

## **Gendering, empowerment and inclusion**

### *Ways to strengthen female participation in meeting the COP21 goals in developing countries*

It is well known that climate change affects everyone - but not equally. Women face unique and in some aspects disproportionate challenges as consequences of climate change. Acknowledging this is vital in order to develop an effective action plan on climate change that does not fail to include women – as victims and as agents.

Climate change and the conditions for women are closely related. Women are significantly more vulnerable to climate changes in all aspects, physical, economical and social. Women are at the forefront of combating the climate change effects, overrepresented in all groups and all aspects that face the most pregnant consequences of climate change. For instance, women are more dependent on natural resources threatened by climate change for their livelihood. Additionally, poverty and the impact of climate change are intertwined, and women are disproportionately represented among the estimated one billion people living in extreme poverty.

These facts point to proclaiming that women are at the centre of the climate change issue. However, in the policy making process, in institutional and economic spheres, they are in the margin.

This policy paper will examine how the United States and Sweden can help ensure that women in developing countries participate equitably in helping their countries meet COP21 commitments.

The COP21 goals are not only about counteracting global warming but these goals also imply doing so in a sustainable way that lifts people out of poverty, promotes human rights and effectively enhances life conditions on earth. Given these premises and emphasized perspectives there are two words that should guide a fruitful policy direction: *Empowerment* and *inclusion*. Climate change action must consociate with empowering and including women at all stages, all sectors and all levels. We will propose one core policy with three different approaches – gendering, empowerment and inclusion – that at different levels with different instrument all aim at recognizing

the indispensable role of women.

## **Women and climate change – a brief background**

In our analysis we have identified what we consider the most pressing areas of the climate change issue with respect to the situation for and the potential role of women in developing countries. These are poverty, energy and agriculture.

The people living in the poorest and most climate change sensitive areas in this world are exposed to extreme dangers. Air pollution, bad sanitation, direct exposure to the smoke and particles generated by biomass fuel energy production are some examples. The major part of energy production in developing countries, and especially in rural areas, comes from traditional biomass fuels such as wood, charcoal and agricultural wastes – and the responsibility of collecting and managing these resources are traditionally that of women or young girls. The task is physically wearying and time-consuming, and the time and effort women put into it results in less opportunities to other work, education, engagement in other public activities or even in politics. It is foremost women that are fettered by chores closely tied to the home and a society dependent on fossil fuels. A transition to cleaner energy resources, like for example solar energy, would not only give positive effects globally in the long run long-term but also immediate effects for those most affected locally. Here, women can play a crucial part and benefit immensely from it.

Women constitute 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries and at least 50 percent in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (numbers around 60 percent are often presented as well). The number of land holdings by women is however not even close to matching their participation in the workforce, with women representing fewer than 20 percent of all agricultural holders in the developing world, and in several countries in Africa and Asia less than five percent. These are strict statistical numbers of course that do not cover the additional problems such as discrimination in accessing credit market that aggravates possibilities for rural women to purchase productive inputs, leading to significantly worse conditions for efficient production and yield in comparison to men.

As is evident, the experience and the untapped potential of women with regards to climate change challenges are related to and overall similar to that of the relationship between women and development. As has been said by former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan:

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”.

### **Towards strengthened female participation**

The subject of women's participation on climate change issues is truly complex, meaning of course that there is no small set of policies that in themselves can help ensure that women are involved in the crucial steps towards meeting the COP21 goals. However, there are numerous ways to help improve the situation for women's participation in developing countries, of which we suggest three mutually dependent strategies constituting one general policy direction in what follows.

We suggest focusing the effort to expand and deepen female participation in meeting the COP21 goals in developing countries on three areas that aim at different levels as well as sectors of society, over varying periods of time. The wider scope of attempts at solutions is necessary, since complex and deep-rooted problems must be met with the appropriate context-oriented means.

We propose first to actively push for the *gendering of climate change issues* on the international level, secondly to work to *empower women* through targeted aid and support for local initiatives and businesses, and lastly to strive to *include women* within the political sphere and therefore strengthen women's influence on climate change issues.

### **Gendering of climate change issues**

Gender mainstreaming has long been the primary strategy within the United Nations working towards the goal of gender equality. The strategy intends to take gender into account in any planned policy action regardless of the issue area and level. While the strategy is not entirely unproblematic and has been criticized, we argue that climate change issues have prevalent gender dimensions that are not sufficiently considered,

making this policy area one where gender mainstreaming would successfully leave room for more efficient solutions in the future. The active gendering of climate change issues would work as an overarching long-term approach to complement the more practically oriented solution proposals.

We hold that the United States and Sweden should *actively push for the establishment of international regimes that emphasize the importance of recognizing the situation for and role of women in issue-specific areas* related to climate change, for instance regarding the situation for female climate change refugees. With pushing for a long-term normative shift within the international community, the United States and Sweden can play an important part in paving the way for future action.

### **Empowering women**

The International Center for Research on Women defines economic empowerment as when a woman “has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions”. However, the term empowerment is broader than that. There is an obvious connection between access to sustainable, renewable energy sources and women empowerment. Empowering women - enhancing their life conditions and lifting them out of poverty – and targeting environmental issues, combating the effects of climate change – are just two sides of the same coin. Fighting climate change eases women’s situation, and inversely, supporting women in environmentally vulnerable and economically poor areas is thus a climate change action.

According to *Solar Sister*, a nonprofit initiative that is working to eradicate energy poverty by empowering women with economic opportunity to be entrepreneurs of bringing clean air technologies to communities across rural Africa, the income of self-employed rural women with access to energy is over twice that of their counterparts without access to energy. For rural female salary workers, access to energy is correlated with 59 percent higher wages. Research has also shown that women reinvest a higher percentage into their families than do men, making the economic inclusion of women a great positive economic impact both locally and nationally. This further emphasizes the link between *sustainability, economic development and women*. Recognizing this relationship will enable more gender-sensitive and more

effective responses to mitigate and adapt in the context of a changing climate.

The effort to help enhance women's participation in meeting the COP21 goals in developing countries must have its core in the individual woman. This means not stipulating the final goals but rather providing women the means to make informed and independent choices regarding their business and livelihood, being able to autonomously set the frame for how to contribute to sustainability. Therefore, actions must be focused on facilitating women's equal access to information, technology and equipment as well as economic opportunity in the form of credit and markets.

At local level, we urge that the United States and Sweden support programs and projects that engage women and which use their knowledge and capacities to combat the effects of climate change. This can be done through *cooperation with as well as financial and technological support for* income-generating initiatives within the concerned sectors. This can for instance be done through financing start-ups, providing microloans or granting assistance to initiatives that aim at *boosting female entrepreneurship*. Moreover, we propose that the United States and Sweden give *targeted aid* to developing countries to be invested in strengthening businesses as well as to promote women's equal right to education, thereby enhancing female knowledge on for instance energy and technology.

Parallel to support for local initiative, the United States and Sweden should *jointly expand investment and cooperative research focused on developing new technologies and products* for energy extraction as well as water purification that is sustainable, user friendly and affordable. This is a strategy efficient foremost in the long-run, but equally important as direct assistance, particularly as the development of available technology also determines the success of the direct aid itself. Especially since we have earlier emphasized the importance of not stipulating the conditions for any woman in developing countries, developed countries must contribute according to expertise and resources. We therefore believe that this is where technologically and scientifically advanced countries such as the United States and Sweden should put the most effort. Technology provides the instruments to meet the unique and pressing needs for the women at the climate change forefront, allowing them to take an active

role in combating the threats.

### **Including women – at the local, national and international level**

Equally essential as the need for women to independently set the frames for their lives and livelihood while participating in meeting the COP21 goals, is the right to influence policies on these issues from a decision-making perspective. Women are categorically underrepresented in decision-making, which is a problem in itself, but also because of the potential benefits it hinders. As put by H.E. Mary Robinson, United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Change and President of “Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice”:

“Women are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, but their participation in decision making at all levels of climate action remains limited. The inclusion and involvement of women in decision-making is not only a fundamental right, but it also results in positive outcomes for men and women and for the planet.”

We stress the need to make room for female agency within any decision-making body handling these topics, allowing women to rightfully influence the policies that so gravely affect their everyday lives. As we have earlier underlined, any positive change preferably comes from the people affected themselves, which is why we suggest that the United States and Sweden should *establish and continue contact with civil society organizations and grassroots movements that work with women's equal democratic participation in developing countries*. Support for such organizations should proceed from local knowledge and based on the stated needs of those active in working locally with these issues.

However, to equitably use one's influence one must be provided information and education, which is vital for the ability to make use of one's democratic rights. Thus we recommend, in addition to our previous suggestion, that the United States and Sweden *work to create platforms and fora on the topics of environment, energy and sustainability where women can exchange knowledge, ideas and visions*. These can be sector specific, with international exchange between for instance companies and businesses, or issue specific, focused on exchange, between for instance universities from a number of countries. The United States and Sweden - separately but especially

with joint forces - have extraordinary opportunities to bring together women in these matters from all parts of the world, creating networks and linkages between women with different experiences from all fronts of climate change. As put by UN Women, “women are not only vulnerable to climate change but they are also effective actors or *agents of change* in relation to both mitigation and adaptation”

### **Cooperation for participation**

Women have not chosen to stand at the frontline of climate change, but inevitably still do. The role of women is that of disproportionately affected victims, but also as agents for change, with essential knowledge and potential in combating climate change. The initiatives proposed in this policy paper all aim at strengthening the individual woman in her context, allowing her to fully participate in meeting the COP21 goals. The United States and Sweden can do a lot to help ensuring that women play their rightful part in determining the success of the agreement.