

Parallel Session by Geographic Region
Session No. 2: South Asia and West Asia

In Aid of Climate Change Reduction and Disaster Risk Reduction:
A Gender-Responsive Legislative Agenda

1. The Parallel Session was Chaired by Ms. Brigitte Leduc, Senior Gender Specialist of the Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) for Nepal and the Himalayan Region.
2. There were 10 participants from Iran, Bhutan, Pakistan and India.
3. The first Speaker was Dr. Rosana Mula, Coordinator of the Learning Systems Unit, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) based in Andhra Pradesh, India. She focused on the topic, "Women's Coping With Mother Nature: ICRISAT's Response to Climate Change in the Semi-Arid Tropics."
 - 3.1. Dr. Mula said that climate change is the greatest challenge humanity faces today. This is depicted by various climate change models showing a rise in temperature, sea levels, and extreme weather events leading to unprecedented changes in various sectors like the agricultural production system. Among the developing countries with slack resources and adaptive capacity, the impact brought by climate change has become extremely difficult to manage.
 - 3.2. She said that the wanton effects of desertification, potable water, soil erosion, increased salinity, biodiversity loss, erratic temperature to agriculture are impacting agricultural productivity with 'domino' effects to food availability, livelihood security, health and nutrition, and the entire economy of a country. To date, detailed implications of the problem situation caused by climate change have come to the attention of most sectors and institutions like the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research Center (CGIAR), of which the International Crops Research Center for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is a member.
 - 3.3. ICRISAT's primary mandate is the improvement of rainfed farming system in the semi-arid tropics (SAT). With this mandate, serious attention to climate variability is a must among the scientists of ICRISAT because of the likelihood of severe effects in these areas. Seasonal rainfall, which has become erratic in recent years, has been creating havoc to agricultural activities and lives of people as whole. Life in the semi-arid region is beyond compare. A farmer in India as best described by the The Royal Commission on Agriculture as "born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt."
 - 3.4. Among the most important constraints directly or indirectly linked with climate change are water (availability and quality), land degradation and malnutrition, migration due to frequent droughts, lack of infrastructure, poor dissemination of improved technologies, and some ineffective policy pronouncements.

- 3.5. In this situation of interlocking constraints faced by farm households, women's feat in meeting the day-to-day demands of the household despite limited resources at their disposal is remarkable. Women are managers of specific domains; as curators of community genebanks, caretakers of small livestock, handlers or processors of small grains. ICRISAT's works in India and Africa on community watersheds and microdosing have shown that enlisting women's participation – their inclusion in institutional innovations like access to information and ownership of major factors of production like to water infrastructure – can facilitate their participation. Having limited access to land rights or to their recognition as 'heads of households' indicates exclusion to major households' decision making.
- 3.6. Dr. Mula said that the long-term perspective ICRISAT has brought in to its research activities seeks the development of crop varieties and cropping systems to a changing environment. The integrated genetic and natural resource management (IGNRM) is ICRISAT's overarching research strategy that recognizes and implements the synergies of different disciplines in addressing key factors of high and low temperature tolerance; increased root stress due to drought, salinity, acidity, nutrient availability and flooding; changed severity and distribution of pests and diseases; and the migration of ICRISAT's mandate crops into geographical areas already marginal for crops currently grown in the said areas.
- 3.7. She said that strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in any form of undertaking is indispensable. In light of climate change, this is even more critical because people need to be informed as quickly as possible. ICRISAT's experience on knowledge sharing and management is worth underscoring because of the innovative means it has adopted, which emphasizes women's contributions.
- 3.8. Through the Virtual Academy for the Semi-Arid Tropics (VASAT), the problem of drought mitigation faced by resource-poor farm households of the SAT (India, South Asia and West and Central Africa) is addressed through demand-driven and need-based content type of information, communication and capacity building (www.vasat.org). VASAT creates information, education, and communication materials that are readily accessed by rural households. It also caters to national and international interest groups. Institutional members of the VASAT coalition, through a peer-mediated review process, develop learning resources. This makes the contents relevant to users.
- 3.9. To unlock persistent barriers of communication, she said that women might be the key to manage this process better. Even with the village level studies of ICRISAT show at how the social networks of women served as pipelines for creating impact in community watershed projects. These have allowed women access to technologies and information faster which leads to their empowerment.
- 3.10. In ending her presentation, Dr. Mula said that for the localization and customizability of content, a successful extension activity needs the involvement of credible individuals from the locality – as facilitators or intermediaries. However, local capacities have to be developed with respect to the essentials of practical agriculture, where an open learning paradigm should be adopted.

4. Dr. Mula's presentation was followed by Ms. Leduc's discussion on the topic, "Climate Change in the Himalayas: The Women's Perspective."
 - 4.1. She said that from Karakoram in Pakistan to Chomulungma in China, the Himalayas crosses eight countries with great diversity not only in terms of ecosystems and landscapes, but also in terms of cultures, religions, political structures, social organizations and livelihoods.
 - 4.2. The Hindu Kush Himalayas, in particular, she said, is inhabited by over 210 million people who are among the most marginalized and vulnerable in the region. The mountain people's livelihood is largely based on agriculture and livestock raising and the exploitation of natural resources, small-scale trade and migration.
 - 4.3. Living in the Himalayan region is a daily challenge. Remoteness combined with harsh environment and limited infrastructure hamper the mountain people's economic development.
 - 4.4. Temperature increase is widespread over the globe, but the impact is more felt in the highlands. Global warming has particular effects on the Himalayas: Glaciers are melting and forming glacial lakes that can burst at any time; The precipitation system is changing to more rain and less snow causing flash floods, landslides, and droughts; and fragile mountain ecosystems are being threatened by species loss and migration. All these changes impact on people's livelihoods and can also result in loss of life and property.
 - 4.5. In Asia, poverty, caste, ethnicity and gender are among the factors that may hinder people's resilience to climate change.
 - 4.6. Chitrali women save lives. Women play an important role in the community early warning system. Generations after generations, they have developed their capacities to recognize the signs that a flood is coming by observing the river banks; or an avalanche about to happen by the sound it makes. They have put in place a flood monitoring systems using stones. When they see the signs, they inform people of their village and the ones living in the villages down the hill by shouting warning and using mirrors. Women, therefore, implement their rescue plan and protect people and livestock.
 - 4.7. Climate change has also brought with it a combination of problems, she continued. Increased occurrence of flash floods and landslides affects greatly people's livelihoods. Many livestock are missing; the already limited cultivated land is often washed away; the warmer temperature also creates confusion in the cultivation cycle since crops come into maturity earlier; and most of the springs that provided drinking water have now disappeared.

- 4.8. She said that one of the most noticeable impacts of climate change in the Himalayas is the increased frequency and magnitude of natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and landslides.
- 4.9. She also cautioned that with the intensification of natural disasters, coping mechanisms may be stretched: (a) The poor are more at risk as women are more vulnerable to poverty, and they are also more vulnerable to natural disasters; (b) Droughts increase women's workload and stress as they have to travel farther; (c) Many more women are victims in floods and earthquakes because of their social norms and gender roles, such as dress codes, behavior norms, and the mode of decision making.
- 4.10. Remoteness and isolation deprive the population from accessing essential information about climate risks. Most disaster preparedness and management plans do not contain a gender perspective to address the differential vulnerabilities and needs of women and men. Despite their role as caregivers and the fact that women are often working around their house and village (while a large number of men are working outside the village), women are still rarely involved in learning about early warning systems.
- 4.11. Mountain people are highly dependent on natural resources to meet household needs (and even for their own survival). The loss of biodiversity will have a great impact on people's health, as well as their livelihoods.
- 4.12. She pointed out that women and men use natural resources differently. Women collect fuel wood and medicinal and aromatic plants, mainly for household needs, and fodder for livestock; while men collect timber wood to generate income. In the context of extreme poverty, she said, the intensified use of natural resources for income generation often becomes a priority over sustainable use and household needs. While women are participating in the sustainable management of natural resources, their role is underestimated and they are often excluded from conservation initiatives. They are sometimes even forbidden to use such resources.
- 4.13. In Humla, food scarcity is not a new phenomenon and people have adopted different strategies to cope with it. Trading forest resources is one option, sometimes the only one, even though it contributes to the cyclical depletion of their resources. The other option is migration, and in rural Nepal, it is generally the men who migrate to find jobs. For some, it is an enormous challenge to adapt to a new environment and lifestyle. For women, the result of men's migration is usually an increased workload and all the added stress which that creates. This case study then demonstrates that coping strategies are gender-specific, and subsequent policy options should also be gender sensitive.
- 4.14. It is important, then, to identify what factors and abilities help people to adapt, she continued: (a) Put a human face on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies; (b) Mainstreaming gender into policies and strategies to involve both men and women; (c) Environment-friendly technologies are needed to reduce women's drudgery. Even with the best infrastructures, alert systems, or

intervention plans, it is the people's reaction and response that will make the policies work or not, she said.

4.15. Ms. Leduc said that gender equality and women empowerment are essential conditions to achieve development goals; they are also essential to build mountain people's capacities to face the challenges of climate change: (a) Women represent at least half of the population and the world cannot meet those challenges without their contribution, she pointed out. Women's movement has to play a role in the global climate change mitigation and adaptation negotiations in advocating the integration of a gender perspective, focusing on people's needs and capacity.

4.16. The following are among her recommendations:

- (a) Document the gendered impacts of climate change in the Himalayan mountains in all sectors;
- (b) Promote equity and mainstream gender in adaptation and mitigation strategies, taking into account the particular challenges mountain people are facing;
- (c) Mainstream gender and address mountain specificities in disaster preparedness plans and involve women in early warning systems;
- (d) Promote gender-sensitive development initiatives to build mountain people's resilience to climate change;
- (e) Facilitate mountain women's access to alternative and renewable sources of energy with the perspective to alleviate their workload;
- (f) Promote mountain people participation in climate change negotiations and policy making;
- (g) Involve gender experts and women scientists in the preparation of national climate change mitigations and adaptation policy/ strategies;
- (h) Conduct gender analysis of proposed mitigation and adaptation to climate change interventions and assess their impacts on the mountain environment;
- (i) Develop effective information channels to reach out to mountain women, especially in remote areas, with information about climate change;
- (j) Facilitate and equitable access to technologies and other productive resources to build mountain people's resilience to climate change and ensure that women needs are properly addressed.

Group Work – *Strategic, Practical and Realistic Recommendations for Engendering Climate Change Strategies in South Asia and West Asia*

5. After discussion, the following activities were forwarded by the participants:

5.1. Information Mechanisms

- (a) Inform decision-makers and the public at-large, especially women and men living in rural and remote areas, on the effects of climate change and the measures to adapt using different written and visual media forms, ICT, songs, street plays, radio programs, the news, TV soaps, etc.
- (b) Develop database of sex-disaggregated data
- (c) Do not stereotype women in certain roles such as communicators

- (d) Involve women in all training, awareness raising, skills building activities
- (e) Put in place facilities to support women's participation such as child care centers
- (f) Change women's image: Women are change agents, farmers, workers, leaders, natural resources managers, risk managers, etc. (not victims)
- (g) CAPWIP should facilitate the information sharing on DRR and CCA issues

5.2. Legislation and Policies

- (a) Most countries have well designed policies but they are not implemented. Mechanisms to implement the already existing policies in terms of environment, development and equality must be put in place before formulating new policies.
- (b) Keep commitments from different UN engagements: The UN is regularly coming up with new issues to tackle and Governments shift their attention towards those new issues, but "forget" their previous engagements.
- (c) Amend existing laws and policies to make them more gender-sensitive and responsive
- (d) Implement the National Plan of Action for Gender (NPAG)
- (e) Revisit the NAPA and ensure that the gender perspective is properly and efficiently integrated

5.3. Participation Mechanisms

- (a) Increase the participation of women in the negotiation delegations and in the committees for the elaboration and implementation of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation
- (b) Involve gender specialists and women scientists in those committees

5.4. Budget

- (a) Sufficient budget must be allocated to address women's adaptation needs. We must advocate for gender budgeting for climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- (b) Take into consideration the positions of women into the organizations for allocating funds for adaptation budget (If there is no equitable number of women in the organization at all level, no funds should be allocated)
- (c) Favor the convergence and partnership for addressing the multiple needs for adaptation to climate change

5.5. Others

- (a) Conduct awareness raising and training on gender mainstreaming in climate change adaptation for Members of Parliament, the ministry of environment and other related ministries involved in adaptation strategies
- (b) Organize capacity building activities for increasing understanding of climate change impacts for the ministries of women to develop their capacity to advocate for integrating a gender perspective in climate change adaptation strategies
- (c) Assess the impact of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy on women and men. How do they benefit from it? What would they lose?

5.6. Regional Cooperation

Utilize the existing regional network of decision-makers for sharing the knowledge about the gendered impacts of climate change such as SAFMA (South Asia Forum of politicians, journalists, and NGOs), SARC (South Asia Regional Cooperation), SACEP (South Asia Corporative Environment Program), Chambers of Commerce, the Regional Gender Network for West Asia, etc.

END OF PLENARY SESSION 2 (South Asia and West Asia)