

A sustainable future and healthy environment for all - on the shoulders of women or men?

Nairobi, 25 May 2016 – Gender inequalities, such as weak rights to own land and reduced access to energy, water and sanitation facilities for women, have a negative impact on human health, the environment and sustainable development, according to a new report released today at the second United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2).

The summary report on the links between gender and the environment, the *Global Gender and Environment Outlook The Critical Issues* builds on the work of hundreds of women and men in the scientific sector, academia, governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international and civil society organizations, and other entities. It is an abridged version of the first comprehensive global assessment on Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO) which will be introduced later this year.

Environmental change affects the lives of men and women in different ways due to existing gender dynamics and inequalities, the report finds.

In addition to gender, adverse impacts can be compounded by factors such as age, geographical location, socio-economic conditions and other vulnerabilities. Varying roles and status within society can affect the coping strategies and choices women and men have available to them in becoming agents of change in sustainable development.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said, “Virtually everywhere in the world, environmental change has different impacts on women and men. Gender also has a role in determining how – and sometimes whether – people are able to act as agents of change on their own natural environments.

“Perhaps recognizing this reality, the poet Maya Angelou has called on us ‘to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes’. For me/us, these include people such as Rachel Carson, the author of *Silent Spring*, and Professor Wangari Maathai, who founded the Greenbelt movement in Kenya.

“It also includes the villagers in India who started the Chipko movement against deforestation, as well as the many people around the world who are protesting environmental degradation and the effects of climate change.” **Rights to land, natural resources and biodiversity** Natural resources underpin livelihoods for the vast majority of local populations worldwide. Persistent restrictions imposed on access to natural resources by certain communities (and groups of people) are examples of the structural inequalities and discrimination that can potentially destabilize a peaceful society.

This is most evident with respect to land tenure, but also extends to access and usage rights for renewable resources such as water, as well as equitable distribution of benefits from extractive resources including minerals, metals, timber and oil and gas.

According to the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index, in only 37 per cent of 160 countries do women and men have equal rights to own, use and control land. Addressing issues of gender and other inequalities related to sustainable environmental and natural resource access, participation and decision-making can further efforts toward lasting peace and development.

Access to food, energy, water and sanitation

Unpaid care work by women and girls is also of particular relevance in terms of their access to food, energy, water and sanitation. In both rural and urban areas, particularly in urban slums and low-income neighbourhoods, lack of basic infrastructure and of energy, water and sanitation services leads to time poverty and social and economic pressures.

Women tend to be the primary energy, water and sanitation managers in most developing countries. Together with children, they bear a disproportionate burden with respect to finding and fetching water and fuel.

The food and nutrition security of women and girls can be disproportionately compromised because women assume a great responsibility for feeding their families and often their communities, while they often eat last and eat least.

Although women produce a significant proportion of food in the developing world, mainly through smallholder farming, they remain the worst fed and most undernourished due to cultural and social norms that give preference to men and boys. Thus, food and nutrition security for women and girls is of foremost importance.

Well-being: climate change, sustainable consumption and production, and health

The impacts of climate change, such as biodiversity loss and constraints on access to productive and natural resources, amplify existing gender inequalities and jeopardize the well-being of all.

Climate change and variability reveal the fragility, the under-valuing and the precariousness of gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities, which shape the nature and extent of exposure, sensitivity and impacts. The gender-differentiated consequences of climate change can intensify the constraints that place women who rely on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods at a disadvantage.

As agricultural work becomes more labour-intensive or alternative sources of food and income need to be found, the burden of additional work often falls on women. Climate- and disaster-related health risks and water and fuel scarcity further add to women's unpaid care work.

The impacts of environmental and climate challenges on family and community well-being (and on women's unpaid care work) are especially severe when health facilities and services are unavailable or unaffordable.

Women's empowerment is essential to build resilience and adapt to climate change. Gender-responsive climate change policy needs to be sensitive to the nuances of local and intra-household dynamics in efforts to mitigate and transform these patterns, as well as farsighted enough to support building resilience and preventing these gendered impacts from occurring.

Overall Recommendations from the GGEO report

- Existing environmental and gender commitments by governments need to be followed up and effectively implemented;
- Adequate funding and resources will contribute to improvement and progress in developing

- and implementing gender-sensitive environmental policies;
- Gender-sensitive environmental assessments are needed at national and international levels;
 - Gender-disaggregated information is essential;
 - It is also essential to promote and support women’s voices, leadership and agency;
 - It is important to bring men and boys, as well as women and girls, into the gender-and-environment conversation;
 - Enabling conditions for large-scale transformations with respect to the environment and gender need to be created;
 - Issues of unpaid work and time poverty need to be addressed.

About GGEO

UNEP made a commitment at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 to undertake this *Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO)*, recognizing the importance of highlighting gender from an environmental perspective and in response to a call from the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment. The purpose of the GGEO is to review links between gender and the environment, and to inform policy decisions aimed at increasing gender equality.

About UNEA

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world’s most powerful decision-making body on the environment—the de-facto “Parliament for the Environment”—and responsible for tackling some of the most critical issues of our time. The assembly holds the power to dramatically change the fate of the planet and improve the lives of everyone, impacting everything from health to national security, from the plastic in our oceans to the trafficking of wildlife. Thanks to UNEA, the environment is now considered one of the world’s most pressing concerns alongside other major global issues such as peace, security, finance and health.

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