

Climate change and South Asia

A gendered perspective

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Due to limited resources and capacities, the economic, social and environmental costs of climate change are higher for developing countries. South Asia is even more vulnerable due to its varied geography, high population density and greater dependence on natural resources. The region is home to about 23 percent of the world's population, three quarters of which live in rural areas, with one third living in extreme poverty.¹ It is also among one of the most food insecure regions in the world. Approximately 70 percent of the people in the region depend on agriculture for food, income and employment.²

As agriculture in South Asia is non-irrigated and rain-fed, climate fluctuations and reduced monsoons are predicted to drastically decline yields of all major crops like rice, wheat and maize; thus increasing the likelihood of the severity of food insecurity.

Climate change and gender

There is consensus today that climate change affects women and men differently.³ Women's greater reliance on natural resources causes them to be disproportionately affected by changes and shifts in their local environment. As the impacts of climate change increase over time, women's household responsibilities will also increasingly become more burdensome, demanding a higher physical toll and more time for household chores. For example, due to water shortages, women will have to travel longer distances for water, hence facing increased exhaustion and less time for other activities.

Similarly, many women in South Asia are dependent on agriculture and other activities that are directly tied to stable environmental conditions. While the male population employed in agriculture in the region is 40 percent of the total employed male, in the case of female, it is 68 percent.⁴ As the Figure shows, except in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, more economically active women are involved in agriculture as compared to men. Thus, effects of climate change on agriculture will affect more women than men.

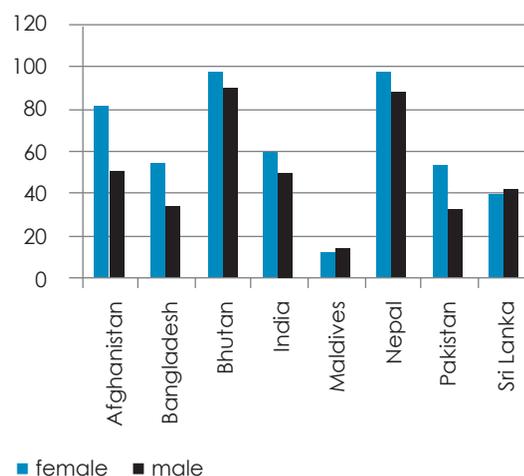
Mainstreaming gender

At the international level, "gender" first appeared in the final resolution of the Seventh Conference of the Parties

(COP7) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2001 when it was stated that the preparation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) should be guided by gender equality. Thereafter, it did not re-appear in the negotiation texts until COP16 in 2010 where gender equality was acknowledged as integral to effective actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In COP17, the creation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) made history as the first global climate finance mechanism to include gender equality concerns. Similarly, COP18 and COP19 committed to gender balance and inclusion of women in formal negotiation processes.

While UNFCCC decision texts are becoming more gender-aware in recent years, women's participation in the preparation of gender-sensitive climate change policies and programmes are yet to take centre stage. At the national level, monitoring and ensuring that gender inclusion and empowerment is addressed in NAPAs and Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPAs) still remain a big challenge. For example, in South Asia, no country, except Nepal, explicitly addresses gender concerns in its national climate change plans and strategies.⁵

Figure: Female and male economically active in agriculture, expressed as percentage of economically active female and male, respectively



Source: Adapted from FAO Stat 2013

Climate finance and gender

Climate finance is essential to address the impacts of climate change, especially in developing countries and least-developed countries, because large scale investments are required for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Table provides an overview of approved and disbursed climate funds for South Asian countries so far.

At present, different climate funds and mechanisms have varying degrees of gender sensitivity. While some progress has been made in reflecting gender concerns in climate finance mechanisms, many existing funds and mechanisms have yet to methodically incorporate gender considerations. For example, gender mainstreaming has been promoted in the Least Developed Countries Fund and Special Climate Change Fund. On the other hand, the Clean Development Mechanism has been criticized for focusing on large-scale projects while giving very little emphasis to small-scale and community-based activities that women typically engage in.⁶

Overall, there is no gender-specific climate fund, and none of the existing funds fully integrate gender into their governing and decision making structures, or make gender mainstreaming a criterion for project support. In many of the existing funds where gender has been addressed, it is an afterthought and has not been included in the planning and operational framework, except in the case of the Green Climate Fund.⁷

In addition, women's ability to engage in climate finance is further constrained by existing gender disparities at the national and regional levels. Women's disproportionately higher illiteracy rates and their low representation and participation in political decision making place women at a disadvantage in accessing climate finance.

Way forward

Women consist of the majority of the world's 1.2 billion poorest people⁸, and they are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, mainly due to existing socio-economic conditions. In order to ensure gender equality while addressing climate change impacts, it is necessary to take the following steps:

- Mainstreaming gender in national climate policies, including NAPAs and LAPAs.

Table: Climate finance in South Asia (in US\$ million)

Country	Approved	Disbursed
Bangladesh	489.11	24.32
Bhutan	50.46	6.45
India	3686.52	137.3
Maldives	39.01	17.04
Nepal	148.76	7.21
Pakistan	201.17	16.16
Sri Lanka	27.33	16.86

Source: Climate funds update (accessed March 2014).

- Conducting social and gender impact analysis of financing options for climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Expanding project approval criteria for climate finance to include small-scale projects.
- Utilizing gender indicators to track progress towards gender equality in financing mechanisms.
- Ensuring equal gender representation in climate change financing mechanisms' boards and decision-making bodies.

Notes

- ¹ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21991827~menuPK:2246552~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:223547,00.html>
- ² World Bank. Note 1.
- ³ Schalatek, Liane. 2012. Climate Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Challenges and Opportunities. United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-sixth session, New York.
- ⁴ FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture—Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- ⁵ Saxena, Lopamudra Patnaik. 2012. "Gender Dimension of Climate Change and Food Security". *Briefing Paper No. 13*. Kathmandu: SAWTEE.
- ⁶ UNDP. 2013. Gender and Climate Finance. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Briefs*. New York: UNDP.
- ⁷ UNDP (2013). Note 6.
- ⁸ Schalatek (2012). Note 3.



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 E-mail: sawtee@sawtee.org, Web: www.sawtee.org
 Design: Bipendra Ghimire
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Lalitpur

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) is a regional network that operates through its secretariat in Kathmandu and 11 member institutions from five South Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The overall objective of SAWTEE is to build the capacity of concerned stakeholders in South Asia in the context of liberalization and globalization.

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