

Putting gender at the heart of climate security

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Key messages

- **Build better evidence-base by gathering gender-disaggregated data.** By virtue of capturing the nuances that exist between gender and other social identities, an intersectional lens should be applied to understand how different groups of people experience climate-related security risks and enhance the social inclusivity of research programming.
- **Focus on women’s and marginalised people’s agency and put their voices, knowledge, and experiences at the heart of the solutions.** Thought must be given to which groups of women and which groups of men (based on their ethnicity, social status, and age) might be excluded based on these intersecting identities, and whose voices need to be empowered through targeted actions to have them represented based on their role in project-relevant activities.
- **Tackle deep-seated inequalities.** Interventions and policy should be designed and implemented in ways that address underlying inequalities and power dynamics and transform harmful gender norms that inhibit equality.

Panelists and short summary

Climate-related threats to human security affect millions of people worldwide, but not equally. The most marginalized, including women, youth and ethnic minorities are often disproportionately impacted because of deeply rooted gender and social norms, relations and inequalities that inhibit their capacity to adapt and respond to these shocks.

For the discussion, we focused on the following key questions:

- **How do climate-related security risks impact men and women differently, and how can we assess and analyse these impacts better?**
- **What kind of approaches are best suited to address the gender and climate security nexus?**
- **Why is it important to engage women and young people when designing and implementing programs?**
- **Where do gaps lie with how policymakers and researchers have engaged with gender and climate security previously, and what needs to be done in the future to inform future research and policy?**

For this webinar, we were joined by our distinguished panel, consisting of:

- **Jessica Smith**, Research and Policy Manager, Institute for Women, Peace & Security, Georgetown University
- **Adriana Abdenur**, Executive Director, Plataforma CIPO and Senior Policy Fellow at the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research
- **Sophia Huyer**, Gender and Social Inclusion Research Leader, CGIAR Research Programme on CCAFS and Director of Women in Global Science and Technology
- **Adenike Oladosou**, Founder, I Lead Climate

Why this webinar?

Climate-related threats to human security, such as displacement, food insecurity, and health risks, are far from gender-neutral. Droughts, floods, and extreme weather events interact with existing gender and social norms, relations and inequalities in a way that disproportionately exposes women and other marginalized groups to new and multi-faceted forms of insecurity. For instance, a study from UN Women Fiji (2014) finds that in the aftermaths of two tropical cyclones in Vanuatu in 2011, the reported cases of domestic violence against women and girls increased of 300% as a negative coping mechanism to deal with stress and loss of property. Similarly, a UNHCR report (2020) shows that transgender, intersex, and non-binary people often face increased protection risks during and after natural disasters due to unequal access to emergency reliefs and shelters.

Despite growing recognition by international institutions and development practitioners that a gender lens is crucial to understand and promote resilience to climate and security risks, it has yet to be meaningfully applied to climate security research and practice (Ide et al., 2021). This can be partially attributable to the fact that scholarly and policy discussions around the security implications of climate change have to date almost exclusively focused on the implications for conflict, thus ignoring more holistic dimensions of insecurity that different groups of people experience because of climate shocks (Adger et al., 2021). There is, therefore, a need to look beyond conflict to address how gender and other axes of social differentiation intersect with climate impacts to produce differential security risks for women and men of different backgrounds (e.g., age, race/ethnic community, class/caste). Ignoring these dynamics risks threatens to disempower and exclude socially marginalized people in interventions and policies, leading to lopsided and weak solutions.

This webinar aimed to explore how climate-related security risks shape and are shaped by gender and social norms, relations and inequalities and discussed opportunities these risks offer to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment. Furthermore, by bringing together gender experts from the climate, development and security realms, the webinar further stressed the importance of bridging the silos between stakeholders working in diverse fields related to the gender-climate-security nexus.

Background

Climate impacts are not gender neutral. Gender, along with class, race, age, and other intersecting social identities contribute to shaping the roles, power, and resources available to women and men in any culture, including the resources necessary to adapt to climate change. For example, gender inequalities in decision-making, access and use of productive resources, workloads, and collective action affect the level of adaptive capacity women and men have towards dealing with climate shocks.

Resource scarcity. Gender norms, relations and inequalities in land ownership, resource rights, use of resources and participation in natural resource management deepen the impact climate shocks have on women and marginalized groups. Deteriorating ecological conditions and resulting competition over dwindling resources often lead women to have limited access to fertile land, clean water, and livestock, generating both economic insecurity and food insecurity. The gendered division of labour, particularly around the collection of water and fuelwood, heightens gendered-climate risks, including increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Despite being the guardians of natural resources and repositories of traditional ecological knowledge in many cultures, women often lack the voice to provide solutions to resource scarcity – this lack of participation can compound gender inequalities in the allocation of scarce resources.

Loss of livelihoods. Due to climate impacts on agriculture and food production, worsening conditions are likely to lead to different livelihood and security outcomes for women and men. Gendered differences in income and education often lead women to have fewer capacities to diversify their livelihoods in times of climate-induced economic hardship, generating both food insecurity and risks for sexual and gender-based violence. Given that women often have lower incomes and are more likely to be economically dependent than men, they have less of a “buffer” of savings during difficult times, and along with other assets, makes it harder for them to invest in alternative livelihoods. Managing climate-related risks to agricultural production requires new information, skills, and technologies, such as seasonal forecasts, risk analysis, and water-saving agricultural practices. Men are more likely to have access to these resources than women and the power to use them, and are, therefore, better equipped to adapt.

Mobility and migration. Gender is a key factor in shaping mobility and migration decisions and abilities. Gendered differences in the resources required to move and gender norms that mediate women’s mobility shape adaptive capacity and opportunities to migrate, generating gender-differentiated environmental and economic insecurities. Used as a coping strategy from climate shocks such as floods/natural disasters and long-term impacts on livelihoods from drought/variable rainfall, out-migration from agricultural communities has tended to focus on men’s out-movements, which frequently leads to the ‘feminization of agriculture’ for the women and girls left behind to manage the farm in addition to their usual tasks. Women’s lack of mobility has direct implications for their security – women who cannot rely

on mobility/migration as an adaptive strategy are directly exposed to climate risks, which further compromises their ability to cope with and recover from environmental shocks.

Intrahousehold and communal conflict. Resource scarcity, the disruption of traditional gender roles/norms due to loss of livelihoods, and changing migratory patterns heighten the risk of intrahousehold and communal conflict. Masculine norms can create and perpetuate intrahousehold and communal conflicts that target both women and men through rigid interpretations of masculinity/socially appropriate behaviour for men. This generates risks related to sexual and gender-based violence, post-traumatic stress disorders, and intrahousehold and communal violence. In addition to open conflicts, less visible gendered violence in the form of femicide and attacks on women environmental defenders is a key issue at the heart of the gender-climate-security nexus.

While women are disproportionately affected by climate-related security risks, what is also true is that they are on the front lines of addressing these challenges. Due to their reliance on the environment, indigenous women and women in resource-dependent communities are often the first to feel climate impacts via the reduction of resources through environmental degradation and climate variability. Despite being the guardians of natural resources and repositories of traditional ecological knowledge in many cultures, women often lack the voice to provide solutions to resource scarcity. This lack of participation can compound gender inequalities in the allocation of scarce resources. Given that women's knowledge of natural resources contributes to community and cultural resilience (Tavener, 2018), new strategies for integrating their knowledge and strategies into climate responses are essential.

Resources

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