

Brief for Policymakers

The State of Gender and Climate Change in ASEAN

Spotlight focus on renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, and agriculture sectors

Introduction

Responses to climate change not only have key implications for gender equality, but can support broad-based sustainable development and poverty reduction. To do so, policy and practice need to be grounded in an understanding of how intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, based on gender, class, ethnicity, migration status, age, disability, and other factors, create differentiated vulnerabilities and limit people's ability to influence and equally benefit from climate action.

Against this backdrop, the report on **the State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN** is a product of joint effort led by the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) in consultation with the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN), Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE), ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), ASEAN Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), and ASEAN Centre for Energy with the support of the ASEAN Secretariat Poverty Eradication and Gender Division (PEGD), UN Women and the UN Environment Programme. The report is prepared and drafted by the research team of the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI Asia). It aims to support the development of effective, equitable and inclusive policies. It provides a gender-based analysis of climate mitigation and adaptation in 10 ASEAN Member States, with a focus on three key sectors: renewable energy (RE), disaster risk reduction (DRR), and agriculture. In addition to the regional overview, it offers closer analysis at Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam, with detailed reviews of relevant policies. Finally, the report draws lessons and best practices that could be emulated across the region.

This policy brief consolidates the key points of the assessment report and aims to guide action towards climate commitments that put gender equality and social-inclusion at its core. The brief presents a summary of current efforts towards integrating gender in the key sectors and provides recommendations for more gender-transformative climate responses by focusing on the following key themes:

- Transforming normative frameworks
- Improving coordination and facilitation
- Allocating resources
- Building knowledge and capacities
- Promoting gender data, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability

To access the full report, visit the resources section of www.empowerforclimate.org



Photo: UN Women/Anjane Raab

Addressing gender equality in climate change adaptation and mitigation is critical to ASEAN

Existing social inequalities and stratifications within Southeast Asia have a bearing on how climate change affects different communities and individuals. Women and other marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable, as they often lack access to key resources needed to adapt and the power to influence decision-making. This is especially the case for many women living in poverty, who have limited economic capacity, and poor political or legal influence. Recognizing women as agents of change in climate action and integrating women's knowledge and experiences in climate-related planning and decision-making is an important step towards a gender-transformative agenda. This requires urgently reforming governance structures to enable women of all socio-economic backgrounds to participate in shaping responses to climate change without further adding to their double-burden of often precarious work and unpaid care work responsibilities.

ASEAN has made a high-level political commitment to gender and social-inclusion through key documents such as the 1988 Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region, the 2010 Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of the ASEAN Women and Children, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, as well as the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. A strategic framework has also been developed with clear objectives and monitoring and evaluation plans for integrating gender and social inclusion in ASEAN policies and institutions. However, the analysis shows significant differences in policy commitments between sectors and among countries.

In regards to climate action, all 10 ASEAN Member States have submitted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and several have set clear gender equality priorities in their submissions. This is a promising trend. Yet, there is room for improvement to advance from gender-responsive to gender-transformative approaches, particularly in terms of delineating structural inequalities that impede gender and social inclusion and setting specific goals to address them.

The task now is to build on best practices and move towards gender-transformative policies and initiatives at all levels, with strong institutional support to ensure success.

Key findings by sectors

Renewable energy

- Against the backdrop of a rapid rise in energy use across the region, transition to RE is urgent. However, multiple systemic barriers act as drivers of inequalities within the sector. These include gender disparities in energy sector leadership, gender inequalities at the household level that limit access to and use of RE, and the often overlooked needs of small-scale energy users when planning centralized energy systems.
- Lack of access to clean energy, including from RE, affects the economic opportunities and even personal safety of women and girls, who are typically responsible for collecting biomass fuels.
- Large-scale RE projects can have hidden and indirect gender implications. There is increasing evidence in the region that large-scale RE projects may lead to land loss and displacement, which can threaten food security and livelihoods, with poor and marginalized people bearing disproportionate costs.¹



Photo: UNEP/ Andrew Bai

- Currently, although commitments have been made towards addressing gender issues in energy planning, key ASEAN energy policy documents and plans make little or no mention of gender.
- It is imperative for energy policies to acknowledge and urgently address socially differentiated needs and conditions, to ensure that sustainable energy systems translate into equal social outcomes.

DRR

- Disaster impacts are gendered and disproportionately affect the livelihoods, health, and well-being of women, especially those with low socio-economic status. Various intersecting social, economic and political factors continue to increase vulnerabilities. For example, women's traditional role as caregivers can hinder their own ability to recover from disasters. Women's livelihoods tend to be more affected by disasters than men's, as they rely more on natural resources and often work in the informal sector. Moreover, increase in gender-based violence during post disaster context have been increasingly documented.
- The discourse around disasters has largely focused on physical hazards, such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones. This framing results in approaches that address the symptoms of vulnerability, rather than addressing the socio-economic root causes that puts women and other marginalised groups at a disadvantage.²
- While disaster resilience is a key priority in the region, women in Southeast Asia are significantly underrepresented in DRR decision-making roles and spaces. This can result in governance systems that do not recognize the lived experiences of women and girls or address their needs and interests in the context of DRR.
- Marginalized people who are highly vulnerable to disasters, including rural women and indigenous groups, have important knowledge and skills to mitigate, predict and respond to natural hazards. However, institutionalized DRR approaches often fail to integrate this knowledge.
- It is necessary to maintain a holistic approach to DRR when addressing gendered vulnerabilities. This includes engaging with broader development efforts (e.g., access to education and other social services and infrastructure), promoting resilient livelihoods, and enhancing meaningful participation in decision-making and overall climate change action.
- The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021–2025 and the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management 2021–2025 are crucial entry points for supporting Member States in implementing gender-responsive DRR and humanitarian action.

Agriculture

- Women are significantly involved in the region's agriculture sector,³ yet gender norms and structural inequalities significantly limit their ability to adapt to climate change impacts (e.g., reduced yields and crop failures). They are often excluded from decision-making, and often lack crucial productive resources, especially land.
- Across Southeast Asia, the rural share of the population is projected to steadily decline from about 50% in 2021 to under 40% by 2050.⁴ Large numbers of men have migrated to urban areas, and the feminization of agriculture can leave women doubly burdened, with both domestic and wage-earning responsibilities. Despite these significant responsibilities, women keep being sidelined from decision-making processes and adaptation efforts.
- Gendered livelihood practices, such as the collection of non-timber forest products, can lead to women being disproportionately affected by climate and conservation policies. In addition, pre-existing livelihood precarities, such as unequal access to productive resources and assets, can make women particularly vulnerable to climate change.
- ASEAN has demonstrated a strong commitment to mainstreaming gender in the agricultural sector, through policies such as the ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Food Security and Nutrition Policy; AMAF's Approach to Gender Mainstreaming in the Food, Agriculture and Forestry Sector; the 2018 ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry and, to an extent, the ASEAN Regional Guidelines for Promoting Climate Smart Agriculture Practices as well. Despite the existence of such policy frameworks, systemic barriers against gender equality still remains a challenge via political, economic, and social norms and practices within the sector.

Recommendations

Overall, the analysis identified a number of key gaps:

- There is a need to better understand the root causes of vulnerability, a basic precondition for being able to address those root causes in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner.
- Robust and consistent gender-disaggregated data and related analyses are still in short supply, hindering effective policy-making as well as monitoring and evaluation.
- ASEAN and its Member States need more dedicated funding and staff for gender mainstreaming at all levels and across sectors.
- Discriminatory gender and social norms are deeply entrenched and continue to constrain women's roles at home and in their communities and lead governments to favour more technical and technocratic, male-dominated approaches over experience-based and traditional knowledge and practices.

Recommendations emerge from those insights for ASEAN and national governments, for both sectoral and overarching policies to support gender-transformative responses to climate change, in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

Highlights include:

Transforming normative frameworks

- Promote policies and programmes aimed at enabling equal and fair access to and control of resources for those who have traditionally been marginalized.
- Ensure that gender is meaningfully and thoughtfully integrated into overarching regional and national policies, plans and declarations, as well as in a "just transition" framework for RE and in DRR and agricultural policy frameworks.
- Develop clear plans for how gender-transformative goals will be operationalized, including synchronizing and cross-referencing such plans across policy documents.

Coordination and facilitation

- Clarify and prioritize leadership roles within ASEAN's governance to spearhead and oversee gender integration across sectors at both the regional and country levels.
- Develop platforms that encourage gender-transformative, multi-stakeholder dialogues on climate change and response options, including both women and men from marginalized communities.
- Enhance cooperation between ministries in charge of climate-related sectors and those in charge of women's affairs, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge between technical experts and those focused on social inclusion.

Resource allocation

- Prioritize funding and staff for initiatives that promote gender equality and social inclusion, such as community-based RE projects that engage both women and men to improve energy access.
- Establish gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors to ensure sufficient financial and human resources to mainstream gender and social inclusion in climate action and resilience-building, including in public services, such as education.

Knowledge and capacity-building

- Ensure that gender-related trainings and capacity-building initiatives include men and highlight men's roles in promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal structures.
- Mandate gender focal points across ministries, and ensure continuous training to build capacities for gender analysis as well as mainstreaming of gender and social issues across sectors.
- Initiate an ASEAN-led regional knowledge-sharing conversation/platform to share experiences and best-practices of progress in integrating gender into national policies such as the Nationally determined contributions (NDC).
- Meaningfully engage with traditionally marginalized groups (e.g. rural women and indigenous groups) to formulate policies and plans that reflect their knowledge, needs and priorities in the

context of climate action.

- Continue to build evidence on the gendered impacts and dimensions of climate change through working with research partners, academia and affected communities.
- Exchange capacities between ministries to ensure that technical knowledge and gender analysis capacities are streamlined across cross-cutting issues.

Gender data, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability

- Ensure that robust gender analysis underpins climate action plans and sectoral plans, with clear definitions of terms such as "gender equality", and provisions to collect and analyse a broad range of data that are disaggregated by gender, age, race and other factors.
- Create binding policy documents with clear indicators to enable monitoring and evaluation of gender and social inclusion progresses.
- Develop clearer mechanisms for ASEAN Member States to report on their progress to measure achievements in relation to commitments towards gender equality and climate resilience, including through the collection and use of disaggregated data.



Photo: UNEP/Maxwell Gutteridge

Endnotes

- 1 Johnson et al. 2020
- 2 MacGregor 2009
- 3 OECD 2021, Siddiqi 2015
- 4 ADB 2021