

# Gender-Responsive Climate Mitigation in Southeast Asia

## A Role for Participatory Governance

Eric Zusman and So-Young Lee, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

E-mail: zusman@iges.or.jp

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### 1. Introduction

The adverse effects of climate change often fall more heavily on women than men (Demetriades and Esplen 2008, Terry 2009, Alston 2015, Gupta 2015). This is partially due to long-running inequalities and natural resource dependences—women provide anywhere from 50% to 80% of the world’s food production, but own less than 10% of its land (UNDP, 2009). It is further attributable to vulnerabilities after extreme events—women and girls can be more susceptible to breakdowns in the social order that often accompany these events (Neumayer and Plümpner 2007). For these reasons, the challenges women face in adapting to climate change have tended to overshadow the contributions women make to *mitigating* climate change (Hostettler et al. 2015, Leach et al. 2016).

Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that women are both capable of adapting to and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. Part of the reason for this recognition involves reforms to the international climate regime. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), for instance, has a gender mandate at its core and is arguably the best example of several climate funds that are increasingly promoting gender-responsive climate finance for both mitigation and adaptation (GCF 2015, Schalatek 2015). The recently agreed to Gender Action Plan (GAP) at the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 23) also has as one of its five priorities to increase climate-related financial resources that integrate gender priorities and reflect the needs of women and girls (UNFCCC 2017). Lastly, many countries are including the references to gender in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) (UNFCCC 2015).

There is nonetheless a possibility that the recent progress within countries stops with references in the NDCs. One way to harness the energy of women in mitigating climate change is to make climate governance more participatory at the national level. In many environmental policy areas, participatory forms of governance has been found to incorporate wider-ranging values, accumulate richer information, and generate more equitable and effective outcomes (Fischer 2000, Steele 2001, Beierle 2002, Pellizzoni 2003, Richards et al. 2004, Koontz and Thomas 2006, Newig 2007, and Reed 2008). In 2013, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) initiated a technical assistance project entitled *Harnessing Climate Change Mitigation Initiatives to Benefit Women*

that sought to make mitigation more participatory in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> The remainder of this article describes how the ADB technical assistance—financed by the Nordic Development Fund (SNV) and jointly implemented by IGES and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation—operated in those three countries.

### 2. Climate Change Mitigation Initiatives to Benefit Women

The technical assistance project worked on three different levels: at the first level, the project was working with policymakers in gender and climate institutions to equip them with the skills and knowledge to mainstream gender into climate policies. At the next level, they helped ensuring that the policies contained language and provisions that supported local initiatives that empowered women to mitigate climate change and deliver other co-benefits. On the ground level, the technical assistance helped to initiate many of the pilot project activities described previously that offered tangible evidence of the multiple benefits from a value chain of gender-responsive interventions.

This multilevel approach was not only consistent with trends supporting the growing supplies of international climate finance but helped build leadership skills and strengthened participation to capacities to articulate demands for those resources. For example, in Lao PDR, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment had not factored gender into the national climate change action plan. In consequence, the lack of consideration of how projects might include and/or affect women’s lives could easily be overlooked. Through the project, gender was integrated into a review of the 2010–2020 National Climate Action Plan. This was also facilitated by the formal invitation to a representative of the Laos Women’s Union to participate in the Technical Working Group on Climate Change. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries’ Gender Mainstreaming Policy Strategic Framework lacked a climate element, whereas the Ministry’s Climate Action Plan did not include gender issues. Following the project’s gender-sensitive thrust, the Climate Action Plan references gender and the Gender Mainstreaming Policy Strategic Framework to climate mitigation.

The project empowered women and enabled them to bring benefits to their communities. In Cambodia,

the project has helped women set up low-carbon technology businesses and partnered with the private sector in a pilot initiative that trained women as sales agents for fuel-efficient cook stoves. Not only did this improve stove access, it also helped enhance operations in the private sector. With women now representing over 70% of newly trained sales agents, Cambodians have learnt that supporting women's access to technology can be more equitable and efficient.

In Vietnam, women masons were trained to build household biodigesters in Dong Hoi, a coastal city vulnerable to numerous climate risks. This effort also deepened the use and benefits of biodigesters as well as business development and sales skills. These small but strategic activities enabled participants to proactively respond to climate change. The project has also created the opportunity to the National Biogas Programme to expand potential benefits to women producers and users of biogas technologies. This has been achieved by updating training materials and methods to make them less intimidating to potential women trainees and enhancing the capacity of male trainers, who were previously inexperienced in training women masons.

### 3. Concluding Thoughts

The pilots involved women in concrete on-the-ground initiatives that built knowledge and skills to mitigate climate change while earning other livelihood benefits. Simultaneously, the institutional capacity building and policy mainstreaming empowered women and women's groups, engaging them in decisions that could help achieve longer-lasting results. The project concluded that these multi levels of activities reinforced each other—institutions supported policies that encouraged pilot initiatives.

The next step is transitioning from a grant-financed project to securing larger private flows for gender-responsive climate mitigation. This is particularly important since, "As of 2013–2014, only 2% ODA to these sectors targeted gender equality as a principal objective" (OECD 2017: 52). This transition will also arguably require institutionalizing the participation of women in climate change mitigation at multiple levels. This ADB technical assistance offers some insights into how these can be achieved in three diverse contexts, leading to an environmentally and socially sustainable policy.

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#### Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Additional information about the project, including relevant knowledge products, instructional videos, and closing workshop details, can be found here: <https://gender-climate.iges.jp/>; last accessed on December 22, 2017.