

CLIMATE CHANGE and CANADA:

An untapped opportunity to advance gender equality?

BY JIMENA EYZAGUIRRE

THE LEAD UP TO INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSIONS ON A PATH FORWARD BEYOND THE KYOTO PROTOCOL IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON CANADA'S ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE. A NUMBER OF ISSUES RELATED TO REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND HELPING COMMUNITIES ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ARE BEING DISCUSSED.

However, addressing gender differences in government policies and programs has not been among the topics of discussion. This is despite Canada's adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995, which commits to the integration of a gender perspective across government policies and programs in pursuit of gender equality.

Climate change is an environmental and socio-economic concern shared across Canada. The extent of media coverage on the issue, public outcry over government action or inaction, and results from public opinion polls reveal the sensitive and complex nature of the challenge. Climate determines how and where we live. Warming temperatures; changes in rain, snow, and ice patterns; rising sea levels; and more frequent and intense

weather-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, extreme heat waves, forest fires, and violent storms have the potential to disturb ecosystems and pose a threat to human health, safety, and well-being. At the same time, reducing the impacts of climate change requires a shift away from activities and behaviours that increase the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, mainly through the combustion of fossil fuels.

Tackling climate change demands two complementary policy responses: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation involves curbing the emission of GHGs. Adaptation prepares societies for future climate impacts and those that will take place regardless of mitigation. Women play special and gender-specific roles in both types of policy response, yet these roles remain poorly understood. ►

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CANADA

The lack of analysis and debate in Canada on the linkage between gender and climate change is not atypical. In United Nations forums, mention of the issue is recent, first appearing in discussions at side events in the 2002 and 2003 rounds of international climate change negotiations. Dialogue that does take place focuses mainly on developing countries, where differences between men and women in income, education, economic opportunities, and access to and use of energy resources, highlight the relevance of gender in designing climate policies and programs. However, the *Climate for Change* project, funded by the European Commission in 2004-2005, and emerging evidence from other sources argue against assuming gender neutrality in climate change policy in industrialized countries as well.

Based on a review of publicly available information pertaining to federal climate change policies and programs to date, Canadian policy-makers would be well justified in paying closer attention to gender issues in designing and assessing future responses to climate change. Gender equality refers to the ability of men and women to realize their full human rights and potential to contribute to society, and benefit from the results.

Canada's policy response to climate change

Women remain under-represented in positions of power within most Canadian governments. Today, one in five Members

of Parliament are women. Participation rates of women in provincial and territorial legislatures and municipal councils are equally low. Within Natural Resources Canada and Environment Canada—two leading federal departments in addressing climate change—female employment is below the federal public service rate as a whole. And, although female representation at the executive level is slowly increasing, men still occupy most executive positions.

A chance to foster increased participation of women in developing the national response to climate change existed after Canada's decision to sign on to the Kyoto Protocol in 1998. At the time, the Canadian federal government set up a consultative process to develop options for addressing climate change, involving sixteen sectoral working groups of about 470 "experts" in total. Industry, academia, non-governmental organizations, and governments were represented. Each group analyzed the costs and benefits of tackling climate change and recommended options to reach the national GHG emissions target. On average, for every female expert, seven male experts sat at the table. The only group in which women were not the minority was in public education and outreach.

Until recently, government investments to address climate change focused on the provision of information, financial incentives, and funds for research and development (R&D) of

FOUR REASONS TO ACCOUNT FOR GENDER ISSUES IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

Reason #1:

Establishing goals and priorities in climate protection requires the insights and expertise of both men and women.

Limiting the adverse effects of climate change requires adjustments in individual and collective behaviour with potentially far-reaching social, economic, and ecological consequences. Everyone has a stake in these decisions. To maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of policy solutions, both women and men need to participate in shaping the future of Canada's economy, in making decisions on natural resource and environmental management, in setting research agendas, and in prioritizing investments. In other words, both women and men should be involved in deciding and influencing who gets what and when. To date, Canadian women have had a limited role on both accounts.

Reason #2:

Preferences and abilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions differ between Canadian men and women.

Differences in emissions profiles between women and men are important considerations for programs targeting households. In Canada, patterns in personal mobility, use of electrical home appliances, and space heating and cooling account for over 80% of household-level GHG emissions. Comprehensive studies documenting gendered differences across Canada in these areas are lacking. However, selected city-level studies on transportation indicate that transit ridership tends to be

“clean” technologies in an effort to induce change in behaviour across Canadian society. Investments have also gone into expanding the market opportunities for Canadian businesses to transfer clean technologies to developing countries and to gain access to carbon credits from GHG-reducing projects.

A new wave of policies to reduce Canada’s GHG emissions include federal government regulations targeting industrial emitters, and carbon taxes implemented by Quebec and British Columbia.

The role of women in climate change policy

What are the special interests and roles of women to consider in climate change policy? At present, the lack of publicly available data disaggregated by sex is a barrier to answering this question for Canada. Federal government reports on household emission trends or on the performance of programs do not report on gender-specific outcomes. Due to the recognition of gender as one among 12 social and economic conditions influencing health outcomes, Health Canada and the Public

Despite the imperative to advance gender equality that climate change policy presents, federal policies and programs implemented in Canada have been gender-blind.

Health Agency of Canada appear to be the only federal organizations explicitly examining the link between environmental change (such as climate change) and gender in Canada. Program funding provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to developing countries for action on climate change is more likely to support equality in outcomes for men and women. Gender equality is one among several of CIDA’s priorities, and its use of gender-based analysis helps ensure that policies and programs reflect

women’s concerns and experiences. As an example, a CIDA-funded project to reduce Nigeria’s vulnerability to the impacts of climate change integrates gender dimensions in all activities—from research and analysis, implementation of community-based adaptation projects, development of policy options, and communications.

At the same time, women are increasingly engaged in climate change discourse, are active in a range of policy dimensions, and represent disciplines pertaining to natural and social science, business, and technology. For example, since the ►

greater for Canadian women than for men; women make shorter trips when driving, generally to run errands or to cater to other family members’ travel needs; and women are generally more concerned with vehicle safety and less concerned with power and acceleration than men.

Some evidence indicates that women have less confidence in technological solutions than men. For example, a 2005 study by the Energy and Materials Research Group at Simon Fraser University on Canadians’ attitudes towards the capture and storage of carbon dioxide emissions—a type of GHG—in underground geological formations suggests that women are less likely to support the application of this technology than men. A recent public opinion survey by Harris/Decima probed the future role for nuclear energy in Canada in the context of climate change. The survey revealed that men are twice as likely to support the increased use of this energy source as women.

Finally, if information campaigns and volunteerism form a significant part of policy, the information, messages, and incentives provided to society need to resonate with both sexes and take into account cultural considerations in order to be effective.

Reason #3:

Vulnerability of women to the impacts of climate change tends to be different from that of men

In Canada, as in most countries, social-economic trends still place women at a disadvantage in absorbing any additional costs associated with recovering from or preparing for the effects of climate change. Women tend to live on lower incomes than men and are more likely to live in poverty. Within the female population, Aboriginal women have even lower incomes and higher rates of poverty. Women are also more likely than men to be responsible for child-care and care of aging relatives, the health of these two groups being particularly at risk from the effects of climate change. ►

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CANADA

2000 launch of *Climate-L*, a list service of the Manitoba-based International Institute for Sustainable Development, the relative proportion of annual submissions by women has nearly doubled, from 20% to about 40% of total postings. Consideration of this reality in developing climate change policy is a point of entry towards gender equality.

Despite the imperative to advance gender equality that climate change policy presents, federal policies and programs implemented in Canada have been gender-blind. Today, we cannot say with certainty that climate policies and programs implemented since the late nineties reflect the aspirations, views, and concerns of Canadian women. A first step to addressing this critical shortcoming would be to identify the types of policy responses that are most relevant to the discussion, such as those that I have highlighted here. Non-governmental organizations and universities can assist in this process of discovery. Our commitment to gender equality demands that we use all areas of public policy towards this goal, climate change is no exception. ♻️

Jimena Eyzaguirre has worked on climate change issues since 2000, as an academic, NGO representative, consultant, and public servant. Currently, she is a policy analyst at Natural Resources Canada.

An earlier version of this article was published in *Women & Environments International Magazine* Spring/Summer 2007 Issue 74/75 Women and Global Climate Change.

For more information, visit:

The International Institute of Sustainable Development
Climate-L list service
www.iisd.ca/email/climate-L.htm

Climate for Change – Gender equality and climate policy project in Europe
www.climateforchange.net

Gender CC: Women for Climate Justice www.gendercc.net

Canadian research focused on understanding gendered differences in vulnerability to climate change impacts is sparse. One exception is a study on the 1998 ice storm in Québec, Eastern Ontario, and New Brunswick, linking children's long-term health effects to the stress of natural disasters on mothers. This 2008 study concludes that pregnant women's exposure to stress and anxiety affected the general intellectual development of children born shortly after the storm. The researchers suggest that these developmental delays could become less pronounced over time, as is the case with premature babies. The research team studied stressors such as the number of days without power and the financial losses that families faced.

Gender tends to be considered among other demographic factors in studying the health effects of extreme weather events, yielding interesting results. For example:

- In *Health Policy Research*, a 2000 study following up on the health impacts of the 1996 Saguenay flood among affected residents in Québec revealed that the physical and psychological effects of the flood were greater for women than for men. Women are at greater risk of suffering from psychological effects than men, since they often are faced with the need to recover from the event while continuing to fulfil household and external demands.
- A 2005 project by a University of Toronto researcher and Environment Canada dealt with differences in risk perception during extreme weather events and implications for disaster management strategies. In this study, the results of a survey on attitudes during the passage of Hurricane Juan through Nova Scotia in 2003 show that women generally felt more vulnerable to the effects of the storm than men. The perception of vulnerability could both limit engagement in risky behaviour and act as a deterrent to taking decisive action in the event of a disaster. An awareness of difference in risk perceptions among residents of a city or community can help identify barriers to successful adaptation.

Reason #4:

Governments are responsible for ensuring the fair distribution of benefits of climate policy and programs

Who has benefited from government investments to address climate change? How are information and programs affecting the behaviour of women and men with respect to energy use and personal mobility? Are both women and men able to access and prosper from investments in R&D for clean technologies and climate impacts research?