

Climate change is not gender neutral

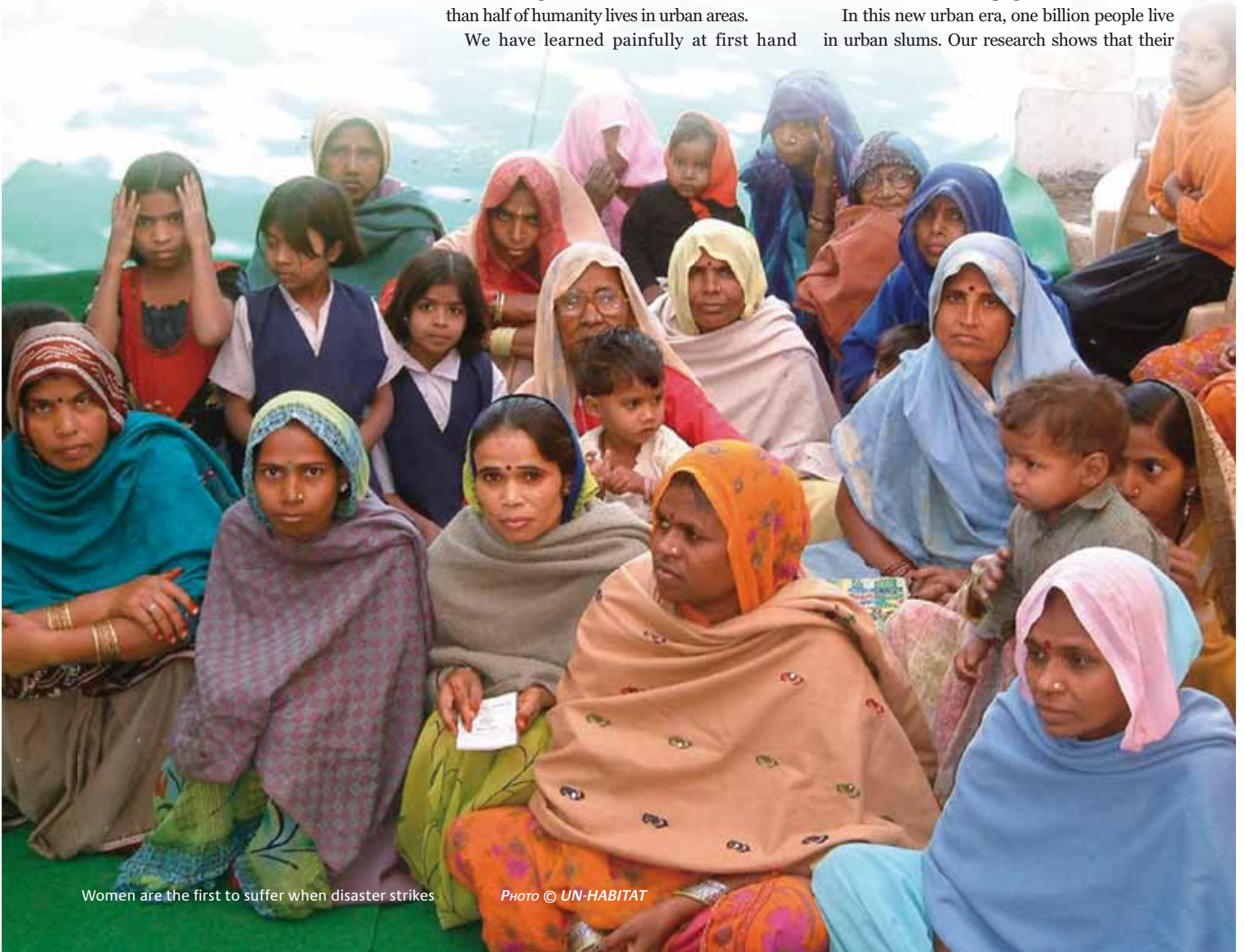
Integrating gender into climate change policy at the local, national and international levels is of paramount importance. Here **Lucia Kiwala**, Chief of UN-HABITAT's gender mainstreaming department, and colleagues **Ansa Masaud** in Geneva and **Cecilia Njenga** in Nairobi, explain that putting gender at the top of the climate change agenda is more important than most people realize.

At UN-HABITAT, the UN agency for the built environment, there is growing concern about the impacts of climate change on towns and cities around the world in an age when, for the first time now, more than half of humanity lives in urban areas.

We have learned painfully at first hand

from disasters around the world that climate change adaptation and mitigation measures *cannot* be gender neutral. This is because climate change impacts are *not* gender neutral. (See fact box on page 29).

In this new urban era, one billion people live in urban slums. Our research shows that their



Women are the first to suffer when disaster strikes

Photo © UN-HABITAT

numbers are set to double in little more than a generation if current trends prevail. Everywhere, it is the slum dwellers whose homes will be swept away if floods strike or a hurricane hits.

ference of the Parties held in Poznan, Poland in December 2008 under the auspices of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC). “I support your drive to

from floods, droughts or other calamities in outlying areas. And in the slums themselves, the residents often live in places highly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters such as floods, and are also least able to cope with the effects. Women’s groups in these cases should be the direct beneficiaries of adaptation funds to ensure access to energy, and the protection of water catchment areas so that streams don’t run dry.

We have to increase awareness of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women within the predominantly male world of technocrats working in this field. We must have gender responsive policy-making, planning and programming, and ensure the effective participation of women at every level if the Copenhagen climate talks in December 2009 are to be a watershed.

The solutions aside, human face of climate change must be strengthened through increased focus on women, youth and the very poor.

In many countries of developing world, declining agricultural productivity due to climate change related weather patterns and population pressures are pushing greater numbers of rural residents towards the cities.

More than a quarter of the populations of the world’s Least Developed Countries now live in urban areas. From 15 million in 1950, their numbers have jumped to 234 million today.

The nexus between rapid and chaotic urbanization and climate change has multiple impacts on highly vulnerable groups, especially women, youth and the very poor.

Look at it this way: in many households in these countries, especially in the slums, women rely on firewood for cooking fuel. Yet if cities had the capacity to deliver power, or for that matter to provide cooking gas, fewer trees would be felled. This is where the battle to save our forests starts – right in the slums!

Look at this too: women often have to risk their lives to walk long distances to fetch water or go to the toilet. Sometimes, household and human waste is simply dumped in rivers or streams. Yet if cities had the capacity to deliver better water and sanitation services, key water sources would not get contaminated, and there would be fewer health and environmental risks.

Cities spew out huge amounts of the so-called greenhouse gases responsible for global warming. Seventy-five percent of global energy consumption is thought to take place in cities. At the same time, cities and local authorities in some countries hold tremendous power, leverage and



Woman can play an important role in shaping policies regarding climate change PHOTO © SOFIA HENRIQUES

Women and the children they support are usually the first to suffer when disaster strikes. Yet women are also the most important agents of change at the household and community levels.

In our humanitarian work as part of the One UN country teams helping pick up the pieces after a terrible disaster, we ensure that gender is incorporated, so that we can build back better. A woman who loses her home, after all, should not lose her inheritance, land or property rights as well.

“It is heartening to see here governments like Finland and the Global Gender and Climate Alliance bringing the voices of women to the global deliberations on climate change,” said Mrs. Tibajuka in a speech at the 14th Con-

exchange knowhow and experiences, and most importantly, your push to translate the language of the UNFCCC so that people at the local level people can understand the implications of the decisions being taken, complex as they are.”

Women can and do make a difference. They are knowledgeable and experienced in adaptation and mitigation strategies, natural resource management, conflict resolution and peace building. Women leaders at the national, local and community levels have already made a visible difference in natural disaster responses, both in humanitarian and post-disaster recovery.

Many slum residents around the world are often environmental refugees who have fled

Fast facts

The 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that greenhouse gases and aerosols will alter the energy balance of the climate system. Over the next two decades it is projected that there will be a warming of 0.2°C (IPCC, 2007). Climate changes are expected to have unprecedented effects on people worldwide, particularly through the increase in natural disasters. Social, economic and geographical characteristics will determine the vulnerability of people to climate change. Many studies have determined that poor women are more vulnerable to natural disasters given socially constructed gender roles and behaviour.

A study of disasters in 141 countries provided decisive evidence that gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women's economic and social rights. In inequitable societies, women are more vulnerable to disasters; for example, boys are likely to receive preferential treatment in rescue efforts and both women and girls suffer more from shortages of food and economic resources in the aftermath of

disasters (Neumayer and Pluemper, 2007).

Women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men during a disaster. In the 1991 cyclone disasters which killed 140,000 in Bangladesh, for example, 90 percent of victims were women. Similarly, in industrialized countries, more women than men died during the 2003 European heat wave. During Hurricane Katrina in the United States, African-American women, who were the poorest population in that part of the country, faced the greatest obstacles to survival. During the 2006 Indian Ocean tsunami, more women died than men – for example in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, male survivors outnumber female survivors by three or four to one (Davis et al., 2005).

Although women are disproportionately impacted by disasters and swift environmental changes, women have also contributed to curbing the impacts of climate change. Women's knowledge and responsibilities related to natural resource management have proven to be critical to community survival.

Recommendations by women's groups at the climate change talks

The UNFCCC international Adaptation Fund must include gender considerations.

National and international adaptation plans, strategies, and budgets should mainstream gender.

Global and national studies should produce gender-differentiated data on the impacts of climate change and emphasize the capacities of men and women to adapt and mitigate climate changes. Studies should also determine the advantages of implementing gender-sensitive adaptation projects.

Governments should understand and use the knowledge and specialized skills of women in natural disaster survival and management strategies.

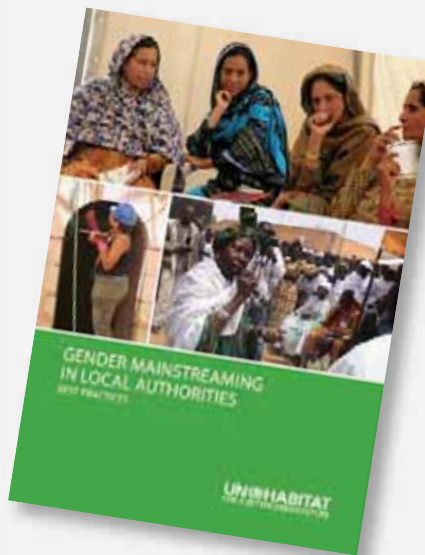
Women must be recognized as powerful agents of change and that their leadership is critical. Women should be included in all levels of strategies to adapt to climate change.

Women's access to, and control over, natural resources need to be improved in order to reduce poverty and vulnerability and to ensure that women have resources to adapt properly.

Training and educational programmes for women and girls (especially in vulnerable communities) that provide general information about disasters, and strategies to cope with them should be developed.

Gender Mainstreaming in Local Authorities

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing recognition of the need to ensure women's equal access to urban public spaces. This handbook documents initiatives, which promote women's empowerment, equal opportunities and outcomes for men and women in the development of cities and local authorities. Some are comprehensive and are based on supportive policies, while others are ad-hoc and address specific issues as a result of crises. Whatever the context, the initiatives provide lessons that others can learn from. UN-HABITAT provides technical advice, training, resource materials and support for women's networks on gender-related work in urban development. For further information contact, gender@unhabitat.org



resources to influence both the causes of climate change and the solution to advance climate protection through mitigation and adaptation.

The perspectives of women, youth, and children *must* inform policy, programme design and implementation at the global, national and local levels. The local knowledge and experience of women must be tapped in designing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

International gender and climate change organizations should strengthen linkages with grassroots organizations and local authorities in all countries, and especially those bearing the brunt of climate change impacts.

Human settlements planning needs to take ►



Developing countries are most at risk from climate change. Road flooded in Chennai, India

PHOTO © GURU THILAK

the level and type of impacts of climate variability into account. Any action to reduce the impacts of climate variability in human settlements can only succeed with an understanding of overall vulnerability – and that includes the situation of women in slums and informal settlements.

Next, we need to develop gender indicators to monitor impacts of climate change, and to ensure that planning strategies respond to the specific needs of women and men.

And finally, we must support the response capability of vulnerable groups by strengthening their assets – social, natural, physical, human, and financial. And on the latter – especially in these times of global financial crisis and economic downturn. ♦

UN-HABITAT in the driving seat - a strategy towards gender equality

UN-HABITAT promotes the empowerment of women and gender equality in the sustainable development of cities. By creating awareness of the different effects of urbanization on men and women and promoting gender equality, whole communities can benefit, societies can become fairer and services more effective. The Gender Equality Programme (GEP) is UN-HABITAT's roadmap towards gender equality.

If we are to meet the global anti-poverty targets as pledged in the Millennium Development Goals, we cannot afford to overlook the needs of women and girls, who not only make up half the world's population but represent the majority of the urban poor. To stabilize and prevent the growth of slums and promote liveable, productive cities, we need to respond to enduring gender differences and inequalities. These persist despite decades of campaigning from women's rights organizations. For example:

- Women hold less than two percent of the world's private land.
- Women in slums and informal settlements are particularly at risk of violence in public spaces.
- Women generally spend more time in slums than men, since many men leave for work in other areas. This leaves women to bear the brunt of confrontational evictions, which generally take place during the day.
- Women also have more exposure to all the attendant risks and dangers lurking in slums.
- The lack of separate toilet facilities for boys and girls in slums and informal settlements deters many girls from attending school, particularly after the onset of puberty.

UN-HABITAT tackles gender equality in housing and urban development through:

• Advocacy and monitoring of gender equality in cities –

Inequality between men and women has previously been under-reported due to a shortage of data on women's situations in comparison to men's. UN-HABITAT is promoting and developing global reports and policy guides that reflect gender differences, so that inequalities in specific areas can be identified and then addressed.

• Urban planning, governance and management –

Gender-responsive policies and legislation help governments and stakeholders design and develop inclusive cities and urban services that respond better to the needs of women and men—for example in resource allocation, personal safety and security, and post-conflict and disaster reconstruction.

• Addressing inequalities in land and housing –

A woman's right to land and housing is largely linked to marital property and inheritance rights. Women generally have more difficulty securing land and property and keeping it. UN-HABITAT works with governments to improve policy, legal and regulatory frameworks that also respond to women's land and housing.

• Developing environmentally-sound urban services –

The agency works to improve governance and infrastructure such as clean drinking water, sanitation and waste management, transportation and power. Moreover, UN-HABITAT seeks to ensure that women are engaged in the design, management and evaluation of these services.

• Improving finance systems for affordable housing –

Promoting programmes on financing affordable housing and infrastructure for the urban poor, especially women.

Compiled by Emily Wong