

52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Interactive expert panel Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men

“Gender perspectives on climate change”

Thursday, 28 February 2008, 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.

ISSUES PAPER

I. Introduction

In accordance with ECOSOC resolution 2006/9, the Commission on the Status of Women identifies an emerging issue requiring increased attention for consideration at each annual session, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations. The Commission will consider “Gender perspectives on climate change” as the emerging issue at its 52nd session through an interactive expert panel.

II. Background

Addressing the threat of climate change is a current global priority. There is broad consensus that climate change is best addressed in the context of sustainable development. Unless it is effectively dealt with, climate change will have a dramatic impact on the environment and on economic and social development. Climate change is also likely to exacerbate both natural disasters and potentially conflicts over natural resources. The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali in December 2007 clearly signalled Member States’ commitment to addressing climate change and delivered the Bali Action Plan – the crucial mandate to launch negotiations for the achievement of a comprehensive global agreement by the end of 2009.

The Bali Action Plan confirmed that effectively addressing climate change requires both *mitigation* and *adaptation* action as well as *technology* and *financing*. Mitigation involves a process of curbing greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, for example, emissions from fossil fuels as well as deforestation, with a view to stabilizing greenhouse gas concentration at a safe level. Adaptation involves a range of activities to reduce vulnerability and build resilience, for instance in key sectors such as water, agriculture and human settlements. New and improved technologies and financing initiatives at all levels, are also receiving attention as part of the global effort to address climate change.

Development (2002), and the 2005 World Summit recognized the essential role women play in sustainable development. In its recent follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, the General Assembly highlighted the need to “involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; and strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impacts of development and environmental policies on women” (A/C.3/62/L.89).

At its 46th session in 2002, the Commission on the Status of Women took up climate change issues when it addressed environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission called for action to mainstream a gender perspective into ongoing research by, inter-alia, the academic sector on the impact of climate change, including the root causes, and to encourage the application of the results of this research in policies and programmes (para 7(c)).

III. Critical issues

There are important gender perspectives in all aspects of climate change. Gender inequalities in access to resources, including credit, extension services, information and technology, must be taken into account in developing mitigation activities. Adaptation efforts should systematically and effectively address gender-specific impacts of climate change in the areas of energy, water, food security, agriculture and fisheries, biodiversity and ecosystem services, health, industry, human settlements, disaster management, and conflict and security.¹

Women make up a large number of the poor in communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood and are disproportionately vulnerable to and affected by climate change. Women’s limited access to resources and decision-making processes increases their vulnerability to climate change. Women in rural areas in developing countries have the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security, and are negatively affected by drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation.² Because of their roles, unequal access to resources and limited mobility, women in many contexts are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as floods, fires, and mudslides. It is important to identify gender-sensitive strategies for responding to the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change.

Women are not only victims of climate change, but also effective agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Women have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Women’s responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of natural resources has positioned them well for livelihood strategies adapted to changing

¹ See generally the *Report of the Secretary-General on overview of UN activities in relation to climate change* A/62/644.

² *Changing the Climate: Why Women’s Perspectives Matter*. Women’s Environment and Development Organisation Information Sheet 2007, p2.

environmental realities. Wo

identification of gender perspectives and the involvement of women in addressing climate change.

The following questions may serve as a non-exhaustive discussion guide to stimulate sharing of national level experiences, strategies and good practices:

- What steps are being taken / could be taken to **mainstream gender perspectives** into the climate change efforts at the national, regional and international levels – including in policies, strategies, action plans and programmes? What good practice examples can be provided?
- What steps are being taken / could be taken to **reduce the vulnerability of women** and to reduce the negative impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to their critical roles in rural areas in provision of water, food and energy? What good practice examples can be provided?
- What steps are being taken / could be taken to **increase the participation of women** in decision-making on climate change at different levels? What good practice examples can be provided?
- What are the **major contributions of women as agents of change** in mitigation and adaptation to climate change at local levels? What good practice examples exist, and how can these be made more visible and more effectively utilized?
- What are the critical issues for women in relation to **technology and finances** in addressing climate change at national and local levels?
- What are the **major achievements and gaps and challenges** in ensuring adequate attention to gender perspectives in climate change efforts, for example in relation to specific issues/contexts, including but not limited to:
 - ✓ Natural disasters, such as floods, drought
 - ✓ Desertification
 - ✓ Deforestation