

SUBMISSION BY SOUTH AFRICA ON VIEWS AND CHALLENGES TO THE FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN CLIMATE-RELATED PROCESSES AND ACTIVITIES

Gender and climate change

Although climate change effects are universal they are not gender neutral. Climate change will have an impact on hunger and food security. Volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity and climate change have intensified inequalities and vulnerability, with specific impacts on women and girls.¹

Climate change has impacted negatively on agricultural production and prices, compounding essential needs for redressing women's socio-economic disadvantage in agrarian settings. It has also had a negative impact on those women and families who depend on the market for food as food prices are set to rise exponentially in the face of the El Nino effect.

Climate change will continue to affect women disproportionately should gender dimensions not become part of plans and policies. However, these policies must not be looked at in isolation. Instead, an integrated approach is required to ensure that women who are on the frontlines of climate change are not disproportionately affected.

Roehr (2007) states that women and men are differently affected by climate protection and adaptation measures. According to the Humanitarian Information Facilitation Centre (HIFC) a gender approach to climate change goes beyond women to men, who are also vulnerable, but in different ways. Focus is on the relative ability of different social groups to adopt "sustainable ways to safeguard and regain livelihood in a changing or changed local context" based on their position and condition in a society undergoing climate change.

Women make up 70%¹ of the world's poor and this places them on the frontline of coping with disproportionate climate impacts on their livelihoods. During field work in Limpopo, a province in South Africa, women highlighted challenges associated with changing weather patterns e.g. erratic rainfall and seed quality, which has resulted in decreased subsistence produce.

The success of increased agricultural production rests largely in the hands of women farmers across Southern Africa. Women farmers play a major role in food production on the continent and are key contributors to household food availability. Unfortunately, women farmers face severe constraints compared to their male counterparts when it comes to accessing productive resources such as land, credit, technologies and information.

In summary, women:

- Suffer more from the impacts of climate change because of their limited access to goods and services.
- Are more likely to be the unseen victims of resource wars and violence because of climate change.
- Take care, in most cases, of the household while men work outside the home to earn an income for their households.
- Have limited access to resources and decision-making processes, which increases their vulnerability to climate change. The majority of women in rural areas spend their time in collecting natural resources for food and to maintain their family's livelihood. This often leads

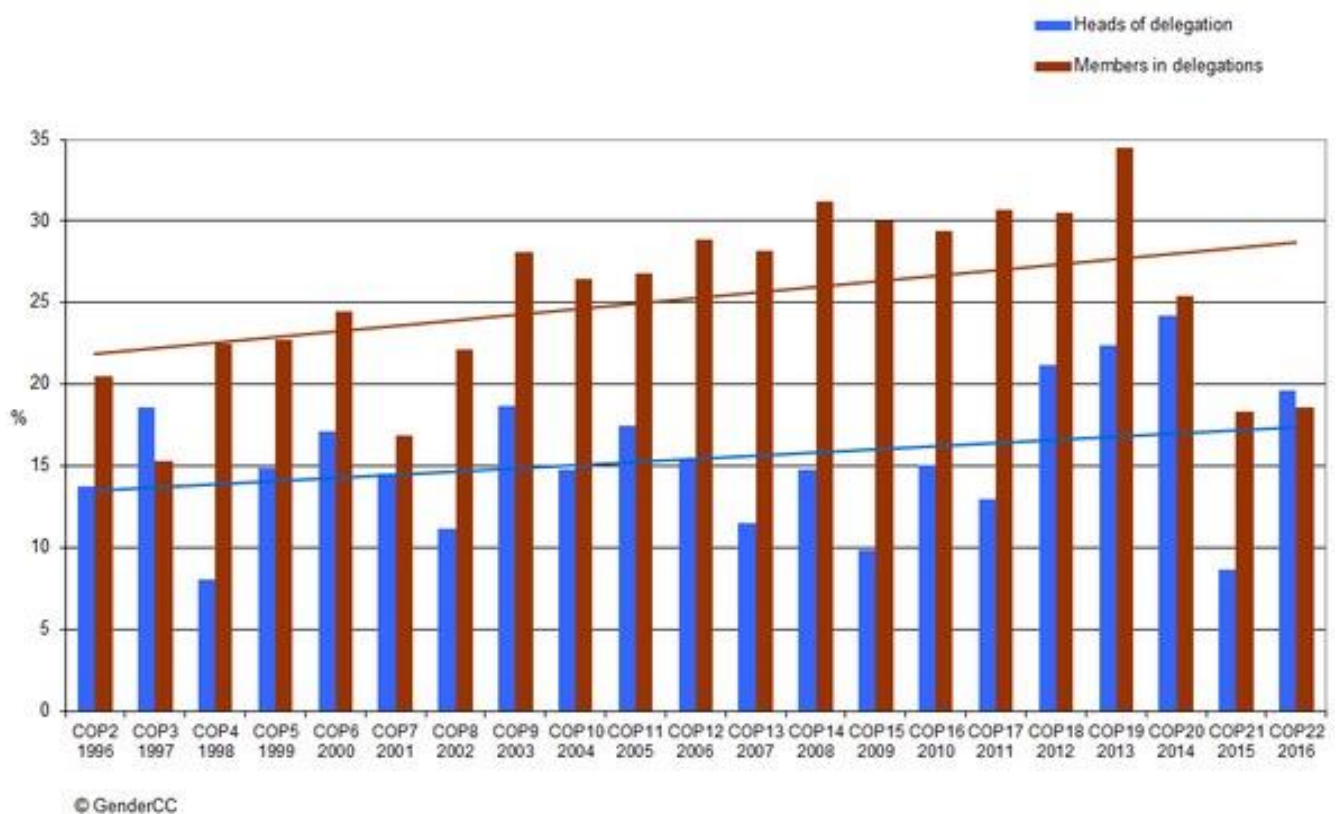
¹ Progress of the World's Women, UN Women 2015

to a low level of women’s participation in decision-making and actions that influence their livelihoods and lifestyles. Women tend to be under-represented in decision-making processes at all levels, including when it comes to decisions about major issues such as sustainable development, including climate change. This impedes their ability to contribute their unique, valuable and vital perspectives and expertise to issues related to climate change.²

- Remain heavily affected by climate change through increasing workloads, especially in areas prone to frequent flooding (e.g. northern central regions and north east regions of Namibia). They have many responsibilities in their households, including collecting firewood, fetching water, and ensuring food security.
- Experience compromised health: they suffer due to special physical vulnerabilities, due to their caring role in families, and the additional work that is required to provide for their families, because of the depletion of environmental conditions.

Gender dimensions of the UNFCCC

Women's participation at the climate negotiations



Improving the participation of women in climate change decision-making presents an ongoing challenge, both at national and international level. While the numbers of women on UNFCCC boards, bodies and government delegations have improved slightly in recent years, women continue to be underrepresented, particularly in high-level positions.

²52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Interactive expert panel: Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: “Gender perspectives on climate change”.

The last decade has seen an increase in the presence and engagement of women's and gender organisations in the UNFCCC process. Although small in number, they are representing a wide array of women's organisations worldwide, and are having a growing impact in the debates. At COP13 the women's caucus started to discuss applying for its own constituency. In November 2011, just in time for COP17 in Durban, the UNFCCC Secretariat officially recognized the Women and Gender Constituency.

The charter of the Women and Gender Constituency states: "The goal of the Women's and Gender Constituency is to formalise the voice of the women's and gender civil society organisations present and regularly active in UNFCCC processes, and to debate, streamline and strengthen the positions which these organisations put forth. The Constituency which has two Focal Point Persons (i.e. Northern Focal Point and a Southern Focal Point) draws upon global commitments to gender equality and women's rights, especially as they relate to climate change, and toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and related commitments and Conventions. The Constituency works to ensure human rights and a gender perspective is incorporated into UNFCCC negotiations, plans and actions."

The 18th Conference of the Parties (COP18) held in Doha, Qatar, in 2012 took a decision on "Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations and in the representation of Parties in bodies established pursuant to the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol". This decision marked an important step forward in advancing gender-sensitive climate policy by ensuring that women's voices are represented in the global discussion on climate change. It does this, for example, by setting a goal of gender balance in the bodies of the Convention and the Protocol, and by inviting Parties to strive for gender balance in their delegations.

In 2015, women made up, on average, 38% of UNFCCC national delegations, which is an 8% increase since negotiations in 2011. Women also accounted for 24% of Heads of Delegations to the UNFCCC, on average. In comparison, in 2008, women comprised, on average, just 17% of Delegation Heads.

Currently, the six most influential positions within the United Nations process are all held by women, a significant increase on last year's total of two. This offers a great advance to the gender justice movement. However, we are yet to see women from the developing world taking over these key positions linked to the UNFCCC talks.

COP 20 witnessed the launch of the "Lima Work Programme on Gender", which aims to advance implementation of gender-responsive climate policies and mandates across all areas of the negotiations. This critical initiative faced challenges as well, with governments debating on "gender equality" for "gender balance." The Women & Gender Constituency insisted that the goal for COP 21 in Paris, France, in 2015 had to be a fundamental framework of a strong "rights-based" agreement that is focused on climate justice. However, improving the participation of women in climate change decision-making is an ongoing challenge that need to be pursued, both at national and international level.