

Biodiversity, Gender and Climate Change



There is growing scientific consensus that an average global warming of 2°C above the pre-industrial level¹ would constitute a dangerous level of climate change with serious implications for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other Rio Conventions. Global greenhouse gas emissions are on an accelerating trend and if left unchecked, could lead to a 6.4°C (11.5°F) temperature increase by the end of the century, exceeding conservative estimates².

It is now widely recognized that climate change and biodiversity are interconnected, not only through the effects of climate change on biodiversity, but also through changes in biodiversity and ecosystem functioning that affect climate change. The carbon cycle and the water cycle, arguably the two most important large-scale processes for life on Earth, both depend on biodiversity—at genetic, species and ecosystem levels.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment identified climate change as a dominant driver of future biodiversity loss and indicated that it will adversely affect key development challenges, including the provision of clean water, energy services, and food; maintenance of a healthy environment; and conservation of ecological systems, their biodiversity, and associated ecosystem goods and services³.

¹ which is around 450ppm atmospheric carbon dioxide equivalent (IPCC 4th Assessment Working Group I Report, e.g. TS-5, p. 66.)

² IPCC Chair, Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, told UN delegates on 26 August, 2009. See also The Copenhagen Diagnosis: Climate Science Report which summarises the key findings in climate science since the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report in 2007. It is available at www.copenhagendiagnosis.org

³ Ecosystems and Human Well-being – Policy Responses. Ch 13. p. 378. Available at www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.318.aspx.pdf

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Ecosystem-based adaptation, which integrates biodiversity and provision of ecosystem services into an overall climate change adaptation strategy, can be cost-effective, can generate social, economic and cultural co-benefits and help maintain resilient ecosystems.

Biodiversity is part of the solution to climate change. For men and women in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries, biodiversity is vital for their survival and the survival of their families. Biodiversity is also part of their belief system and their cultural and spiritual values.

As recognized in Millennium Development Goal 7, biodiversity is important for the well-being of all humans on the planet. Without such diversity we would all be poorer, in economic, social and cultural terms. Because the current rate of loss of biodiversity is severe, we risk exacerbating the detrimental impacts of climate change, initiating further conflicts over limited natural resources and accelerating widespread poverty. The causes and impacts of biodiversity loss are gendered, and should be treated as such.



Exposing and understanding the gender-differentiated biodiversity practices and knowledge of women and men enhances biodiversity conservation. Many case studies from around the world have demonstrated that in empowering women and vulnerable groups to participate as equals in information sharing and generation, education and training, technology transfer, organizational development, financial assistance and policy development, biodiversity conservation efforts become more effective and efficient.

As with biodiversity, climate change does not affect women and men in the same way and it has, and will have, a gender-differentiated impact. Therefore all aspects related to climate change mitigation, adaptation, policy development, and decision making should include a gender perspective.

Women—particularly those in poor countries—will be affected differently than men. They are among the most vulnerable to climate change, partly because in many countries they make up the larger share of the agricultural work force and partly because they tend to have access to fewer income-earning opportunities. Women manage households and care for family members, which often limits their mobility and increases their vulnerability to sudden weather-related natural disasters. Drought and erratic rainfall force women to work harder to secure food, water and energy for their homes. Girls drop out of school to help their mothers with these tasks. This cycle of deprivation, poverty and inequality undermines the social capital needed to deal effectively with climate change.⁴

Considerable efforts over the past fifteen years at national and international fora, have brought the Convention on Biological Diversity to understand the fundamental roles that women play in managing and conserving biodiversity and the need to integrate the gender perspective into their framework. The Convention is strongly committed to recognizing and promoting the integral yet distinct roles that women and men play in conserving, celebrating and sharing biodiversity. The CBD further recognizes that women, and distinct groups of women, require special consideration because of institutionalized systems that do not explicitly value women's contributions to biodiversity.

⁴ UNFPA state of the world population 2009, Facing a changing world: women population and climate
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To ensure that climate change policies, decision-making, initiatives at the global, regional and national levels are gender responsive, in an unprecedented effort, IUCN, UNDP, UNEP and the Women's Environment Development Organization (WEDO) created the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) in December 2007. Because of the interconnectivity between biodiversity and climate change, the CBD is now a member of the GGCA as the efforts required to address climate change and gender call for collaboration between sectors and institutions. Taking a gender-sensitive approach to the inter-linkages between biodiversity and climate change contribute to sustainable livelihoods, environment protection and sustainable development.

The UNFCCC's secretariat in December 2008 formally recognized at the 14th Conference of the Parties in Poznan', Poland: "the gender dimension of climate change and its impacts are likely to affect men and women differently." The secretariat urged formulation of "gender inclusive policy measures to address climate change" and stressed that women "are important actors" and "agents of change" in coping and adaptation. The secretariat also named a gender coordinator and a group of "gender focal points" assigned to assure gender is brought into three of the UNFCCC programme areas.⁶

Support to the implementation of the CBD Gender Plan of Action welcomed by the Conference of the Parties through decision IX/24:

- the Government of Finland has contributed €190,000 for the establishment of a full-time Gender Programme Officer, including support to the other Rio Conventions on gender mainstreaming
- the Government of the United Kingdom has contributed £10,000
- the Government of Norway has pledged \$25,000
- HIVOS the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation, of the Netherlands has contributed \$300,000
- Swiss Development Cooperation \$30,000 for women's participation in COP 9
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature through the Office of the Global Senior Gender Advisor secured funding for the elaboration of the CBD Gender Plan of Action and continues to give technical support, advise and resource mobilization to the Secretariat including the elaboration of the *Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans*

⁶ UNFPA state of the world population 2009, Facing a changing world: women population and climate

Fast Facts

- The 192 Parties to the CBD have acknowledged both the need to facilitate biodiversity adaptation and the contribution of biodiversity to broader adaptation activities, particularly to the most vulnerable regions and ecosystems.
- Of the 61 national reports available in English, French or Spanish as of the 1st September 2009, 60 national reports mention actions relevant to the cross-cutting issue on biodiversity and climate change. Furthermore, among 40 national communications to the UNFCCC, 37 Parties mention biodiversity. The most commonly reported element is impact and vulnerability assessments.
- Good forest governance is a key prerequisite for successful efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). Recent research from India and Nepal confirms earlier findings that a community forests with a high proportion of women in key decision-making bodies had significantly improved forest conditions⁷.
- Women constitute up to 80% of refugee and displaced populations worldwide, and in emergency situations women and children may typically make up 70 to 80% of those needing assistance⁸.
- In November 2006, the Kenyan women's organization Green Belt Movement and the World Bank's Community Development Carbon Fund Project signed an Emission Reductions Purchase Agreement (ERPA) to reforest 2,000 hectares on two mountain areas in Kenya with thousands of indigenous trees⁹.
- Women from many indigenous communities possess repertoires of "coping strategies" that they have traditionally used to manage climate variability – In Rwanda, women are reported to produce more than 600 varieties of beans, and in Peru, Aguaruna women plant more than 60 varieties of manioc.
- In the midst of a drought in the Federated States of Micronesia, it was women who dug into the ground and created a new well that filled with drinkable fresh water. Women's work on the land had given them a considerable understanding of hydrology, but planners and decision-makers had originally not considered their contributions¹⁰.



⁷ (Agarwal, B., 2009: Gender and forest conservation: The impact of women's participation in community forest governance. Ecological Economics, Volume 68, Issue 11, 15 September 2009, Pages 2785-2799).

⁸ www.genderandenvironment.org/admin/admin_biblioteca/documentos/Climate.pdf
Global Gender Climate Alliance www.ggca.org

⁹ www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/hsn-study-final-may-20-2008.pdf

¹⁰ www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/changing-the-climate-why-womens-perspectives-matter-2008.pdf