (COP21). Two years later at COP23 a Gender Action Plan was agreed. Ireland played an active role in securing agreement on the GAP.

There are a number of entry points within the Paris Agreement for gender responsive climate action:

- In **mitigation** there is scope to better reflect gender issues in forest and natural resource management, and energy actions.
- **Capacity building** support would help countries to implement plans in a way that increases involvement of women and builds on their contributions.
- While much has been done on **technology** and women at local levels, strategies at national level could involve women better to address their needs.
- Building on the good progress being made with the Green Climate Fund Gender Policy and Action Plan, further work is needed to **prioritise funding for grassroots and women organisations** to empower local civil society and to complement the large financing mechanisms.



Mary Robinson, Agnes Leina Executive Director of the Ilaramatak Community Concerns Kenya, Minister Mereseini Vuniwaqa -Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Fiji highlight the key themes that emerged from Enabling Grassroots and Indigenous Women’s Participation in Gender Responsive Climate Action, an event co-hosted with the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN and the Mary Robinson Foundation- Climate Justice at CSW on 14 March 2018

Climate change is a key concern of the UN Security Council, as it represents a threat to peace and stability. Ireland's own experience of conflict has taught us that the role of women must never be overlooked. This is particularly true when it comes to climate stress. Women are the most directly affected by climate change, but also the stakeholder group with the most to contribute to peace processes. Women – particularly those at the frontline of climate and conflict – must have a stronger voice at the Security Council.

WHY IS PROGRESS ON GENDER AND CLIMATE INTEGRATION SO SLOW?

There is a power imbalance when it comes to decision-making. Women tend to be poorly represented in decision-making fora on climate action. As a result gender dimensions are rarely prioritised in national policies on climate and in implementation programmes.

There is an evidence gap compelling decision-makers to make gender sensitive climate action a priority. More tangible evidence is urgently needed on the effects of addressing gender and climate issues in a coherent way.

Lack of capacity hinders progress. More funding and support for capacity development is needed to ensure better gender-sensitive responses.

A tendency to interpret gender as meaning focusing on women only. Male champions are needed at global and local levels to work with women and support balanced decisions.

IRISH POLICY ON GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Ireland is committed to supporting a step-change in how international climate action takes account of the needs and roles of women, and is calling on others to do likewise.

Gender and climate change are policy priorities for Ireland's International Development Policy and practice, including our humanitarian response. Ireland is on track to meet the Government's commitments for international climate finance, made in 2015. In 2017, €64m was spent on international climate action, the vast majority of which was focused on adaptation for the poorest, especially women. This was an increase on €52.7m in 2016. Ireland is also the current chair of the Commission on the Status of Women. In 2018, Ireland's leadership helped to ensure that climate change featured in CSW62 commitments.³

The Irish Government's partnership with the Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice has been key in building momentum behind climate justice issues (including gender equality), which will continue to feature in the Irish Government's work.

Ireland helped to take the momentum on gender in COP23 to the Commission on the Status of Women in 2018, where the conclusions contain strong messaging on climate change. These include the following: “develop and adopt gender-responsive strategies on mitigation and adaptation to climate change to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls... through... promotion of their health and well-being... resources to ensure women's full participation in decision-making at all levels on environmental issues... and by ensuring the integration of the specific needs of women and girls into humanitarian responses to natural disasters, into... disaster risk reduction policies and into sustainable natural resources management”

CSW 62 agreed conclusions. <http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8>

3. UN Women, 2018. CSW 62 agreed conclusions. <http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8>

ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN IRISH AID PROGRAMMES

Irish Aid addresses gender equality and climate change as two cross cutting issues and also as standalone initiatives. Our investments and poverty targeting are informed by country specific **climate risk assessments**. Examples of our gender responsive climate action include initiatives in pro-poor energy, agriculture, social protection, and health among others. We acknowledge that we have much to do in order to build the evidence base of what really works at scale.

Gender and access to clean energy. In Malawi, Irish Aid is targeting the most vulnerable female headed households with clean cookstoves. Early **evidence** suggests that this intervention is reducing demand for firewood, addressing environmental degradation, and reducing the workload of women and girls. It also contributes to increased incomes for the women and men engaged in producing the stoves. In Ethiopia, efforts to ‘green’ the health sector have been complemented by cookstoves and solar lights being donated to new mothers, with household health and well-being impacts.

Gender and climate resilient agriculture. Irish support to smallholder agriculture is increasingly focusing on the introduction of gender sensitive climate resilient agriculture practices. Our work also includes support to post-harvest handling and market access for women farmers, reducing labour burden and generating higher incomes.

Gender perspectives of Social Protection and Climate Adaptation. Irish Aid’s work in Mozambique is using statistics about vulnerability to strengthen how social protection mechanisms can be structured for climate adaptation. In addition women are being supported to participate in local adaptation planning for risk preparedness and recovery.

Gender, climate change, health and HIV/AIDS. Irish Aid is exploring emerging gender and climate linkages in our multidimensional work on health and HIV/AIDS. For example in Uganda climate smart technologies including kitchen gardens and energy saving techniques are being introduced to women and men living with HIV and AIDS. This is building their climate resilience and improving their nutrition status.



Mary Robinson chats with Constance Okollet, a farmer from Uganda, and Michelle Winthrop of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the margins of COP23

Gender and land tenure. Our partnership with the International Land Coalition has a strong focus on women’s land tenure. In Tanzania, Irish Aid support for pastoralists is supporting women to secure rights over communal land and run for formal positions of office on village councils where decisions on land use and land management are made.⁴

Research and evidence. Irish Aid is investing in research and evidence to inform programmes and policy, critically teasing out gender and climate linkages. This body of work can be accessed on www.climatelearningplatform.org which provides the space to share best practices and lessons learned in climate programming, especially among Irish Aid partners.

4. Our approach to climate resilient agriculture is outlined in a 2017 guidance note <https://www.climatelearningplatform.org/case-study-approaches-supporting-pastoralist-groups-facing-climate-change-effects-tanzania>

KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICYMAKERS

- A meaningful transformation in addressing gender in climate action must be driven at national level. Partner governments urgently need support to build their capacity to integrate gender into national adaptation and mitigation plans, and NDCs, and into sectoral plans and programmes.
- Women's voices need to be heard - at all levels and especially in international fora. Gender balance in national delegations to the UNFCCC should be encouraged and women supported to maximise their voice, confidence and negotiation skills while 'at the table'. More funding at grassroots level will help empower women.
- Gender and climate policies and practice need to be strengthened in climate funding instruments.
- Spending targets should be given consideration, along with the application of gender and climate 'markers' to track allocation of resources.
- Integration of gender and climate across multilateral agreements and frameworks is important. For example, national Action Plans on Women Peace and Security (1325) can incorporate important climate messages, as can the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In 2017, the Irish National Delegation to the UNFCCC was honoured to be joined at COP23 by Constance Okollet, a farmer from Uganda. She joins us again in 2018 as a member of the Irish team. Constance's powerful testimony of the effects of climate change on her community and her leadership in addressing the problem has inspired many COP attendees, and reminded negotiators of the power of grassroots women as agents of change. In Constance's own words: "I told them (members of her community) that climate change had come to stay but that we should try to fix things".

KEY MESSAGES FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Addressing gender and climate change coherently at multilateral, national, sub-national and grassroots levels requires a fundamental shift in ambition and ways of working.
- This should be informed by a solid analysis of power dynamics, capacity gaps, and incentives, accompanied by training and support in addressing gender in climate responses .
- Placing gender and climate objectives at the heart of programme objectives will make them more effective. Stand-alone interventions may need to be complemented by action to address structural issues too.
- Effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability are critical, especially the use of gender disaggregated data in climate vulnerability assessments, and reporting progress against gender and climate SDGs, among others.
- Investment in continuous learning to inform adaptive management is a bedrock of good practice on both gender and climate action.

IRELAND WILL INTENSIFY HOW WE CHAMPION GENDER AND CLIMATE AS KEY FACTORS IN ACHIEVING THE SDGS. SPECIFICALLY, WE WILL CONTINUE TO:

- Champion gender at the UNFCCC, and support the Gender Action Plan in all its elements including strengthening civil society and grassroots organisation, especially of women;
- Use our voice at the UN, the EU other multilateral fora to champion the rights of the most marginalised and vulnerable; and to challenge the status quo constraining women from making their full contribution, including to climate action;
- Ensure that our partnerships at global and bilateral levels are characterised by a clear focus on gender and climate change; and
- Support a generation of evidence and learning about what works in gender responsive climate action.
- Work to improve coherence on gender and climate in our domestic and international resources.

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