

THE RIO CONVENTIONS **ACTION ON GENDER**



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Convention on Biological Diversity

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



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Introduction



Balkh province after floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains, Afghanistan
Photo by Azarda, Xinhua

The year 2012 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, which resulted in the establishment of the three Rio Conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In the 20 years since their inception, the Rio Conventions have made important progress in advancing their work. Given that climate change, biodiversity and desertification are interconnected, the conventions explored possible cooperation in these areas. In response, the Joint Liaison Group among the secretariats of the CBD, the UNCCD and the UNFCCC was established in 2001 with the aim of enhancing coordination among the three conventions, including for information sharing and outreach.

The increasing awareness of gender in the context of sustainability adds a new opportunity to further strengthen cooperation among the three Rio Conventions. In this sense, this is an interesting and exciting time for all three conventions, because gender awareness is at an all-time high in the context in which the conventions function.

It is common knowledge that vulnerability to biodiversity loss, desertification and climate change impacts are deeply

connected to gender, and that, conversely, sustainability interventions, responses and solutions need to consider gender issues if they are to fully meet the objectives for which they were established.

This important and ongoing paradigm shift on gender mainstreaming is also increasingly reflected in the respective mandates that Parties have given to the three conventions. The CBD's decision on access and benefits sharing has a clear reference to gender considerations at the policy level and beyond; the UNCCD's Advocacy Policy Framework (APF) on gender and the respective decision of its tenth conference of the Parties will become a guiding instrument for gender-sensitive implementation of the convention; and the outcomes of the 2011 Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference contain some 16 mentions of gender across key substantive streams.

The integration of gender into actions against biodiversity loss, climate change impacts and desertification will maximize the results of interventions, efforts and resources spent and will hopefully lead to gender-sensitive policymaking with optimal outcomes.

We should, therefore, take a closer look at the goals, objectives and opportunities relevant to the integration of gender into each of the three Rio Conventions.

The mandate of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG), which comprises the Executive Secretaries of the CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC, is to enhance coordination among the three Rio Conventions and explore options for further cooperation. The JLG supports Parties in the achievement of national-level synergies and coordination in the implementation of the Conventions. A coordinated platform exhibiting joint work is the Rio Conventions Pavilion (<www.riopavilion.org>), which helps to raise awareness and share information on linkages in science, policy and practice between biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management. The Pavilion convenes on the margins of the conferences of the Parties of the three conventions. The Pavilion partners will be extending the momentum of this collaborative initiative to this year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

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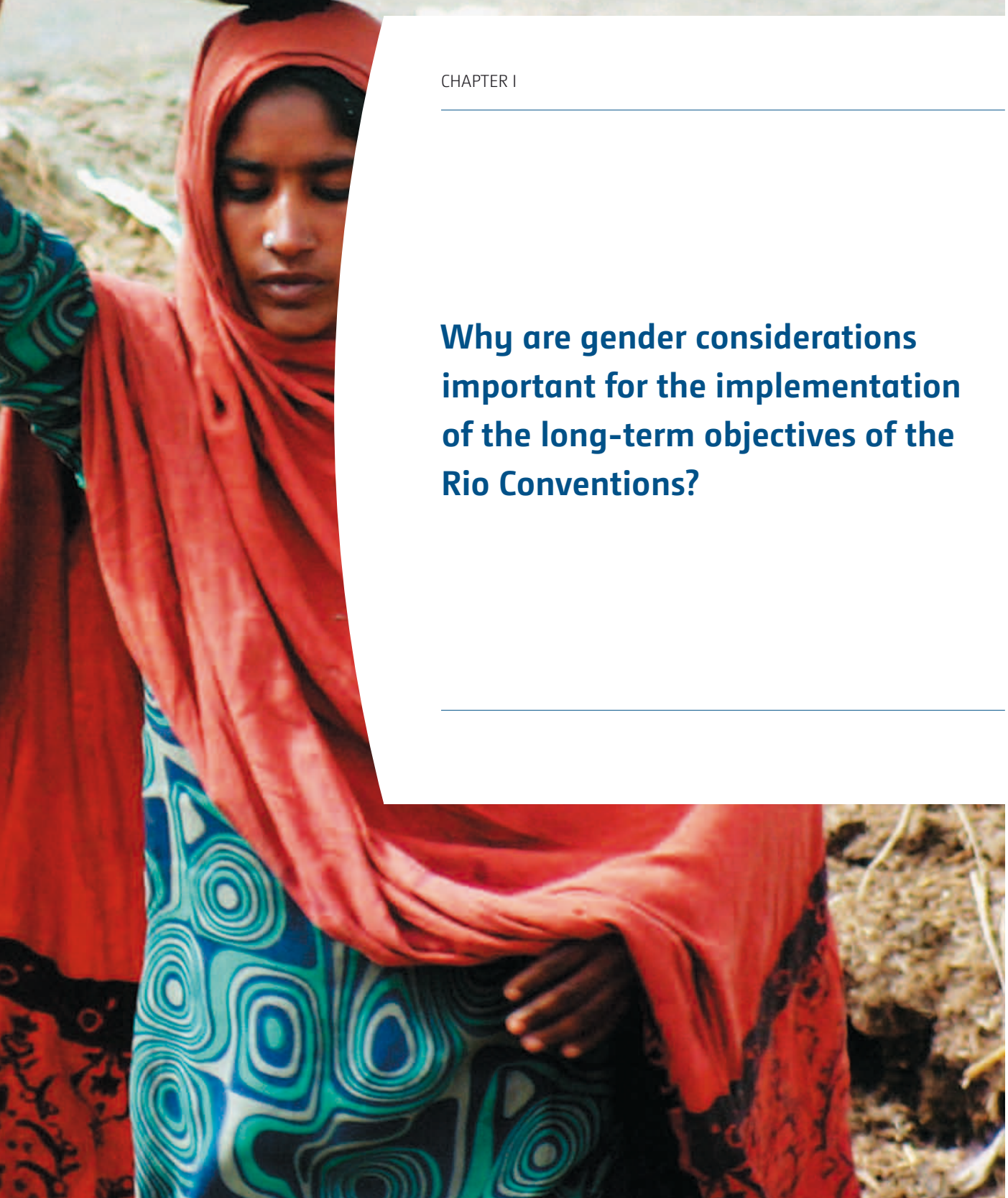
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CHAPTER I

Why are gender considerations important for the implementation of the long-term objectives of the Rio Conventions?



CBD

Meeting the three objectives of the CBD will require the broad consideration of gender issues, since the significance of biodiversity to individuals varies according to gender. This is especially true when considering the important knowledge and role that women have with regard to biodiversity resources, their use and conservation. Also, depending on the ease of access to biodiversity resources and the provision of ecosystem services, healthy ecosystems affect the daily lives of many women by limiting their access to education and alternative livelihood options.

As one example, according to some estimates women account for 70 per cent of the world's poor, while women farmers are responsible for 60 to 80 per cent of food production in developing countries. Such women are particularly dependent on biodiversity for their livelihoods, and, in some cases, for their survival. The current rate of biodiversity loss is severe. So severe, in fact, that humankind is exacerbating the detrimental impacts of climate change and there is a risk of initiating conflicts over limited natural resources and increasing levels of poverty. To address biodiversity loss, the accumulation of gender-differentiated biodiversity knowledge and gendered biodiversity-related knowledge acquisition and usage are critically important.

The preamble to the text of the CBD recognizes the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and affirms the need for the full participation of women in the implementation of the convention. Subsequently, the General Principles for the programme of work on the implementation of article 8(j) of the convention call for the "full and effective participation of women of indigenous and local communities".

Perhaps the most significant step towards gender mainstreaming occurred in 2008, when the Gender Plan of Action was approved and endorsed in decision IX/24 by the conference of the Parties at its ninth meeting.

Gender mainstreaming was further integrated into the CBD's mandate in 2010 when decision X/19 invited Parties to consider gender as a core cross-cutting issue in the implementation of biodiversity-related activities. The same decision requests Parties to commit to mainstreaming gender into the development, implementation and revision of national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

Additionally, Parties to the CBD have further committed to gender in target 14 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, which states that "by 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and

contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable".

Initiatives and linkages

The CBD is now in the phase of implementing the Gender Plan of Action. As such, Parties are urged to mainstream gender issues into both the implementation of, and reports to, the convention, as well as into the development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans. Efforts by Parties will be supported through the development and dissemination of case studies and best practice examples, the involvement of gender experts in workshops convened by the CBD secretariat and the mainstreaming of gender issues within CBD publications and reports.

The CBD is also including gender issues in the regional and subregional workshops on the revision of national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

The secretariat will continue to implement activities to harmonize gender mainstreaming among the Rio Conventions. This work will include outreach and awareness-raising on the importance of gender mainstreaming, capacity development on gender mainstreaming priorities, and approaches and support for the exchange of information and experiences between focal points and countries.

Box 1. CBD Technical Series No. 49: Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

The CBD has produced guidelines to support countries to mainstream gender activities within their national biodiversity planning processes (NBSAPs). These guidelines present the background and legal framework for gender mainstreaming in NBSAPs and suggest step-by-step guidance on how this can be done through three phases:

- 1. Strategy development, including the organization of work and stocktaking and assessments;**
- 2. Action plan development, including identifying activities, setting priorities and developing an implementation plan;**
- 3. Monitoring and evaluation**

Key next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

The next steps for Parties to the CBD will focus on promoting gender equality in achieving the convention's objectives, and mainstreaming gender considerations, where appropriate, into the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and its associated goals, the Aichi Targets.

In particular, mechanisms for implementing the Strategic Plan include capacity development on gender mainstreaming in accordance with the CBD's Gender Plan of Action. The CBD

is currently developing a series of tools to support Parties in the mainstreaming of gender issues, including a training module on gender mainstreaming within their national biodiversity strategies and action plans. This training module will be available soon at <http://www.cbd.int/nbsap/guidance-tools/guidelines.shtml>. Furthermore, efforts will continue to mainstream gender considerations within all secretariat outputs, including publications, reports, recommendations and workshops.

UNCCD

Women in rural areas, particularly in the drylands of the developing world, make crucial contributions to their communities, especially through agricultural and other rural processes, including in animal husbandry and as smallholder farmers, workers and entrepreneurs. Their roles vary across regions, but in all regions women face gender-specific constraints that reduce their productivity and limit their potential contributions to agricultural production, economic growth and the well-being of their families, communities and countries. In addition, desertification, land degradation and drought have a disproportionate negative impact on women and children. They directly bear the burdens of land degradation and, when faced with the option of migrating, are the last to leave their land.

The range of measures often emphasized in gender-sensitive strategies and policies to reverse desertification and land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought include the improvement of women's participation in decision-making, building the capacity of women's organizations, eliminating illiteracy among women, minimizing the disproportionate workload of women and eliminating all other gender disparities, for example in employment opportunities and in access to and the ownership of resources.

The UNCCD has been mainstreaming gender issues since its inception, by recognizing the role of women in ensuring improved rural livelihoods, with the concomitant benefits to ecosystem conditions, and by encouraging the equal participation of women and men in capacity-building and technology transfer. The UNCCD is the only Rio Convention that contains a *gender aspect in the convention text* itself:

- The UNCCD, in its prologue, stresses “the important role played by women in regions affected by desertification and/or drought, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, and the importance of ensuring the full participation of both men and women at all levels in programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought”;
- Article 5, paragraph (d) of the convention calls on affected country Parties to the convention to commit themselves to “promote awareness and facilitate the participation of local populations, particularly women and youth, with the support of non-governmental organizations, in efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought”;
- Moreover, according to article 10, paragraph 2(f) of the convention, governance of development, implementation and review of national action programmes to combat desertification must be based on the decision-making processes that men and women adopt at the local level;
- Paragraphs 1(a) and 3 of article 19 call for the promotion of capacity-building in cooperation with various development actors to ensure the full participation of local people, especially women and youth, in the implementation of the convention.

Furthermore, decision 3/COP8 adopted the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy), which sets out the four strategic objectives to guide the actions for all UNCCD stakeholders and partners: to improve the living conditions of affected populations, to improve the condition of affected ecosystems, to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the convention and to mobilize resources through effective partnerships between national and international actors.¹

Initiatives and linkages

One objective of the secretariat's multi-year plan (2012–2015) is to improve the understanding of the linkages between the implementation of the convention and gender issues.

Under the guidance of decision 8/COP9, and in line with the strategic approach of the UNCCD to increase the effectiveness of the convention in delivering on the long-term objectives of its Strategy, work on gender issues was acknowledged by decision 9/COP10 on the consultative approach for the development of the Advocacy Policy Framework (APF) on gender (SEE BOX 2). Decision 9/COP10 further requests the UNCCD secretariat to take gender-sensitive approaches into account when formulating other APFs, especially the forthcoming APF on drought and water scarcity. It also requests the secretariat to draw on gender-related guidance to increase ecosystem resilience and improve livelihoods in the drylands.

A central element for the implementation of the convention at the national level is the establishment and implementation of partnerships between national and local authorities and representatives of civil society and any other institutions that support local communities. A major responsibility of such partnerships is to put in place processes that lead to the implementation of the priorities set forth in the national action programmes to combat desertification and their alignment with the objectives of the Strategy and are based on the principles of continuous planning and the active involvement of the dryland populations, including women. In this regard, women have to be fully recognized as a stakeholder group and their contributions taken into account. Gender issues find a noteworthy mention in some of the latest reports to the UNCCD (fourth cycle as of 2010), where gender is mentioned and acknowledged as having a cross-cutting nature. Furthermore, the UNCCD, with the support of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, (IUCN) is collaborating with the CBD and the UNFCCC secretariats on efforts to harmonize gender mainstreaming among the Rio Conventions.

Key next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

- A strong mandate from Rio+20 to continue gender mainstreaming in the work of the UNCCD at the national level will complement the efforts of the UNCCD;
- Implementation of the APF on gender and its 20 targets, including a gender strategy for the UNCCD secretariat;
- The adoption of revised procedures to include gender-specific organizations and the participation of civil society organizations in the conference of the Parties and other UNCCD bodies is also envisaged (e.g. set up a UNCCD Women Major Group).

Box 2. UNCCD Advocacy Policy Framework on gender²

The Advocacy Policy Framework (APF) on gender is the result of a consultative process among Governments held in February 2011. The same was drafted in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature Gender Office. Its main recognition is that gender mainstreaming in efforts to combat desertification, land degradation and the impacts of drought needs to be undertaken through a holistic and comprehensive approach and has to take place at different levels and involving multiple stakeholders. It is through the full participation of local people, and especially women, that the efforts to combat desertification can be most effective.

The UNCCD APF on gender contains 20 time-bound and action-oriented targets for mainstreaming gender, spread across four spheres: policy, organizational, constituency and delivery. The APF is one key guiding instrument for the implementation of the UNCCD and its Strategy.

¹ The gender-related decisions of the conference of the Parties (decisions 9/COP10, 5/COP9, 8/COP9, 21/COP9, 11/COP8, 3/COP8, 1/COP6, 15/COP5, 15/COP4, 15/COP3, 13/COP2, 17/COP1 and 27/COP1) can be found on the UNCCD website at <<http://www.unccd.int>>.

² The APF is available on the UNCCD website at <<http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Thematic-Priorities/gender>>.

UNFCCC

The ultimate objective of the UNFCCC, as stated in its Article 2, is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations “in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”. It goes on to state that “such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.”

It is well-known that a gender-sensitive strategy is a precondition for rising to the challenge of sustainable development. This is equally true for climate change, both for dealing with the impacts of climate change (adaptation) and for reducing emissions (mitigation).

Adaptation

It is indisputable that climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods and other extreme weather events, affect the poorest the hardest, and that women form an especially vulnerable part of that group. A disproportionate share of the poorest in developing countries is highly dependent on local natural resources, and thus especially vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Climate change often affects the basis of livelihoods, such as nutrition and water and energy supplies, for which women are responsible. For example, as women are responsible for growing the bulk of food staples in developing countries, changes in climate, particularly with regard to growing seasons and precipitation, will have a profound impact on their work and on agricultural productivity.

At the same time, owing to gender differences in cultural, social and economic roles and property rights, climate change impacts tend to affect women, especially women in developing countries, disproportionately. This means that adaptation-related policies will benefit from a gendered approach and will contribute towards achieving the UNFCCC's ultimate objective.

Mitigation

The bulk of global emissions are caused by the generation and use of unsustainable energy sources. At the same time, many people in developing countries have no access to reliable sources of energy, and as a result nearly 2.4 billion women use traditional biomass fuels for cooking over health-threatening open fires. According to the World Health Organization, exposure to indoor air pollution is responsible for nearly two million excess deaths, primarily of women and children, from cancer, respiratory infections and lung diseases.

The use of environmentally-friendly energy sources would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide better and safer access to energy. The use of efficient energy systems at the household level (e.g. solar cooking stoves and ovens) can reduce emissions and harness the potential of women as actors for mitigation measures.

Women as agents of change

Women should not be regarded solely as victims of climate change, since they have a strong body of knowledge that can be used in both mitigation and adaptation approaches. For example, the responsibilities of rural women in food production have positioned them well to deal with changing environmental realities. An illustration of this is the case of rural women in four Central American countries planting 400,000 nut trees, in order to increase food sources while also increasing carbon sinks.

Notwithstanding their body of knowledge, women tend to be underrepresented in national and local-level decision-making on climate change, including the allocation of resources. This means that their ability to contribute and implement their solutions and expertise is severely limited. And it also means that climate change policies need to be increasingly gender-based.

Initiatives and linkages

Encouragingly, many Parties have become increasingly aware of the need for gender-sensitive policies and programmes. At recent United Nations climate change conferences, gender has increasingly been referenced and decision texts are becoming gender-sensitive. The first results of this growing awareness are beginning to show in the major recent accomplishments under the UNFCCC.

Both the Durban Outcomes and the 2010 Cancun Agreements show a growing recognition that solutions are becoming increasingly gender-based. For example:

- In adaptation, adaptation planning tools now include gender considerations. Gender-sensitive tools and approaches are also urged in other adaptation-related work;
- Under the newly launched Technology Mechanism, which will boost global technology cooperation on both mitigation and adaptation, governments will aim to achieve a gender balance in its Executive Committee;
- In terms of finance, the same applies for membership of the new Standing Committee, which will coordinate the delivery of climate finance. Gender is also increasingly recognized in capacity-building activities.

But perhaps the most tangible advance on gender to date has been under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). (SEE BOX 3)

Key next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

The UNFCCC will continue to support gender-related concerns, as well as the recommendations contained in the key decisions of the Durban and Cancun United Nations climate change conferences, including the following:

- Supporting the least developed countries by preparing a report on gender-related considerations regarding vulnerable communities;
- Developing and delivering gender-related training workshops;
- Ensuring that gender-related issues are also reflected in collaborations with stakeholders;
- Implementing an e-learning course that covers the main aspects of gender and the CDM.

Box 3. Gender and mitigation action on the ground

A large number of the project types under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), especially those that aim to enhance energy efficiency and make renewable energy technologies available and affordable for households, not only contribute to sustainable development but also have gender-positive impacts on the ground.

In rural areas, supporting access to renewable energy sources and efficient domestic appliances through the CDM translates into support for rural women, both in terms of health and quality of life.

Next to the gender-sensitive analysis of CDM methodologies, strategic planning, both at the level of the UNFCCC secretariat and the CDM Executive Board, has led to the formulation of a set of activities dedicated to the enhancement of gender mainstreaming through the CDM process.

These include approaches to:

- **Enhancing the geographical reach of the CDM, which translates into increased participation by vulnerable social groups, including women and children;**
- **Ensuring operationalization of a loan scheme and assisting project development in the least developed countries and small island developing States;**
- **Developing top-down standards and standardized emissions baselines, which could benefit the livelihoods of vulnerable social groups;**
- **Building capacity through improving the transparency of the regulatory governance structure and administrative support, and preparing training materials that take into account gender.**

These examples demonstrate the potential of the CDM to enhance gender considerations and gender mainstreaming while delivering direct positive impacts. There is great potential to extend the benefits of the CDM even further.



CHAPTER II

Opportunities and challenges to implementation: through local and national governments, UN-Women, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the business community

CBD

Opportunities

- The adoption of the Gender Plan of Action coinciding with the adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the revision of national biodiversity strategies and action plans provides a unique opportunity for gender mainstreaming to be enhanced through implementation of the CBD;
- Organizations are being encouraged and provided with some of the tools required not just to mainstream gender issues into CBD activities, but also to mainstream gender issues into their own organizations and institutions.

Challenges

- The need to enhance the understanding of gender issues among stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the CBD;
 - Ways and means to ensure that gender experts are included in planning and implementation activities.
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UNCCD

Opportunities

- The acknowledgement of gender issues by Parties to the UNCCD is safeguarded in the APF on gender as a policy-relevant element for the implementation of the convention.
- The APF also invited the UNCCD secretariat, drawing on its guidance to undertake advocacy with Parties, to increase ecosystem resilience in the drylands and to improve the livelihood conditions of affected populations.
- Focused training of national focal points on strategies for gender mainstreaming offers opportunities to further implement gender considerations into the work of the UNCCD.

Challenges

- Although awareness on gender mainstreaming has been increasing, effectiveness is limited by the low level of financial and human resources available to the secretariat;
 - There is a need to increase existing efforts to mainstream gender into research and policy development related to desertification, land degradation and drought.
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UNFCCC

Opportunities

- Given the limited participation of women in decision-making processes on climate change at the national and local levels, governments have been encouraged to foster increased participation;
- The newly created Durban Forum on Capacity-building will enable governments and stakeholders to share experiences and best practices, including on gender-related issues.

Challenges

- Although awareness of the importance of gender policies in contributing to climate change solutions and sustainability has increased markedly over the past few years, still more needs to be done to 'boost gender' in the context of climate change.



CHAPTER III

**The way forward for the Rio
Conventions on gender policies
in contributing to sustainable
development**

There are many opportunities for development in the context of gender and sustainable development. All three Rio Conventions will aim to build on these opportunities, including through the avenues listed below:

- The further development and implementation of approaches to gender mainstreaming and synergistic action towards Rio+20 are envisaged to ensure that an integrated approach is taken on environmental governance, poverty reduction and sustainable development;
- The vision of the Rio Conventions on gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting priority and paradigm shift is to ensure that gender-related issues are taken into account in the implementation of activities that lead to the achievement of the long-term objectives of these conventions;
- Following the road map for 2012–2014 that the Rio Conventions have developed on collaborating on gender issues to assist them in harmonizing action, creating new opportunities for synergy and improving responsiveness efforts, cooperation and resource efficiency;
- Exploring opportunities to work with governments to promote efforts at the national level in order to intensify gender-related actions that contribute to climate change solutions, the preservation of biodiversity and combating land degradation, desertification and drought.



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