

# COP 23: Gender Equality and Climate Change



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**Abstract:** The World Climate Conference 2017 (COP 23) yielded the adoption of the first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Action Plan (GAP). This is a positive shift towards an integration of gender justice and human rights in the context of the UN Climate Action Plan. GAP necessitates importance granted to gender-equal climate policy and therefore, must be integrated into national climate action plans (programs). The first progress assessment will be conducted at COP 25 towards the end of 2019. However, while GAP recognizes women's roles and importance with regard to climate change, it does not reach out beyond this. For instance, development policy measures that likewise play an important role have been excluded. In the Asia-Pacific the specific role of women as livelihood providers has received minimal attention and resultantly there has been little implementation of concrete measures. There are still many steps to be taken before deeper and more fundamental changes are reached.

**Keywords:** World Climate Conference, Gender Justice, Gender Action Plan, Pacific Islands

**"The Paris Agreement cannot be implemented if we ignore  
55 percent of the world population" (El-Haite, 2016)**

The World Climate Conference 2017 (Conference of the Parties: COP 23) in Bonn yielded no significant resolutions. A significant gap remains between intended claims and on-ground realities regarding planned contributions to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, a positive element was the passing of the first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Gender Action Plan (GAP). By reaching this decision, the need for a gender-equitable policy was recognised on all levels of climate change adaptation and mitigation activities, and relevant measures for the next two years were agreed upon. This is a significant step forward towards an integration of equity and human rights in the context of UN Climate Action Plan.

Climate change has variegated impacts across regions, states, communities, households and individuals. While it is recognised that women in the global south are more seriously impacted by climate change, this is not reflected in the relevant programmes and policies. Women do not share the same advantages as men particularly in societies where women are economically and socially unequal. This power disequilibrium also influences opportunities to react to climate change in an anticipating and active way.

In planning processes, women's circumstances are not adequately considered. Comparative to their male counterparts, they often lack access to information, institutions and financial support including (land-)ownership and assets. This results in weak

preparedness to confront potential disasters. Because of climate change they are more seriously impacted by productive and reproductive workload increases. These include extended walking distances to acreage and/or fresh water supplies as well as negative impacts on farming and related economic opportunities from changing precipitation. In addition, they face further intangible impacts rooted in existing gender inequalities. Yet, women are not given equal platforms in the political sphere or during expert debates. Their perspectives are consequently disregarded or insufficiently considered in global and local plans, and in decisions on adaptation and mitigation.

Requests for incorporating these gender-specific facts and consid-

erations into the UNFCCC process have taken significant time to be heard. In Doha 2012, a decision was reached on equal gender ratios within the UNFCCC process. But it was only in Bonn at COP 23 that this was actualised, after requested action plans and financial support were formalised in Marrakesh 2016 (Women Gender Constituency, 2017).

In the run-up to COP 23, multiple emphases were placed on the need to establish the participation of women in climate change issues. The establishment of the Gender Action Plan (UNFCCC, Gender and climate change, 2017) on 13 November 2017 marks a significant success on the path to gender equality in the global dealing with climate change issues. The GAP states that under any conditions specific importance



Source: Oliver Hasenkamp 2017.

Figure 1: COP23 Panel about the role of women in fighting climate change

must be given to gender-equal climate policy. Its goal is to promote a gender-equal climate policy while prioritising this perspective in the Agreement's implementation and in the work of all stakeholder groups. Furthermore, the GAP strives to advance the entire and equal participation of women in the negotiations and regulates the implementation of its settlements in national climate programmes.

The GAP's contents are divided into five categories. The argumentation however exclusively relates to equal gender participation in climate negotiations, financing and adaption programmes. Gender equality, albeit closely related, is not addressed in any aspects beyond a narrowly defined climate change framework. Exemplary, development policy measures that likewise play an important role, also in national climate plans, had been excluded

The GAP that was passed at COP 23 aims at the following (Aguilar and Verveer, 2017):

- Improved access, on local and national level, to gender-equal education and technical training in all climate protection and adaption measures, which have been agreed upon in the UNFCCC context, including the Paris Agreement
- Provision of means to support the participation of women in national delegations
- Creating capacities for the integration of gender aspects in climate protection and to achieve balanced gender equality
- Gender-equal access to financial means as well as gender-equal budget planning by the governments in the implementation of climate protection measures
- Evaluation of the implementation of the agreements

The first progress assessment report of the integration of GAP in national action plans is being expected at COP 25 in November 2019. It will be interesting to see whether changes

of the current situation will in fact already be noticeable by then.

Fiji had the chair at COP 23 and because of this climate change impacts in Oceania were given the strongest visibility. Pacific Island countries are already facing the effects of climate change related extreme weather and other forms of ecological damage such as rising soil and water salinity. In most of these countries cultural practices and identity of the indigenous populations is intrinsically tied to land and sea. Damage or loss of ecological systems will have a strong impact on their way of life. In such cases women are often responsible for the sustaining livelihoods. They are often the guardians of knowledge regarding farming and localised natural resource use. In such situations key opportunities exist for women to find solutions to climate change. However, even where adaptation programmes already utilise such opportunities, they have been rarely implemented.



Figure 2: Women from the Pacific during the welcoming ceremony of the conference

As expected, under the COP chairmanship of Fiji, the smaller Island States, have urged for the rapid establishment and implementation of a planned fund for the financing of adaptation measures and financial compensation related to the damages caused by climate change. They not only seek adaptation and compensation for material damages but also cultural losses occurring for issues such as resettlement. They argued that payment for mitigation of such existential restrictions had to be covered by the major industrial nations responsible for it. However, the specific role of women as livelihood providers and cultural guardians barely received any attention. This fact is not surprising since significant Pacific region climate related data are still inexistent, particularly with regard to gender relations.

If a change towards gender equality is to be achieved, attitudes and behaviours across the society need to be confronted by men and women. Only then can gender-specific inequality through climate change be reduced. The Pacific region has a lot of catching up to do in terms of such

changes, as it is clearly at the bottom of the league when it comes to gender equality.

Hilda Heine, incumbent President of the Marshall Islands, showed optimism in Bonn with regard to the GAP. She wrote, “In the next two years, the plan will aim to increase the number of female climate decision-makers, train male and female policymakers on bringing gender equality into climate funding programmes, and engage grassroots and indigenous women’s organisations for local and global climate action.” (Heine, 2017)

The COP 25 will offer by the end of 2019, the first opportunity to examine which goals have been incorporated into the national action programmes and implemented. Furthermore, it will show to what extent positive changes are noticeable, and whether women can play an active role in the fight against climate change.

### Hint: Research Report

A long version of the report was developed in the context of the course ‘Gender, Environment and Climate Change in Asia-Pacific’ in winter semester 2017/18 at the

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