

Gender Equality and Climate Mitigation Finance: The current literature

Overview

In a literature review of twenty-six documents related to gender equality and climate mitigation finance a majority of the sources/authors recognize that gender equality's integration with mitigation is limited and uneven at best, and there is a deficit of knowledge in terms of the connections between gender and climate change in general (Aguilar 2013; Gender Action, Oxfam, WEDO 2011; Oxfam 2011; Skutsch 2002). Because of the prevailing scientific and technological approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, it is the scientific and technological measures that are preferred over measures addressing behavioral and social differences (Lambrou 2006). While mitigation is crucial to addressing climate change so that its impacts do not continue to exacerbate existing inequalities, to date, many mitigation interventions have been approached in a gender neutral/gender blind manner (UNDP 2011, Peralta 2008). This is visible in some of the largest financial mechanisms of mitigation projects, including the clean development mechanism (CDM).

CDM

The CDM, having a longer history than most mitigation initiatives and having financed over 6000 projects since its operationalization, has recognized that its prevailing focus on quantitative carbon credits is exclusionary of a number of stakeholders, and has therefore begun to adapt some of its practices (UNFCCC 2012). These include more focus on least developed countries and small island developing states, as well as on local communities and household activities, which may be more conducive to participation from both women and men (Etuati 2008, Schalatek 2009).

Those who have benefitted most from mitigation projects are middle income countries due to the large, industrial projects they are able to absorb and from which they are able to gain carbon credits. However, as the CDM has recognized, when there is a focus on household level and community based projects, there are more opportunities for participation from communities, smaller entities and, particularly, women who may not have been participating in the CDM opportunities previously. The CDM has done this through bundling projects which can allow for a number of small projects to be bundled together to provide the mitigation credits and also can allow smaller projects that have community co-benefits (Schalatek 2009). Many publications addressed this bundling as a way to approach future mitigation projects so that they are more inclusive and reap co-benefits, which make them more sustainable in countries moving toward low-carbon development pathways (Gender CC 2008, Schalatek 2009, 2011, 2012; UNFCCC 2012).

However, the vast majority of mitigation projects continue to be large scale and industrial; these projects are usually gender neutral/blind and focus on greenhouse gas emission offsets rather than sustainable development. The Finland Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UNFCCC Secretariat have tried to address the gender-blindness of mitigation projects in the CDM by suggesting tools to identify projects that may have a positive impact on women's empowerment and gender equality (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2010, UNFCCC 2012). However, it remains a question

whether or not these large scale projects can be gender-sensitive or should be gender mainstreamed; or perhaps smaller scale projects should be given greater consideration for mitigation investments, which may be more impactful in terms of sustainable development/low-carbon development pathways.

Cookstoves

As taking a gender-sensitive approach to mitigation projects is fairly new, there are many gaps in the research on this issue. However, one of the most researched gender-sensitive mitigation project-types is energy efficient/renewable energy cookstoves. Because women are often in a certain role in the household, managing food resources and cooking, cookstove projects usually target and involve women from the outset (UNFCCC 2012, Alstone et al 2011, Karlsson & Rojas 2013). The mitigation aspect of cookstove projects are intended to reduce emissions from wood and forestry or oil use by replacing these fuels sources with renewable energy such as biogases or solar energy. Co-benefits of having cookstoves mean less time spent for women and girls collecting firewood and other fuel sources for cooking and reduced/elimination of indoor air pollution, which is created by soot from the wood/coal sources, resulting in better health of the entire household, especially women who are cooking. Indirect impacts include more time and better health for participating in the formal economy/getting an education (SEI 2013, Alstone et al 2011, Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves 2013).

The potential of carbon credits from cookstove projects can exceed 1 billion tons of CO₂ equivalents per year, according to researchers (Mueller et al, 2011). However, more research needs to be done to improve methodologies that can verify emissions reductions from cookstoves. So far, the GHG emissions reductions that have been measured from cookstoves are CO₂ but if non-CO₂ GHG emissions are measured there could be even greater GHG emissions reductions from cookstoves (SEI 2013). Therefore investments in cookstove projects seem to imply a win-win situation for improving the livelihoods of women and girls and reducing GHG emissions significantly.

It must be noted that while cookstoves have been heralded as a great way to gain women's participation in mitigation and energy projects, other activities in which women are involved should also be included in energy efficiency investments. Such activities often require large amounts of time and heat energy and include pumping water, agricultural production, processing food, baking, brewing beer, making soap and shea products, street lighting and communication technologies (Karlsson and Rojas 2013).

Rural Electrification

Another successful intervention that has been particularly gender-sensitive is rural electrification with renewable energy. Often done in synergy with cookstoves, rural electrification projects have targeted women in many cases (Alstone 2011, Schalatek 2009). Women's participation in renewable energy installations has been evidenced and showcased by UN organizations in which women are specifically trained to be solar technicians and entrepreneurs. As women are responsible for maintaining solar panels and/or other renewable energy products used in the household, they are not only benefitting from using these products, but they are also gaining

knowledge from these projects (UNDP 2011). Outside of low-carbon development, similar co-benefits for women and children arise from rural electrification as from cookstoves. In addition, women can become entrepreneurs for selling and installing the renewable energy products and serving as technicians, giving them an opportunity to earn money and join a profitable market (Alstone 2011). However, some of these approaches are very top down without much of a participatory, bottom up or learning from women approach. While there are some partnerships recommended for the empowerment of women, most are more for the benefit of the market instead. With a focus on the benefit of the market first and foremost, the actual benefit to women can be lost.

REDD+/Forestry

A mitigation initiative that is receiving and promises to receive large investments and financing is REDD+. So far, gender considerations have been integrated into REDD+ at the international level mainly in the form of safeguards. Recognizing that land tenure can play a huge role in whether or not land can be used for REDD+ purposes, it is important that forest dependent groups, as well as groups dependent on agriculture for their food security and livelihoods, are safeguarded against instances of possible harmful results of REDD+ processes and projects (e.g., eviction from land). In many places women aren't afforded the right to own land, although they may have access to the land and are often traditionally stewards of the natural resources (Bäthge 2010). To protect communities from harmful possibilities of REDD+ application, decision 1/CP.16 established a set of safeguards that take into account gender considerations. A recent report by the Women's Environment and Development Organization and the REDD+ SES (Social and Environmental Standards) Secretariat, drawing on action research done in four countries, reveals what it means to have gender considerations in REDD+ safeguards (Quesada 2013). Having these safeguards can not only help to make sure that the REDD+ projects will not be harmful to local communities but also that local communities can be afforded the opportunity to be involved in REDD+ projects.

Conclusions

Common ground

Gender-sensitive mitigation projects tend to:

Focus on small-scale, local-level, community-based, household actions

Reduce barriers and develop safeguards for participation of groups rendered vulnerable or marginalized

Include capacity building and training programs to implement and sustain mitigation activities

Gaps

Gender blind implementation of large scale mitigation projects, which are often assumed to be gender neutral

Currently only a small subset of funded mitigation projects are gender-sensitive and attuned to women's participation

Gender-sensitive mitigation projects unevenly address gender equality; systematic inclusion of the issue as well as monitoring and evaluation are needed

Recommendations

Better enabling conditions may encourage investment in mitigation projects that have gender-sensitive approaches and implementation. Such conditions could include strong women's networks, gender-sensitive policies and political will and technical capacity and knowledge among governments and key stakeholders on the gender dimension of mitigation (Quesada 2013).

Mitigation projects can be screened beforehand for their potential to include or address gender equality co-benefits (UNFCCC 2012, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2010).

Standards could be put in place, such as WOCAN's women's carbon standard, to understand how a mitigation project might have positive co-benefits and impacts in particular areas, including women's increased income/assets, shifts in time use, access to education and knowledge, political empowerment, increased food security and local health (2013).

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