

Gender equality and climate change: what issues and lessons from other geographical contexts?

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This insight draws largely from discussions held in a workshop on gender and environmental change in 2014 (a summary of the discussions can be found here: <http://pubs.iied.org/17237IIED.html>), and current work on urban food security with federations of the urban poor in Nairobi and Accra (information on this can be found here: <http://pubs.iied.org/17218IIED.html>).

My first observation is that while there is an increasing attention to women, there is also perhaps less attention to gender relations. Unequal gender relations mean that in many (if not most) cases women are still responsible for activities which are outside the cash economy, but are fundamental for household and individual wellbeing. This means looking after children and sick relatives, cleaning and making sure that there is food on the table.

From a *policy perspective*, ignoring the time needed for these activities and focusing only on productive and resilience-related activities can result in longer working days, which adds on to the burden of unpaid care work which in turn is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and other stresses (for example, higher food prices). Gender-sensitive policies also need to actively engage with issues related to unpaid care work – and this includes access to adequate housing, water, sanitation and basic services.

My second observation is that women are a high proportion of informal food sector street vendors. They play a crucial role in feeding low-income communities, who often lack the space, time and money to cook at home. Informal sector workers are often marginalised, but where they are included in a dialogue with local governments they can play a very active role in improving awareness on nutrition and appropriate diets to their consumers. One good example is that of the street vendors in Dakar.

From a *policy perspective*, encouraging collaboration with women vendors can have a positive impact on current issues such as growing obesity and malnutrition.

My third observation is that in many cases women's inclusion in programmes and initiatives falls short of involving their voice, representation and participation in decision-making. But when women can voice their needs and priorities, and identify the ways to address them, policy-makers may need to re-assess their views. Our work with street vendors and low-income residents of Nairobi and Accra suggests that for the majority of street-vending women the real issues are access to water, sanitation and solid waste management – in other words, being able to do their jobs in a clean environment so that food safety is guaranteed.

From a *policy perspective*, women's voice, representation and participation in decision-making can be incredibly effective and have positive impacts on whole communities. But this requires time – time for grassroots organisations to get together, identify their priorities and engage in a dialogue with local governments on how to address them.

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