



The intersections between climate change and gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights

Synthesis Paper

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1. Introduction

Background

This synthesis paper was commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and reflects the main outcomes of the desk study¹ also commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that maps and analyses the state of evidence on the intersection of climate change and gender equality and climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). It serves to present the main intersections between gender equality, SRHR and climate change as well as it highlights the implications for future donor programming and policy development (section 2), and identifies thematic areas that emerged as particularly relevant for future work and donor support (section 3). Finally, the paper concludes by outlining best practices identified through stakeholder interviews (section 4).

Approach and selected thematic areas

The synthesis paper focuses on areas with robust evidence of climate change impacts on gender equality and/or SRHR, as well as areas requiring further investigation for effective programming and policy support. These areas are characterised either by a lack of evidence in clearly establishing the drivers, causes and effects of a particular intersectional issue, or gaps including the diverse voices, demands and needs of women leading to a gap in effectively addressing the issue at hand. The main findings and selected thematic areas also draw from interviews with key stakeholders, identifying important areas for further strengthening. The synthesis provides crucial insights for donors and funders to inform future programming. Highlighting a sustainable development agenda and a human rights-based approach, it emphasises the pivotal role of women in achieving climate change goals and the significance of human rights for sustainable development.

The intersections of climate change and gender equality and climate change and SRHR need to be understood in the context of sustainable development. Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and disproportionately impacts marginalised population groups. High confidence evidence is substantiating a vicious cycle in which adverse impacts of climate change, development deficits and inequality exacerbate each other. Existing vulnerabilities and inequalities intensify with adverse impacts of climate change². Similarly, evidence indicates that the most vulnerable population groups, residing in countries and regions facing the greatest climate risks, urgently need effective responses. These groups often live in low-income countries with limited response capacity and bear minimal historical responsibility for climate change, given their low carbon emissions. Consequently, low-income countries face compounded challenges including high levels of poverty, significant portions of the population lacking access to basic services, economic and gender inequalities, and governance challenges (ibid). Climate-related disasters have cost the African continent 12.3% of total GDP from 2010-2019³. Marginalised groups and women and girls experience the greatest impacts of climate change as they have limited control over and access to resources that build climate resilience⁴.

The following paragraph outlines areas where donors can provide valuable support to address the intersectional issues between climate change, gender equality and SRHR from a human rights-based perspective more effectively.

2. Main findings of the desk study

Responses promoting voice and empowerment

The desk study has identified strong evidence of a gap between the aspiration to achieve gender equality and SRHR within ambitious climate policies and the actual formulation, design, and implementation of climate policies at national and local levels. The evidence examined thus shows a gap in terms of including women and addressing the root cause of inequality in climate policy decision making as well as in setting priorities, programmatic responses and practices.

The voices reflected in the report's findings emphasize the importance of empowering and unlocking the agency of women to take greater action in climate initiatives. This empowerment necessitates a fundamental shift in addressing inequalities and gender norms that hinder effective participation and agency in decision-making processes related to policy, priority, programs, and practices. Additionally, sufficient, additional, and targeted climate finance is essential for addressing key intersectional issues and achieving climate action, gender equality, and the realization of SRHR.

Directing climate finance flows

To achieve the 2030 climate targets and goals, financing for climate action must increase four-fold compared to 2019⁵. However, the desk study found evidence that only a minimal portion of climate finance is allocated towards achieving gender equality and SRHR goals within climate action and women and women's organisations face limited access to such funds. The analysis further demonstrates that climate finance mechanisms lack gender sensitivity, impeding women's effective participation in entrepreneurial initiatives. Paradoxically, various reviewed examples illustrate that involving women in implementing climate action projects, such as providing increased access to finance for clean and affordable energy, positively contributes to both climate and development goals⁶.

Enhanced climate finance could thus usefully be directed towards ensuring a more consistent access to clean and affordable renewable energy solutions, ensuring the engagement of women and women's groups in project design and implementation strategies, as well as ensuring representation and learning from women voices in climate policy- and decision-making processes. The desk study found a gap in supporting the return flow from intentions captured in policy to design, implementation and priorities of project implementation on the ground. One way of securing a more coherent process between policy, prioritisation, programming and practice could be to fund the organisations that bring the two spheres of policy-making and voices from the ground together in effective advocacy, knowledge sharing and best practice learning.

Support for women organisations linking voice, evidence and policy advocacy

Stakeholder interviews highlighted that networks, coalitions and advocacy organisations play key roles in translating evidence, lived experience and programmatic knowledge into policy action, advocacy messaging and influencing to ensure that high level policy, finance, programming and discourse reflect the experiences of the front lines. The desk study reviewed a range of these organisations and found that their way of working is embedded in values such as intersectionality, voice, empowerment, reproductive justice and feminist principles. Networks and coalitions active on the international level were found to do the difficult work of convening diverse partners and actors for joint campaigning and policy advocacy. Coalitions working at the international policy level conveyed their efforts to share

power and political space, socialising new knowledge, training and capacity building and ensuring access and a seat at the table in policy making fora. Collective organising such as this is at the heart of some of the successes of the Women and Gender Constituency of the UNFCCC for example. Other examples of the work that these organisations engage in is collecting stories and evidence which provide important contributions to programme design on the ground⁷ and highlight the key role women hold in addressing climate change challenges and in offering solutions⁸. These organisations work most effectively and reliably if provided with core funding that is long-term, consistent, and flexible. Such finance should also support grassroots organisations that collate, collect and disseminate evidence and voice at international and national fora where the voices of women are generally excluded or underrepresented.

Investing and strengthening gender climate policy infrastructure

The desk study found that women are less represented in climate policy making and are generally not engaged in a meaningful manner in priority setting, nor the design of climate programmes and climate action. The literature reviewed indicates a significant gap in realising the full potential women and girls have for achieving ambitious climate action goals in mitigation, adaptation and in developing resilient responses to climate induced disasters. Whereas there is evidence that women and other climate vulnerable groups are mentioned more often in climate policies and related strategies, there are also significant reports on the lack of women voices, perspectives and contributions in the formulation and implementation of climate mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies and programmes. Both the academic and the non-academic literature reviewed for the desk study provide strong evidence of the necessity to address the root causes of inequality and discrimination and changing gender norms for more effective, sustainable and transformative climate action through the effective shift of power imbalances, including strengthening the representation of women voices at all levels of strategy and programme development.

Some important policy infrastructure exists to support the inclusion of gender justice within climate policy action and for achieving commitments to climate action, such as the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan. However, there is an opportunity to further strengthen the existing policy infrastructure with funding, capacity building, evaluation and accountability mechanisms. This includes for example, the role of gender focal points at national level and their engagement in national and international climate policy processes. A further example is the Adaptation Fund's gender policy for implementing entities. This policy already integrates much of the best practice on gender transformative climate finance, but the fund itself is underfinanced⁹. Funders and governments have an opportunity to support the existing climate policy infrastructure on gender to become more meaningful. This may include funding and convening a best practice peer network for gender focal points, increasing funding to organisations with existing high quality gender policies, working with governments and duty bearers to ensure accountability to existing gender related mechanisms within the UNFCCC and climate policy and onwards.

Supporting and convening communities of practice for SRHR and climate

The desk study showed that there is a paucity of evidence and robust evaluation about what works for gender equality and SRHR and climate programming and a need for innovating and updating existing programmatic interventions. Furthermore, the report showed that there is a gap in the availability and production of gender disaggregated data and in the formulation of indicators that measure achievements with regards to gender equality and SRHR in climate programmes. It is thus difficult to measure what response efforts work. The evidence from the desk study shows that this

can be related back to both a gap in evidence and the exclusion of voice, knowledge and lived experience from processes and fora that discuss and decide responses to climate change and the realisation of gender equality and SRHR. A way to address this gap could be to convene a high-level community of practice that brings together diverse knowledge including evidence, lived experience, guiding values, voice and principles, existing programmatic modalities, and what existing interventions or interventions from other domains has the potential for replicability and scalability. Such a community of practice could be initiated by progressive front-runner countries that take a genuine interest in feminist climate action. The results from the community of practice would support further informed priority setting and programmatic action on gender equality, SRHR and climate change.

Mainstreaming climate, gender and health

As the climate crisis is context specific, system wide and complex, the intersections look different in different places and the desk study shows that they are inevitably transsectoral and based in root causes of structural and cultural inequalities. The root causes of structural inequality cannot be addressed in programmatic isolation. Developing mechanisms for ensuring that programmes, policies and initiatives in sectors as diverse as health, gender, climate, include analysis, best practice and indicators from each sector is key to a joined up and coherent approach. For example, acting on heat related morbidities in relation to maternal health requires consideration from multiple sectors as exposure to heat relates to the built environment, the health system, the workforce, the social determinants of health such as poverty and discrimination and onwards. Therefore, a programme that only addresses the gendered dimensions, or the health dimensions would not sufficiently tackle these intertwined issues. As pointed out earlier it is also in this instance key to ensure that priorities and programmes include the voices of those most affected and are mainstreamed across departments, sectors, practices and programmes.

3. Future work

The desk study found that gender equality and SRHR across the board are under researched and under considered when developing responses to climate change. There is thus a gap both in terms of mainstreaming gender equality and SRHR into climate change programmes; and vice-versa mainstreaming climate change into gender programmes, SRHR interventions and more general health programmes, including at the indicators level. The thematic areas highlighted below are both strongly relevant for the intersection as well as they are issues high on the political agenda for both donors and recipient countries in their efforts to achieve transformational change and adequate societal responses to climate change.

Research and action gaps regarding sexual rights: Justice beyond fertility and reproductive health

The desk study has identified a significant research gap concerning the impact of climate change on sexual rights. While there is growing evidence on the effects of climate change on HIV and substantial research on the intersections between climate change and gender-based violence, there are gaps in knowledge regarding sexually transmitted infections. Additionally, research is lacking on the impact of climate change on people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, as well as sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), and on access to information, education, and services including comprehensive sexuality education. Supporting and collaborating with civil society

organizations to lead community-based participatory research and advocacy would help ensure an intersectional response to climate challenges.

Opportunities for gender, climate and health

There is growing recognition of the intersections between climate change and health¹⁰. Interviews with stakeholders highlighted that there is a need for greater linkages between climate, health and gender, which will inevitably include greater attention on SRHR. As professional medical associations, research bodies and multilateral organisations such as WHO increase their focus on climate change and health, an intersectional approach that explicitly includes focus on SRHR needs would be valuable. Based on existing knowledge, leadership from governments, donors and multilateral organizations is needed to ensure that gender and SRHR are not left behind as this thematic area develops. This includes in research agendas, policy responses, data collection and advocacy regarding the interlinkages between climate change and health.

Just transition and gender equality

The Just Transition towards low-carbon economies is one highly relevant topic where gender equality and climate change goals and climate action processes intersect and are intrinsically linked to each other. The desk study produced a large amount of grey literature reports describing the intersections between gender equality and just transition processes most prominently in relation to coal phase out processes. The analysis found that there are both areas of opportunity and risks associated with the just transition and achieving gender equality goals. The opportunity is clearly to ensure that new, decent, green jobs also target women and support the improvement of livelihoods through income and job opportunities. The potential negative impact and associated risk is that women's participation in just transition processes is neglected; that women are disproportionately affected by job losses in sectors with high female participation (agriculture, informal economy related to the fossil fuel industry); and that the impact of just transition processes on women working in the informal and/or care economy is not recognised or addressed. Finally, the desk study found evidence that new jobs often are created in sectors with low women participation (STEM sectors). The desk study concludes that there is significant need to gain a more granular understanding of the vulnerabilities that women experience in relation to just transition processes. This also includes understanding and designing support structures that facilitate women's agency by for example ensuring access to climate finance for building community climate resilience and/or for promoting the dissemination and use of clean, affordable and safe energy in rural areas. It also includes ensuring that women are part of Just Transition processes, even though they might be organised outside of the formal tripartite structures.

4. Best practices

The desk study reviewed a number of guidelines, tools and best practices on climate change and gender equality and SRHR in found a range of helpful best practices across different economic sectors, policy making processes and programming. The report also noted that there is a large amount of resources guiding the design of gender responsive climate change programmes, while there is less evidence on what works best post-implementation. This is a result of the lack of larger robust evaluations, the lack of gender disaggregated data as well as the lack of specific gender indicators in project monitoring. Based on the best practices reviewed for the desk study, and the interviews with key stakeholders, the following criteria are essential to consider for programmes that wish to address the intersections of climate change and gender equality and climate change and SRHR:

- Providing equal access to benefits, including finance mechanisms, technological tools and services and advisory services.
- Considering the additional burden to women's workload, including domestic care work.
- Empowering women by increasing their access to and control over essential resources (food security, land, water, health and sanitation services, and income opportunities)
- Promoting women's engagement and meaningful participation in decision-making processes at all levels.
- Promoting the use of locally appropriate and locally driven solutions and encourages local ownership and scalability.
- Supporting women entrepreneurship and education based on gender-sensitive social protection schemes.
- Ensuring that just transition plans are gender transformative and considers gender into resilience building and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- Considering the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls.
- Setting gender specific targets and indicators.
- Creating gender-inclusive accessible financing mechanisms.

Endnotes

¹Jacobsen Toftgaard & McMullen, 2024, Desk Study 1: The intersections between climate change and gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

² IPCC Working Group II, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

³ UN General Assembly 2023, A/77/640, Main Findings and Recommendations of the midterm review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

⁴ IPCC Working Group II, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

⁵ Report by the G20 Independent Experts Group, 2023: Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks - the triple agenda https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/The_Triple_Agenda_G20-IEG_Report_Volume1_2023.pdf

⁶ See for example the Solar Sisters programme here: <https://solarsister.org/lastmilelearning-1/>

⁷ See for example IPAS work here: <https://www.ipas.org/our-work/climate-justice/building-the-evidence/>

⁸ For examples see Gender Just Climate Solutions, 2023, published by the Women and Gender Constituency: https://womensgenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/GJCS-brochure_COP28_EN_WEBs-1.pdf

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, 2023: Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfinanced. Underprepared. Inadequate investment and planning on climate adaptation leaves world exposed. <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023>

¹⁰ See for example the UNFCCC COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health (WHO) here: https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/climate-change/cop28/cop28-uae-climate-and-health-declaration.pdf?sfvrsn=2c6eed5a_3&download=true