

## How do international organizations address the articulation between gender and climate?

**Lessons from a bibliometric analysis**

It is not prior to the 2010s that the gendered aspects of climate action were comprehensively addressed and started to permeate the climate change agenda through the Conferences of Parties. Over the past decade, major actors of international development have thus elaborated policy priorities, tools and programs devoted to gender and climate. Therefore, mapping discourses on the gender and climate change nexus articulated by different types of stakeholders within the international development community represents an innovative analytical contribution addressing the intersection of gender and climate change.

### **An innovative mapping exercise...**

Building upon an up-to-date state of the art, a sample of 54 organizations included international organizations, national development agencies, transnational NGOs, communities of experts and practitioners, and multilateral funding agencies and regional development banks. The research gathered 800 strategic documents, policy briefs, and project-related documents addressing the nexus of gender and climate. This repository demonstrates the growing relevance of the gender and climate nexus to major international development and climate action stakeholders. A grid comprising of 150 codes identified the main core concepts, agendas and approaches applied by above-mentioned categories of stakeholders to gender and climate issues.

### **... revealing 8 narratives at work in the Gender and Climate Change “nexus”**

The four dominant frames of the Gender and Climate Change nexus are the following:

**“Gendering emergency climate action through the lens of vulnerabilities”:** Integrating gender in climate action is primarily understood in the context of emergency and humanitarian action in relation to climate-induced risks of disasters, such as post-disaster intervention or forced displacement. This frame addresses vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of agency, illiteracy, greater exposure to the impact of climate change induced or natural disaster or greater risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

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### **“Gendering climate change as ‘smart’ economics”:**

Women and girls are viewed as potential economic agents of the green transition, whose involvement is key to advance towards carbon neutral, climate-resilient and socially and environmentally sustainable economies and societies. The focus is thus placed on women's access to credit, education and training, digital and green skills through specific actions and schemes in the realms of finance, capacity building and innovation.

### **“Mainstreaming gender in the climate change agenda”:**

In this framing, gender mainstreaming, mainly understood as integrating the sex variable and considering the different roles of men and women in society when designing and implementing a policy or program, is not only a method, but also the driving force for gendering the climate change agenda. Hence, mainstreaming tools play a great role in achieving more gender-sensitive climate change policies, possibly to the expense of a more structural agenda unravelling gendered power structures. This frame usually does not entail an intersectional focus.

### **“Empowering women and girls for climate adaptation”:**

Women and girls are primarily framed through the traditional gendered division of reproductive and productive work and their socially ascribed roles depending on context. Their empowerment is deemed key to strengthen climate adaptation and resilience for which programs and projects specifically targeting or involving them in fighting the direct impact of climate change on communities are required. The emphasis is thus placed on access to agency, land ownership, education and decision-making.

Along with the four previous dominant frames, several challenging ones coexist, articulating a more transformative understanding of the nexus gender and climate change.

### **“Integrating gender for transformative climate action”:**

In the pursuit of climate justice and a just transition, gender appears to be a lever for transformative change., “transformative” referring here to the transformation of power relations among men and women and different groups within society, in the prospect of fairer and more sustainable societies. Feminist and gender theories are mobilized and self-reflexivity is promoted among the agents of this process of change to achieve structural, rather than cosmetic transformation.

### **“Putting intersectional focus on gender and climate”:**

this refers to a “gender+” approach, which articulates gender with other intersecting inequalities such as age, social status, and disabilities in relation to the multi-layered impact of climate change. Although cumulative factors of risk or exposure are addressed, gender is not apprehended through the lens of overlapping vulnerabilities. Instead, the gender+ approach intends to support the development of finer grained, more inclusive climate change policies, taking into account most marginalized groups – including indigenous populations, domestic workers or LGBTQ individuals.

**“Considering women as Mother Earth's keepers”:** this frame is rooted into different streams of ecofeminism, including native philosophies or cosmogonies that link women with the preservation of nature and attribute feminine

traits to the Earth. Women's contribution to tackling climate change primarily consists in the preservation of local ecosystems and communities, maintaining sustainable and environmentally friendly livelihoods as well as in their supposedly different perception of climate change-induced risks or their role as primary caregivers.

**“Decolonising gender and climate action”:** Both gender and climate action are framed within the post-colonial studies and politics, aiming to ensure that voices from indigenous and other marginalized groups are heard, promoting self-reflexivity and knowledge circulation rather than knowledge transfer. Although marginal, a decolonizing approach to gender and climate nonetheless emerges at some multilateral funding organizations such as the Green Climate Fund or the Inter-American Development Bank.

## **What the narratives do not (or rarely) mention...**

The frames developed around gender and climate issues are still largely path-dependent to constrained existing dynamics. Firstly, the shift from a “women in development” approach to a “gender and development” approach remains unachieved. The challenge to adopt a more structural understanding of gendered power relations in development contexts is still largely ahead as the categories « gender » and « women » are being used as much frequently. Secondly, gender mainstreaming as a method and a body of instruments for integrating gender in program or project planning and execution remains predictive of the degree of institutionalization of gender & climate issues in most organizations. Thirdly, the recent integration of gender concerns in the global framework of climate action has mainly focused on adaptation, whereas the contribution of reshaping the gendered distribution of power and social roles in mitigating climate change or achieving more resilient societies remains largely unaddressed.

Finally, it could be possible to deepen the understanding of the gender and climate change nexus, if a number of assumptions materialized:

- Although more vulnerable to the impact of climate change, women and girls cannot be solely addressed as victims. Their contributions to shaping solutions, and the relevance to challenge gendered power relations and assets distribution for building resilient societies should also be devoted greater attention.
- Framing gender and climate through the role of women as economic agents should entail a full and explicit recognition of their disproportionate contribution to unpaid reproductive and care work, of their presence in large segment of informal economies, and help challenging gendered segregation access to land property and rights, paid work, technical skills and financial agency.
- Empowering women and girls should entail challenging the status quo of gendered power relations, and not be limited to including them in existing policies/programs or designing limited specific actions.
- The organizations of our sample largely fail to adopt a transformative agenda of gender power relations as they primarily focus on women's vulnerabilities and their role as economic agents in fundamentally unequal and segregated economic structures, combined with a

- rather technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming. Consciously drawing inspiration from more transformative frames and from those designed in the Global South over the last decade of climate action diplomacy, can certainly support the advent of a deeper structural understanding of this nexus, and facilitate its diffusion to the larger public.
- National development agencies, and more specifically those from countries which have embraced the principles of a feminist diplomacy or foreign policy, as well as multilateral funding organizations including development banks, can play a pioneering role in advancing the gender and climate change agendas.
  - Critically assessing and benchmarking their framing of the issue and its potential consequences on designing and implementing effective actions, building knowledge on gender and climate or reaching out communities, can help the organizations featured in this sample to move forward and to contribute to a joint, global framing of gender and climate change issues.
  - This should go hand in hand with challenging a binary definition of gender often understood as a proxy for the sex variable, thus failing to account for the power relations and hierarchies upon which gender categories are built and for the intersection of gender with other inequality or discrimination grounds.
  - Such an endeavor could also be driven from a gender-sensitive reflection on the notion of basic commons, through promoting equal access to the fundamentals of climate-resilient livelihoods, as well as to those commons supporting the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals and more specifically of gender equality, such as education, health or sexual and reproductive rights.

## How do National/Bilateral Development Agencies reflect these narratives?

As shown in the table hereafter, "Gendering emergency climate action through the lens of vulnerabilities" ranks first among national development agencies with 21.7% of anchorages. "Gendering climate action as smart economics and Mainstreaming gender in climate change agenda" obtain practically equivalent scores. The latter is particularly present among the national development agencies of the European and the Japanese and Korean agencies. This framework obtains significantly lower scores for UKAid, USAid, CIDA and SIDA. Among the first three cited, the modest scores obtained by the framework associated with the mainstreaming approach are likely to indicate a lower appropriation of the method concept disseminated from the mid-1990s in multilateral institutions.

The framework "Gendering emergency climate action through the lens of vulnerabilities" dominates in several agencies like AECID, US Aid, JICA, KOICA and AFD. However, for the latter the "Gendering climate action as smart economics" framework is less prevalent than in most of the agencies studied. If the "Integrating gender for transformative climate action" framework obtains a higher score than the average for this category, the other emerging frameworks show consistent anchoring levels with those noted for this category as a whole.

Table 1 — Frequency of interpretative frameworks by organization: National Development Agencies (anchoring of the different frames in %)

Interpretative framework	AECID	AFD	CIDA	EnaBEL	GIZ	JICA	KOICA	NORAD	SIDA	UKAid	USAid	Average score
Gendering emergency climate action (...)	26,34%	27,83%	17,82%	14,54%	19,09%	28,56%	25,69%	13,96%	20,56%	19,18%	25,29%	21,71%
Gendering climate change as smart economics	11,62%	15,87%	23,45%	20,63%	27,97%	16,53%	13,46%	24,58%	20,21%	34,92%	21,35%	20,97%
Mainstreaming gender in climate change	26,34%	19,57%	4%	26,92%	25,82%	24,35%	30,89%	20,13%	15,68%	12,83%	14,35%	20,08%
Empowering women and girls for climate adaptation	8,53%	10,47%	14,18%	16,70%	9,70%	17,30%	16,82%	24,03%	19,05%	15,34%	11,65%	14,88%
Integrating gender for transformative climate action	11,62%	11,51%	17,09%	6,68%	2,73%	2,77%	5,50%	5,19%	9,41%	7,94%	4,90%	7,96%
Intersectional focus on gender and climate	7,94%	8,20%	13,82%	11,39%	7,45%	4,83%	5,20%	10,06%	6,39%	4,89%	8,10%	8,15%
Women as Mother Earth's keepers	5,10%	5,32%	8,91%	2,36%	4,36%	4,53%	1,83%	1,30%	5,81%	3,57%	10,12%	4,52%
Decolonizing gender and climate action	2,51%	1,22%	0,73%	0,79%	2,91%	1,11%	0,61%	0,65%	2,90%	1,32%	4,25%	1,73%

## 5 key issues paving the way forward

1. While women are more vulnerable to climate change, they should not be reduced to the sole status of victims. Their contributions to address the challenges of adaptation and mitigation should also be valued, and special attention paid to questioning power relations and hierarchies between the genders reflected in differentiated access to the common goods like education health, resources and decision-making. It is about building more resilient societies and facilitating their evolution towards reducing the pace and intensity of climatic changes.
2. Considering women as economic agents should not ignore their disproportionate contribution to unpaid care work and their share in informal employment from subsistence agriculture to services. Such recognition implies taking into account the intersecting factors of inequality and discrimination and the existence, in all spheres of economic activity, of significant horizontal and vertical gender-based segregation, grounded in particular in an unequal distribution of rights and resources.
3. By insisting on vulnerabilities and limiting the understanding of the role of women as economic agents operating within economic structures that are fundamentally unequal, the organizations studied are depriving themselves of important levers of transformation. This framing does not allow to establish a logical connection between the transformation of societies to strive for the goal of gender equality and the resolute action to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change.
4. Drawing inspiration from emerging frameworks such as those promoting a better circulation of knowledge between North and South, and taking into account the structural dimension and hierarchical gender relations or the intersection of different factors of inequality can contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the intersection of gender and climate issues, and facilitate its dissemination to wider audiences.
5. Finally, national development agencies, and especially those articulated to a "feminist" diplomacy, can play a pioneering role. Finally, engaging the development aid community that mobilized around the fight against climate change in a more detailed understanding of the relationship between gender and climate issues can be done based on a reflection from a gender perspective on access to the commons. This could be achieved by promoting equal access to the foundations of resilient livelihoods and lifestyles in the face of these changes, including education, health or sexual and reproductive rights, in the sustainable development goals perspective.

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