



World Meteorological Organization
Organisation météorologique mondiale

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*Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
Geneva, 29 February 2016, Palais des Nations, Room XVI*

*General Discussion on Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction
and Climate Change*

**Keynote Remarks on Gender-responsive Strategies on Climate Change
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Dear Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today as a keynote speaker on a topic which is very close to my heart. It is also a topic on which the World Meteorological Organization has acquired significant knowledge and insights in the past few years.

Let me first thank the Chair, Ms Yoko Hayashi, for this kind invitation and congratulate the Committee for placing this important matter on the agenda.

A year after the Sendai Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Beijing+20 Review, the moment is ripe for action. We are also at the outset of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementation of the historical climate agreement signed in Paris in December last year. Now is the time to move from words to deeds and from commitments to effective implementation of gender-related mandates.

The World Meteorological Organization made a valuable contribution to these international processes through the Conference on the Gender Dimensions of Weather and Climate Services which we jointly organized with fellow UN and other international organizations in November 2014.

A key outcome of the event was the formulation of actions and mechanisms on how to equally empower women and men in four climate-sensitive sectors of the economy – agriculture, water resources management, public health, and disaster risk reduction. We submitted the Conference Statement and Sector-Specific Recommendations as a written contribution for the Committee's consideration.

The conclusion of our three-day deliberations was very unequivocal: the effects of weather and climate are not gender-neutral. Women and men are affected differently by weather and climate, and therefore need gender-sensitive information and services. Not because they have inherently distinct needs but because of their distinct social roles and multiple vulnerabilities due to existing inequalities.

To illustrate, 60-70% of women in developing countries are active in agriculture. However, in a project in India where weather information was given over mobile phones, it turned out that only 11% of the users were women. We also found out that there were 300 million women in the world without a mobile phone.

In an era when meteorological services are increasingly using smartphone applications to provide weather and climate information, it is clear that a gendered approach to reaching out to female farmers is necessary and ensuring access to information. We must also develop and implement specific plans to fill the gaps in education, access to technologies, and decision-making schemes for women in rural contexts.

Extreme weather events and disasters represent another area where gendered impacts have clearly been established. In many parts of the world, women and children suffer disproportionately from natural disasters, especially if they are less mobile and have less access to communications than men.

More women than men died in the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 because they were less likely to know how to swim and long clothing hampered their movement. In Bangladesh, of the 140,000 people who died from the flood-related effects of Cyclone Gorky in 1991, women outnumbered men by 14:1, partially due to insufficient access to information and early warnings.

Nevertheless, I would also like to emphasize that men can be equally vulnerable in certain situations and may equally require gender-tailored weather and climate services.

For instance, the UK Met Office recently revealed that men were three times more likely to be struck by lightning. This finding was confirmed by the National Weather Service in the United States which discovered that 81% of mortalities were men as they were generally more “risk-seeking.” Men also lose their lives more often than women in emergency relief efforts and during post-disaster rebuilding.

To be gender-responsive, climate and disaster risk strategies must consider assessing gender-specific risk and investing in National Meteorological and Hydrological Services to deliver gender-sensitive services and scale up good practices.

It is also essential that women and girls are not considered as a helpless group of victims. Disaster risk reduction efforts must recognize that women and girls – like men and boys – play a central role in the survival and resilience of their families and communities. They are very effective at mobilizing communities in the event of disasters. They are at the frontline in moving forward with recovery. Women further hold key knowledge in natural resources management, and are key actors in climate adaptation and mitigation. As such, they must participate on an equal footing in decision-making and have the value of their contribution recognized.

Moving to the area of public health, the risks related to climate change show clear gender differentials. The World Health Organization estimates that 7 million premature deaths are caused by exposure to air pollution each year. Of these, 4.3 million are caused by indoor air pollution – often from smoke generated by open-fire or unventilated stoves, to which, due to social roles, women and children are generally more exposed.

Increased warming and humidity is further another well-known impact of climate change which can specifically affect women as demonstrated by the higher female mortality rates during heatwaves in certain contexts. Similarly, men are more at risk of heatstroke because they are more likely to be active in hot weather.

A gender-responsive climate strategy to these issues would involve increased gender analysis when assessing vulnerability and conducting health-impact assessments. This would imply closer collaboration between the meteorological and medical- and public-health disciplines; more cross-disciplinary research; increased delivery of impact-based forecasts

and warnings; and enhanced awareness that moving to a low-carbon economy will have a positive effect on public health, especially for women and children.

Weather and climate also greatly impact the availability of and access to water. Huge gender imbalances exist in terms of the distribution of burdens and benefits.

It is common knowledge that in many parts of the world gathering and transporting water is an activity that typically falls on women and girls. As a result of climate change, this is a task that is taking increasingly longer hours, especially in drought-prone areas. Apart from exposing them to the risk of violence, the longer travelling robs women and girls of precious time which they could dedicate to education or other productive activities.

For example, substantially fewer women are enrolled in civil engineering education and participate in water management. Women's involvement is also crucial in the context of trans-boundary water management due to their nature and skills in conflict prevention and resolution.

A gender-responsive climate strategy to these issues would involve comprehensive gender analysis which identifies and assesses the vulnerabilities of both genders to climate change and its impact on water management and access to water.

We further need to train water professionals in gender mainstreaming and gender equality, and ensure that women from all sectors and social strata participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of water schemes at local and national levels.

To conclude, we need to scan all policies and programmes through a gender lens in devising strategies to climate change. We must account for the different needs and roles of women and men in all sectors of the economy and in social systems.

When enacting laws, policy makers need to account for these different needs and ensure that (1) the legislative frameworks they create are gender-sensitive and that (2) the decision-making mechanisms which guide implementation are inclusive.

National Meteorological and Hydrological Services and disaster risk authorities should improve their understanding of the gender-specific impacts of weather and climate as well as produce and communicate gender-sensitive information in a format and language which is comprehensible and effective for both female and male users.

Last but not least, we must recognize the essential role that women play in sustainable development and ensure their economic empowerment and participation in decision-making.

We must acknowledge women's outstanding contribution, empower them, educate them, and use their capacity as negotiators, scientists, advisors, and agents of change.

The overall effect would be more resilient communities, better integrated water management, increased food security, healthier societies, and overall a world which is more equal, more stable and more prosperous.

Thank you very much for your attention.