Issue Linkage in the Climate Regime
Gender Policies in Climate Finance

By Dr. Gabriel Chan, Lindsey Forsberg, Peder Garnaas-Halvorson, Samantha Holte, and DaSeul Kim

CONTACT Gabriel Chan | gabechan@umn.edu

OVERVIEW

At the international policy and institutional level, the goal of gender equality has been increasingly linked with climate change under the assumption that linkage will create important synergies and co-benefits in climate change adaptation and mitigation. However, there is some concern that the simultaneous pursuit of multiple objectives across many actors, policy areas, and institutions will dilute responsibility and will make coordination more challenging in working towards gender and climate change goals. The institutions that provide finance for developing countries to address climate change (e.g. UN climate funds, World Bank climate funds, various bilateral aid funds) play a unique role in translating the gender-climate linkage into practice both by incorporating gender equality goals into a set of cross-cutting social and environmental objectives and by directing funding towards projects that have a clear climate and gender focus.

Over the last 15-20 years, climate funds have adopted gender policies guiding their governance, project selection, project support and implementation, and evaluation practices. Such policies aim to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of both gender and climate outcomes, but little research has evaluated the capacity of climate institutions to realize both gender and climate goals or to understand how policies are being translated into practice. As the gender policies of climate funds increasingly affect the global practice of mitigation and adaptation, as well as the flow of billions of dollars in public and private climate finance, it is important to consider the advantages, limitations, and best practices of closer integration of gender equality goals within the international climate policy regime.

A theoretical literature exists on the potential benefits and disadvantages of the linkage between gender and the environment. However, in evaluating the effectiveness of gender policies in the context of climate funds, practice has gone far ahead of scholarship. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and women’s advocacy groups have lobbied international organizations to adopt a range of gender policies, which are now being operationalized across levels of practice. Our goal is to step back and examine the rationale behind these policies, how they differ across funds, and how they are translated into practice.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is defined as: “the inclusion of gender into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.”¹ The concept of ‘mainstreaming gender’ grew from the 1970s onward as women, gender relations, and economic development became conceptually linked as a method of advancing gender equality worldwide. Gender considerations have since been incorporated into the policies of many development aid organizations, INGOs, and national governments.

Gender mainstreaming across policy arenas and institutions faces at least four main challenges: (1) gender considerations may be integrated into the status quo rather than transforming institutions; (2) there can be a disconnect between language used in policy and the realities of practice; (3) the goals of gender mainstreaming face difficulties in measurement and evaluation; and (4) implementation of gender mainstreaming requires context-specific considerations that can preclude a globally uniform approach.

The linkage of women and the environment emerged in parallel with gender mainstreaming in the international development context in the 1970-80s from ecofeminist philosophy which characterized women as spiritually linked to the environment, the “givers of life” and thus the “rightful caretakers” of nature.”² A narrative around gender gradually emerged in the climate regime along with deepening linkages between climate and a broader set of social issues. The narrative claims that women are more vulnerable to climate change due to the high percentage of women in poverty, constraining cultural gender roles, and limited financial/social control over natural resources. Critiques of the gender-climate narrative focus on the conflation of gender as the cause of vulnerability rather than as a correlated factor, but the linkage is politically useful and persists in the global discourse despite this critique.³
The effectiveness of climate finance in achieving gender goals can be influenced both by explicit gender policies for funding decisions and less formal practices in implementation. Factors affecting climate finance effectiveness in achieving gender co-benefits include: (1) fund governance structures, including gender representation, the existence of a gender focal point or gender team, and gender-responsive training; (2) the level of funding available to institutions for supporting projects and the application of gender-focused criteria in funding decisions; and (3) measurement and evaluation practices, including gender-disaggregated baseline and outcome measurements and gender-specific outcomes.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

The increasing acceptance of the gender-climate linkage is reflected in the development of gender policies in most—but not all—multilateral and bilateral climate funds. As a critical mechanism for the multilateral regime to more equitably and effectively respond to climate change, these funds represent a potentially transformational force in international development. But they have faced significant challenges during their inception and initial implementation. Here we propose a set of preliminary takeaways (for issue linkage generally and for gender-linkage specifically) based on our review of scholarship and practice to inform future research and policy.

**Issue Linkage in the Climate Regime**

- Climate action operates as a “regime complex” with many institutions across scales shaping policy. The possibility of “forum shopping” may dilute responsibility and make coordination challenging, especially when linking multiple objectives. However, a diversity of approaches also creates opportunities for learning.
- Issue linkage can take many forms: (1) single institutions working toward multiple objectives simultaneously; (2) multiple institutions working for separate goals with loose coordination in implementation; (3) a single institution working toward a primary goal with one or more secondary goals (“co-benefits”) that shape implementation significantly, on the margins, or not at all.
- There is an opportunity cost of not linking other social issues to the primary goals of the climate regime. If the world is to meet the 2°C goal of the Paris Agreement, trillions of dollars will need to be mobilized in the form of finance, technology, and building organizational capacity. If these resources are channeled under existing institutions, current power dynamics will be reinforced and the opportunity to restructure these dynamics for social progress, including greater gender equality, will be lost.

**Gender-Climate Issue Linkage**

- The way climate institutions engage with national and regional entities for project implementation varies widely. As a result, the interpretation of gender equality in institutions at different scales varies widely as well.
- As climate funds operate under multiple objectives, there must be broad acknowledgement that achieving these objectives will require more than just finance. Many multilateral funds include requirements for national and regional capacity building around gender equality, but capacity-building efforts must be robust and well-funded themselves to be successful.
- The virtue and vulnerability narrative for women is outdated but still appears widely in many climate institutions. A broader recognition that gender is not the root cause of women’s vulnerability to climate change may be required for transformational impact.

**CONTINUING QUESTIONS**

As we continue with our research, we are seeking insights from experts and practitioners on the following questions:

- Does gender mainstreaming in climate policies have an impact on the effectiveness of climate funds in meeting their mitigation and adaptation goals?
- What are the potential conflicts between gender norms reflected in gender policies set at the international level and national-level norms relevant in implementation?
- What evidence regarding gendered differences in vulnerability, systemic inequality, and societal roles is required to inform the gender policies of climate funds?
- What are the advantages and limitations of climate funds in pursuing the goal of gender equality and what roles can other institutions in the climate regime play?

---


The views expressed in this brief are the views of the authors and not the University of Minnesota or the Center for Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy. A full paper on the ideas in this brief will be available in late 2018. Please visit chan-lab.umn.edu or contact gabechan@umn.edu