

GENDER ACTION LINK: Gender International Finance Climate Change



"Women are the most vulnerable and the best poised to curb the effect of climate change" (WEDO 2007).

The IFIs and commercial banks, through continuous investments in fossil-fuels, increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and loss of biodiversity and livelihoods. Despite public IFI commitments to invest in renewable energies and commercial bank promises to reduce environmental degradation in collective agreements like the Equator Principles, both public and private banks continue to invest in oil, gas, dams and biofuel projects that exacerbate climate change.

Recent studies reveal that some private banks now indirectly finance more GHG emissions than entire countries (BankTrack 2007). Similarly, the World Bank Group increased fossil fuel investments by 94% between 2007 – 2008, spending over \$3 billion on coal, oil and gas in 2008 (Bank Information Center 2008). These trends belie the World Bank's emerging image as a 'climate bank' with two new Climate Investment Funds (CIFs) introduced in 2008 (Clean Technology Fund and Strategic Climate Fund). Like other IFI loans, CIF investments will only increase developing country debt and undermine global efforts to achieve gender and climate justice.

In every society on Earth, these 'dirty' investments disproportionately impact women. Gender disparities in decision-making, property rights, access to information, and unequal divisions of labor mean women bear the brunt of IFI and commercial bank-financed climate change impacts (COP10 2004). Droughts, floods and natural disasters leave women uniquely vulnerable to livelihood loss, disease, violence and even death.

✓ **Natural Disasters:** Where women face social and economic disadvantages, women die exponentially more often than men from natural disasters (Neumayer & Pluempner 2007). In the 2004 Tsunami, 70 - 80% of all deaths were women. Of the 140,000 who died from the 1991 cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, 90% were women (IUCN 2004, a). And during Hurricane Katrina in the US (2005), African-American women faced the greatest survival obstacles (Araujo and Quesada-Aguilar 2004).

These disparities in disaster mortality rates link directly to social and economic factors. In many societies, boys and men are more likely to hear warning signals in public spaces where they work, receive preferential treatment in rescue efforts, and have priority access to food aid (Neumayer & Pluempner 2007). In Sri Lanka, more boys learn to swim and climb trees, which helped them survive the 2004 Tsunami (Oxfam 2005).

Unfortunately, the IFIs have done little to meet their commitments to promote gender equality in the face of climate change. A recent Gender Action study of IFI reconstruction investments in post-tsunami Indonesia found that "despite firm [World Bank-administered Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDF)] commitments to address gender issues, no MDF projects include gender equality goals in the project objectives, and most projects fail to integrate gender issues in their analyses of the project's social context and monitoring and evaluation" (Gender Action 2008).

✓ **Agriculture:** The IFIs and commercial banks regularly finance infrastructure and extractive projects that seize and contaminate agricultural lands (Whirled Bank Group 2008). Because women constitute 70 - 80% of the world's farmers, they are often first to lose their livelihoods in affected communities and last to find new work in formal sectors. Additionally, women and girls in many rural societies spend up to three hours per day fetching water and collecting firewood. Droughts, floods and desertification exacerbated by climate change make women spend more time on these tasks, diminishing their ability to participate in wage-earning activities (IUCN 2004, b). Commercial banks and IFIs that only assess agricultural patterns at the household level fail to address these gender injustices (Action Aid 2008).

✓ **Disease and Care Work:** Because women worldwide conduct the majority of care work within households, increasing illness from natural disasters, water contamination or famine means increased work burdens for many women. It also means increased exposure to disease, particularly Malaria and HIV/AIDS (IUCN 2007). Despite these realities, the World Bank recently reduced spending to improve reproductive health and combat HIV/AIDS, and other IFIs spent a mere fraction of one percent of their budgets on these critical issues (Gender Action 2007 a).

✓ **Conflict:** Droughts, floods and soil erosion can lead to conflict over natural resources. Droughts alone increased civil war by 50% in some regions (WEDO 2007). During conflict, women face heightened domestic violence, sexual intimidation, human trafficking and rape (Davis et al. 2005). IFIs like the World Bank deepen these impacts through gender insensitive post-conflict reconstruction interventions and policy reforms such as public expenditure cutbacks that further impoverish both women and men (Gender Action 2007 b).

✓ **Women as Change Agents:** Just because women face unique vulnerabilities to climate change does not mean they should be perceived as victims. Women's survival skills, specialized agricultural knowledge, and resource management capabilities make them powerful climate change leaders. Not only should women be included in IFI-managed climate activities at local, regional and international levels, it is their RIGHT to participate.



Doña Vera on Hurricane Mitch (1998)...

"I lived on the Atlantic coast in Honduras. At that time, I was a single mother of three kids, my husband had left us some time ago. I built a very "rustic house" close to an estuary. With my older son I collected mollusks, did some fishing from the coast and processed (dried and salted) some of the smaller fish that the fishermen gave up.

One morning some of my neighbors said that they had heard in the radio that a big storm was coming and that it had winds of about 290 Km per hour.

Most of us on the coast were women with our sons. What should we do? We had no idea. Some women commented that they had heard from their husbands that we had to take some precautions. Unfortunately none of us had ever been invited or went to meetings dealing with this type of situation.

Then it happened. The winds, the waves, the flood. I took my three kids and started walking inland. Very soon the current was so strong, I could not hold all of them, my oldest son was holding my daughter. My hands were holding my youngest baby. The water snatched them, I saw my son trying to swim... I lost sight of them.

I was rescued and sent to a school. I was so lost; I kept on looking for my other two kids. Nothing. Life in the shelter was not easy, too much violence.

I was alone, I had nothing, no land under my name, no money. I still believe that Mitch had something against women..."

(Quoted in Aguilar 2007)

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Conduct gender-sensitive research and advocacy on climate change, the IFIs and commercial banks that produce gender-disaggregated data.
- Ensure IFI and commercial bank investments improve women's access to and control over natural resources, land, climate change planning and governance processes.
- Develop climate change indicators that account for gender disparities in formal and informal labor sectors, care work, land ownership and energy usage.
- Monitor and advocate for IFI and commercial bank implementation of international conventions and treaties that mandate gender-sensitive approaches to climate change interventions.

POSSIBLE PARTNERS!

- Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) www.wedo.org
- IUCN Gender Programme: Lorena Aguilar, Senior Gender Advisor www.genderandenvironment.org
- ENERGIA: International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy: www.energia.org
- Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) Women and Environment Program: <http://www.apwld.org>
- Southern African Gender and Energy Network (SAGEN) www.mepc.org.za
- Gender and Water Alliance (GWA): www.genderandwater.org
- Gender and Disaster Network: www.gdnonline.org
- Gender Action: www.genderaction.org

ACTION RESOURCES:

- [WEDO Online Resource Guide](#)
Extensive list of links to toolkits, fact sheets, policies and articles on gender and climate change.
- [genderCC.net](#)
A new web platform for information knowledge and networking on gender and climate change. Initiated at the UNFCCC COP9 (2004), this platform draws activists and campaigns from all over the world. It provides an extensive archive of gender and climate change articles and tools.
- [IUCN Gender and Environment](#)
Informative fact sheets, reports, manuals and case studies about different gender and climate topics.
- [GenaNet](#)
Information on gender & climate campaigns and activities.
- [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#)
Preamble: "...the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity."
- [The Manukan Declaration of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network \(2004\)](#)

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