

Gender Equality Action for Climate-Resilient Food Systems: Parliamentarians' perspectives

September 29, 2021

Worldwide, the climate crisis is accelerating faster and more severely than previously anticipated. [The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report](#) predicts that the world will reach 1.5°C of warming in two decades, much earlier than anticipated. As the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) approaches—and leaders have made new and ambitious commitments at the UN Food Systems Summit—it has become clear that collective action is urgently needed for enhancing gender-responsive and climate-resilient food systems and agriculture.

While the link between gender equality and climate change is not always obvious, there is broad evidence that women and men are affected differently by climate change, which also increases women's vulnerabilities. In light of this situation, the sixth virtual dialogue of the Parliamentarians Actions for Gender Equality and Resilient Food Systems in Response to COVID-19 series focused on the link between gender equality and climate change. Participants, ranging from parliamentarians to civil society organizations and government representatives, gathered to discuss the international policies and legal frameworks needed to address the nexus between gender equality, climate change, and agriculture and develop recommendations on how to support gender inclusion in climate change policies and at the international debate in order to improve the effectiveness of climate action. This webinar was organized on September 29, 2021, under the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Network of Parliamentarians on Gender and Agriculture Investment Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), and Oxfam.

The webinar allowed participants to share their challenges, lessons learned, and progress made to date, as well as recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive and climate-resilient food systems, and the expected role of parliamentarians.

At the policy and institutional levels, some progress has been made in integrating gender equality issues into policies designed to support food systems transformation. Increasing attention is being paid to integrating gender-responsive approaches in climate adaptation. For example, 96% of the submitted National Adaptation Plans developed by countries in response to the climate crisis considered gender issues. However, more needs to be done to better address gender equality within climate-resilient food systems. Further consideration needs to be given to who is sitting at the negotiation table and ways to empower women and youth to increase their engagement in decision making at all levels of governance. This can be done through the design of gender-responsive interventions including investing in education and the leadership of women to enable their participation in national and international debates, or the establishment of legal provisions. For example, in Chad, the government has recently introduced a quota in its National Assembly to ensure 30% representation for women. This implies an increase in women's participation in policy-making and the review of national policies and laws that might discriminate against women.

More attention is still required to design and implement policies and legal frameworks that address the nexus of gender, climate change, and agriculture. This requires undertaking a specific gender analysis to identify the main gender issues and define specific (and measurable) gender-related targets with set timelines. At the webinar, participants recognized the important roles that parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play in raising these issues and in monitoring the activities to ensure adequate commitment and resource allocation by their governments to support the achievement of gender equality and deal with the adverse effects of climate change on men and women.

Beyond the legal frameworks, practical action must be taken to support gender equality and women's empowerment. Female farmers are often among the most productive sections of the agricultural workforce. However, they are still disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change compared to men, as they have less access to productive resources, services, local institutions, climate-smart technologies, and mechanization, even though they play key roles in farming, processing, and trading. They also face an increased workload in rural areas. To address these challenges, urgent action is required through specific investments in innovative, climate-smart, and labour-saving technologies, rural infrastructure, and basic social services such as health, water, and sanitation. It is also important to develop gender-sensitive agri-food value chains. There is strong evidence that if women were given the same access as men to productive resources and services (both advisory and financial), major progress could be made toward developing climate-resilient food systems and reducing undernourishment and rural poverty.

Participants at the webinar also recognized that the situation has worsened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the increasing and changing impacts of climate change. Ministries and national institutions need to ensure that appropriate systems are put in place and concrete actions are taken to target and empower the most vulnerable groups so they can become active agents in value chains.

During the webinar, participants also stressed the importance of taking into account other social issues in addition to gender (such as age) that also have an intersectional effect on inequality, resilience, and vulnerability. As highlighted at the recent United Nations Food Systems Summit, the inclusion of young people can represent a powerful force to call for change. This implies including a diversity of ages and a balance of genders in debates at such platforms. However, it is not just about ensuring representation. Women and youth need to be involved in policy design and implementation at all levels, from the local to the international. One concrete action is facilitating access to funding for small-scale farmers along with women's and youth organizations, for example, through new partnerships. This would support the move beyond rhetoric to provide women and youth with a space in platforms and give them a voice in policy debates as a real opportunity for influence. To build sustainable, resilient, and gender-equitable transformation of food systems, no one must be left behind.

Some recommendations that emerged from the discussion include:

- **Consider gender as a cross-cutting issue**, as past experience has shown that continuing to work in silos to address gender and other social issues will not yield the desired results.
- **Undertake a gender analysis to support informed and evidence-based decision making.** Gender analysis and the use of available gender tools are crucial for understanding and addressing gender-specific constraints and differences. This will enable policy-makers to make more informed decisions and target investments to achieve gender equality while addressing climate change. It will also be necessary to create a gender strategy for any given project or program—concrete gender-related actions must be integrated into policy design and implementation.
- **Work within existing structures** and harness existing frameworks to support the work toward gender equality.
- **Incorporate gender analysis in the diagnosis of the problem** where countries have no specific gender-responsive policies or strategies, using available tools to better address the specific constraints and priorities of men and women.
- **Continue to raise gender awareness of parliamentarians and other key stakeholders**, who, as representatives of the national population, can play a crucial role in development and resilience building by supporting the design of gender-transformative agricultural investments. Existing platforms can be used to raise awareness and bring attention at a high level regarding the need to integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment issues into climate-related policies and actions.
- **Enhance national capacity in gender mainstreaming** to support the design and implementation of gender-responsive interventions, including all relevant actors from the public and private sectors, civil society organizations, and media.
- **Ensure that parliamentarians advocate for increased funding for gender-responsive and climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives.** In their oversight role, parliamentarians can ensure that governments provide the funds they commit to and that programs are implemented to support gender equality and reverse the adverse effects of climate change. NGOs can also support parliamentarians in this role of overseeing and monitoring the various programs funded by national budgets. This implies supporting budgets for gender-responsive planning and implementation of adaptation actions.
- **Monitor gender-related progress.** While the adoption of gender-sensitive policies and frameworks is a good start, concerted efforts are required to ensure their enforcement and adoption. This implies the establishment of specific targets with measurable indicators. For example, policies should take into account how many men, women, and young people are affected and benefiting from their activities. Internal gender-sensitive monitoring systems should be adopted to track progress and ensure commitments are delivered upon.
- **Engage both the public and private sectors** to build more sustainable, nutritious, and resilient food systems, recognizing that gender mainstreaming activities are both time and resource intensive.