

Women must be involved in shaping the future and tackling the (climate) change

Written by Shila Meyer-Behjat

Many acknowledge the brunt women bear when it comes to the effects of global warming. However, less focus is still given to their capacity to be drivers of change in the fight against climate change.

A **new report** by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlights just how little women have been involved: On average, they hold just about one fourth of decision-making positions related to climate change in the public sector. The paper published on the Institute's website gives an overview of current research on the gender dimension of environmental issues which gained broader attention in recent years among experts and has slowly started to be recognised by the general public.

*"Women play an important role in environmental management and progress, full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development. It should not only be a matter of justice to involve women", says **Virginija Langbakk**, director of EIGE, "but one of pure logic for **women and men to stand side by side with men to tackle climate change.**"*

The report points out that while female participation in decision-making bodies on the international and EU level continues to improve accounting for around 40 per cent, women are much less involved within the EU member states. In public sectors of environment, transport and energy which are all relevant to climate change policies, more than 80 per cent of top level (ministerial) positions are held by men. **Only Finland and Sweden have reached an equal number of women and men** – the ideal setting according to EIGE. *"Any decision-making body performs better when it includes people from a range of perspectives and backgrounds. A complex matter such as climate change simply needs this diverse, holistic approach",* Langbakk points out.

The report has been part of the Institute's work on the review of the Beijing Platform for Action under the EU's Danish Presidency during the first half of 2012. In it researchers not only assessed the amount of women at the negotiation tables but also potential future involvement of females by taking into account the **number of women graduates in natural science and technology**. Here, the report highlights, changes have gone in the right direction, although women still opt for life sciences, a huge number, especially environmental sciences rather than technological fields which might be crucial in finding alternative solutions to tackle global warming.

Overall, Langbakk concludes, women's lacking involvement in shaping a future in which they especially will have to cope with climate change, will harm society as a whole. "Such factors should become an integral part of climate change policy debates and decisions. Otherwise we as a society will continue to lack the right answers."

The active participation of women and the integration of gender issues in environmental policies and actions are critical determinants for the implementation of the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), and the Millennium Development Goals.

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