

## POLICY BRIEF

## Climate Change Governance

### Local Adaptation to Climate Change: The Gender Perspective

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*Gender-related inequalities are pervasive in the developing world. The concept of “feminization of poverty” is also about ‘the result of the deprivation of capabilities and gender biases present in both societies and governments.’ The importance of placing women at the heart of the vision of sustainable development ensuring equitable and fair share of opportunities for growth is critical to the aspired change. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an analysis of roles women and men play in their entire life cycle and preferably for short term by sectors impacted by climate change.*

## Policy Pointers

- Need to understand that challenges faced by women are different in nature from those encountered by men.
- Placing women at the core for sustainable development to ensure equitable and fair share of opportunities for growth to the aspired changes.
- Strong focus on women and gender equity in designing adaptation programmes.

#### GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

Bangladesh is considered highly vulnerable to climate change. The majority of its population lives in rural areas. The effects of climate change pose new challenges to already-vulnerable populations such as those living in coastal or haor areas, communities who suffer from water logging (experienced in these areas in recent times and attributed to climate change) or from drought. It is important that the consequences of climate change should not lead already-marginalized sections of communities into further deprivation, causing them to slip even more down the poverty ladder.

Gender-related inequalities are pervasive in the developing world. A substantial portion of the 1.3 billion people in the developing world are living below the threshold of poverty, and a majority of them are women. In Bangladesh alone, it is estimated that 30% of the population are living below the poverty line. That is about 30 million people and half of them are women. In households which are headed by women have been found to have a higher degree of poverty. Often it is said poverty has a feminine face and it is definitely reinforced in these situations. The concept of “feminization of poverty” (it describes a phenomena in which women represents a disproportionate percentage of the world’s poor and the burden of poverty is borne by women) is also about ‘the result of the deprivation of capabilities and gender

biases present in both societies and governments.’ Women generally have far less access to and control over the resources they depend upon. Nor do they have opportunities for direct governance and effective influence in politics from the household to community, national, regional and international levels. In some contexts, women are often subject to gender-based violence, harassment and psychological violence within the household. Such situations affect women in negative ways, and further impede women’s ability to adapt to events and changes in their environment.

Disasters tend to aggravate the effects of existing gender inequalities, particularly the issues related to health and health care. Women are more prone to nutritional deficiencies because they have unique nutritional needs, especially when they are breastfeeding. In many cultures where women are treated as members of the lowest rung of the household food hierarchy, these needs are usually not met. Intergenerational malnutrition from years and years of such a cycle has exacerbated the health and intellectual deficiencies in children born to these girls and women. The growth patterns of these children vary because of this as well. The existing development practices and paradigms have not succeeded in comprehensively addressing the gender disparities. This influences the rate of poverty, the choices and opportunities available to people, especially the ability

for women and their children to lead long, healthy, and creative lives, and enjoy basic rights like freedom, respect, and dignity.

The importance of placing women at the heart of the vision of sustainable development ensuring equitable and fair share of opportunities for growth is critical to the aspired change. Women have to adapt to extreme weather impacts within existing socio cultural practices. They are called to deliver the new born in water logging conditions with minimal medical or no facilities, move to cyclone or flood shelter with the children and elderly and continue to care for them and fulfill all the roles ascribed in society to women. As the playing field for women and men is not level and there are existing disparities between men and women in social, economic and political arena it is essential to develop an understanding of how men and women are differently vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and able to cope with it.

### **GENDER REALITIES:**

In our attempt to understand the linkages between gender and climate change in Bangladesh and global context highlights a number of disparities that contribute to discrepancies between women's and men's exposure and vulnerability to climate change and the risks associated with it.

- Patriarchy and existing practices built on patriarchal values, such as socio-cultural norms that limit women from acquiring the information and skills to avoid or escape disasters or hazards.
- The economic, political and social barriers faced by women related to income and earnings and productivity, land ownership, opportunities for education for girls and the rate of literacy among women limit their chances to react post climate related disasters.
- Challenges faced by women in regards to participating in the processes of formulation of legislation, policy and implementation, thereby incorporating their perspective in decision-making and into policy processes.
- A lack of disaggregated data on gender contributes to underestimation of women's roles, which results in gender-blind climate change policies and programmes that can increase gender-based vulnerability.

Women face challenges which are different in nature from those encountered by men. It is reported that women go hungry/starve during a disaster when there is a crisis and food shortage in order to feed her children and other members of the family. They are exposed to new forms of risks when they have to move to flood or cyclone shelter. Displaced women and girls who move to temporary shelters or embankments are in even higher risk categories. There have been reports that girls have been victims of child marriage or trafficking as it has been recorded during emergencies time and again by CBOs, NGOs and women's groups.

Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an analysis of roles women and men play in their entire life cycle and

preferably for short term by sectors impacted by climate change. This is to cope with various strategies:

- Integrating gender perspectives in climate change programming
- Ensuring mitigation and adaptation efforts address gender inequality and vulnerability and poverty
- Incorporating gender perspectives into national and international climate change finance mechanisms and strategies.

These are required to be reflected in budget and plans regarding climate financing at local level and through local governments.

### **THE BANGLADESH SCENARIO:**

Post 1994 with the ratification of United Nation Framework Convention (UNFCCC) Bangladesh has been playing an active role in climate change negotiation process and taken a number of steps such as passage of legislation, policy, strategy and action plan. But few of these steps address women's vulnerability in the context of climate change. As a result the number of services or safety net program to address the vulnerability of women in the context of climate change remains inadequate.

Existing legislations fail to address the vulnerability of women in the reality of climate change. National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009 (BCCSAP), National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-15, and Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-21 address women's vulnerability associated with climate change. However, vulnerability is not addressed specifically enough. It states that due to climate change women will face economic, social and health problems. We are yet to determine under these broad head what sort of problems women will actually face so as to create and develop the relevant response. There is no specific mention as to how issues of the women and children from coastal areas, char areas, southern parts of the country where there is water logging, rise in salinity etc, are to be addressed or such interventions to be financed.

Public services in its present form and practice do not suffice to meet realities on the ground. Water, sanitation, health care require to be re-thought and re-designed and that which means coming up with solutions that target women and girls keeping in mind specific needs and gender dimension. Food insecurity attributed to extreme weather and climate change causing crop failure push up the vulnerability of women on many fronts. It provides the scope to rethink existing models of development, programmatic interventions with 'business as usual' approach and accept that it is not working. This should determine policy and intervention particularly at national and local level. Special and concerted efforts, policies and programmes are imperative to address the matter of access to information, models and climate change finance to address the vulnerability and move to growth.

### **FINANCING LOCAL ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION: THE WAY FORWARD**

Union Parishad, the lowest tier of local government

institution, is located at the grassroots level. Under Article 59 and 60 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, local government is established which also provides an outline of local government. There are five institutions under the Local Government Division – City Corporation, Pouroshova, Zilla Parishad, and Upazilla Parishad and UP. In accordance with the hierarchy of Administrative Structure, UP is the last tier of the local government institutions which consists of one chairman and twelve members (including three reserve seats for women). UP implements national policies and development programmes at the grassroots level. Bangladesh government has set up within the Union Parishad structure the Social Welfare and Disaster management standing committee. There are also committees such as Family Disputes, Women and Child Welfare committee, Education, Health and Family Planning committee and members required to be informed and have a certain level of understanding to contribute in these committees. It is important therefore to develop understanding regarding climate vulnerability and adaptation of the members to participate in the development of pragmatic and effective programme interventions.

#### **BANGLADESH EXPERIENCE FROM GRASSROOTS:**

While women are the ones most negatively impacted by climate change, they are also the ones who are the key to solutions. Women's voices, responsibilities and knowledge on the environment and the challenges they face will need to be a central part of the adaptive response to a rapidly changing climate.

In the char areas of Kurigram, in the northern part of Bangladesh, vulnerability due to natural disasters are also 'gendered' and socially constructed. Again in the areas of Sirajganj where river erosion displaced communities and salinity threatened food security severely in Dacope Khulna situations were turned around by women.

Post disasters investment in women by non government organizations has repeatedly demonstrated the potential of change and sustainable solutions. In the coastal areas and chars of Bangladesh where communities were most affected by cyclone SIDR in 2007 and Aila in 2009, information was provided to women, their capacity developed, gonogobeshona dal formed under the support and guidance of ActionAid Bangladesh and its partners to assess vulnerability. Women came up with local solution for community based adaptation thereby reversing a situation which could have pushed the community further into poverty. In Lalua Char women gonogobeshona dal identified intrusion of salinity into cultivable land as a problem, thus organized and become vigilant against groups that would damage water bodies for shrimp cultivation and profit. The outcome was rice harvest, cultivation of multiple crops in Lalua, and rice harvest after 3 years in Dacope.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATION:**

Design adaptation programmes in food security, agriculture, and managing natural resources in ways that are sensitive and responsive to the different and multiple roles women and men play in various spheres of natural resource management, as well as their households, communities, livelihoods, and customary and statutory institutions and relations. The programmes should have a strong focus on women and gender equity to ensure successful implementation and that adequate resources are allocated to translate this vision into tangible action.

Improve women's livelihoods and strengthen adaptation by ensuring women's access, control and ownership of resources (such as land, livestock, property and income opportunities), and access to development resources such as credit, information, training and outreach, and culturally appropriate and labour-saving technology.

Invest in gender sensitive and culturally appropriate labour-saving green technologies, water harvesting, storage, irrigation systems, and substitutes for fuel wood and use (including mechanisms for maintenance). Design and implement these investments in collaboration with women to reflect their needs and concerns. Ensure that physical, cultural, social, economic and practical elements are compatible with their livelihood practices within diverse ecosystems supporting agriculture, forests, watersheds, households and communities.

In designing NAPA and LAPA participatory and gender sensitive approaches coordinated with sustainable development objectives, policies, plans and programmes require to be adopted.

#### **SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

##### **1. Recognize the value of women contribution in community based adaptation and mitigation where relevant.**

- Monetize the value of women works in the home and community particularly in regards to natural resource management and green practices.
- Institute reward systems for contributions of women to CBA. This will act as an incentive to further women's contribution and leadership
- Celebrate women leaderships regarding existing solutions as well as innovation to address climate change vulnerabilities.

##### **2. Recognize gender gaps in policy, planning and budget**

- It is imperative that GoB takes into consideration the numerous policy reviews by academics and non government organizations available to identify gender gaps regarding climate change planning, finance, and implementation.
- Undertake research for policy reform to improve the system of developing climate change adaptation plans and finance linked with gender priority.
- Incorporate gender lenses in climate finance and in selection of projects for BCCTF and BCCRF.
- Review the present gender budgeting policy and incorporate climate change and gender diversity in the

analysis and planning. Annual budget preparation on gender budgeting for ministries works together with MoEF and Ministry of Planning to maximize the incorporation of gender lenses and dimension in addressing Climate Change.

### 3. Ensure social protection programmes are established for women vulnerable to climate change

- At present Bangladesh has social protection programmes therefore increase coverage of these schemes to climate change vulnerable communities
- Reduce and remove impediments in regard to the access of social protection programme for women and girls
- Ensure that at the Union Parishad level women and children welfare committee as well as DRR committee with women membership plays a decision making role in developing social protection programme

### 4. Ensure greater coordination for developing and implementing gender sensitive budget and plans

- By way of inter ministerial coordination between MoWCA and MoEF for climate change and gender
- A steering committee established on CC and Gender

equality that bridges MoEF and MoWCA planning and implementation of target initiatives. It is important to create a mechanism for inter ministerial coordination and co-operation to further both adaptation and mitigation.

### 5. Establish effective implementation and monitoring mechanism

- Monitor the systems and institutions for policy implementation
- Monitoring and supporting development of climate finance for gender sensitive interventions and development programmes through regular data collection, evaluation and impact assessment.
- Modify existing programmes especially in response to gender priority articulated by communities particularly women. This requires women participating in planning and implementation at national and local level.
- Reporting on gender sensitive plans and programmes to address climate change, community based adaptation and mitigation plans.

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