

Expert Group Meeting

Sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 69)

‘Beijing +30: Emerging issues and future directions for gender equality and women’s rights’

Virtual, 13–15 August 2024

**Gender Justice Is Climate Justice:
Promoting Gender Equality and Securing the Rights
of Women and Girls in a Worsening Climate Crisis**

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* The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of UN-Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

1. Overview

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was a critical milestone as the first global policy framework to confirm gender ‘mainstreaming’ as a key strategy for realizing gender equality and elevated its significance by calling on governments and other actors to apply it to all policies and programmes. The 12 critical areas of concern are as relevant today as almost 30 years ago: poverty, education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutions mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child. The strategic objective K on the environment, urges governments to “integrate women, including indigenous women, their perspectives and knowledge, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making regarding sustainable resource management and the development of policies and programmes for sustainable development, including in particular those designed to address and prevent environmental degradation of the land; [...] develop a strategy for change to eliminate all obstacles to women’s full and equal participation in sustainable development and equal access to and control over resources” (United Nations, 1995).

Though elements of this strategic objective were forward-looking and some might even say ahead of its time. Since its development, climate change has emerged as a growing area of concern globally and a catalyst for gender inequality, outpacing the ext.

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) in its summary of the state of knowledge of climate change posits that the extent and magnitude of climate change impacts are larger than estimated in previous assessments (high confidence). It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Climate change has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater, cryospheric and coastal and open ocean ecosystems (high confidence). The extent and magnitude of climate change impacts are larger than estimated in previous assessments (high confidence). This has led to widespread adverse impacts on food and water security, human health and on economies and society and related losses and damages to nature and people (high confidence). Climate change has impacted human and natural systems across the world with those who have generally least contributed to climate change being most vulnerable. The IPCC notes that climate change has had adverse impacts on gender and social equity. Climate change contributes to the worsening inequality between men and women and has led to a renewed sense of urgency in response to current concerns about gender inequality, gender-differentiated impacts on communities around the world of a planetary imbalance and a changing climate.

2. Strategic objective k did not anticipate the climate crisis the planet is now experiencing

The strategic objectives of this critical area, or indicators if you will, speak to 1. Involving women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels, 2. Integrating gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development, and 3. Strengthening or establishing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact and development and environmental policies on women.

COP 18 agreed that additional efforts need to be made by all Parties to improve the participation of women in bodies established under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol. It adopted a gender balance goal for bodies established under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol in order to improve women's participation and inform more effective climate policy that addresses the needs of women and men equally. COP 25 noted the persistent lack of progress in and the urgent need for improving the representation of women in Party delegations and in all bodies established under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. COP 26 took note of the annual reports on gender composition for 2020 and 2021,⁷ which highlighted the persistent lack of progress in in-person participation, challenges identified in promoting women's full, equal and meaningful participation in virtual forums, and the urgent need for improving the representation and leadership of women in Party delegations. COP 27 adopted the amendments to the GAP agreed at the intermediate review of its implementation and requested the secretariat to support the attendance of national gender and climate change focal points at relevant mandated UNFCCC meetings, upon request and subject to available resources. As Stella Gama, Malawi's lead climate change negotiator on gender and Least Developed Countries Group coordinator for gender, and Gender balance at the UNFCCC must be seen as more than a nice-to-have- but rather as an imperative for gender transformative policies and actions. And according to NAP-GN (2022) despite the fact that the numbers of women and men on party delegations are almost equal (49% women and 51% men), men accounted for 60% of the speakers and 74% of the speaking time in plenaries – emphasizing the need to look beyond the numbers when considering gender balance in participation.

In terms of policies and programme for climate action, we have seen significant progress in the inclusion of gender in national-level strategic documents such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. By integrating gender considerations into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), countries can better access and mobilise climate finance to meet the needs of their whole populations through public and private financing mechanisms. In a study of NDCs from 120 countries, only 24 per cent identified national gender equality institutions as part of climate change governance and only 27 per cent noted the importance of women's participation in climate decision-making (UNDP 2021). National Adaptation Plans increasingly consider gender and show evidence that gender analysis informed the framing

of the document. Yet, in many instances, this ambitious and forward-looking approach in gender in climate policy is not supported by equally strong language and policies in some countries.

3. Decadal review of the Beijing Platform for Action

BpfA at 10 years. One of the most urgent environmental issues today is climate change. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported in early 2007 that global warming is 'unequivocal' and that human activity is the main driver of this activity. 19 To date, however, there has been little discussion on the gender dimensions of this threat and strategies to deal with. Some authors have pointed out that since the poor are the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, then women, as a disproportionate percentage of the poor, are particularly vulnerable. Given increased environmental instability, women will face particular challenges given their primary care-giving roles in times of disaster and environmental stress. Despite these challenges, many women have developed adaptive strategies to protect the sustainability of their environments and livelihoods. Some analysts have argued that gender inequalities and roles are also relevant variables in tackling climate change in northern countries as well. Research from Germany also indicates that there are gender differences in attitudes and perceptions of climate change, and these are relevant in developing strategies to address this issue.

At 20 years. In 2012, in Doha, the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted a decision to promote the goal of gender balance in the bodies of and delegations to the Conference of the Parties and to include gender and climate change as a standing item in the agenda of the Conference of the Parties. The representation of women among the various delegations were, for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 29 per cent in 2008 and 33 per cent in 2012. It acknowledged the disproportionate impacts of climate on women, made reference to women's unpaid care work and called for gender-responsive planning and legal reforms. Since 2012, the gender dimension of climate change has been addressed as a standing item under the UNFCCC.

3.1 In the last decade: Unequal impacts of climate crisis

Climate change affects us all – but it does not affect us all equally. Climate change catalyses and exacerbate pervasive inequalities between men and women. The significance of the crisis is rooted in a crisis of extreme economic inequalities that has concentrated wealth and power among the few while causing widespread economic insecurity among the many and trapping millions of women and girls in poverty and hunger. It is rooted in a crisis of care, exacerbated by a vicious cycle of debt, austerity and the retrenchment of public services, which has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without support while imposing hard choices and enormous costs on women and girls. The gender dimension is present in the way women and men contribute to GHG emissions, mitigate, adapt to and perceive climate change. Women and men are influenced differently by the socio-economic impacts of climate policies.

Women's and girls' health is endangered by climate change and disasters by limiting access to services and health care, as well as increasing risks related to maternal and child health. A [2023 UNFPA study](#) on countries most at risk from the climate crisis highlights how the climate crisis impacts women and girls, by driving up maternal mortality, child marriage, adolescent birth rates, and gender-based violence. The displacement that comes with climate-driven disasters plays a key role by disrupting access to healthcare and safe spaces when they are most needed. Evidence shows that climate change directly and indirectly affects maternal health, leading to conditions like anaemia, eclampsia, and low birth weight. Despite this evidence, few countries are integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights into their national climate policies.

Gender-based violence increases in times of crisis, and the climate crisis is no different. Indigenous and Afro-descendant women are particularly vulnerable to violence, and in fact, roughly half of all women activists killed in 2017 were killed for defending their communities and environmental rights (Ervin, 2018).

Gender inequality coupled with the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of our time. IPCC emphasizes that “differences in vulnerability and exposure arise from non-climatic factors and from multidimensional inequalities often produced by uneven development processes... These differences shape differential risks from climate change... People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also to some adaptation and mitigation responses... This heightened vulnerability is rarely due to a single cause. Rather, it is the product of intersecting social processes that result in inequalities in socioeconomic status and income, as well as in exposure.

At COP 21 in 2015, Parties anchored gender equality and the empowerment of women as a core principle in the Paris Agreement's preamble (UNFCCC, 2015b). The Paris Agreement also mandates gender-responsive adaptation and capacity-building efforts but fails to integrate gender-specific language in its mitigation, technology, or finance section.

4. Emerging areas for consideration

4.1 Climate finance: Lack of access to climate finance by women

Despite climate finance gaining increased attention and the establishment of most funds up to 17 years after the Beijing Platform for Action – many climate funds started out gender blind. By December 2018, each of these funds had an explicit gender policy and/or gender action plan, a gender specialist focused on the implementation of the policy and/or action plan, and increasing accountability mechanisms integrating gender equality principles. Unfortunately, the architecture of climate finance has not been designed to involve small grassroots organizations. Funds generally channel resources through “implementing agencies,” which are mostly large international environmental organizations or United Nations system agencies, which then distribute funding to others, and women's organizations are often at the end of this line. For this

reason, a technical training process may be necessary to ensure access to this type of financing. A climate proofed Beijing Platform for Action should promote the use of Gender equality and women's empowerment as guiding principles and a cross-cutting mandate for all climate finance instruments rooted in a human rights-based approach.

4.2 Mitigation, Energy transition & extractives

To speed up the transition to a green energy sector and economy within the short time frame left for limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, women and girls need to be equally, fully and meaningfully included at all stages and levels as leaders and agents of change, designers, implementers, and end users of renewable energy policies, technologies and practices. unequal access of women to new technology and advanced forms of energy. Clean energy can be transformative for gender equality. When women own and benefit from productive uses of energy, such as for paid work or for healthcare, opportunities for economic empowerment and resilience are unleashed. Global gas power generation capacity should decrease by more than 55% by 2035 compared with 2020 levels" in order to try to limit average global temperature increases to 1.5°C, in line with the Paris Agreement target. This places us at Beijing +40 and provides an opportunity to lobby for gender-responsive pathways to a just transition.

4.3 Climate and care

Climate change and environmental degradation lead to an increase in women's and girls' unpaid care, and domestic and communal work. Climate change is exacerbating water scarcity, which increases the burden of water collection and treatment on women and girls. Women spend 2.8 more hours than men daily on unpaid care and domestic work.

Gender-responsive climate action towards climate change mitigation and adaptation and a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy offers opportunities for achieving the 5Rs of care work. This requires us to develop a more gender-aware approach to the economy and to economic policies, which would fully value women's work and also fully cost the damage and harm that the exploitation of the physical environment causes for humans and all forms of life, both currently and for future generations. According to the ILO (2022) the global care crisis has been exacerbated by the effects of global warming, intensifying the work of caring for people, animals, plants and urban and rural green spaces. The increased demand on households due to the crises triggered by extreme weather events falls on women. The Just Transition agenda will not be possible if the importance of care work is not recognized, and unless initiatives are developed for it to be distributed fairly and channels for participation and leadership are opened

5. Relevance of BPA in a world besieged by the climate crisis

Notwithstanding this growing body of evidence, international and regional framework, efforts to mainstream gender equality in responses to climate change are often limited to measures that have

failed to break unequal power structures or to have enough of a structural impact to close gender gaps or promote the enjoyment of women's rights.

The Generation Equality Forum, in July 2021, led to the establishment of an action coalition focused on feminist action for climate justice (FACJ), one of six in the Global Acceleration Plan. Among other objectives, the FACJ action coalition aims to build the resilience of women and girls to climate and disaster risks (Generation Equality Forum, 2021). Feminist climate justice brings a gender lens to this by showing how the drivers of climate and environmental breakdown are also the structural drivers of gender inequalities. By challenging existing power structures and tackling the root causes that lie behind the climate crisis, this approach challenges the prevailing notions of what both the climate crisis and climate action are.

In March 2022, the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was held, with the priority theme of “achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes” (CSW, 2022, p. 1). The conclusions emphasize the need for an intersectional approach that addresses issues such as racism, discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and the exclusion of people with disabilities. Throughout the conclusions, the need to respect human rights and ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership in climate-related decision-making at all levels is highlighted. The importance of a whole-of-government approach to achieving gender-responsive climate action is also noted.

It is important that the Beijing Platform 30 years in builds on these wins.

Climate in the Beijing Platform for action beyond 2025 should be relegated to Strategic Objective k – but must be seen as a key issue across all 12 areas. Hard-won progress on gender equality since the Beijing Platform for Action has been incremental but inadequate, and without action to halt climate change, the world's women and girls now face wholesale reversal of their human rights. A future-proofed Beijing Platform for Action must respond to the evolution of the broader context of climate globally, regionally and nationally. The Beijing Platform for Action must seek to improve coherence and coordination as the world seeks to address gender equality and the climate crisis more systemically in areas and frameworks. A climate-responsive Beijing Platform for Action requires climate-proofing the economic, political and social structures, institutions and norms that are perpetuating climate injustice. According to the IPCC, integrated policy packages can improve the ability to integrate considerations of equity, gender equality and justice. If this 30th anniversary is to truly be the opportunity to strengthen gender-responsive action and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other global commitments then the language must change to reflect the extent of the climate crisis, accountability measures must demand that governments do more than refer to climate in relevant policies and plans.