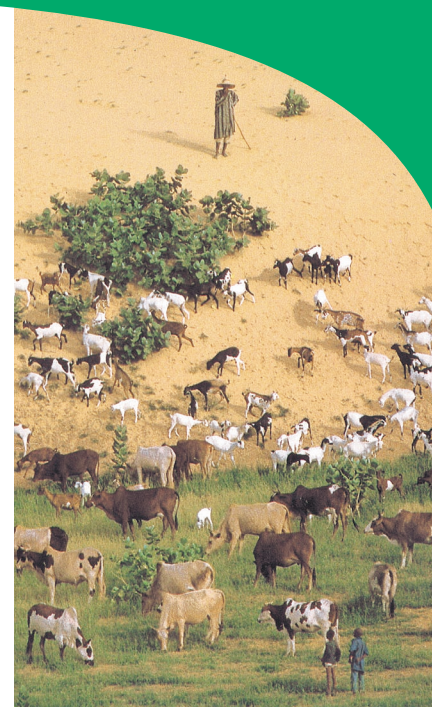


## Gender Makes the Difference

- Unlike many other communities in Honduras, La Masica reported no deaths after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Six months earlier, a disaster agency had provided gender-sensitive community education on early warning systems and hazard management. The community decided to involve women and men equally in all hazard management activities and women took over from men the abandoned task of continuously monitoring the early warning system. As a result, the municipality was able to evacuate the area promptly when Hurricane Mitch struck.
- In areas subject to periodic drought or flooding, men and women have different knowledge, management practices and exchange relationships. They have also developed complex adaptive strategies, differentiated by gender, to cope with seasonal climatic change, including spatial mobility, access arrangements to grazing and water resources, crop and herd diversification and management and exchange relationships with sedentary and urban peoples.
- Climate change is likely to exacerbate both natural disasters and conflict over natural resources at all levels. Men and women often bring different skills to their households, communities and countries with respect to conflict management.
- Environmental change due to climatic causes is likely to drive migration. Men migrate more often than women do, both seasonally or for a number of years. In dryland areas, the female-headed households left behind are often the poorest, and wives of seasonal migrants may not receive remittances or have sources of income. The workloads of these women, their children and the elderly increase significantly as a result of male out-migration.
- During emergencies, women are less likely to have access to information about assistance than men. In Bangladesh women suffered the most following the cyclone and flood of 1991. Among women aged 20-44, the death rate was 71 per 1000, compared to 15 per 1000 for men. Warning information was transmitted by men to men in public spaces, but rarely communicated to the rest of the family. Also, women were not allowed to leave the houses without a male relative, and many perished waiting for their relatives to return home and take them to a safe place.
- 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 assistance.
- Without secure access to and control over natural resources (land, water, livestock, trees), women are less likely to be able to cope with permanent climatic change or willing to make investments in disaster mitigation measures.
- Climate change adaptation measures, including those related to anti-desertification, are often labor-intensive. Women often are expected to contribute unpaid labor to soil and water conservation efforts. Too often, these measures focus on women's practical needs (e.g., safe drinking water, fuelwood) rather than on their strategic interests, such as participation in climate change planning and governance processes.
- More women than men work in the informal sector and in small enterprises. These sectors are often the worst hit and least able to recover from the effects of disasters (because of their low levels of capital accumulation, weaker access to credit and information, among others).

Gender issues have not been considered in wider climate change discourses and initiatives. The international response to the implications of climate change has largely focused on mitigation initiatives (reduction of greenhouse gases), and has directed less attention to adaptation strategies (assistance with adapting to the adverse impact of climate change on food, livelihood, and human security). They have also displayed little regard for the social implications of climate change outcomes and the threats these pose for poor men and women, or for the ways in which people's political and economic environment influence their ability to respond to the challenges of climate change.



## FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

IUCN-Gender and Environment  
[www.genderandenvironment.org](http://www.genderandenvironment.org)

International Human Dimensions  
Programme on Global Environmental  
Change (IHDP)  
[www.ihdp.uni-bonn.de/](http://www.ihdp.uni-bonn.de/)

Women's Environment and Development  
Organization (WEDO)  
[www.wedo.org](http://www.wedo.org)

ENERGIA  
[www.energia.org](http://www.energia.org)

Sustainable Energy and Environment  
Division (SEED) of the United Nations  
Development Programme  
[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

Southern African Gender and Energy  
Network (SAGEN)  
[www.mepec.org.za](http://www.mepec.org.za)

Gender and Climate Exchange  
[www.cru.uea.ac.uk/](http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/)

Gender- a Forgotten Element  
[www.cru.uea.ac.uk/](http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/)

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There are four major opportunities for addressing gender inequities in climate change programs and policies:

- Understanding and addressing gender-specific resource use patterns that can degrade the environment (*e.g.*, deforestation due to inappropriate agriculture practices or weak tenure rights).
- Recognizing that women are already more vulnerable to poverty than men and therefore have gender-specific needs in climate change driven scenarios (*e.g.*, floods, drought, disasters).
- Identifying women's particular skills and capacities in various aspects of their household livelihood strategies and natural resource management that lend themselves to mitigation and adaptation.
- Strengthening the quantity and quality of women's participation in decision-making at all levels in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

## WHY GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER MITIGATION INITIATIVES

- By understanding traditional and gendered approaches to monitoring natural resource conditions, programs have been able to mitigate natural disasters and prevent desertification.
- Tapping women's interest in disaster mitigation and preparedness has led to improved community welfare during and after disasters. Gender-sensitive target group analysis, identifying and preparing safe areas for villagers to escape floods; establishing local early cyclone warning, monitoring and communication systems; research on indigenous resilience practices and the creation of women-accessible emergency loan funds can help the poor reduce risks associated with natural disasters.
- Putting women in charge of food distribution systems has led to less corruption, more equitable food distribution to male- and female-headed households (systems supervise by men tends to overlook female-headed households) and better calculated family food packages based on the number of family members.
- Through better access to technologies and credit, women have been more likely to increase efficiency in their use of renewable energy and to mitigate climate change. More secure access to resources from forests and protected areas has resulted in lower rates of deforestation and preservation of carbon sinks.
- Improved ownership rights to small, medium and large livestock has helped women living in drylands to feed their families and earn income, even in times of drought and when household men have migrated to cities.
- Improvements in family income have reduced the need for males to migrate to urban and other areas, thereby increasing rural labor availability for anti-desertification and reclamation practices (*e.g.*, soil and water conservation, cut-and-carry fodder systems and intensive agro-forestry systems) and enabling traditional ecosystem management practices to be passed on by both women and men.
- Women are not usually taught how to swim in Latin American and Asian countries. The ability to swim has kept women and girls from drowning during floods.
- Climate change decision-making has included broader and more diverse perspectives at local, national and regional levels, and has better reflected the needs and preferences of both men and women (*e.g.*, resource tenure, reliable water, natural resource conflicts, migration issues, access to disaster assistance).
- Masculinity courses have helped men cope with negative norms imposed on their gender. During disasters, cultural norms and perceptions about what it means to "be a man" can: encourage risky and undesirable heroic action in a disaster; make men less likely to seek counseling; raise the level of domestic violence; and lead to higher consumption of alcohol and drugs as a way to deal with difficulties.
- Some countries and communities have used resources from environmental services payments, such as carbon fixing initiatives, to promote equity. In Costa Rica forested land has been purchased and deeded to women or women's groups so they can continue to receive the benefits of environmental services, and scholarships have been made available to train young people in forest management.