



Brief for Policymakers

State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Bangladesh

This summary is based on the assessment report for Bangladesh and presents the essential findings and recommendations for policy actors to promote gender equality in climate action.

Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

Introduction

The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change is a series of reports covering countries across the Asia-Pacific region. It identifies areas where gender-responsive climate action needs to be strengthened in order to realise the objectives of global commitments like the Paris Agreement and Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The assessment report for Bangladesh was prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UN Women, and the UN Environment Programme with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). It aims to strengthen country-driven processes by presenting evidence on the linkages between gender equality and climate change.

It analyses the gendered impacts of climate change and the gender gaps in sectoral policies. Specifically for Bangladesh, these sectors include agriculture, water resource management, forestry, and renewable energy. These four sectors form part of the national priorities for adaptation and mitigation outlined by critical policies, including the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP).



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

Gender Equality and Climate Change Interlinkages

Climate change impacts are not gender-neutral and affect women and girls differently due to societal norms, systemic gender inequalities and reproductive obligations. Vulnerability to climate change impacts varies depending on geographic location and socio-economic inequalities, like poverty and climate-sensitive livelihoods. In Bangladesh, the climate change hotspots where location-specific and socio-economic inequalities intersect and affect women and girls comprise of coastal areas (due to salinity and cyclones), the north-western highlands (due to drought), the north-eastern wetlands (due to flash flooding) and along the main rivers (due to river erosion and flooding). These climate-induced disasters threaten to erode development gains and place women at a greater disadvantage.

Integration of gender into NDC and sectoral policies needs further improvement

Bangladesh has adopted a unique approach to integrate the NDC and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) under a joint governance structure, which connects with key national strategies like the five-year plan, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation plan, and the BCCSAP. While this joint governance structure provides an enabling environment for overall NDC implementation, there is a gap in interlinking gender equality and climate change. Gender integration remains weak due to limited gender analysis across the key sectors and insufficient guidance in implementation. The NDC also falls short on gender commitments in mitigation and adaptation.

One of the latest policies relevant for this assessment is the 2020 version of the BCCSAP, which promises greater integration of gender-responsive actions. It presents the active institutional role that the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs plays in climate action. There is also a clear directive to develop practical initiatives and integrate gender issues in climate-sensitive development projects.

The four sectors under the NDC show varying degrees of gender sensitivity. For example, renewable energy, selected as a mitigation sector, has hardly any reference to gender equality in policy and implementation. Meanwhile, agriculture, water resource management, and forestry, which are critical sectors for climate change adaptation, have some recognition and acknowledgement of the importance of integrating the gender into climate actions. By and large, the policies deal with gender equality and climate change as separate, standalone issues. Subsequently, challenges arise at the implementation stage due to the lack of capacity and clear guidance to translate policy into action. Furthermore, gender indicators need to be integrated into the monitoring and evaluation frameworks to strengthen them.

Limited data and capacity hinder implementation of gender strategies

Robust, sufficient, and transparent data and access to information are critical for appropriate actions to protect women and other marginalized groups as far as the selected sectors are concerned. However, there is a lack of gender, age, and diversity disaggregated data, which often leads to vague and generalized assumptions.

This represents a significant challenge in assessing climate change vulnerabilities among different social groups such as men, women, and diverse populations, and developing measures to address those vulnerabilities in the policy framework and implementation plans of sectoral strategies.

Opportunities for institutional gender-responsive climate financing

Bangladesh has initiated the Medium-Term Budget Framework (MTBF) process by integrating budgeting with planning and policy. Three specific measures were carried out under the MTBF to promote gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). These consisted of a) assessing how proposed activities would benefit women; b) assessing how much of fund allocations would benefit women; and c) reporting on the use of budget for gender equality with explanations of gender-responsive activities by different divisions and ministries.

Bangladesh has also enhanced its climate financing to meet its commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF), funded by the national budget, was established under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC). However, climate financing allocated through BCCTF has not been gender-responsive due to limited capacity and lack of tools for gender mainstreaming in the trust fund framework as well as during the project development phase. Bangladesh has also developed two more financing mechanisms for climate action. The Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) is a government-financed institute to support private sector initiatives. The Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) is a financial institution founded by the government for sustainable development. Both IDCOL and PKSF are Green Climate Fund (GCF) accredited agencies which can be utilized to source additional international climate finance. As more and more GCF projects are implemented, the concerned ministries and agencies will be able to develop the capacity to institutionalize gender tagging and gender-responsive budget development.

Key Findings by Sector

Agriculture

- Women are the repository of traditional knowledge critical for climate change adaptation and mitigation. However, the persistent gender gap due to patriarchal norms limits the capacity of women from initiating practical climate actions.
- The involvement of women in agriculture remains systematically unrecognized and under-reported, resulting in lower wages and limited access to credit, agricultural extension services, technologies, and markets. In addition, limited land ownership and rights of women and girls contribute to low decision-making power compounding the negative impacts of climate change.
- Relevant policies like the National Agriculture Policy of 2018 and the Agriculture Extension Policy of 2020 aim to address the conditions that hinder women's effective participation and recognition through engendering decision-making spaces, forming women farmer groups, promoting small and medium enterprises and raising awareness on gender equality.
- Agriculture policies and strategies do not have the benefit of analyses on differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men. Consequently, they do not explicitly provide interlinked measures to address climate change and gender issues together.
- Lack of sex-disaggregated data on access to land, finance, extension services and agricultural tools is also a barrier for effective gender-responsive climate action.

Water resource management

- Water-related impacts of climate change are likely to be the most critical for Bangladesh, mainly due to in-land and coastal



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

flooding, droughts, and salinity intrusion. Vulnerabilities to climate change-related hazards and water-related crises are gender differentiated. Due to societal norms, systemic gender inequalities and reproductive obligations, women are disproportionately affected. For example, collecting and storing water and other labour-intensive care work in the household, reduce their time and opportunity for economically productive work, income-earning, networking, skill development, information gathering and community activities.

- Floods, droughts and salinity intrusion disrupt the food production system, disproportionately burdening women and girls with food insecurity, income loss, and health hazards. In addition, these events force men to migrate to cities for employment opportunities, leaving female family members in a relatively insecure social position and exposing them to Gender-based Violence (GBV). As documented in several studies, climate change impacts are likely to aggravate the situation.
- To reflect these gendered impacts, the national water management authorities in Bangladesh made an effort to integrate gender. The National Water Policy (NWP) of 1999 recognized that women have a particular stake in water management on the policy front, while the National Water Management Plan (NWMP) of 2001 mentioned the necessity to set up a sex-balanced development and management process; consider gender dimensions of flood-related mortality; and take required action to facilitate women's involvement. Unfortunately, climate change issues have not been incorporated into the NWP. The NWMP, however, recognized the gap in knowledge regarding the implications of climate change.
- The role and leadership of women are mentioned in the main strategy document of the Delta Plan of 2001. However, it does not give adequate attention to gender equality.

- The Participatory Water Management Rules of 2014 provided guidelines for including women in water management organizations, with women accounting for 30 per cent of committee membership. However, in reality, women face diverse forms of social barriers resulting in systematic exclusion and self-exclusion from these institutions and platforms, particularly in the coastal zone of south-western Bangladesh.
- The climate change Gender Action Plan of 2013 highlighted that the water sector remains among the most neglected in analysing the linkages between gender and climate change.

Forestry

- Degradation and deforestation affect women more than men in forest-dependent communities. Women are often more reliant on non-timber forest products and non-economic benefits from forests. Women's ability to fulfil their household responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water and gathering fuelwood is significantly constrained by limited and declining forest resources.
- Bangladesh moved from state-oriented forestry to a participatory social forestry system to respond to deforestation in the National Forest Policy of 1994. It was the first forestry-related policy to recognize the importance of gender issues. It stated that "women will be encouraged to participate in homestead and farm forestry, and participatory afforestation programmes".
- Over the years, women's participation in forest management appears to be having an impact, as more than 30 per cent of the beneficiaries of social forestry programmes are women. However, there continues to be a lack of recognition of women's contribution to the sustainable management of forests due to insecure property rights and limited decision-making power. Women are also subjected to discrimination and bias in the supply of services, such as credit and technology. Recently, women's equal participation



Photo: UN Environment Programme

in forest management decisions has been secured through co-management committees for protected forest areas. However, women still face social and cultural barriers that hinder them from having a strong voice in these committees.

- Climate change issues are addressed in the draft National Forest Policy of 2016 by recognizing the emergence of environmental and socio-economic changes due to climate change and the loss of forests. The policy spells out commitments to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement through an intended nationally determined contribution by enhancing forest carbon stocks and generating benefits. This is accomplished through mechanisms such as the clean development mechanism (CDM) and the framework to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+). However, the role and leadership of women in mitigating climate change impacts on forestry are not mentioned in the policy document.
- The critical reasons for varying degrees of gender sensitivity in policies and programming are limited capacity in undertaking an intersectional approach to analyse the impacts of climate change and the lack of sex-disaggregated and qualitative data on how women and men use and benefit from forests.

Renewable energy

- The fact that the energy sector continues to lag in terms of equality is due to the absence of a gender mainstreaming strategy. This can be attributed to several factors, including

a focus within energy policies on economic performance and energy production as well as, the technical and male-dominated nature of the sector. Energy policies do not integrate gender considerations in general. None of the energy sector policies focus on the role of women in energy consumption and management.

- Mitigation actions, including the transition to clean energy, primarily focus on technology. As a result, experts are mainly concerned with the project's feasibility or viability, with gender concerns receiving little attention.
- Rural women are disproportionately exposed to energy poverty and energy access challenges. For example, indoor pollution is a severe problem for women and girls in Bangladesh. In addition, women and girls spend considerable time gathering fuel, cooking, and performing other household chores, leading to their time poverty, which is another dimension of gender inequality.
- There are promising initiatives related to renewable energy. Currently, there are 5.5 million installations of solar home systems in predominantly off-grid areas of Bangladesh. Men are primarily employed in the renewable energy sector, while there are opportunities for women to become engaged as technicians and entrepreneurs moving forward.
- Renewable energy sub-sectors offer benefits that can be leveraged to improve women's livelihoods, employment opportunities, and lives. However, they also present challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that women and men benefit equitably.

Recommendations to Ensure Gender Integration in Climate Action

Sensitize and build capacity of key actors

- **Sensitize Members of Parliament and policymakers.** Special efforts should be made to sensitize parliamentarians on climate change and gender equality in policymaking, participation, and communication at international fora like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP sessions; during reporting conducted through national communications to UNFCCC, SDGs, CEDAW; and in planning processes, such as NAP and NDC processes.
- **Build capacity of government stakeholders.** The capacity of government officials on gender-responsive climate action should be improved. This should include government workers at every level, including local government. In addition, capacity building on gender-responsive climate budgeting and upgrading the current manual for 'development project proforma' with greater gender integration is necessary.
- **Strengthen coordination.** Effective coordination among different ministries, departments and agencies is needed to

co-develop gender mainstreamed action plans. Furthermore, when designing any policy and action plan, collaboration among gender experts, climate change experts, and women's rights organizations and climate change organizations is necessary.

- **Increase qualified gender advisers** in national government departments and local government units to increase and improve services for women across different sectors.
- **Promote women's leadership.** Women professionals and leaders, including youth representatives dealing with gender and climate change, must be able to represent different people in climate hot spots and advocate gender mainstreaming in policies and practices. The leadership and voice of women in natural resource management and energy committees should be enhanced rather than merely having their participation ensured.
- **Incorporate a broader definition of gender and intersectionality** from a human rights perspective so that gender-related issues are discussed and climate solutions are designed with the perspectives of transgender and

gender non-binary people taken into account. In addition, the standpoint of indigenous men and women needs to be considered in devising climate change policies and actions so as not to marginalize them or ignore their traditional rights.

Develop research and evidence base

- **Conduct studies on gender-differentiated impacts of climate change.** One of the critical gaps identified in the assessment is the lack of integration of gender equality and climate change in policies and programmes. Studies should be conducted to identify entry points for gender integration across sectors and different population segments at local and national levels. Such deep-dive studies will provide evidence on policy gaps, community-level best practices, and gender-sensitive green growth potential across sectors.
- **Set up multi-foci expert groups.** A 'climate change and gender working group' can be developed with gender focal persons from relevant ministries along with representatives from civil society, academia, NGOs, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities. Such a multi-stakeholder group can organize dialogues and assist in analysing climate change policies and strategies with a gender lens. Such knowledge is essential for building capacity of different agencies to integrate gender in their respective climate interventions, policies, and strategies.
- **Explore business models and develop entrepreneurship.** Emphasis should be given to designing gender-responsive climate actions so that those actions remain economically, socially, and ecologically beneficial for men and women.
- **Bring strong focus on female members of natural resource-dependent households.** Since male dominance in all sectors underplays the essential role of women, particular emphasis should be given to female household members and female-headed households that are dependent on natural resources. A gender-responsive human rights-based approach should change and challenge social norms and practices to ensure gender equality in climate action, breaking away from a narrow sectoral perspective.
- **Develop technical guidelines for promoting gender-mainstreaming in climate change policies and financing.** The BCCSAP draft has proposed to develop technical guidelines for gender mainstreaming in policies. Such guidelines will be useful to build the capacity of

government officials. Such guidelines/standards should consider the following:

- **Support for submission of gender mainstreaming reports** in development activities, international reports and communications
- **Integration of work related to changing social norms and practices with climate action** to maximise the gender-sensitive outcomes of the interventions.
- **Safeguarding of women while designing policy and action interlinking gender and climate change** so that these do not pose an additional burden for women and instead facilitate their leadership

Develop gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- **Standardize gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation frameworks.** All line agencies should use a standard gender responsive monitoring, evaluation, and reporting framework to track gender integration and impacts in respective sectors. It will facilitate the collection, analysis and use of sex-age disaggregated data to strengthen gender-responsive strategy development. Government ministries, departments and related authorities need to be sensitized and capacitated on the proposed guidelines under BCCSAP to enable them to develop gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation framework in climate change activities. Social impacts and a human-rights based approach should be the central focus of this results-based monitoring framework.
- **Develop monitoring and evaluation framework for the gender budget.** The government's initiative on the MTBF for gender-responsive budgeting provides an opportunity to strengthen gender responsive climate financing. The finance division and Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Ministry of Planning should work in a concerted fashion and create an enabling environment to support policy dialogue, capacity development, and pilot projects to make climate finance work for women. Climate finance accountability should be ensured through a systematic and ambitious approach to auditing the gender responsiveness of climate projects and flow of funds. Improvements in fiscal planning and budgeting processes are necessary, this requires undertaking a gender analysis of ongoing processes to identify entry points for strengthening gender-responsive climate finance and tagging accompanying benefits thereof.