

OPINION: Delivering Nationally Determined Contributions – An opportunity for gender mainstreaming

On International Women's Day, Ricardo Energy & Environment's Outi Korkeala, Nidhi Mittal and Nipunika Perera review the ways in which gender issues can be factored into implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions.

The UN Conference of the Parties (COP 21) in Paris last December was a success in many respects. One of the key reasons was the momentum across national governments to develop their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) in advance of the COP. INDCs are a result of a country-led process to agree on the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change adaptation commitments in the form of targets, policies and actions. INDCs will become Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as countries ratify the Paris Agreement.

Although NDCs are about countries' climate policy commitments, many countries also used the opportunity to embed climate policies within their wider development agenda, and highlight cross-cutting priorities. For example almost 40 per cent of the INDCs submitted, explicitly mentioned 'gender' and/or 'women' in the context of their [national ambitions on climate change mitigation](#). This clearly demonstrates a collective intent to better incorporate gender considerations in national climate policies. Notwithstanding the huge effort made in Paris and the significant milestone it represented, huge ground still needs to be covered in the context of the implementation of the Paris Agreement. As countries are beginning to deliberate on their mitigation and adaptation policies and actions, an obvious opportunity stands out for revisiting national priorities and ensuring that gender remains integral to national policies, plans and programmes at all levels.

Leveraging the Five Pillars of NDC Implementation

Ricardo Energy & Environment has developed a framework for NDCs comprising of five key pillars: mitigation, adaptation, finance, monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) and governance (for further information see Ricardo Energy & Environment's [whitepaper on NDC implementation](#)). Together, these five pillars work together to help national governments achieve transformational change to tackle climate change. The framework also presents an entry point for countries to assess the barriers and opportunities for mainstreaming cross-cutting priorities such as gender across climate change policies and programmes. Let's take the Governance pillar as a case in point which will be central to the NDC implementation process. Political will and effective institutions are needed to maintain momentum, raise awareness, engage with stakeholders and increase accountability and capacity at all levels. Gender aspects are vital to each of these actions. Linking the NDC climate agenda with national development strategies enables the climate policies to mirror development targets of the country and pave the way for the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and specifically SDG4 on gender. In addition any coordination and management process devoted to NDC implementation has the opportunity to demonstrate equal access to decision making of women and men – guiding the way to more equitable governance systems.

Monitoring, reporting and verification is another key NDC pillar which requires countries to set up systems to track the implementation and impact of climate change policies. This provides a clear opportunity for also tracking and reporting the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming initiatives, and gendered impacts of climate policies at all levels, whether it be local, national, regional or global.

Building on and scaling up opportunities and good practice

The NDC implementation pillars on integrated adaptation planning and long-term mitigation strategies represent concrete and tangible opportunities for embedding a strong gender focus especially within programme and

project operationalisation. Traditionally adaptation policies and programmes have been the cornerstone for mainstreaming gender considerations. The focus on people, wellbeing and vulnerable groups is clearly synergistic, and has rendered itself well to integrating gendered approaches to resilience.

In general, mitigation policies and projects have been slower to recognize gender as a core element, and have struggled more to articulate the differentiated needs and opportunities for men and women. Energy access projects have been relatively more successful in incorporating gender considerations by including women as key beneficiaries and training them to become entrepreneurs in distribution and maintenance of energy products and systems. A renowned example is Solar Sister, a social enterprise, which aims to help women create economic opportunities and eradicate energy poverty. The specific gender-focused benefits of Solar Sister range from income and skills development to social network expansion, better self-confidence and improved health. Large-scale energy generation programmes on the other hand, have lagged slightly behind and have less visible evidence of gender mainstreaming. But there is enormous potential to consider gender aspects at all stages, from programme design (such as assessing the impacts of land acquisition on men and women) to access and distribution of electricity.

Sustainable forestry is also an important NDC priority for many developing countries with mitigation, adaptation and development co-benefits. Around 1.6 billion people globally are estimated to depend on forests for their livelihoods, with women across the developing world being primary users of forest products. Women can play a vital role in forest management and conservation but only if their skills and knowledge are used in programme design and implementation and they are provided with access to decision-making at all levels. Addressing inequitable access to natural resources such as land, providing training and opportunities for women to access markets and develop businesses and increasing women's voices and influence in the sector are examples of good practices in the sustainable forestry which have potential to be scaled-up and replicated further.

Piggybacking on a favourable climate funding environment

Last but not least, accessing and utilising climate finance effectively is a key NDC pillar. Climate finance amounted to USD 391 billion in 2014 (See [Climate Finance Landscape 2015](#)). Therefore it is important to consider the distribution of and access to climate finance. Climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) have gender policies that gives the Fund '*a clear mandate to enhance a gender sensitive approach in its processes and operations*'. In the GCF, gender considerations are acknowledged both in terms of the Fund's impacts and enabling equitable access to funding. Countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam are now facing up to this challenge by starting to integrate gender in their national climate finance and policy frameworks. Further, most if not all bilateral and multilateral donors are coming forward to provide financial and technical assistance to national governments on gender mainstreaming.

This is only the beginning!

We at Ricardo Energy & Environment strongly believe that gender inclusive approaches are a critical component of climate change and development. The demand and need for mainstreaming gender within national climate policy and planning is unequivocal, and the NDC implementation framework, through its five inter-connected pillars, provides a viable step-by-step process for national governments to mainstream gender effectively into climate policies and programmes. A gendered approach, if well framed and integrated effectively right from the outset, can support impactful national and sub-national actions on climate change. This, in turn, would help to deliver the ambitions reflected by national governments in the Paris agreement, with the wider developmental co-benefit of progressing the 2030 agenda for achieving sustainable development.